



2015/2347(INI)

21.4.2016

OPINION

of the Committee on Regional Development

for the Committee on Transport and Tourism

on improving the connection and accessibility of the transport infrastructure in
Central and Eastern Europe
(2015/2347(INI))

Rapporteur: Joachim Zeller

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Regional Development calls on the Committee on Transport and Tourism, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

1. Considers that the introduction of thematic objectives has had a positive role in encouraging the Member States to focus their investment policies on the development of their transport infrastructure; is of the opinion that the ex-ante conditionality of drafting master plans for transport has helped the Member States in prioritising their transport investments; urges the Commission when approving, and Member States when planning, transport infrastructure to fully ensure that transport master plans and ESIF investments in the transport sector are better aligned with the ‘European White Paper on Transport’ as regards key goals; considers that the responsible services of the Commission should assess and provide for a follow-up to those master plans, in particular so that they form part of an overall strategy for sustainable mobility and emission reduction in the transport sector;
2. Urges the Member States in Central and Eastern Europe to ensure coordination and synergy between the existing European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds, the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), Horizon 2020, the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) and EIB and EBRD resources when implementing projects aimed at improving the connection and accessibility of the transport infrastructure in the region; recalls that EUR 11 305 500 000 were transferred from the Cohesion Fund to the CEF to be spent in the transport sector in Member States benefiting from Cohesion Fund support; underlines that the use of all this readily available funding should be given priority, especially in the context of the current absorption rate, over investment participation by third parties in cases where this investment is driven by political considerations rather than business interests; encourages the use of the potential of European private investments in the rail sector, which could contribute to an increase in absorption rates and improve the quality of transport services;
3. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to move towards a more efficient use of grants combined with financial instruments for revenue-generating major projects under ESIF;
4. Calls on the Central and Eastern European Member States to ensure a high level of transparency and close scrutiny of the use of those funds and to publish details of their allocation at the earliest opportunity;
5. Stresses that ESI Funds can be used in the development of the missing links in the border areas across Central and Eastern Europe, and in the consolidation of existing infrastructure, in order to ensure full access to the single market and to further promote economic growth; stresses in this regard that, as transport is key to regional development, adequate and properly funded local infrastructure is a basic and inevitable requirement in bringing about economic, social and territorial cohesion; recalls that priority should be given to cross-border projects pertaining not only to the core trans-European networks (TENs) in the region, but also to the missing links, in order to eliminate existing bottlenecks, as well as to investment in linking the different modes of transport more effectively; calls, in this context, for continued efforts to be made towards introducing

common standards in infrastructure, notably with regard to railways, in order to speed up attainment of the objective of efficient and Europe-wide interoperability, and stresses the need for more wide-scale use of and interconnection between combined modes of transport, in particular road-rail freight transport;

6. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to streamline and simplify procurement procedures, to issue guidelines for PPP, to ensure an adequate state aid framework and to simplify the permitting procedures, in order to facilitate the implementation of transport projects, in particular cross-border projects;
7. Stresses that there is a need to boost the development of North-South transport corridors, such as the Via Carpathia route, inter alia with a view to connecting Northern and South Eastern Europe, and that this would prevent the spread of regional disparities; welcomes the Commission's efforts to extend the TEN-T corridors to Western-Balkan candidate countries, decreasing their infrastructure deficiencies and eliminating cross-border bottlenecks with Member States, as well as other obstacles, associated with the prospective expansion of the Schengen area; urges the Commission to consider this successful model in connection with Eastern Partnership countries as well; stresses in particular the importance of modernising and equipping the railway infrastructure/network to overcome any such potential obstacles for the benefit of Central and Eastern Europe as a whole; notes that all the above-mentioned efforts can contribute to the economic development of the participating countries by creating new business and employment opportunities in small and medium-sized enterprises, favouring trade exchanges, and providing support for science, research and innovative technologies;
8. Encourages regions and Member States to adopt or continue with measures to move towards more environmentally friendly transport options; encourages the use of the ESI Funds for projects aimed generating demand for public and more sustainable transport options, e.g. through simplified cross-border ticketing and investment in electrical charging point systems;
9. Underlines the need to strengthen investment in improving the quality of railways in order to make them more attractive for both passenger and freight transport and increase their utilisation;
10. Notes that Central and Eastern Europe has significant development potential as regards its inland waterways as well as its river and sea ports; considers that this potential may only be exploited showing due respect for the Union acquis on the protection of the environment, biodiversity and water, and that placing more emphasis on the use of ports and railways could help to support the goal of enhancing multimodal transport in the region; stresses, in this context, that it is important and necessary to exploit the inland waterway transport capacity offered by the Rhine-Main-Danube corridor and to connect the rail network to the North Sea-Baltic corridor, since this is the main route connecting Eastern and Western Europe, as well as the connections between the Oder, Elbe and Danube water corridors, which could boost the transport and communication capacities of the whole region on the North-South axis;
11. Notes that improving the connectivity and accessibility of transport infrastructure in Central and Eastern Europe is a means of achieving the objectives of cohesion policy, especially as regards the desirable economic development of border regions;

12. Reminds the Commission of its obligation under the 2011 White Paper on transport until 2020, in which it adopted an implementation plan of 40 specific measures on developing a competitive and resource-efficient European transport system; recalls that one of its long-term goals is to shift 30% of road transport over 300km to rail or waterborne transport by 2030, and more than 50% by 2050, thereby significantly reducing traffic in Central and Eastern Europe;
13. Strongly advises making better use of existing policies and instruments for regional cooperation, such as European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), Interreg and especially European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), to draw up and implement joint projects designed to enhance cross-border transport between regions and remove bottlenecks; urges the Member States to support such solutions on a local and regional level, accelerate the completion of the construction of rail network links in border regions, make sure that the use of EU funds complies with the overall objectives, including on improving the railway sector, interconnectivity and interoperability, and involve local and other stakeholders as part of a transparent process; advocates the use of macro-regional strategies like those for the Danube, the Baltic Sea, the Adriatic and Ionian, and the Alpine regions, in order to advance transnational infrastructure projects and preparations for potential new macro-regional strategies in Central and Eastern Europe, such as the one for the Carpathian region;
14. Recalls that ESI Funds could also be used to increase the administrative capacity of the intermediate bodies and beneficiaries, which could otherwise undermine the EU's support to transport investments in the region; notes that the JASPERS assistance mechanism in particular has proven helpful in this role thus far and might, therefore, apart from simply being continued, be considered also for a more permanent, institutional setting; points out that the technical assistance offered through the European Investment Advisory Hub should help public and private project promoters to create a stable pipeline of mature and well-structured projects in order to benefit from the financial instruments for a long period of time; recalls that European coordinators for core network corridors do have a political mandate, but do not have sufficient administrative capacities; calls on the Commission and the Member States to take steps to streamline the public management of such resources in order to avoid unnecessary red tape;
15. Calls on the Commission and the EIB to cooperate better and coordinate their efforts to ensure a wide consultation with all stakeholders on the financing of transport infrastructure, the exchange of best practices, the promotion of financial instruments and the early mapping of potential projects, and to provide regular information to the European Parliament thereon; stresses that any steps concerning projects aimed at improving the connectivity and accessibility of transport infrastructure should be taken as a matter of the greatest urgency;
16. Underlines that all the efforts in the field of transport in Central and Eastern Europe should be pursued in a performance- and result-oriented manner and in a manner which seeks out cost-effective solutions that take account of the environment and which preserves the existing infrastructure, as this region would stand specifically to gain from the above-mentioned funding being properly coordinated, not least in terms of protection of strategic EU interests;

17. Stresses the importance of developing a more regular and better functioning air transport system that links up smaller outlying Member States and larger, more central cities; points out that the current flight systems do not operate well as connections tend to be infrequent and time-consuming.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	19.4.2016
Result of final vote	+: 33 -: 3 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Pascal Arimont, Franc Bogovič, Victor Boștinaru, Mercedes Bresso, Andrea Cozzolino, Rosa D'Amato, Bill Etheridge, Michela Giuffrida, Krzysztof Hetman, Ivan Jakovčić, Constanze Krehl, Sławomir Kłosowski, Andrew Lewer, Louis-Joseph Manscour, Iskra Mihaylova, Jens Nilsson, Andrey Novakov, Konstantinos Papadakis, Mirosław Piotrowski, Stanislav Polčák, Julia Reid, Monika Smolková, Ruža Tomašić, Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso, Monika Vana, Matthijs van Miltenburg, Lambert van Nistelrooij, Derek Vaughan, Kerstin Westphal
Substitutes present for the final vote	Daniel Buda, Salvatore Cicu, Viorica Dăncilă, Andor Deli, Ivana Maletić, Maurice Ponga, Davor Škrlec