

TOWARDS MORE SUSTAINABLE FREIGHT TRANSPORT

10 crucial points to show how freight transport will become more sustainable

1. Integration

Making freight transport more sustainable is complex, but feasible if a bundle of instruments is applied to achieve this objective. Complex issues demand complex solutions. One single instrument cannot be sufficient on its own, but can contribute to making freight transport more sustainable as part of a package of measures. The integration of single instruments into a comprehensive and coherent whole is a basic step towards sustainable freight transport.

2. Objectives

Instruments and measures must always serve a certain objective. The general objective is sustainability of freight transport, which includes, according to the Amsterdam Treaty, economic, environmental and social sustainability. Translating this general objective into detailed objectives must have first priority. (For example reducing energy consumption per ton-kilometre, stopping the increase of ton-kilometre of environmentally less sustainable transport modes, increasing modal split of rail and inland water transport, defining an upper limit to environmental impact in sensitive areas)

3. Priorities

All the instruments and measures have to contribute to achieve the objectives. Priorities must be given to measures favouring such environmentally less harmful transport modes as railways and inland waterways. The wider use of these transport modes can contribute to making freight transport more sustainable if they manage to maintain or even increase their environmental advantage.

4. Level playing field

The environmentally less harmful transport modes must be put into a position where they can successfully compete with other modes, especially road. Therefore, the creation of a level playing field for all transport modes is a condition of making freight transport more sustainable. Levelling the playing field means abolishing competitive distortions and ensuring fair competition among transport modes. Competitive distortions, which must be removed, exist with regard to taxation, pricing, entrepreneurial freedom, legal requirements, infrastructure investments and subsidies.

5. Pricing

Getting the prices right for the use of transport infrastructure is on the top of the priorities as the existing pricing system is a major reason for the lack of sustainability in the freight transport system. Getting the prices right means applying the user pays principle, which is common for the majority of goods also for the use of infrastructure. Pricing should be based on equal principles for all transport modes, preferably on social marginal costs. However, pricing should also contribute to achieve the defined objectives.

6. Services

In all transport modes, freight services should be supplied in a similarly open and competitive environment. Therefore, entrepreneurial freedom should also be given to rail freight operators. Rail infrastructure has to be opened for rail freight operators, and institutional barriers in international rail freight transport must be abolished in order to make it more competitive with road freight transport. There is an ongoing political responsibility to ensure that liberalising rail infrastructure provides incentives to improve rail freight services by intramodal competition and also leads to an improvement of rail freight's position in intermodal competition.

7. Infrastructure

Existing transport infrastructure should be optimised by increasing its capacity through technical and operational improvements. Conventional rail systems have to become interoperable throughout Europe and the implementation of modern technology as traffic management and control systems should be applied for all transport modes. Additional infrastructure has to be built to remove bottlenecks, after economical and strategic environment assessments have been made.

8. Investment

Infrastructure investment policy has to support the defined objectives, giving priority on investments in environmentally less harmful transport modes, such as railways and inland waterways. Putting the priorities on railways and inland waterways also rebalances the historical emphasis on road infrastructure investment.

9. Standards

Equal standards for all transport modes are required with regard to environment, safety and social regulation. These standards must be upgraded to bring them on a equal level within all transport modes, to best protect the environment, citizens and employees. Furthermore, existing regulation must be consistently enforced and any abuse effectively fined in all transport modes.

10. State aid

Until the playing field has been levelled, direct public support for environmentally less harmful freight transport services may be necessary to reach the defined objectives. This would give environmentally sensible services the opportunity to survive in the absence of economical opportunity for these services. Such state aids must be seen as a second-best solution and should be applied for a limited period only.

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T&E is Europe's primary non-governmental organisation campaigning on a European level for an environmentally responsible approach to transport. T&E is the umbrella organisation of 37 member organisations covering 20 European countries working in this field.

The logo for T&E, consisting of the letters 'T' and 'E' in a bold, white, sans-serif font, with an ampersand between them. The logo is set against a dark blue rectangular background.

Bd. de Waterloo 34 • B-1000 Brussels • Belgium
T: +32 2 502 99 09 • F: +32 2 502 99 08
E-mail: info@t-e.nu • Homepage: www.t-e.nu