

## **European Perspectives**

*This new regular section looks at emerging issues with a definite pan-European focus and high significance for transport and/or infrastructure research. Three general inter-related themes will be examined in the new section – policy, practice and research. The connections between these themes will also be the focus of the section. Sometimes the section will primarily address one of these themes and at other times it will address two or all three of the themes. The policy theme will include recent developments in European transport policy and also recent developments in environmental, regional development and economic policy where there are specific implications for transport. The practice theme will include issues such as European benchmarking and pilot projects as well as recent developments in different transport industries across Europe (shipping, aviation and rail for example) and prospects for the future. The research theme will include topics such as recent developments in European research priorities and funding opportunities for transport and/or infrastructure research.*

### **The European Transport and Environment Reporting Mechanism (TERM)**

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#### **1. Introduction**

Article 6 of the Amsterdam Treaty, agreed by the European Union's political leaders on 17 June and signed on 2 October 1997, states that environmental protection requirements must be integrated into the definition and implementation of Community policies and activities. The Treaty also identifies integration of environmental and sectoral policies as crucial to sustainable development. In the following year, at the European Council Summit in Cardiff in 1998, the Council requested the European Commission and the Transport Ministers to focus their efforts on developing integrated transport and environment strategies.

These decisions led to work on transport and environment indicators by the European Environment Agency (EEA) and subsequently to the inception of the transport and environment reporting mechanism (TERM) as a way of enabling policy-makers to gauge the progress of integration policies. Since the start of TERM, the European Commission's sixth

environmental action programme (European Commission, 2001a) and the Commission's proposal for an EU strategy for sustainable development (European Commission, 2001b) have also emphasised the need for the integration of environmental concerns into other areas of policy and the decoupling of transport growth and economic growth.<sup>1</sup>

The main output of TERM is a regular indicator based report through which the effectiveness of transport and environment integration strategies can be monitored. The first two indicator reports were published in 2000 and 2001 and focused on the current Member States of the European Union (EEA, 2000 and 2001). The third and most recent report, published in November 2002, focused on accession countries for the first time (EEA, 2002). In common with the previous TERM reports, the indicators in the 2002 report are used to answer a set of policy questions related to the integration of environmental concerns into transport policies. This comparative analysis of the differences and similarities between the European Union (EU) and the accession countries aims to contribute to the continuing debate on how to achieve more sustainable transport within an enlarged Europe. This paper gives a summary of the findings of the latest TERM report.<sup>2</sup>

## **2. Transport and environment trends**

Political and economic restructuring in the accession countries during the past decade has led to substantial changes in their transport systems. Transport volumes, which fell significantly following the economic recession of the early 1990s, are now rising again as economies recover. The modal split, although less road-based than the EU, is evolving towards a more road-orientated system. This means that, just as for the EU, transport trends in accession countries are moving away from the objectives of sustainable development and the decoupling of transport growth and economic growth.

Transport energy consumption and associated greenhouse gas emissions per capita in the accession countries are of the order of three to four times lower than in the EU, and NO<sub>x</sub> emissions per capita are around 50% lower. Road and rail networks are less dense but this position is changing rapidly. Motorway lengths have increased rapidly in recent years. As in the EU, transport greenhouse gas emissions and energy consumption are growing. The car fleet is on average four to five years older and consequently accession countries lag behind the EU by several years in terms of uptake of cleaner technologies and fuels. As a result, urban air quality in accession countries is frequently poor although decreases in emissions of certain air pollutants (such as NO<sub>x</sub>) shows that the accession countries are on the way to bridging the technology gap. Of concern, however, is the issue of traffic growth, which is offsetting efficiency gains in terms of pollution and also safety. In 1999, there were 126 road fatalities per million persons in the accession countries, compared to 110 in the EU. This is despite the fact that car ownership in the accession countries is almost 50% lower than in the EU.

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion concerning decoupling transport growth and economic growth, see for example Stead and Banister (2002).

<sup>2</sup> This text is based on the summary chapter of the 2002 TERM report (EEA, 2002).

### 3. Policy integration

In recent decades, the EU has focused its transport and environment policies mainly on infrastructure investment (such as the trans-European transport network) and on environmental and safety regulations. A similar pattern is emerging in the accession countries, not surprisingly since integration of the EU *acquis* is the prerequisite for accession. The indicators presented in the 2002 TERM report show that there have been benefits from the early introduction of EU vehicle, fuel, environmental and safety standards in accession countries.

A good-quality transport infrastructure network is an essential backbone for society and the economy as well as integration in the EU. The development of the TEN-T and its extension to the east is therefore one of the common transport policy's key priorities. However, a strategic environmental assessment of the TEN-T and its extension has not yet been carried out and the network's economic and social benefits and impacts have not yet been assessed. Recent figures on infrastructure funding indicate that road-building is being given higher priority than for example rail development. This implies a risk for the future contribution of rail transport in the accession countries.

In recent years, various policies and tools have emerged within Europe to attempt to restrain the growth in transport and improve the modal split. Examples include the internalisation of external costs, voluntary agreements with industry, revitalisation of rail and inland waterways, coordination with spatial planning and strategic environmental assessment to support infrastructure planning. Such policies and tools are less familiar in the accession countries. National integrated strategies and indicator-based monitoring systems are also often lacking in the accession countries.

### 4. Conclusions of the report and future issues

The 2002 TERM report highlights substantial data gaps for several indicators, and inconsistencies between data reported to different international organisations. These are more pronounced for the accession countries, although statistics for the current Member States are not always complete or of good quality. Concerted action is needed by various international organisations to improve data and their comparability. Countries also need to improve the data flows to these organisations and improve data on rail, water transport, aviation, and non-motorised modes (walking and cycling). The lack of clear policy targets or objectives against which indicator trends can be evaluated is another difficulty. The transferability of the EU's current policy objectives and targets to its future new member countries may also pose some difficulties. The communication on environmental objectives for the sector, announced in the White Paper on the common transport policy, could be one forum for addressing such problems.

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