



Commission outlines legislative revision to encourage sustainable freight

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The European Commission has published a roadmap to revise the Combined Transport Directive (CTD), with the aim to encourage a shift to a more sustainable transport system.

The commission is proposing to “extend the support from today’s narrowly defined combined transport operations to all intermodal or multimodal operations that save certain negative externalities compared to road only transport”. Negative externalities identified in the revision plan, published last Thursday, include greenhouse gas emissions, as well as potentially pollution, congestion and accidents.

Akos Ersek, chief policy advisor at the International Union for Road-Rail Combined Transport, welcomed the CTD reform and a potentially broadened scope, while cautioning that “we need to see what this [negative externalities] calculator is like [and] how easy or difficult it is to use”.

The EU executive is scheduled to adopt a proposal to reform the CTD in the third quarter of 2022.

The 1992 directive is “partially outdated and low in effectiveness”, the commission explains in the CTD revision roadmap, while outlining a set of policy support options ranging from indirect economic and regulatory measures to direct subsidies for multimodal freight operations.

“Without an intervention to promote the use of multimodal transport, the uptake of

more sustainable transport options will not take place to the desired degree and in the desired time-frame,” it adds. The Commission’s green deal communication and ensuing Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy set out an ambition to shift a substantial part of EU road freight to rail and ship.

Ersek echoed the importance of multimodal transport for achieving zero-emission transport, while questioning the feasibility of mooted alternatives such as extensive hydrogen-fuelled road freight. “Zero-carbon combined transport is feasible with all known technologies [whereas] a bet on hydrogen [is] a bet on scientific discoveries,” Ersek said, while highlighting the superior energy efficiencies of rail transport coupled with battery-powered trucks for short-haul routes.

Last year, the commission withdrew its 2017 proposal to reform the CTD after “several amendments introduced by the co-legislators distorted the proposal in a manner which prevented achievement of its objectives,” the roadmap reads. According to Ersek, “member states wanted to pass a number of changes... that would have further narrowed the effect of the directive”.

Yet Ersek sees a more favourable political mood this time round. “At the time... the mobility package was more driven by social considerations and currently, I think the positions are much more affected by climate considerations,” he said.

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Follow-up: Revision roadmap for the Combined Transport Directive

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