

Truck traffic suffocates Alpine valleys

Recent reports show a surge in truck traffic crossing the Alps¹, causing congestion, pollution and an accelerated degradation of the road infrastructure there. Only the A12 motorway in Austria - which crosses the Brenner Pass - was used by 2.000.000 more trucks this year as compared to 2014.

The reasons behind this undesirable growth of road traffic are

- (i) the collapse of the price of oil, and correspondingly the price of diesel fuel, and
- (ii) inadequate road tolling, which does not reflect the costs of all externalities related to road transport.

Both of these factors act to lower road freight rates; a reduction which rail freight and Combined Transport Operators in particular are in no position to match:

- (i) the price of traction electricity - increasingly coming from renewable sources - is not in correlation to that of diesel and oil, whereas
- (ii) Track Access Charges are - if anything - on the rise, most lately related to the internalisation of railway noise.

Combined Transport, both through its unaccompanied and accompanied (RoLa) variations, offers a superb solution to mitigate the negative consequences of this undesirable increase in heavy truck traffic. However, several regulatory measures would be necessary to correct the price signals that shippers receive to make the right choice:

- (i) the European Union's energy taxation regime² - unchanged since 2003 - should be thoroughly revised to update the method of tax calculation to reflect the energy content of the fuel in question (needed to valorise the minimum excise levels) and to internalise the GHG emission and oil dependency externalities, while
- (ii) the Eurovignette Directive³, which was last amended 5 years ago, should mandate distance-based tolling to replace the present circulation encouraging time-based (vignette) charging, and should also require the internalisation of all of those external costs of road transport, which are presently borne by the taxpayers: congestion, noise and pollutant emissions, accidents and the destruction of biodiversity.

Excessive long-haul trucking not only plagues the life of Alpine residents, where its excesses appear in the most concentrated way, but it adversely affects the quality of life of every European citizen. Subsequently, the Member States of the European Union should stand together and demand that the European Commission tables the legislative proposals needed to correct the price signals received by the participants of the market, who make the choice of which mode of transport to use.

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¹ <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/transport/alpine-region-vexed-traffic-sees-light-end-tunnel-320459>

² Directive 2003/96/EC

³ Directive 1999/62/EC



Ralf-Charley Schultze

"The price signals received by market participants today are distorted by inadequate and one-sided regulation, which rapidly needs to be corrected if we are to preserve the quality of life that we have become used to in Europe. Both energy taxation and road tolling related Directives need urgent updating to protect the living conditions that residents enjoy throughout the European Union." - pointed out UIRR President Ralf-Charley Schultze.

Who is UIRR?

Founded in 1970, the **International Union for Road-Rail Combined Transport** (UIRR) represents the interests of European road-rail Combined Transport Operators and Transhipment Terminal Managers.

Road-Rail Combined Transport (CT) is a system of freight forwarding which is based on efficiently and economically inserting electric rail into long-distance (road) transport-chains through the use of intermodal loading units (ILU).