

Position of the MOT on the consultation of the Committee of the Regions on Mobility in geographically and demographically challenged regions

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I. Introduction

The Committee of the Regions has launched a stakeholder consultation about the mobility in geographically and demographically challenged regions.

The network of the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT) very much appreciates this initiative and would like to participate in the consultation, in particular on aspects linked to cross-border cooperation.

According to article 174¹ of the Lisbon treaty, "particular attention shall be paid [...] to regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps such as [...] cross-border [...] regions".

The present documents contains two parts, one about the specificity of cross-border transport, and a second part, in response to the questions in preparation of the stakeholder meeting on 15 April 2014 at the Committee of the Regions.

Presentation of the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT - Transfrontier Operational Mission):

The Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière, created in 1997, is both an association and a French inter-ministerial structure, which has the main objective of facilitating cross-border projects. Its missions are operational assistance to leaders of cross-border projects (project development, legal structures, studies, etc.), networking, assistance in the definition of overall strategies in cross-border cooperation, and implementation of European projects. The MOT brings together within its network sub-national authorities and their groupings, associations, cross-border structures, large corporations, states, etc. involved in cross-border cooperation and situated on both sides of the border. It has more than 60 members, from 10 European countries.

To date, the MOT has concentrated its work on cross-border proximity cooperation and assistance in the definition of policies regarding cross-border territories.

Website: www.espaces-transfrontaliers.eu

II. The MOT contribution

II.1. Cross-border transport

For several years now, border territories have been facing a continued increase in daily migration linked to the opening of the internal market and the practical implementation of the freedom of movement established by the European Treaties.

Different types of cross-border flows can be distinguished. Commuting flows constitute the most important phenomenon. For example, today it is estimated that every day more than 350,000 people cross the border from France to work in a neighbouring country. However, these flows of workers, while significant, coexist with other types of flow: local flows comprising short journeys for various everyday purposes (health, education, leisure and consumption) as well as long-distance transit flows.

¹ "In order to promote its overall harmonious development, the Union shall develop and pursue its actions leading to the strengthening of its economic, social and territorial cohesion. In particular, the Union shall aim at reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions. Among the regions concerned, particular attention shall be paid to rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition, and regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps such as the northernmost regions with very low population density and island, cross-border and mountain regions."

This coexistence of local and international transport, using the same infrastructure, particularly roads, has major consequences on safety, leads to increased congestion and pollution, and is thus a major nuisance in certain cross-border conurbations.

More than ever, there is a need for public authorities to deal with this increase in cross-border mobility and focus on developing a transport offer tailored to the needs of border residents and the requirements of sustainable development of the territories concerned. Cross-border urban and interurban transport, by road and rail, is therefore a very important factor in the process of territorial integration in Europe.

In addition, the quality of transport provision is a key factor for territories' economic attractiveness, and in particular for the attractiveness of conurbations on a European scale.

With its 2014-2020 Cohesion Policy the European Union has set the goal of "promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures." To that end, the Cohesion Fund will be able to support investments in Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) projects and in the creation of cross-border urban transport systems, preferably with low CO2 emissions.

Limited use of cross-border public transport

The average modal share of public transport in cross-border flows is around 7%. The limited use of public transport compared with that of the private car can be explained by a mismatch between a poorly adapted or insufficient transport supply and an unknown demand due to a lack of surveys and statistics.

Despite the growing need for cross-border public transport in Europe, cross-border transport provision retains an "experimental" character, and its development faces significant technical, institutional and political difficulties, as detailed in answer 1.

Due to the low use of some routes (often road for that matter) public authorities can be unwilling to improve transport provision, for example by adapting them to peak hours likely to interest the most people (in particular cross-border workers) or by optimising routes to maximise their catchment area. Such improvements would have to be based upon up-to-date information on journey patterns within the cross-border territory concerned.

Projects at all territorial levels

All modes of public transport are concerned (urban and interurban, bus and coach, rail links, tram-train, tramway, river and maritime ferries) and one of the challenges in cross-border transport is intermodal integration.

Examples:

- ≡ On the Franco-Swiss border, the "Greater Geneva" project is developing four strategic transport projects
 1. the Cornavin - Eaux-Vives - Annemasse (CEVA) link connecting the Swiss and French rail networks
 2. the development of high frequency public transport services between Geneva and Annemasse, Saint-Julien, Saint-Genis-Pouilly and Ferney-Voltaire
 3. the improvement of links from Annecy to Annemasse, Geneva, the Arve Valley and Chablais
 4. the strengthening of coach service networks in Haute-Savoie and the Pays de Gex
- ≡ At the Franco-Italian border, the cross-border project "TRIA – Integrated Alpine TRansport" aims to improve cross-border public transport in historic alpine regions like Savoie (Maurienne / Lower Suse Valley) and the Dauphiné (Briançonnais / Upper Suse Valley), with the development of integrated road-rail transport as well as a more efficient coordination of transport services and a more targeted communication strategy to better inform the public.
- ≡ At the Franco-Belgian border, the Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai has been heading a fare-setting and awareness-raising project since its inception; negotiations were held with the rail transport service operators SNCB and SNCF. Both operators are facilitating cross-border mobility by eliminating the habitual surcharges on cross-border tickets (resulting in a reduction of 1.4 € per ticket). The providers' web platforms also coordinate with each other to provide complete information on train times for cross-border routes.
- ≡ At the border between Spain and Portugal and agreement has been reached to use the same device to pay at tolls on both sides of the border. This agreement is already functioning so users can now use their domestic device to pay at tolls in the neighbour country.
- ≡ Furthermore there are two other examples cited in answer 1.

II.2. Answers to the questions for discussion of the stakeholder meeting on 15 April 2014 at the Committee of the Regions

1. Article 174 TFEU on economic, social and territorial cohesion stipulates that particular attention should be paid to regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps. Do the EU's policies, impact assessments, and overall legal framework in relation to transport sufficiently reflect this?

Concerning cross-border territories, as one kind of regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps the situation is even more complex than within a pure national context, as several countries are concerned. Cross-border transport faces significant technical, institutional and political difficulties.

On the one hand, there are differences between systems and technical regulations on either side of the border (environmental requirements, electrical power supply, safety, training of personnel, etc.). On the other hand, there is a great diversity of levels of competence and working procedures between transport authorities on either side of the border (operator selection, fare-setting, funding sources, etc.).

EU policies should use cross-border territories as laboratory for European integration and its economic, social and territorial cohesion. The cross-border specificities are rarely taken into account concerning impact assessments. Furthermore there is often confusion between (local) cross-border transport and transnational transport in regard with the overall legal framework.

Cross-border programmes are not aimed at financing great infrastructure projects. Therefore there is an important need for cross-border transport to be also taken into account via other programmes and funding sources. The Cohesion Fund should further support investments in Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T) and the creation of cross-border urban transport systems.

There have been best practices in the 2007-2013 programming period, as the project at the French-German border: the cross-border extension of the Strasbourg tram network to the neighbouring town of Kehl in Germany, projected for 2014, and being co-financed by the Interreg IV Upper Rhine programme.

Another best practice concerns the Franco-Spanish border: the Perpignan-Figueres high-speed line was inaugurated on 27 January 2011. Connecting the two cities in 23 minutes, this new line is part of the priority project "High-speed railway axis of southwest Europe" of the Trans-European Transport Network as defined by the EU.

2. What measures or incentives might be appropriate, and at what level of governance, to improve mobility in such regions thus reducing the risk of depopulation?

In order to cope with increasing cross-border flows, several stakes need to be tackled at different levels, local/regional, national and European:

- ≡ Creation of cross-border observatories

Detailed knowledge of cross-border movements would contribute to a better identification of needs in terms of road and rail infrastructure for example, the need to create or reinforce a particular service on saturated routes. It would allow national governments as well as local authorities to establish their transport policy and cross-border spatial planning on reliable data, rather than relying on intuition or using the lack of statistics as a justification for inaction. The European Union should give impulses for a better coordination of observatories and continue to help developing a cross-border observation, via programmes such as ESPON etc.

- ≡ Clarifying the roles of key actors and harmonising their approach at the institutional level

The responsibility for and the organisation of public passenger services are defined by the domestic law of each territory or grouping of territories. It also regulates the relationship between operators and organising authorities. The European Union should help to raise awareness of this need for a better coordination.

The use of a legal framework (including the signing of cooperation agreements) or the creation of a cross-border transport authority can harmonise the approach of different stakeholders. Local authorities in border areas have many tools at their disposal (EGTC, LGCC, European district...) allowing them to create cross-border transport authorities to manage cross-border services. These tools should be promoted at the different governance levels.

- ≡ Promote the establishment of a single transport authority

The organization of a coherent cross-border transport network thus requires, in some states, the involvement of a large number of organising authorities in order to bring together the necessary competences, whereas in neighbouring countries, there may be a single competent authority, with at the same time more substantial financial resources.

3. Improved transport links are an essential part of an effective regional development policy. Improved links to geographically challenged regions can drive improved business competitiveness and allow access to a larger pool of labour. What could therefore be done to improve the functioning and coordination of the different EU funds which contribute towards this goal e.g. transport funding (such as TEN-T); transport focused research funding (8th Framework Programme); and European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) including rural development funds (EAFRD)?

- ≡ Provide and promote adapted instruments and funding sources

Because of their interregional and international dimensions, many projects involving the creation of or investment in cross-border transport networks and services represent too large a financial undertaking for local authorities alone. It is therefore advisable to acquire a critical financial mass in order to support cross-border transport initiatives.

It is also important for local authorities to consider "co-financing" by organising capital rounds, and thereby mobilizing all relevant levels of governance, to ensure the financing of large-scale projects. The use of EU structural funds within the 2014-2020 EU Cohesion Policy objectives is also possible, as well as the opportunities offered by EU funds earmarked for the Trans-European Transport Network by the MOVE Directorate-general (European Commission) and loans from the European Investment Bank. There is indeed an important need for cross-border transport to be taken into account and supported not only by European Structural and Investment Funds.

A better coordination within the EU structural funds has already been encouraged in the new programming period via the introduction of new tools for territorial integrated approaches, especially important for cross-border territories, which goes in the good direction without being sufficient concerning cross-border transport.

4. Urban-rural partnerships can be made a reality through a range of governance models to ensure that transport infrastructure in more populated areas also works to the benefit of more remote areas. What more can be done to ensure that a holistic, multi-modal, and coordinated approach to mobility challenges is adopted by policy makers?

- ≡ Consideration of cross-border public transport in planning documents

Efficient provision of cross-border transport involves a systematic cross-border component in national and regional planning documents (such as the French SCOT, PDU, or 'contrat d'agglomération', the British 'general plan' or the German 'Bebauungsplan') on both sides of the border. The development of a cross-border component in land-use and development planning for border areas would allow the identification of existing services in neighbouring countries, resulting in better interoperability of transport services, and thus a greater cohesion and continuity of cross-border areas.

- ≡ Involvement of users in the definition of needs

The active participation of users (actual and potential) in the definition of their needs can contribute to better organisation of public transport provision. This type of consultation is currently almost non-existent, especially in a cross-border context. Targeted surveys of users, websites incorporating facilities for users' suggestions, and regional conferences on mobility are all tools that can be used for more effective transport planning.

≡ Information of the public about transport provision

Effective communication on services, connections and existing fare structures is another decisive factor in the attractiveness of public transport. There is a need for improvement in the transmission of information to users on the multimodal transport offer, for example with the creation of cross-border information centres. Joint tariffs on cross-border lines and the use of vehicles with a real cross-border identity can be implemented within campaigns to inform citizens and raise awareness of such services on both sides of the border. EU cooperation projects may help in doing so.

5. In terms of promoting territorial cohesion, creating jobs and boosting the competitiveness of the EU in a global market, is mobility between such regions and the rest of the EU a more pressing issue than mobility within these regions?

Cross-border transport concerns as such both mobility between EU regions (as already two or three countries are involved), as well as mobility within the cross-border territory. Functioning cross-border transport systems are the precondition to fully exploit the potential of the common cross-border labour market and a cross-border economic development. There is an important increase in daily migration linked to the opening of the internal market, and according to the Europe 2020 strategy, aiming to stimulate smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, it is especially important to support economic development of cross-border territories, laboratories of European integration.

6. What more could be done to improve the EU legal framework (state aids, services of general economic interest etc) in relation to regional airports, short-sea shipping and maritime transport in geographically and demographically challenged regions (considering both public passenger transport and freight)?

In order to answer to this question one needs first to understand the specificity of cross-border transport within a maritime cooperation context.

Concerning cross-border maritime cooperation, a problem related to the nature of the border is the accessibility.

The need to operate and link transport infrastructures should be emphasised, in order to solve the territories' problems of accessibility by land (vehicle parking, road networks to ports, city/port relations) and by sea (frequency and seasonality of ships, transport costs, port upgrading to accept larger vessels, etc.) or by air.

The time factor (crossing time, but also ferry frequency) is essential in local maritime cooperation. In addition the cost factor is much more of a handicap than on land borders. Moreover, changes are often unfavourable. Today, despite the process of European integration, transport provision is structured according to the domestic needs of the Member states.

Thus, in spite of the existence of the Channel Tunnel, current Eurostar rail services give priority to a long-distance relationship between cities to the detriment of local services for the territories of Kent and the Pas-de-Calais, which Eurostar trains run through. It has now got to the point where the Eurostar stops in Ashford and Calais-Fréthun have been reduced and these towns are no longer directly linked by the same train. There is therefore an urgent need for the cross-border partners to take action to ensure the necessary movements between these neighbouring regions in the future.

An observation of passenger flows through the Channel Tunnel point to a significant imbalance: 70% of users of the Tunnel are British people travelling to the continent. In order to objectively measure these factors and changes in them, indicators of accessibility (which take into account both the cost of transport (monetary cost and cost in terms of time) and the importance of the destination as a proportion of population or GDP) would in theory offer some interesting insights, provided that the data are available.

Currently, the subsidising of maritime transport links occurs along national lines and not geographical ones (for example France subsidises connections between Corsica and mainland France and not those between Corsica and Italy, which are faster because they are closer). National considerations take precedence over geographical ones, with each country subsidising domestic links in the name of continuity of the national territory. Problems relating to the financing and legal structure of these maritime links have recently been analysed in detail by the MOT in the context of the ROCK project involving Kent and the Nord-Pas de Calais region.

There is an important need to develop maritime transport at the service of cross-border maritime cooperation.

Maritime freight transport is now a priority of the European Union and the member States (development of motorways of the sea² and short-sea shipping³). Local maritime cooperation appears as the missing link in international maritime transport policies and as a driver of local development.

Local and regional actors (port cities, counties, provinces, etc.) are concerned and have an obvious opportunity to work on topics such as the sea/land interface, the promotion of intermodality, the organisation of connecting infrastructures in ports and in the hinterlands, and the structuring of the logistics sector, including in its cross-border dimension. For example short-sea shipping, as an alternative to road freight, is incorporated into the Gothenburg objectives.

With regard to passenger transport, the issues of infrastructure (fixed links, ports) and the establishment of scheduled services have already been mentioned above.

For the development of maritime passenger or freight transport, the issue arises of public start-up aid for new services (e.g. promotion of maritime freight within the framework of the Marco Polo EU programme⁴), or use of ERDF funding in territorial cooperation operational programmes) or a permanent public subsidy (public service obligation for territorial cohesion).

7. The CoR may call for an EU initiative on this matter, in order that the issue can be fully debated by the EU institutions and appropriate responses developed. What form should a future EU initiative take e.g. a legislative initiative, or a strategy/action plan, a communication, recommendations or guidelines etc?

The future EU initiative should at least take the form of recommendations to be addressed to the European, the national and regional/local level, as well as to the stakeholders involved. Guidelines for a better coordination between initiatives, programmes, funding sources, policies may also be helpful.

The importance of the EU initiative would be to raise awareness on the issues linked to cross-border transport, which is even more complex than within a pure national context, but may be used as laboratory for territorial integration within the European Union.

² Within the Decision n° 661/2010/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2010 on Union guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network, the term "motorways of the sea" refers to the four maritime routes defined under the title of priority project n° 21 (projects of common interest identified in accordance with Article 13 and concerning the following motorways of the sea):

- Motorway of the Baltic Sea (linking the Baltic Sea Member States with Member States in central and western Europe, including the route through the North Sea/Baltic Sea Canal (Kiel Canal)) (2010),
- motorway of the sea of western Europe (leading from Portugal and Spain via the Atlantic Arc to the North Sea and the Irish Sea) (2010),
- motorway of the sea of south-east Europe (connecting the Adriatic Sea to the Ionian Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean to include Cyprus) (2010),
- motorway of the sea of south-west Europe (western Mediterranean), connecting Spain, France, Italy and including Malta, and linking with the motorway of the sea of south-east Europe (2010).

³ Short distance coastal shipping (alternative terms include "coastal trade" and "coasting trade"). In this context there is BP2S (Bureau de Promotion du Shortsea Shipping en France), an association whose role is to promote short sea shipping and intermodality with maritime links.

⁴ Second Marco Polo programme aiming to improve the environmental performance of the freight transport system ("Marco Polo II"), established by the Regulation (EC) n° 1692/2006, which also repealed the Regulation (EC) n° 1382/2003.