



Common rules for certain types of combined transport of goods between Member States

COM(2023) 702

Executive Summary

Content of the draft

The European Commission's proposal on combined transport aims to reduce the negative impact of freight transport by promoting a shift from road to inland waterway, rail, short sea shipping and maritime transport within the European Union. To this end, binding eligibility criteria are defined that such a service must fulfil within the EU. A key innovation is the assessment of transport on the basis of external costs, i.e. consequential costs that are borne by the general public and not by the polluter. Accordingly, combined transport must have at least 40 percent lower external costs than the alternative of pure road transport. In return, the requirement that a lorry must travel to the nearest transshipment terminal will be dropped. Another funding criterion will be the mandatory use of electronic transport information platforms (eFTI), such as the digital consignment note. The EU Member States are to reduce the costs of combined transport by 10 percent within seven years through a mix of measures and exempt all lorry journeys in the pre- and post-carriage of combined transport from driving bans.

AK's position in brief

- AK supports the goal of making freight transport more climate-friendly and increasingly shifting it to environmentally friendly modes of transport. However, it remains to be seen whether the specific provisions of the proposal actually fulfil this objective.
- The funding criterion of the nearest freight terminal should not be abandoned prematurely.
- Funding should only be linked to external costs and electronic traffic information once these are known and practicable.
- The EU's „Greening Freight“ package and national action plans must specifically promote environmentally friendly transport.

AK's position

The main provisions of the planned draft

AK supports the aim of the proposal to make freight transport more climate-friendly and to shift more to environmentally friendly modes of transport. However, the assessment is very sceptical as to whether the specific provisions of the proposal actually meet this objective. The key elements, namely the calculation of external costs and the use of electronic transport information (eFTI platforms), will only be created through implementing acts and delegated acts. It is unclear how these will ultimately be organised and implemented in practice. Much of the proposal appears to be aimed primarily at the digitalisation of freight transport and the promotion of alternative drive systems in road freight transport. AK therefore advocates sticking to the criterion of the closest freight terminal in the upcoming negotiations, improving the funding framework for combined transport in a targeted manner, waiting for practical eFTI applications and supporting a calculation method that includes full cost transparency for external costs.

External costs

AK fundamentally welcomes the greater consideration of external costs in freight transport mentioned in the recitals. The approach proposed by the Commission for recording greenhouse gas emissions from transport services („Count Emissions EU“, COM(2023) 441), which is based on ISO standard 14083:2023, should not be used in this proposal as it does not reflect the entire footprint. The calculation approach provided for in Article 1c 6) should take the following points into account:

- Use of the national cost rates from the „Handbook on External Costs in Transport“ to calculate each damage category.
- Inclusion of upstream and downstream costs in the production of energy, vehicles and transport infrastructure, as well as habitat and soil pollution.

Consideration of the higher external costs in mountain regions.

However, whether the 40 percent mark is set correctly can only be assessed once a calculation tool with cost factors is available. If external cost efficiency is used as a basis, there is a risk that the proportion of lorry journeys over long distances will become even longer, while the monetary incentives for combined transport remain in place. For example, it cannot be ruled out that a lorry journey from northern Italy via Tyrol to southern Germany will only be shifted to rail there in order to transport the goods to northern Germany or Scandinavia.

AK therefore considers an exemption provision for mountain areas or a restriction to a maximum of one border crossing per lorry section within the framework of combined transport to be necessary.

Digital platforms

AK emphasises the fact that the administration and police can check the eligibility criteria for combined transport at any time, both nationally and across borders, and that professional drivers are not disadvantaged by insufficient freight documentation during inspections. In this regard, reference is made to the corresponding website of the Ministry of Climate Action (only in German) on the eFTI Regulation, on which the proposal is based.

The use of eFTI platforms undoubtedly represents a potential for the further development of combined transport. However, a fundamental change in the funding conditions is only conceivable once a digital platform is available to all players in a practical manner. Under no circumstances should combined transport become a vehicle for promoting the digitalisation of freight transport.

Driving bans

According to Article 9a, lorry journeys within the framework of combined transport should generally be

exempt from weekend, night or public holiday driving bans. From the point of view of AK, it is inconceivable that a lorry journey through the entire Tyrolean corridor from Kufstein to the Brenner Pass is exempt from the driving bans if the journey has started outside Austria and the rail part of the combined transport journey only begins outside Tyrol. This provision also requires either an exemption for mountain areas or a restriction to a maximum of one border crossing per lorry section.

In port hinterland transport, however, there is a risk that rail will suffer a massive competitive disadvantage and lose traffic to road if the updated CT Directive exempts road transport on the pre- and on-carriage to short sea shipping (e.g. Adriatic ports) from any driving bans.

National action plans

Generally binding action plans for the promotion of combined transport, as provided for in Article 3a and the indicative funding list in the Annex, are welcomed. In the view of AK, however, the following additions are necessary:

- An average cost reduction of 10 percent within seven years for door-to-door services compared to pure road transport must under no circumstances be at the expense of employees in the transport sector. Efforts should be directed towards improving the scandalously low wages and working conditions in road haulage.
- A transparent overview of the services offered by the terminals, as proposed by the Commission, is welcomed. In the view of AK, it must also be ensured that all terminals and modal shift infrastructures are accessible to third parties without exception if they have been subsidised with public funds.
- In order to promote the shift of freight transport to rail, there is a lack of an approach to introduce financial subsidies for the shipping industry. This would make single wagonload rail transport more economical for companies.
- The shift of goods to rail should not only be achieved through price incentives, but also through legal requirements for rail-related bulk goods.
- Truck toll surcharges for external costs, as envisaged in the list of proposals (Annex Part 1 c), should be levied in those Member States where the infrastructure costs directive (EU) 2022/362 unfortunately allows loopholes, namely with pri-

vate motorwayconcession companies. In addition, lorries should also pay tolls for using roads off motorways, in line with the polluter-pays principle.

More coherence in the „Greening Freight“ package

The overarching aim of the „Greening Freight“ package is to drive forward the decarbonisation of freight transport; this is not always guaranteed in other Commission proposals. From AK's perspective, the following points should be noted:

- Combined transport can better realise its potential if deficits in other EU legislation are eliminated. In the view of AK, there is a lack of legally defined specifications for the rail compatibility of road vehicles (craneability, shapes, dimensions, foldability, etc.), which are, however, essential for the development of combined transport.
- AK once again speaks out against the introduction of particularly long and heavy lorries („gigaliners“), as these stand in the way of an ecological reorganisation of freight transport.
- The density of checks on driving times and rest periods must be increased and standards improved. The Commission's current proposal stipulates that each Member State must carry out six vehicle checks per million vehicle kilometres. In the opinion of AK, this requirement is clearly too low and has no deterrent effect against abuse.
- When it comes to technical roadside inspections on motorways, the standards of truck inspections and the equipment of law enforcement officers must be improved. Defective exhaust systems in lorries and the manipulation of exhaust gases by road transport companies („ad-blue fraud“) cannot currently be specifically detected.
- The reporting of CO2 emissions from transport services and e-commerce providers in „Count Emission EU“ must not be voluntary, as proposed by the Commission, but must be mandatory and reflect the entire CO2 footprint.



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About us

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