Revised TEN-T guidelines

The revision of the TEN-T guidelines is an opportunity for building and upgrading the network's infrastructure to the highest quality standards

While recognising the necessity of modernising the EU's transport system, the European Commission adopted four transport-related legislative proposals last December, among which the revision of the Union guidelines for the trans-European transport network (TEN-T), with the aim of supporting the transition to cleaner, greener, and smarter mobility. Despite the EU having one of the densest transport infrastructure networks in the world, a large part of it is now ageing and coming under increasing pressure due to a rise in traffic. As such, FIEC welcomes the Commission's proposal and calls for it to be as ambitious as possible, especially regarding the maintenance of the TEN-T infrastructure.

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A MODERN TEN-T

The TEN-T is an EU-wide network of rail, inland waterways, short-sea shipping routes, and roads, connecting over 400 major cities with transport hubs. When complete, it will cut travel times between these cities. To modernise the entire network, the Commission's proposal comes with several changes. It introduces more ambitious requirements for each transport mode. To ensure infrastructure planning meets real operational needs, the new TEN-T creates nine 'European Transport Corridors' that integrate various transport modes such as rail, road, and waterways. Also, with the introduction of an intermediary deadline of 2040, the network will now be gradually completed in three steps instead of two. This should ensure the completion of major parts of the network ahead of the 2050 deadline. Also noteworthy, the new TEN-T required cities along the network to develop Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP) with the objective of promoting zero-emission mobility.

WHAT IS THE NEW TEN-T AIMING FOR?

The TEN-T revision is closely linked to the European Union's climate agenda. The new TEN-T has several major aims. First, the reduction of congestion and transport emissions. Second, acknowledging that the TEN-T network is far from complete, the removal of bottlenecks and gaps on the network is listed as a major objective of the proposal itself. In this respect, the new TEN-T also aims at connecting EU cities and regions, including rural and remote regions. Lastly, the proposal is aimed at bringing more benefits to the users of the TEN-T network with one major objective of providing better transport services to freight customers.

MORE FOCUS ON MAINTENANCE

Over the past decade, a lack of proper maintenance has led to the deterioration of Europe's transport infrastructure thus exposing its users to a greater risk. This vulnerability is no more evident than with the collapse or closure of bridges in recent years. In addition, the maintenance deficit has significant environmental impacts, particularly, in terms of CO_2 emissions and raw material consumption.

The current Regulation contains limited obligations on Member States in terms of maintenance. This changes with the Commission's proposal as Member States would now be obliged to maintain the network's infrastructure in a way that it can provide the same level of service and safety during its lifetime. The addition of these obligations is a step in the right direction as regular maintenance is vital, not only to guarantee the safety of users across the entire transport network, but it represents also a key activity in the circular economy.

INNOVATIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

For FIEC, the TEN-T can also be a precursor for high-quality and future-oriented infrastructure. The promotion of innovative infrastructure is necessary to progressively shift to new mobility patterns such as electrical vehicles. In this respect, the new TEN-T requires the roll-out of alternative fuel infrastructure for various modes of transport, particularly when it comes to recharging and refuelling points for electric and hydrogen vehicles in the cities included in the network. This last point is also a key element of the new urban mobility framework. FIEC welcomes the uptake of this type of infrastructure as it is essential to meet the decarbonisation goals of the EU and securing an effective shift to green mobility.

THE ROLE OF THE EC IN TACKLING DELAYS

While a higher level of ambition is certainly necessary to address missing links in the network, problems of delays for several projects need to be tackled. Indeed, one of the major concerns related to infrastructure projects, especially in the current economic climate, is the lack of speed in terms of implementation. Often, administrative issues play a major role in delays. In Italy, for example, large infrastructure projects take - on average - over 16 years to complete due to administrative obstacles. While the EU has limited competences in addressing these issues, the new TEN-T does strengthen the Commission's oversight of the implementation of parts of the network. This is a positive step towards ensuring the infrastructure projects in the network are implemented swiftly and FIEC considers the European Commission's role crucial to avoid delays.

WHO WILL PAY?

Another major factor behind delays in infrastructure projects is the lack of funding. The estimated investment for the completion of the TEN-T will amount to € 244.2 billion until 2050. Nevertheless, the new proposal does not specify how infrastructure projects are going to be paid. While there are instruments - at the EU level - to co-finance these projects, it is expected that national budgets will take the biggest share of the cost. FIEC argues that the cost could also be shifted to infrastructure users. The 'user-and-polluter pays' principle has proven successful to guarantee funding resources in several EU Member States and should also be applied when implementing TEN-T projects. ce