

# THE CHALLENGES FOR ROAD FREIGHT IN EUROPE

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## THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Looking back two generations, Europe has been the starting point and a major battleground of two world wars with terrible human sacrifice. Initiated by war-weary and far-sighted French and German politicians, a peace project of "Roman" dimensions was started in the late forties.

Today the European Community, a non-federal organisation but with its own elected parliament, its own government, the commission, and its own super-body, the council of European ministers, encompass 15 countries with some 350 million inhabitants. Within a year, another 10 countries with some 75 million inhabitants (giving a total of almost 450 million people) will join the European Community. This process is not without friction. The voting powers of bigger countries like France, Spain and the new member Poland are still under discussion: how to balance the political and economical power with the power of the number of people?

Norway and Switzerland are still not Community members and the United Kingdom, the queen/kingdoms of Denmark and Sweden, although member states, have not adapted to the common currency of the Euro.

## HOW DOES THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY AFFECT ROAD FREIGHT?

The cornerstones of the Community are the free cross-border movements of capital, people, services and goods. Prosperity and peace should be the consequences of a single market, you do not make war with your customer (but perhaps with your supplier?). However the "free market" is partially offset by subsidies. Approximately half of the common EU budget is for agricultural funding and transfers, with a net flow from the north to the south.

Free flow of capital, people, services and goods also acts as a generator of goods transport.

GDP growth implies transport growth to a high degree of accuracy. Growth of transport puts demands on growth of infrastructure for transport, regardless of transport modes: harbour facilities for sea transport, railroads not only for passenger transport and roads for cars, buses and coaches and trucks. In Europe, infrastructure investments have not kept pace with the growth in transport demand.

The geographical and demographical structures of Europe have particular implications for transport infrastructure. Mountains like the Pyrenées separate Spain and Portugal from France and the Alpes separate Italy (mountainous and by far having the most road tunnels in Europe) from the middle and north of Europe. However way you look at it, the roads of Germany are main arteries of the European road transport system.

Road transport, regardless of cars, buses or trucks, also contributes to pollution by local emissions like nitrogen oxides, particulates and noise. On a global scale, the net generation of carbon dioxides is unavoidable with the combustion of fossil fuels.

The death toll by road accidents in the present 15 EU states is approximately 40.000 every year, a heavy vehicle is involved (if not the cause) of one tenth, or 4.000, of these. 400 heavy vehicle drivers are killed on the road every year.

## **THE EUROPEAN CHALLENGE**

The European challenge for road freight is easily formulated:

- increased demand for mobility of goods and people
- less pollution from nitrogen oxides, particulates
- less noise, particularly at night time
- less generation of carbon dioxide and less import of fossil fuels
- less fatalities and injuries on the roads
- less congested roads, at least as perceived at certain time and place

But nobody wants to pay.

Hence, easily stated, difficult to solve. In some respects not only a European challenge but a global one.

## **FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS**

One should not despair, there are some good things happening.

For one, the European Community has been extremely successful in harmonising conditions for cross-border road transport, but not so for rail transport. The directive 96/53/EC on weights and dimensions of trucks and buses must be accepted by every member state (sooner or later). There is no need for any truck transport to carry vast documentation about the vehicle combination at cross-border transport.

So far, only the northern countries of Sweden and Finland have longer combinations of approximately 25 meters LOA (7.82 + 13.6 meters of load length) and 60 tonnes GCW. But tests of 300 longer combinations have been decided in the Netherlands.

There are some 40 European directives for the design of a truck or bus/coach. From smoke, power, emissions over brakes and noise to the designation plate. These directives are all accepted by the 25 member states. A further step is presently discussed within the European parliament, the Whole Vehicle Type Approval, thus abolishing the need for 25 domestic type approvals for new heavy vehicles in series production.

The emission level steps Euro 4 and Euro 5 are in their developing stages and we should aim for a next Global 1.

As for noise the vehicle industry has put forward a new test proposal to the UN bodies. This new pass-by noise test will much better reflect noise emissions in actual operation.

The European Commission, Parliament and Council are discussing amendments to the so called Eurovignette, setting road charge levels for heavy vehicles. General road tolls are on the way to be introduced in Germany and the UK as already in some other European countries. Wisely used, these will contribute to solving the problem of road infrastructure funding.

There will be many proposals for increased road safety, particularly with respect to active safety and the use of so called Intelligent Transport System. Scania, my own company, has suggested a "crash-zone" of about 600 mm to be permitted outside present limitations of vehicle length and weight as an added passive safety measure. Some 900 lives, of the 40.000 mentioned before, are estimated to be saved by this alone.

The issues of carbon dioxide and the use of fossil fuels are probably the most difficult ones.

By logic, the fuel with highest energy density should be used in heavy road freight. This speaks for the continuing development of the diesel engine and the development of synthetic diesel fuels from fossil natural gases.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Road freight is the outstanding transport mode over short, medium and even long distances.

Will we see a revitalisation of the “Silk road” between the Far East and Europe, not by train but by road? Probably so. Will we see a similar development in Africa? Most likely so.

This is not to say that this development is without obstacles and challenges for the legislators, authorities, vehicle owners, drivers and vehicle manufacturers.

I have a firm belief that the Forum for International Road Transport Technology through the Symposia on Heavy Vehicle Weights and Dimensions provides an excellent forum where different stake-holders meet to discuss these challenges.

I also have a firm belief in the advancement of technology, of infrastructure as well as of vehicles. Transport binds us together as it always has and we will overcome the challenges.