Towards a European intermodal transport network: lessons from History

Funding: European
Duration: Feb 2002 - Aug 2004
Status: Complete with results

Background & policy context:

Creation of a European intermodal transport network is a high-priority objective of the European Union and one to which it has dedicated studies, specific legislation and considerable funds. Successful creation of such a network should take into account the lessons to be learned from correct analysis of the already long history of the integration of European transport networks. Earlier research - completed by the authors of this project and their correspondents in several COST member countries - has already demonstrated the historical importance of the concepts of intermodality, interconnection and interoperability. The project is thus based on the postulate that detailed knowledge and rigorous historical analysis of the various transport policies, envisaged or put into effect since 1945 can significantly improve understanding of current issues involved in the creation of a European intermodal transport network, of the conditions that would make this possible and of the obstacles encountered to date.

Numerous studies in transport geography and economics have been completed on waterway, road, rail and air transport networks in different countries and these will provide key input. This project will complement existing knowledge with new historical research, thereby summarising and extending its conclusions in order to establish a solid basis for the creation of a European intermodal transport network.

Objectives:

The main objective of the Action is to contribute to the creation of a European intermodal transport network by defining a framework of references and concepts to guide current European policy in this area. This will be achieved by identification and analysis of the obstacles that transport intermodality has encountered to date. In order to propose methods for solving the most significant problems.

The choice between different modes of transport studied over the long term, will be assessed in order to understand the historic characteristics of intermodality in Europe in the following specific areas:

- flow of tourists between the north and south of Europe, and
- freight traffic on inland waterways.

The history of network connections between different modes of transport since 1945 has contributed to defining the possibilities for developing a European intermodal transport network.

The project will:

- study national and European policies that have tended to favour this connection since 1945;
- define the stages and characteristics associated with national/international and national/local network connections.

The interoperability of different geographic networks (intramodal) and of different transport networks (intermodal) is the key to the set up of an effective European intermodal transport network. The project will therefore seek to identify the conditions which permit this interoperability by analysing successful case studies in the following areas:

- interoperability through technical standardisation (e.g. Europallet);
- interoperability through commercial cooperation (e.g. air and rail reservation systems);
Methodology:

The researchers will work together in thematically defined teams which will meet periodically (four seminars are planned). They will use and improve upon existing statistical databases (e.g. mobility and freight traffic in Europe) and computerised bibliographies.

The results of the Action will include:

- a comprehensive summary of existing research which will address the contribution of the work to the definition of concepts of intermodality, linkage connections and interoperability and to the assessment of political and technical factors which have encouraged or slowed the creation of a European intermodal transport network;

- case studies (presented in accordance with the common principles defined by the research team in order to allow comparison); and

- a critical bibliography.

Parent Programmes:
COST - Co-operation in science and technology

Institute type: Public institution
Institute name: Technical secretariat set in the European Commission
Funding type: Public (EU)

Partners:

13 COST countries: Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, The Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

Organisation:
Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique Institut d'Histoire moderne et contemporaine
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Key Results:

1. Inter-modal transport: from concept to solutions First lesson: Inter-modal transport was a fact well before it was celebrated as a concept and became a political requirement. A historical study of past forms and techniques casts a new light on today 'obstacles' to intermodal transport systems. Inter-modal and inter-modality, understood as operational integration of several means of transport used in succession, have been used in common language for a few decades only. The Council of Ministers of Transport of the European Conference of Ministers of Transport explicitly mentioned the necessary development of inter-modal transport in Europe in 1976. It was not before 2001 that the EC published official definitions for inter-modal transport, for freight and passengers: 'movement of goods in one and the same loading without handling the goods themselves in changing modes'; for passengers, the concept of inter-modality is used for terminals, when these allow changing modes.
Inter-modality doesn't mean nevertheless mere connection between two lines in a network, although the word 'interconnection' or its French counterpart 'interconnexion' includes a possible connection and change of mode in the same terminal. Although the concept definition and its political role are new, and inter-modal transport couldn't be used to describe in this sense past realities of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, historians won't see any novelty in the mere facts: the successive use of at least two modes of transportation was compulsory for any good or passenger following a transeuropean or a mere national route.
Sea transport wasn't of any use without following ground transportation; railways couldn't attract passengers or goods, or dispatch them from railway stations without connections with waterways and roads. These were studied and included in statistics as 'complementary transport' 'complémentarité' or 'combined transport' 'transports mixtes'. The increasing motorization and the development of air traffic boosted the needs for explicit inter-modal transport and related organisation, equipment and infrastructure; load transfers became the rule for the sky-rocketing containers transport.
Second lesson: Some reminders about transport history. How do technical system succeed each other. When considering the past 150 years, historians identify main stages in transport history
after the predominant mean of transport of the time. They show how each successive transport system aimed

Policy implications

Thanks to this COST Action, successes, deficiencies and mistakes inherited from the past are highlighted. Europe will thus be able to take these elements into account and gain some time in the implementation of transnational infrastructures (missing links), and of integrated inter-modal transport networks and chains. Historical studies led up to date in the Action stress on several facts of consequence for the future of European transport, and, then, for integration of the Europe of tomorrow.

1. Ultra-liberalism on the transport market should be counterbalanced by restrictive measures for the sake of sustainable development, for freight transport as well as for passenger transport.
2. This implies a transport policy designed in such a way as to anticipate problems which are likely to occur as well as the consequences of previous decisions, instead of being aimed at answering questions asked by immediate crises.

Intermodal

A comprehensive summary of existing research which will address the contribution of the work to the definition of concepts of intermodality, linkage connections and interoperability and to the assessment of political and technical factors which have encouraged or slowed the creation of a European intermodal transport network.

Infrastructure provision (incl. TENs)

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Related Projects:

The final conference will be held in Paris in June, 2005. It is conveniently entitled: 'Integration of European Transport Networks: Lessons from History and Solutions for the Future.' In parallel to these, Action Cost 340 also aims to analyse and discuss the bibliography on transport and inter-modality in all the social sciences, particularly history, geography and transport economics. This enterprise is an ambitious one as can be seen in the bibliographies gathered in the volume: COST 340, Towards a European Intermodal Transport Network: Lessons from History: A Critical Bibliography. Paris: AHICF, 2004.

STRIA Roadmaps: Other specified
Transport mode: Multimodal transport
Transport sectors: Freight transport
Geo-spatial type: Network corridors