EU

White Paper on Transport

On 12 September 2001, the European Commission adopted its White Paper on a common policy in the transport sector from now until 2010. The oft-postponed document reflects the growing need to reverse current trends in demand for transport so that each mode of transport can return to its 1998 level. The Paper’s approach therefore includes a range of measures combining pricing, revitalisation of alternative modes of transport to the roads and targeted investment in the trans-European transport networks. It contains more than 60 measures that, when implemented, will gradually help to sever the link between growth in transport and economic growth.

The introductory part of the document lists the main challenges faced by the current European transport system. For example, unequal growth in the different modes of transport, congestion on some main roads and busy rail lines, and impact on the environment or citizens’ health and lack of road safety. The document notes that if nothing is done now to strike a balance in the growth of the different modes of transport integrating environmental concerns into their development, these trends will increase, both with the enlargement of the EU and the extra transport requirements this will bring.

The report recommends a range of measures to counteract these problems and to avoid the risk of a near monopoly of road haulage for freight transport. The aim is to give alternative environmentally-friendly transport modes the means to compete.

The White Paper also envisages an upward revision in the proportion of EU funding in the trans-European transport networks (currently set at a maximum 10 per cent of total investment cost) possibly to as much as 20 per cent. The aim is to facilitate certain large-scale projects where Member States only show moderate interest, due to the low return on investment they represent. This would, for example, concern cross-border rail projects across mountain ranges.

Another important new suggestion is the possibility of cross-financing, which would enable transferring part of the revenues from road taxes to the development of other types of infrastructure, such as rail. This approach presupposes adapting current EU legislation that subsidises tolls to cover the building, running and development of the road network.

It would involve putting into practice the principle of
Damning Report on Loss of Erika

The expert report on the loss of the Erika oil tanker on 12 December, 1999 off the coast of Brittany, was transmitted to the plaintiffs on 4 October 2001.

The report, which had been requested by the investigating magistrate, places considerable blame on the Franco-Belgian oil company TotalFina, the Italian ship inspectors Rina and the French State.

According to the report, which was drafted by two maritime experts with the French Cour de Cassation, the Italian ship inspection body Rina, which inspected the most recent work carried out on the vessel, is directly culpable since replacement steel deck panels fitted to the ship were not the correct width, a factor that contributed directly to the loss of the tanker.

The report also indicates that the Erika’s seaworthiness certificate expired in November 1999 and was therefore invalid. The tanker, said to be “in a perilous state”, should therefore not have been available for charter to TotalFina.

The tanker, which was rarely chartered by oil companies (BP rejected the vessel in 1997 and Shell in 1998) bore traces of corrosion on its bulkheads and hull, evidence disregarded by TotalFina.

The report indicates that the maximum authorised load of 30,000 tonnes was exceeded and that the ship was carrying insufficient fuel. According to the experts, this last factor had a direct impact on the control of the ship, contributing to its loss. They place the blame on the Captain,