

Summary of the Logistics Conference, 8 May 2007

1. OPENING OF CONFERENCE AND KEYNOTE SPEECHES

The conference was opened by Fotis Karamitsos, Director for logistics, innovation, co-modality & maritime transport at the European Commission's Directorate-General Energy and Transport, and by Matthias von Randow, Director General for Strategic Planning and International Relations at the Federal Minister of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs. Both speakers referred to the importance of freight logistics for economic performance and competitiveness. To secure this, environmental and social challenges would have to be addressed by policy-makers and industry.

2. INDUSTRY TESTIMONIES

Mr Mats Boll, Manager for Corporate Outlook Development at Volvo Logistics, Mr Erick Staake, Chairman of the Board of Directors at DuisPort and Mr Lübberink, Director for European Affairs at Deutsche Bahn (DB) provided industry's views on the challenges facing the European logistics industry from the perspective of a shipper, a transport operator and a logistics service provider respectively. Their presentations are available for download.

3. THE NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Mr Wieczorek, Head of Division A 14 dealing with Freight Transport and Logistics in the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs spoke of the German Master Plan for freight transport and logistics which should enter the political consultation process after the summer and is expected to be agreed at the end of 2007. Mr Wieczorek noted that work on the Master Plan had shown the importance of involving industry in infrastructure planning and to improve trans-European networks and interoperability, as well as hinterland links and those of distribution centres.

4. THE EUROPEAN LOGISTICS ACTION PLAN

4.1. Introduction

Mr Van Houtte, Head of Unit G.3 at the European Commission's Directorate-General Energy and Transport, introduced the six subjects to be discussed in the afternoon, namely e-Freight, quality, simplification, modernisation of the regulatory framework, « green » transport corridors and urban logistics. He circumscribed the ideas for action in each of these domains but underlined that these were preliminary conclusions. Particular attention needed to be paid to where progress could be made and to determining the timing of actions.

4.2. Analytical approach and preliminary results of the preparatory study

Mr Gentili of the company PriceWaterhouseCoopers and Mr Liedtke of the Institut für Wirtschaftspolitik und Wirtschaftsforschung (IWW) presented the results of the preparatory work for the impact assessment of the Logistics Action Plan, including on the results of the stakeholder survey carried out prior to the conference.

4.3. e-Freight and Intelligent Transport Systems

Mr Jan-Tore Pedersen of the BMT Group Ltd. and active in the Freightwise project was asked to introduce the topic. He argued for a role-centred approach to build an information exchange that is independent of transport modes. In addition, measures should be undertaken to encourage transport operators to publish their services in a uniform way.

In the discussions that followed, the need for additional standardisation was challenged by some and defended by others. The Commission said that other topics that might be addressed under the title of eFreight, included digital maps, the single window for administrative dealings, achieving a holistic approach to data architecture design and electronic tolling. Additional points raised during the discussions included the need to safeguard sufficient bandwidth for the transport sector's growing RFID requirements and the possibility of applying semantic web services to ensure interoperability between different IT systems.

4.4. Quality

Ms Nicolette van der Jagt, Secretary General of the European Shippers' Council (ESC), introduced the subject by saying that quality was a top criterion for shippers, often ranking higher than price. The ESC therefore wanted standard performance measures across modes.

The discussions focussed on service quality in rail and the measures that may need to be taken to improve this. Participants were also told of a World Bank survey on the perceived logistics performance of 150 countries.

4.5. Simplification

The introductory presentation was provided by Mr Sorgetti, Director of CLECAT, who distinguished between an approach to simplification that was based on technology and a second focussing on documentation. As regards the latter, he did not question the desirability of a single European transport document per se, but he suggested that this would be difficult to obtain and might entail some complications, explicitly referring to the innate link between documentation and liability. On technological developments, he said that this, too, could help simplify logistics processes, but care should be taken in order to avoid that issues such as security were used for the promotion of gadgets.

Liability-related questions were the focus of the discussions that followed, with the merits and chances for a European solution vis-à-vis current work in UNCITRAL being contested by some and promoted by others.

4.6. Weights and dimensions

Introducing the subject, Mr Ojala of the Turku Institute of Economics referred to the differences of opinion over the benefits and risks of heavier, larger trucks. Mr Karamitsos also raised the issue of the 40-tonne weight limitation on certain combined transport operations, wondering whether current exceptions for heavier weights in combined transport using ILUs should continue to be limited only to 40ft ISO containers. The proposal for a European intermodal loading unit (EILU), too, was referred to.

Participants spoke both in favour and against the introduction of larger sized and/or heavier vehicles the effects of which the European Commission said it wanted to study closely before pronouncing itself. On the subject of loading units, it was said that the EILU proposal should not lead to a discrimination against other loading standards.

4.7. Green corridors

Mr Mertel, Managing Director of KombiConsult and involved in the BRAVO project, introduced the topic of green corridors and suggested that the concept had been successfully applied in rail but also road and inland waterways, had the advantage of achieving short-term effects but should not ignore the need for coordination between corridors.

4.8. Urban transport

Mr Dieter Wild of PTV AG and involved in the BESTUFS project pointed out that most freight transport trips are over short distances, with cities playing a dominant role in commerce. It is here where sustainability problems were most pressing. He hoped that urban transport would be explicitly and positively mentioned in the Action Plan.

Ms De Schepper of Inland Navigation Europe fully endorsed this, stating that citizens are also consumers. She referred to the importance of support for freight-oriented projects coming from city planning units.

5. THE VIEW OF THE UPCOMING PRESIDENCIES

Looking ahead to the future Portuguese (2nd half 2007) and Slovenian (1st half 2008) Presidencies of the European Council, Mr Lemos and Mr Vrcko outlined their respective countries priorities and intentions during their respective Presidencies.

6. CLOSE OF CONFERENCE

The conference was closed by Mr Karamitsos and Mr Wieczorek with an invitation for participants to provide additional comments in writing on the issues discussed, setting as deadline end of May 2007.