

Seminar on the economic crisis in road transport: Flash report

On Friday 23 October 2009, the Commission gathered 30 experts, both academics and representatives of the road haulage industry, to analyse the effects of the economic crisis on the industry and identify whether specific exit strategies are needed in the road transport sector and if so, which ones.

The main conclusions of the meeting are:

1. The downturn in the sector was substantially greater than the average downturn in the economy, due to the sector's dependency on trade. Signs of recovery are present but uncertainties remain as to its pace and timing. Although there was a feeling that the recovery might start in 2010, it is expected that it will be flat-bottomed and pick up later depending on intra-community and global trade.
2. The structure of the sector, which is made up of many micro-enterprises, helps the industry to adjust to economic fluctuations but on the other hand may hinder its capacity to innovate and to increase its efficiency. Overall, however, the sector has tackled the difficult situation extremely well.
3. In the post-crisis situation, transport growth patterns are not likely to change dramatically. A number of issues deserve particular attention:
 - In the short- to medium-term: an intelligent credit policy is needed to allow investment into environmentally-friendly vehicles and into training in entrepreneurial and managerial skills particularly targeted at micro-enterprises.
 - In the long term, the harmonisation of national rules in the internal market, including possible fiscal measures and enforcement measures, must be accelerated. It was suggested to launch a costs assessment of the lack of harmonisation in those areas.
 - Other long term challenges include the EU's climate change policy, particularly in view of the commercial vehicles sector's current constraints to develop new technologies.
 - With regard to the likely evolution of the public debt, there will be a limit to governments' capacity to support infrastructure-building measures in the road haulage sector. Therefore mechanisms have to be implemented to support and enable the financing of road infrastructure.

The Commission has been called upon to continue monitoring closely the situation of the road transport sector, to strictly defend the integrity of the internal market and not to tolerate short-term measures that could damage the sector in the long-term. Participants have concluded that attention must specifically be paid not to harm the sector with short-term measures but rather to maintain the sector's capacity so it can cope with the recovery and with an increase in demand expected from further globalisation.