



Sensitive Areas Must Be Protected

Particularly sensitive areas, such as mountainous regions, wetlands or coastal zones, are extremely vulnerable to the impacts of transport. The rapid increase of freight transport in Europe has seriously deteriorated air quality, caused widespread noise nuisance and the ever-increasing spread of transport infrastructure is a major threat to biodiversity.

Sensitive areas include unspoiled natural or mostly-natural areas, rare landscapes and habitats, national monuments and nature protection zones. The 1997 Vienna Declaration of the UNECE Conference on Transport and the Environment defines sensitive areas as “areas where the ecosystems are particularly sensitive, where the geographic conditions and the topography may intensify pollution and noise and where unique natural resources or unique cultural heritages exist”. The Declaration explicitly asks that sensitive areas be protected from the negative impacts of transport on human health and the environ-

ment. It also recognizes the need to develop and implement additional and stricter measures for freight transport in sensitive areas.

Sensitive areas are valuable for several reasons

They help maintain biodiversity, contribute to the purification of water and air and alleviate climatic impacts. Furthermore, sensitive areas have the potential for development focussed on sustainable solutions such as small-scale farming, environmentally-sound settlements and landscape patterns, “soft” tourism and recreational activities.

Freight Transport is Endangering the Sensitive Areas

When is an Area Sensitive?

When determining whether an area is sensitive, it is not enough to just examine the sensitiveness of the ecosystem. A criteria catalogue was developed in 2001 which recommends assessing the ecological and cultural value of an area, the fragility of the habitat and the potential for sustainable development, before deciding on major projects (e.g. infrastructure projects or traffic-inducing projects such as factories or shopping-malls).

Source: BMLFUW, 2001

Freight transport

Transport growth has been particularly high the last ten years.

Although particularly sensitive areas must be protected against negative impacts, instruments such as higher tolls or night bans on freight transport, are rarely considered politically acceptable.

No sufficient protection by existing legislation

The Treaty of the European Community states, in Article 2, that the EU must ensure a "high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment, the raising of the standard of living and quality of life". Several directives (e.g. the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC) aim to maintain biodiversity and conserve wild flora, fauna and habitats of importance to the Community.

The Air Quality Framework Directive adopted in 1996 sets a general policy framework for dealing with air pollution. Air quality standards exist for four pollutants, namely: sulphur dioxide (SO₂), nitrogen oxides (NO_x), particulate matter (PM10), and lead (Pb). With the aim of protecting human health, it specifies targets, which are to be attained within a specific deadline.

In spite of the above-mentioned legislation, sensitive areas are not sufficiently protected. The issue of protecting sensitive areas regularly collides with the interests of those who believe the myth that increased infrastructure and transport is a prerequisite of economic growth.

The Current Transport System is Not Sustainable

Transport growth has been particularly high for the last ten years as freight transport growth rates exceeded growth of the European economy. Road transport, since 1990, has been growing at a rate of about 4 % per year on average. Short sea shipping has also increased significantly (2.6 % per year) while rail transport has stagnated. Therefore, road trucking now accounts for 43 % of total freight transport compared to 33 % in 1980.

Unsustainable trends in freight transport

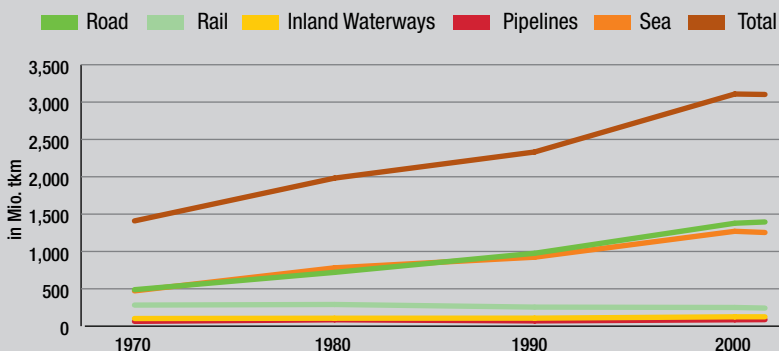
Transport represents a growing source of greenhouse gas emissions. Already 28 % of all greenhouse gas emissions are caused by transport. Road freight transport is responsible for 25 % greenhouse gas emissions from transport. Trucks consume significantly more energy per tonne-km than rail or ship transport and also cause comparably higher CO₂ emissions per tonne-km.

The Variety of Sensitive Areas

- Areas which already have international protected status, such as Natura 2000 areas pursuant to Directive 79/409/EEC on the conservation of wild birds
- Areas covered by Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora
- Areas falling within the scope of the Convention for the Protection of the Alps (Alpine Convention)
- National parks in accordance with IUNC rules (Category II protected areas)
- UNESCO World Heritage Sites
- Areas covered by national protection provisions governing the soil, water, the atmosphere, flora, fauna, habitats, the landscape and cultural assets
- Areas which meet the criteria governing ecological and/or cultural value, the fragility of habitats and the potential for sustainable development

Source: Environment committee of the European Parliament as part of its opinion on the Eurovigette proposal (EP 2003).

Freight Transport Growth



Source: Transport Development in EU15 (EC 2003) Chart: VCO 2004



Road freight transport is the most significant emitter of particulate matter (PM): more than 50 % of total PM emissions are due to trucks, a contribution which has slowly increased since 1990. Particulates seriously damages health, they can cause respiration problems, asthma and increased risk of cancer.

Road, rail and aviation are major sources of noise annoyance. More than 30 % of EU citizens (EU15) are seriously annoyed by road noise above 55 dB.

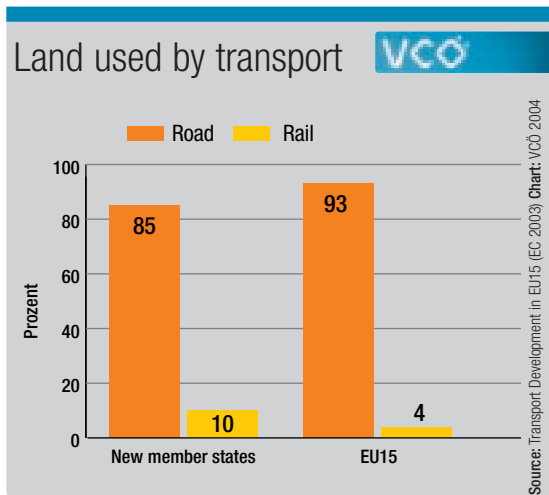
Land is under continuous pressure from new transport infrastructure. It is estimated that between 1990 and 1999 almost 10 ha a day were consumed by new motorway construction in the EU15.

Impact of Transport on Sensitive Areas

In ecologically sensitive areas, emissions from transport (including noise) can lead to a change in living conditions and even extinction of specific animals or plants. Transport is also a growing source of greenhouse gas emissions. The impact of climate change on sensitive areas is already visible: eight out of nine alpine European glaciers are retreating and ice in the European arctic is declining.

Infrastructure

Road is the biggest land consumer.



The expansion of transport infrastructure networks and continuous traffic growth also pose a significant threat to biodiversity from direct impacts and by fragmenting and isolating habitats. In the new EU member states habitants stand a better chance as the average size of non-fragmented land is 174 km² compared to 121 km² in EU15. With the rapid creating of new roads, the question is, for how long?

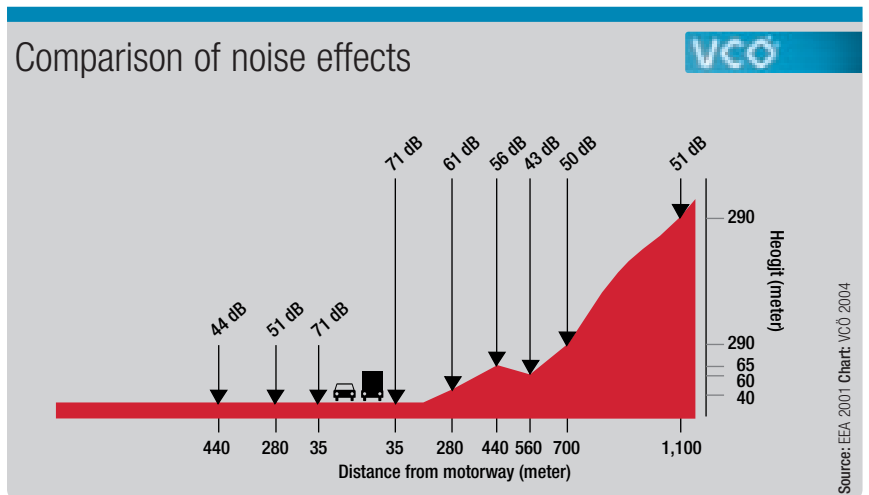
Many sensitive areas have topographic characteristics, which intensify negatives effects. The specific topographic and meteorological conditions of mountainous valleys hamper the dispersion of air pollutants, thus increasing the harmful effects of pollutant emissions compared to non-mountainous areas. The direct effect on the concentration of pollutants in ambient air per unit of NO_x emission is almost one order of magnitude higher than in low-land areas.

CO₂ emission

The CO₂ emission rates for freight transport are larger than for passenger transport.

Noise

Mountainous areas are suffering from traffic noise



A Flexible EU transport Policy is Needed



A scarce resource

In sensitive areas infrastructure should be seen as a scarce resource.

Transport policy needs differ across Europe. There are differences between peripheral and central countries, and between particularly sensitive and less sensitive areas – a “one size fits all” strategy is not appropriate. A flexible EU policy, based on an understanding of different national and regional needs, is urgently required.

The European Commission should propose a set of criteria to define what constitutes a sensitive area both ecologically and from the point of view of human health. Once sensitive areas are defined, the citizens, environment of the area should be effectively protected against the negative impacts caused by transport. Whereas targets for air quality already exist, targets for noise and fragmentation of land are

still lacking. The defined targets must be both ambitious and achievable by a set of instruments. One single instrument is not enough to achieve the targets.

Member States should be allowed to protect their sensitive areas by applying pricing instruments. Regarding air quality, the Commission should propose a coherent policy to enable Member States that want to go further than minimum EU requirements.

• More Infos:

VCÖ: www.vcoe.at

T&E: www.t-e.nu

• VCÖ and T&E Recommendations

European Level:

- The Commission should propose a set of criteria to **define what constitutes a sensitive area**
- A **coherent transport policy** for such areas should then be developed. The policy should be **target-based**, and supported by instruments.
- Targets should be **non-discriminatory** and achieved in the most **cost effective** way possible, thereby favouring economic instruments over regulatory ones
- The Transport Council should appoint a representative to sign the Transport Protocol of the **Alpine Convention**, as promised in 2001
- In the field of European transport **investment** policy, audited Cost Benefit Analyses are needed to avoid unnecessary fragmentation and to enhance Europe's competitiveness.
- Regarding **air quality**, the Commission should propose a coherent policy to enable Member States that want to go further than minimum EU requirements
- The EU should transfer responsibility for noise standards for vehicles, tyres and asphalt/rails to the Environment Council, and propose **general noise targets** as soon as possible, as announced in the Directive on environmental noise

National Level:

- Member States should be allowed to use **pricing instruments** to protect their sensitive areas
- National governments should be prepared to **make maximum use of current flexibility** in EU legislation and implement it in an unambiguous, non-discriminatory manner.