The TEN-T review: A welcome but perfectible proposal

Lucas BOSSER, Director, Transport and Accessibility, lucas.bosser@crpm.org
Guillaume MORENO, Policy Analyst, Guillaume.moreno@crpm.org

After a long preparation process in which the CPMR actively participated, the European Commission presented on 14 December 2021 its proposal for the revision of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) regulation. The TEN-T is of capital importance for CPMR Regions as it establishes both the funding priorities and the transport infrastructure standards within the European Union for the years to come. The current review will therefore determine the availability of European funds for regional authorities to implement TEN-T priorities.

There are several significant improvements to the Regulation, and the CPMR has already issued a technical paper presenting a preliminary analysis of the proposal, including a series of maps. It has also created a dedicated section on its website.

The purpose of this document is to offer a summary of the main issues thrown up by the review of the TEN-T regulation from the perspective of CPMR Member Regions, in anticipation of plans for lobbying efforts towards the European Parliament and the Council.
1. Do the new European Transport Corridors bring an added value to Peripheral Maritime Regions?

The European Transport Corridors (ETC) is the result of the merging of the Core Network Corridors (CNC) and the Rail Freight Corridors (RFC). It covers both the core network and the extended core network of the TEN-T.

The fact that the European Commission has chosen an innovative approach to allow better geographical coverage of the corridors and of the core network is certainly welcome. That will contribute to enhancing territorial accessibility in several peripheral maritime regions. It is worth noting that the ETC should contribute to cohesion through improved territorial cooperation. The proposal establishes that the whole network should ensure enhanced territorial accessibility and connectivity to all regions. In the current TEN-T, this is only an objective for the comprehensive network.

The CPMR also welcomes the merging of CNC and RFC. That will contribute to better coordination and efficiency in the identification of projects and spending of dedicated funds. It is regrettable that the role of the coordinators has not been further strengthened as their contribution is limited to sharing an opinion when examining applications for Union funding under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF).

Likewise, strengthening the coordinators should enhance the implementation of the TEN-T. Although they only have a consultative role when evaluating the CEF project proposals, it is most likely that Member States will advocate for further limiting their authority in the co-decision process.

2. Is the new 2040 milestone an opportunity or a step backwards?

In most cases, the creation of this new milestone is a pragmatic solution to a challenge in the implementation of the TEN-T. Not only does it offer a more realistic perspective to sections in which it would be challenging to reach the 2030 target, considering the high level of standards applying to the core network. It also facilitates the integration of the RFC sections that were not in the core network. It also improves substantially the geographical coverage of the core network, although a few “blind-spots” remain.

However, in some cases, it seems that including rail sections in the extended core instead of the core network is conservative to say the least. For example, new constructions that would have been realistically implemented shortly after 2030 would have been accelerated by including such sections in the core network.

Finally, setting this new deadline partially answers the key question of where the CEF money would go after 2030 by identifying priority sections. However, a question mark remains as to whether the evaluation of CEF projects will be 100% neutral when a core network project will compete with an extended core project on the same call for proposals, especially for those that are already mature. This question will be answered in the next CEF Work Programme in 2024.

3. Does the new approach to urban nodes answer the CPMR claim for better geographic coverage?

This broader approach to urban nodes is in line with past proposals from the CPMR. The selection criterion looks relevant at first glance. Including the NUTS 2 criterion allows to take into account the importance of regional hubs that would not otherwise reach the inhabitant threshold. In some specific cases, especially in low density regions, it may, however, fall short to cover important regional urban nodes.

One concern the CPMR General Secretariat would have regards the requirements for developing the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP). It fears that the involvement of Regional and Local Authorities is not sufficiently ensured in the design and implementation of the SUMP. Annex 5 only mentions an “integrated approach with a high level of cooperation, coordination and consultation between the different levels of government and relevant authorities”.

4. Does the European Maritime Space fill the gaps of the Motorways of the Sea?

The CPMR General Secretariat welcomes the novel approach. It had called for a more ambitious maritime pillar to the TEN-T, and the proposed one is certainly a significant improvement. Allowing more open access to CEF funding will help to encourage the development of short sea shipping and will benefit peripheral ports whether they are in the core or comprehensive network.

Additionally, the Annex features several important upgrades to the core network for ports (Civitavecchia in Italy, Sète and Brest in France, Agii Theodori in Greece) and includes lots of new ports in the comprehensive network especially on islands. The CPMR is convinced that these changes will be beneficial for its member Regions.

It is worth noting that the European Commission plans to exclude from the network any port and airport that would have an average traffic volume below 85% of the relevant threshold over the last 6 years. Although this is an improvement from the current Regulation, a better solution would have meant that exclusion from the network would only be possible upon request from the ports and/or Member State. It is regrettable that some ports of great importance for Peripheral Maritime Regions have been excluded from the network following this strict methodology. The implementation of the TEN-T Regulation brings great opportunities for the European ports, especially in terms of sustainability. This positive dynamic should be maintained and, thus, these ports re-integrated into the network unless requesting otherwise.

5. Is this proposed TEN-T fit for the future?

Stating that the proposal is fully future-oriented is an overstatement. The European Commission has, however, tried to anticipate potential and certain challenges transport infrastructures will have to overcome in the near future. An effort is made to ensure that the network is future proof.

The CPMR welcomes the inclusion of ambitious standards while ensuring a pragmatic approach (possible exemption when standards are ill-adapted) to allow smooth implementation of the Regulation, although the feasibility of some ambitious specifications remain rather uncertain. Likewise, the Regulation brings a strengthened digitalisation perspective. The CPMR does indeed believe that digitalisation is key to achieving the goal of a more innovative, efficient and sustainable TEN-T network, keeping in mind that Regional authorities must be involved in setting its terms and conditions.

This is a stated intention to encourage modal shift towards the most sustainable transport modes. Likewise, the proposal makes rail, short sea shipping and inland waterways a clear priority.

The major question mark that remains is how to finance this ambition. As for lots of aspects of the Fit for 55 Package, implementing some of the standards will demand massive investments. Similarly, the proposal encourages modal shift, and turning such an ambition into a reality is a key question that needs answering. It would be vital to give further consideration to tools such as ‘EcoBonus’ schemes to encourage a shift to rail, waterway and sea.
The Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) represents more than 150 regional authorities from 24 countries across Europe and beyond. Organised in Geographical Commissions, the CPMR works to ensure that a balanced territorial development is at the heart of the European Union and its policies.

Rond-Point Schuman | 1040 Brussels, BELGIUM
info@crpm.org | +32 (0)2 612 17 00

6, Rue Saint-Martin | 35700 Rennes, FRANCE
(siege) info@crpm.org | +33 (0)2 99 35 40 50