



*European Economic and Social Committee*

**TEN/277**  
**Promotion of cross-border  
cycle transport**

Brussels, 25 April 2007

**OPINION**  
of the  
European Economic and Social Committee  
on the  
**Promotion of cross-border cycle transport**  
Exploratory opinion

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In a letter dated 7 November 2006, the German Federal Ministry of Transport, in the context of the German EU Presidency, asked the EESC, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, to draw up an exploratory opinion on:

*The promotion of cross-border cycle transport.*

On 21 November 2006 the Committee Bureau instructed the Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society to prepare the Committee's work on the subject.

Given the urgent nature of the work, the European Economic and Social Committee appointed Mr Simons as rapporteur-general at its 435th plenary session, held on 25 and 26 April 2007 (meeting of 25 April), and adopted the following opinion by 128 votes to two, with eight abstentions.

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**1. Conclusions**

- 1.1 There is (still) no European cycling policy. The European Commission does support, by means of subsidy programmes, research, development and the implementation of projects as part of policy on sustainable mobility and energy use.
- 1.2 The EESC recommends that cycling be integrated into transport and infrastructure policy in general and in particular be given substantial attention in the forthcoming Green Paper on urban transport.
- 1.3 In Europe every train, including high-speed international trains, should be obliged to make space available for transporting, among other things, bicycles.
- 1.4 *Minimum* quality standards should be introduced for cycling infrastructure built with the aid of European subsidies.
- 1.5 The EESC recommends that EU subsidy budgets also be made available for the development and maintenance of cycling infrastructure. Good-quality infrastructure already exists in some European cities and countries.
- 1.6 The European Commission should start and/or continue to subsidise the exchange of information, good practices and public awareness campaigns for cycling and should require cycling policy (for example, intermodality between bicycle and public transport) to be integrated into all transport projects which it subsidises.

- 1.7 Encouragement should also be given at European level to the drawing-up and implementation of adequate safety regulations covering both cyclists and their bicycles as well as cycling infrastructure and other traffic.
- 1.8 Cycling policy must also be integrated into the further development of European policy in the fields of spatial planning (including urban development policy), the environment, the economy, health, training and education.
- 1.9 The European Commission must properly organise the monitoring and collection of data on cycling in Europe and encourage the harmonisation of research methods.
- 1.10 The European Commission must continue to subsidise the creation of Euro Velo Routes so that a complete European Network of Cycle Routes, a TEN (Trans-European Network) for cycling, comes into existence.
- 1.11 It is recommended that a European organisation, subsidised by the European Commission, should take over the administrative and secretariat role for the Euro Velo projects and the various completed Euro Velo routes. This is to ensure continued maintenance of the infrastructure and the central provision of information to cyclists.

## 2. **Introduction**

- 2.1 The German Federal Ministry of Transport, in the context of the German EU Presidency, asked the EESC to draw up an exploratory opinion on cross-border cycle transport. The Ministry raises three questions.
- 2.2 This exploratory opinion first examines the current state of play on cycling policy in the EU (ministerial question No 3), with the focus on cycling as a mode of transport in daily life. It then discusses the possibilities for improving cross-border infrastructure for cycle transport (ministerial question No 2) and European cooperation on extending the route network (ministerial question No 1). Cycle tourism is a central focus in relation to the last two questions.

## 3. **The state of play on cycling policy in the EU**

- 3.1 Until now cycling policy has scarcely been a separate topic. In the past, cycling has come up for discussion at European level mainly in the context of environmental issues after the environmental movement in particular called for a better cycling policy because of the detrimental effects of increasing road traffic. Thus, in a 12-point programme<sup>1</sup>, the EU

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1 European Commission, DG XI: "Cycling: the way ahead for towns and cities", Luxembourg, 1999.

Commissioner for the Environment, Ritt Bjerregaard, called on local authorities in Europe to adopt a cycling-friendly policy.

- 3.2 The 2001 Transport White Paper and its 2006 Mid-term review focuses on other modes of transport. The reaction of the European Parliament<sup>2</sup> to the White Paper does, however, include a call to the European Commission to invest more in improving access to public transport for cyclists.
- 3.3 In his speech at the 2005 Euro Velo-City conference in Dublin the Commissioner for Transport, Jacques Barrot, emphasised that, despite the application of the subsidiarity principle, the European Commission had a role to play in promoting bicycle use across Europe. Cycling could play a greater role in attaining the proposed objective of re-balancing the modes of transport. The Commissioner sees the European Commission as having a role to play: funding programmes, improving road safety and information to decision-makers, and cooperation.
- 3.4 The European Commission supports the CIVITAS (CItY VITAlity Sustainability) Initiative in the context of research and development. Up till now projects aimed at a more sustainable urban transport system have been implemented in 36 cities in 17 countries. One of the eight categories of integrated solutions drawn up relates to the promotion of a less car-intensive lifestyle and more use of bicycles<sup>3</sup>. In the Intelligent Energy-Europe Programme the European Commission supports STEER projects aimed at promoting sustainable energy use in transport. Two projects focus on the exchange of information in the field of cycling policy<sup>4</sup>.
- 3.5 In the Green Paper Promoting healthy diets and physical activity: a European dimension for the prevention of overweight, obesity and chronic diseases,<sup>5</sup> the European Commission calls for answers to the questions: How can public policies ensure that daily physical activity is built into daily routines and what measures, for instance in the planning of residential areas, are required for the development of an environment that can encourage physical activity?
- 3.6 Many answers to these questions have already been worked out in the "cycling world". Experts are linking cycling more and more with health, and not just because it can contribute to a healthy amount of daily physical activity. In the context of environmental policy, cycling

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2 Resolution of 12 February 2003 – EP Committee on Regional Policy, Transport and Tourism, Rapporteur: Juan de Dios Izquierdo Collado, 9 December 2002. REPORT on the Commission White Paper "European transport policy for 2010:time to decide", FINAL A5-0444/2002; <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+REPORT+A5-2002-0444+0+DOC+WORD+VO//EN&language=EN>.

3 See [www.civitas-initiative.org](http://www.civitas-initiative.org).

4 See [www.http://ec.europa/energy/intelligent/projects/steer\\_en.htm#policy](http://ec.europa/energy/intelligent/projects/steer_en.htm#policy).

5 COM(2005) 637 final.

can also help reduce the particle content of the air in urban areas, and yet the poor image of air quality in urban areas is actually discouraging people from cycling.

- 3.7 With the development of increasingly integrated mobility management, increased attention has also been paid to the advantages that the bicycle offers in solving traffic congestion. In addition to daily journeys between home and work, it appears that social-recreational traffic also plays a large part in causing congestion. Other factors include economies of scale (such as mergers of hospitals, and large out-of-town shopping centres) and the longer distances arising from this. Cycling is in danger of becoming less attractive.
- 3.8 A frequent problem is that new or expanded infrastructure cuts across existing or planned cycle routes. This creates insurmountable or troublesome obstacles for cyclists, also for the recreational cyclist who is, as it were, confined to his residential area or town by major transport infrastructure. This problem needs attention and solutions must be found when new infrastructure, especially road and rail, is built. Wherever it is technically possible, a cycle path should also be constructed at the same time as such new infrastructure.
- 3.9 It should also be mentioned in this connection that instruments such as minimum quality standards should be introduced for cycling infrastructure built using European subsidies. In order to create a pleasant living environment, cities can use good, comfortable and safe cycling infrastructure, including cycle routes and parking facilities for bicycles in the inner city, as incentives.
- 3.10 Within Europe the Netherlands is regarded as the leading country for cycling and thus as a model for other countries. The Netherlands owes this reputation not just to the highest rate of cycling mobility in Europe, but also to the Bicycle Masterplan (1990 – 1997). Other European countries have followed the Dutch model and have been persuaded by the Dutch government's attention and commitment (including financial) to a good cycling policy.
- 3.11 The Dutch Bicycle Masterplan clearly demonstrated, by thinking in terms of journeys, that a good cycling policy must not only ensure good (comfortable, fast and safe) cycle paths, but also pay attention to the ability to park bicycles safely and conveniently in or outside the home, at the station, at public transport interconnections and bus stops and at the final destination.
- 3.12 A few years ago, the European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT) commissioned a survey on national transport policy in the ECMT member states<sup>6</sup>. It appears from this survey that only a few countries do not have any national policy for cycling<sup>7</sup>. Of course, the scope, status and impact of the national policy differ in the various countries. The average proportion

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6 ECMT, National Policies to Promote Cycling, (Implementing sustainable urban travel policies: moving ahead), OECD Publications Service, 2004.

7 ECMT, National Policies to Promote Cycling, p. 43.

of the total number of journeys made by bicycle in Europe is, according to the ECMT, 5%. But countries such as Denmark (18%) and the Netherlands (27%) prove that a much greater share is possible<sup>8</sup>.

- 3.13 These differences at national level, with further differences at local level, show that bicycle use can be influenced by government policy. The main growth potential lies in people switching from private car use to cycling for trips of up to 5 to 8 km. In Europe cars are used for more than half of these short trips. Even for trips of less than 2 km car use is still 30%<sup>9</sup>.
- 3.14 The main aim of cycling policy is to encourage people to make short journeys by bicycle. But attention is now also being paid to longer-distance travel; consideration is being given to fast, direct, long-distance cycle paths in metropolitan areas.
- 3.15 The growth potential of bicycle use for short distances is the basis for calculations of the contribution that a good cycling policy can make to combating climate change. According to recent calculations, for example, short journeys by car (< 7.5 km) account for about 6% of total emissions from cars<sup>10</sup>.
- 3.16 The bicycle, whether owned, borrowed or hired, can contribute to greater use of public transport. The bicycle extends the radius around the station, bus stop or home within which the traveller can reach a stop or vice versa without a car within minutes.
- 3.17 The differences between the various European countries regarding the proportion of journeys made by bicycle cannot be explained by purely social, geographical, climatic and cultural circumstances, although they naturally play a role<sup>11</sup>. A significant factor in cycling countries appears to be the important role of associations which work to promote a good cycling policy. They are often responsible for initiatives that lead to national strategies.
- 3.18 Monitoring and assessment of cycling policy at European level are unfortunately hindered by the lack of useful and accessible statistics. Not only the associations but also the ECMT argue for better gathering of data on cycling policy and bicycle use<sup>12</sup>. The decision no longer to include important statistics on the use of bicycles in the Statistical Pocketbook "EU Energy and transport in Figures" was greeted with incredulity.

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8 ECMT, National Policies to Promote Cycling, p. 20.

9 ECMT, National Policies to Promote Cycling, p 24.

10 See <http://www.fietsersbond.nl/urlsearchresults.asp?itemnumber=1>.

11 Research carried out in the Netherlands over the past few years suggests that immigrants (including second-generation immigrants) from, for example, Morocco, on average cycle substantially less than the native Dutch. See "Het fietsgebruik van allochtonen nader belicht", Fietsberaad publication number 11a, November 2006. See: <http://www.fietsberaad.nl>.

12 See ECMT, National Policies to Promote Cycling, p.24.

- 3.19 Whereas GPS navigation systems for cars are now quite common, navigation systems covering all cycle routes have been more difficult to launch because digital maps generally do not cover cycle routes, which have not been listed or digitalised. However, considerable progress is being made in this field in cycling countries, such as the availability of cycle route planners on the Internet<sup>13</sup>.
- 3.20 The European bicycle manufacturing and spare parts' industry has an estimated turnover of EUR 8 500 000 000 and employs (directly or indirectly) approximately 130 000 people. To this figure must be added the more than 25 000 shops and distributors and their staff<sup>14</sup>. This still does not take into consideration high-tech research. The economic importance of cycle tourism is growing, especially in economically disadvantaged regions where small-scale businesses along the long-distance routes are profiting from cycle tourism<sup>15</sup>.
- 3.21 Up to now there has been no European policy on cycling. The Green Paper on urban transport that the European Commission is preparing will - according to the Commission - also address cycling. This offers an excellent opportunity to compensate for the lack of a European cycling policy and its integration into other policy areas by starting to include cycling in the Green Paper as an important form of urban transport.
- 3.22 The exploratory opinion "Transport in urban and metropolitan areas" – TEN/276, CESE 273/2007 – also examines the coordination of the planning of transport and housing structures (point 3.3) in addition to encouraging people to cycle and walk (point 3.3.3). The integration of cycling policy into land-use planning should be developed.

#### 4. **Improvement of cross-border cycling infrastructure**

- 4.1 Problems arise in cross-border cycle transport within Europe, especially when the cyclist wishes to take his own bicycle abroad with him using international high-speed trains, which are an important infrastructure component for cycle tourists. In Europe it is usually impossible to transport bicycles on such trains, however.
- 4.2 While cycle tourism is growing and is being specifically promoted by the European Commission and national and regional authorities as a sustainable and, especially for economically weaker regions, important form of tourism, cyclists wishing to travel by train to their holiday destination or the starting point of their international cycling holiday are likely

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<sup>13</sup> For examples, see: [www.radroutenplaner.nrw.de](http://www.radroutenplaner.nrw.de) and <http://www.fietserbond.nl/fietsrouteplanner>.

<sup>14</sup> According to an estimate for 2003 by COLIBI (Association of the European bicycle industry) and COLIPED (Association of the European Two-Wheeler Parts' and Accessories' Industry).

<sup>15</sup> Source: Presentation by Les Lumsdon at the final conference of the North Sea Cycle Route, 9 November 2006, on tourism, economic regeneration and European subsidies; see: <http://www.northsea-cycle.com>. and [http://www.uclan.ac.uk/facs/lbs/research/institutes\\_and\\_centres/transport/docs/Northseacycleconf.doc](http://www.uclan.ac.uk/facs/lbs/research/institutes_and_centres/transport/docs/Northseacycleconf.doc).

to encounter serious problems. Whereas airlines are happy to transport bicycles, and facilities for transporting bicycles on ferries are good (although routes for cyclists to and from ports and signposting are not always satisfactory), rail operators refuse to allow them onto international high-speed trains.

- 4.3 A solution to this problem in cross-border cycle transport is in sight, however, following the European Parliament's vote in January 2007<sup>16</sup>, carried by a large majority to require all trains in Europe to have a multifunctional section for wheelchairs, skis and *bicycles*, for example. It is recommended that every train in Europe, including international high-speed trains, be obliged to make available space for transporting bicycles.
- 4.4 Road safety for cyclists differs greatly in European countries. This is above all a result of the lack of a specific cycling infrastructure in countries where cyclists have to share the road with cars and lorries travelling at 50kph, 80kph or even higher speeds. This discourages people from cycling. Encouragement should also be given at European level to the drawing-up and implementation of adequate safety regulations covering both cyclists and their bicycles as well as cycling infrastructure and other traffic.
- 4.5 Also the quality of the existing infrastructure varies. Cycle tourists are less likely to go to countries which they consider unsafe if they are used to safer infrastructure at home. It is recommended that *minimum* quality standards (for example , width of cycle paths, also for other non-standard bicycles<sup>17</sup>; signposting) be introduced for cycling infrastructure built with the aid of European subsidies, and that subsidy budgets be made available for the establishment of cycling infrastructure of the kind which has already proved effective in some European cities and countries.
- 4.6 Although the great differences in the proportion of journeys made by bicycle in the various European countries and cities are also a consequence of social, geographical, climatic and cultural differences, the main reason is differences in transport policy. Therefore the exchange of information, good practices and public awareness campaigns for cycling is of great importance. It is recommended that the European Commission should start and/or continue to subsidise this exchange of information, good practices and public awareness campaigns and that an integrated cycling policy (for example intermodality between bicycle and public transport) be made mandatory in all transport projects subsidised by the European Commission.
- 4.7 Cycling is a popular activity which can be promoted, as part of a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, by integrating cycling policy into policy areas other than just transport. It is recommended that cycling policy be integrated into the further development of European

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<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2007-0005+0+DOC+XML+V0/EN>

<sup>17</sup> For example: tandems, delivery tricycles, aerodynamic reclining bicycles and three-wheeled covered bicycles.

policy not only in transport and infrastructure policy but also in the fields of spatial planning (including urban development policy), the environment, the economy, health, training and education. It is also recommended that the European Commission should properly organise the monitoring of and collection of data on cycling in Europe and encourage the standardisation of research methods.

## 5. **European cooperation on the extension of the EuroVelo route network**

- 5.1 EuroVelo is a project initiated by the European Cyclists' Federation (ECF) in 1995<sup>18</sup>. The goal is to develop 12 international long-distance cycle routes across Europe, both within and outside the EU Member States. The total length of the proposed routes is 66 000 km. The routes are largely based on existing local and regional routes. The continental perspective of the project and the vision of a pan-European network of cycle routes have proved a major asset since the start of the project.
- 5.2 This has inspired local, regional and national authorities to cooperate on establishing international long-distance cycle routes. Last year EuroVelo 6, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Black Sea, was opened. INTERREG funds have played a major role in the establishment of these routes. That also applies to the North Sea Cycle Route which was completed as an INTERREG project at the end of 2006 and is considered by the ECF as EuroVelo 12.
- 5.3 The idea behind Euro Velo is to develop and maintain a recognised Trans-European Cycle Route Network as a TEN (Trans-European Network), comparable to the rail and road network. Obviously this is desirable not so much as part of European transport policy but rather for the benefit of tourism and regional development in Europe. In addition to long-term management, route coordination and information, another major task is of course the further development of the network. The publication in 2002 of guidelines on all major aspects of the establishment of a Euro Velo route has proved of great value in preventing disinvestment. The European Commission should continue subsidising the establishment of Euro Velo routes with a view to the development of a complete Euro Cycle Routes Network, a TEN for bicycles.
- 5.4 Discussions between the partners of the North Sea Cycle Group on ways of ensuring the future continuity of the route, its marketing and cooperation between the large number of project partners (approximately 70 regions in eight countries) have not yet produced a conclusion. This question is also of importance with regard to other international long-distance cycle routes set up with project funding (often 50% EU money), where no solution has been found for the management of cooperation and joint marketing.
- 5.5 One much discussed possible solution to the problem, following the pattern of organisations at national level, is to entrust a European organisation such as the European Cyclists'

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18 See [http://www.ecf.com/14\\_1](http://www.ecf.com/14_1).

Federation (ECF) with the management, route coordination and administration of a Route once the work on infrastructure and signposting is complete. According to the ECF, the long-term maintenance of the quality of routes, once complete, is a major issue that needs to be solved at an international, European level. A European organisation should take over the administrative and secretariat role for the Euro Velo projects and the various completed Euro Velo routes. This is to ensure continued maintenance of the infrastructure (including signposting) and the central provision of information to cyclists (including information on where help may be obtained in the event of a breakdown or emergency). As with many European initiatives and cooperation projects, EU financial support will be needed.

- 5.6 Despite its limited resources, the ECF has itself stepped up its efforts on behalf of the EuroVelo project in order to work out and implement a solution to this problem. This includes cooperating on the further development of a system of signposting for the Euro Velo 6 project that is unambiguous but can be applied and adapted in all countries, and pressing for recognition of this signposting system by the UNECE<sup>19</sup>. Formal recognition should be given to the signposting system drawn up by the ECF in the framework of the Euro Velo 6 partner group and its implementation should be encouraged.

Brussels, 25 April 2007.

The President  
of the  
European Economic and Social Committee

The Secretary-General  
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European Economic and Social Committee

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19 See <http://www.unece.org/trans/main/welcwp1.html>.