

Full steam ahead on mobility

Written by Stefan Back on 31 October 2018 in Opinion
Opinion

The third mobility package presents an unmissable window of opportunity for Europe, says Stefan Back.



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The third mobility package is probably the least contentious of the three packages presented by the European Commission within the space of around one year.

Progress has been slow and difficult on both the first and second packages, particularly on issues relating to market access, the posting of workers and substantive provisions on road charging.

In the third package, the way forward appears much easier. This mainly addresses environmental issues and digitisation of the transport sector.

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To date, it has been well received and there appeared to be no major obstacles. However, whether there will be sufficient time to have texts of the legislative proposals approved and in place before the 2019 election of a new European Parliament is another matter.

Given these time constraints, the European Economic and Social Committee is working as fast as possible and its opinions on the majority of the package should be in place by the October plenary.

Admittedly, the schedule is tight; however, I am confident that there still is a strong chance of approving most of the legislative proposals during this parliamentary term.

The focus on CO2 reduction and electromobility makes the package key to implementing the Energy Union and the Paris Agreement.

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These CO2 reduction aims are challenging and will require an effort. However, they are in line with the aims of the 2011 White Paper on Transport Policy and the Paris Agreement.

Proposals on CO2 standards for new heavy-duty vehicles and the action plan to promote the Battery Alliance – part of the November 2017 second mobility package – are important both for implementing the Energy Union and for strengthening the competitiveness of the EU automotive industry.

These will promote production of low or zero-emission vehicles and a competitive world-class battery industry within the EU. Otherwise there is a significant risk that the EU automotive and battery industry will concede its lead to China, Japan or the USA.

I also welcome the initiatives for enhancing road safety through new requirements for vehicle safety systems and road infrastructure.

This is an important follow-up to the 2017 Valletta Declaration on improved road safety, but it also promotes innovation.

The package is part of the Energy Union implementation as well as a follow-up to the New Industrial Policy strategy presented by the Commission in 2017.

This is designed to promote a smart innovative and sustainable industry based on digitisation and

innovation. For the transport and automotive industries, it means focusing on technical development and innovation to strengthen competitiveness and improve sustainability, including road safety.

The keynote message of the package “Sustainable Mobility for Europe: safe, connected and clean” highlights the possibilities offered by new technology for making European mobility safer and for improving accessibility.

“This package, when adopted, will make an important contribution to an innovative and competitive EU transport and automotive sector”

In addition, it highlights the potential of technological advances for making European industry more competitive and for creating employment and at the same time improving the safety of mobility while adjusting to climate change avoidance measures.

This means a fundamental change in the concept of transport, with the emphasis now on flexible and integrated systems that focus on the user, with infrastructure and vehicles becoming part of a single system.

The package also includes a strategy for automated mobility to promote the digitisation of the transport sector.

Major issues include the integrity of vehicle-to-infrastructure communication and the adaptation of the regulatory framework on safety and responsibility.

Autonomous vehicles may make transport safer and more accessible for older people or people with disabilities. Meanwhile, digitised traffic management may reduce congestion and improve punctuality, energy efficiency and subsequently performance.

Further proposals for digitising the transport sector include using electronic documents in contacts with authorities to ease administrative procedures.

The package also contains a proposal for accelerating permit procedures for projects in the Trans-European Transport Network, in particular cross-border projects.

Unfortunately, this proposal does not cover appeals or court proceedings, which risks reducing its impact considerably.

Overall, this package, when adopted, will make an important contribution to an innovative and competitive EU transport and automotive sector.

It will also reduce its environmental footprint. However, urgency is clearly required if Europe is to retain its place as a major player both in transport and in the automotive industry.

Therefore, I sincerely hope that this package will be adopted before the 2019 elections to avoid losing valuable time.

About the author

Stefan Back is a member of the Employers Group of the European Economic and Social Committee

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