



**Europe's voice for sustainable transport**

**Position paper on ecopoints and trans-alpine  
transport**

**DRAFT**

## **Introduction**

In December 2001 at the end of the Belgian presidency, the European Council in Laeken asked the Commission to propose a continuation of the ecopoint system for heavy goods vehicles transiting Austria after 2003. On 20 December 2001, the Commission proposed a regulation establishing an ecopoint system applicable to heavy goods vehicles travelling through Austria for the year 2004 (COM(2001)807final).

Ecopoints were introduced when Austria joined the European Union in 1995 for a limited period till December 2003. Austria is allowed to apply the ecopoint system according to Protocol 9 of the Accession Act of Austria, Sweden and Finland to the EU. The system is only applied for transit trips through Austria by lorries above 7.5 tonnes. That means ecopoints do not apply for trips with point of departure or point of arrival within Austria. Neither do they apply for buses or private cars. The objectives of the ecopoint system were

- to reduce NOx emissions from lorries transiting through Austria by 60 % over the period between January 1991 and December 2003
- to limit the number of transit journeys to maximum 8 % above the level of 1991.

The proposed from the Commission has deleted the 8 % limit and allows the continuation for a limited duration of one to three years only. By that time, the framework proposal on charging for the use of infrastructure should have been adopted and replace the ecopoint system.

## **2. Trans-alpine transport development and its impact**

Transalpine goods transport has doubled and road freight has almost tripled from about 22 million tons in 1980 to over 62 million tons in 2001. More than 60 % of transalpine freight uses roads. Whereas the road share in Switzerland is slightly above 30 %, in Austria and France it is more than 70 %. Transit traffic accounts for almost two thirds of all transalpine transport. Transit traffic through Austria accounts for 90 % of the total freight moved through the Alps.<sup>1</sup>

The impact of freight transport through sensitive areas as the Alps is particularly strong.<sup>2</sup> Mountains act as natural barriers where only limited space can be used for housing, farming and transport infrastructure. The high numbers of trucks in the narrow corridors and their emissions have a major impact on human health and the ecosystem in sensitive areas. The same traffic load contributes to a concentration of NOx in the air three times higher in mountainous areas than in lowland areas. In winter and at night this effect is even higher. The morphological shape of the Alpine valleys also intensifies noise emissions. The increase in road freight transport has

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<sup>1</sup> See the figures Alpinfo, Federal Department of Environment, Transport, Energy and Communication. <http://www.are.admin.ch/imperia/md/content/are/are2/publikationen/deutsch/116.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See the recent study from the European Environment Agency 'Road freight transport and the environment in mountainous areas'.

also become hazardous for citizens and other road users. Tunnel accidents in Austria, France and Switzerland caused 52 victims between 1991 and 2001.

### **3. T&E's Alpine transport policy**

The protection of sensitive areas<sup>3</sup> from the negative impacts of freight transport is an important issue and should become a main objective of the European Union. This would improve the quality of life of citizens which is one objective of the Union according to the treaty of Amsterdam.

Existing national transport policies are not co-ordinated between the Alpine countries and thus do not have the overall positive effects. Negative effects on other corridors caused by a certain measure may outweigh some of the positive effects on one corridor. This is also true for the existing ecopoint solution which is limited to one country and one part of the Alps and also limited to transit traffic only. Thus, the ecopoints are also leading to undesired effects. Therefore T&E is in favor of replacing the ecopoint system by one that gives at least the same protection but is applicable to the whole Alpine area and on all freight transport through other sensitive areas as well. Until such a policy is in place, however the ecopoints have to continue maintaining the current protection and thus maintaining the 8 % limit.

The capacity of transport infrastructure through the Alps is in general not a limiting factor. Conservative calculations show that the existing rail links through the Alps have a potential capacity to accommodate more than 70 % of current transalpine freight transport. The rail share through the Alps could be doubled without any new investment in new rail links. Thus, the citizens and the sensitive areas could be protected from freight transport through the Alps without harming internal market requirements on free movement of goods and people. Alternatives are in place, e.g. on railways but also on short sea shipping which could take over a considerable amount of freight delivered to Italy across the Alps from the ports on the North Sea.

Such a policy needs to be consistent and applicable for the whole Alpine area. An upper limit for road freight transport like those currently existing for the ecopoints (8 % above the level of 1991) must be fixed for the whole Alpine area and for all sensitive areas. This target can be mainly reached with market instruments. It requires the implementation of a kilometer charging system for heavy goods vehicles all over Europe and the improvement of international railways services removing institutional and technical hurdles. In the short term investment in intermodal transport may be necessary and possibly also a form of trading in alpine transport 'permits' ('Alpine transit auction').

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<sup>3</sup> Not only the Alps are suffering from freight traffic but e.g. also the Pyrenees where freight transport increased 330 % in 10 years and 90 % is road transport.

#### **4. Recommendations on the proposed Ecopoints regulation**

**T&E recommends replacing the ecopoint system as soon as possible with a more appropriate system for sensitive areas in general.**

**T&E insists that the ecopoint system is not weakened as long as it continues (no abolition of the 8 % limit) and that every new solution must offer at least the same protection as the current ecopoint system but for all sensitive areas.**

**T&E urges the European Parliament and the Council to include objectives and time schedule to replace ecopoints now in the forthcoming regulation on the ecopoint system. Such a new solution must include an upper limit of road freight transport through the Alps.**

**T&E urges the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council to move ahead with the implementation of a fair and efficient pricing system for all transport modes, for both passenger and freight transport which foresees a kilometre charge for heavy goods vehicles within the EU.**

**T&E urges the railways to improve their rail services and to make better use of existing rail infrastructures through the Alps.**

**T&E urges the European Parliament and the Council to accelerate the discussion on the second rail package in order to provide the safety and interoperability framework needed for an open rail freight market.**

**T&E urges the Member States and railways to accelerate the liberalisation of freight transport, to abolish institutional hurdles and to improve international rail transport.**

**T&E urges the European Commission to produce the announced proposal on tunnel safety without delay.**

**T&E urges the European Commission to propose a coherent approach for freight transport for the whole Alpine area and for other sensitive areas considering the needs of the citizens and the economy as soon as possible.**

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