

## **"European Union policy in road charging"**

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Infrastructure charging has been a recurrent issue for European Community and Union, since 1108-70 regulation (1970) to White paper "European transport policy for 2010: time to decide" [Com (2001) 370, September 2001] through the White paper "Fair payment for infrastructure use: A phased approach to a common transport infrastructure charging framework in the EU" [COM (98) 466, July 1998]. A new directive on HGV charging is on the table since August 2003 and has already failed to pass three times at the EU council (Upper chamber in the EU legislative machinery) while EU council and European Parliament's (Lower chamber) views are significantly different.

Parliament insists on adherence to the principle of subsidiarity, to which the Commission seems to ascribe less importance; the principle could be emphasised by some Member States as a means of resisting excessively strict control. The Council has also expressed its agreement on the need for fair and efficient charging; national interests, however, compel the Member States to interpret fairness and efficiency in widely differing ways.

To decide how to charge (marginal or full cost, cost recovery or market price for a service), how to deal with externalities, how to reach the financial equilibrium (even if neither Parliament nor the Commission (regulations 1107/70 and 1191/69 and amendments proposed by COM (2000) 007 and (2002 1) 107) rules out the idea of public aid for coordination of transport and public services requirements), how to finance and to attract private partners in PPPs is not easy. Behind a politically correct consensus, words have not the same meanings

The framework directive which was supposed to be proposed in 2002 has been forgotten for a Commission communication COM (2003) 448, 04/08/2003 without any backbone standing very much back the directive 2001-14 concerning railways.

Abstract analysis and poor consideration for economic and social behaviours, discrepancy between the objectives (financing of infrastructure and/or general public expenditure, as well as demand management and traffic regulation), lack of political choices for space development, disregard of production process and logistic chain, and competitiveness constraint as well, conflict of interest between peripheral regions and transit ones, weak modal split (effectiveness of non-road modes and of price-signal) are the main problems to be faced. To reach a reasonable balance is made still more difficult because of the non-consistent mix between technologies utilized (satellite-based or DSRC (dedicated short range communication)-based electronic collection) and infrastructure charging principles.