

PRESS RELEASE

High-Capacity Transport in support of Sustainable and Efficient Logistics

CLECAT called for the uptake of high-capacity transport in Europe to support sustainable and efficient transport logistics at Transport Logistics Munich on 9 May. In anticipation of a proposal for a revised Directive on Weight and Dimensions, at times of high energy prices, driver shortages and an urgent need to reduce CO2 emissions, rationalising logistics operations using high-capacity transport is more interesting than ever. Yet, there are remaining challenges which prevent the use of high-capacity transport in Europe, as debated by a panel of industry, research and government representatives moderated by Nicolette van der Jagt, Director General of CLECAT.

Ben Kraaijenhagen, Technical coordinator of the [ZEFES](#) (*Zero Emission, flexible vehicle platforms with modular powertrains serving the long-haul Freight EcoSystem*) project, gave a keynote introduction on the current and upcoming challenges of transport and logistics. 'As freight demand is expected to grow significantly (+49% between 2010 and 2040), coupled with the need to drastically reduce GHG emissions from the sector to meet the Paris Agreement's targets, it is of utmost importance to increase the efficiency of transport and logistics. He noted that high-capacity transport, using longer combinations of vehicles, is one of the leading solutions to reach these goals. Mr Kraaijenhagen presented the main objectives of ZEFES project, which is to demonstrate the potential of zero-emission heavy-duty vehicles operating under real logistic conditions across Europe by identifying and operating a certain number of real use cases, including intermodal transport and high-capacity transport.

Bram Ewals, CEO of Ewals Cargo Care, shared experiences of piloting the Duo-trailer, a 32-metre-long vehicle combination (two Mega XLS trailers attached to the truck). 'The Duo-trailer is an excellent tool for multimodality and can help decarbonise road transport by putting fewer vehicles on the road. However, this vehicle combination should be able to operate across borders to maximise its potential fully.'

Dirk-Jan de Bruijn, in charge of innovation and strategy at the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure, noted that the complexity of European and national rules hampers the uptake of such vehicles and therefore called for more pilots and experiments. 'While the first trial of Duo-trailers in the Netherlands had been conducted in January 2019, there is still a long way to go to authorise their use, due to complex rules managed by different government authorities and agencies which do not collaborate enough. Now that several countries in Scandinavia and Spain have demonstrated the potential for the wide use of these vehicle combinations, other countries should follow, at least by authorising their use in very-specific uses cases, such as between logistics areas.'

With regards to safety concerns of high-capacity vehicles, Lena Larsson, Project Manager HCT at Volvo Technology, explained that there is no clear evidence that longer combinations of vehicles would decrease road safety: 'The number of accidents is instead correlated to the number of vehicles on the road, and not to their size. So high-capacity vehicles could help improve road safety by reducing the number of trucks on the road.'

The panel also discussed the upcoming proposal revising the Weights and Dimension Directive, which will once again raise the debate on authorisation of longer/heavier vehicles, as several stakeholders could consider this will induce a reverse modal shift from rail to road. Mr Kraaijenhagen emphasised that both modes should not be put in competition. Ms Larsson added 'When it comes to rail, nothing beats a well-operated railway for long-distance transport. My experience is that direct goods trains between two positions with a high punctuality beat trucks. But you still need to have very effective truck operations for the first and last miles. Here, HCT combinations can help improve productivity to avoid cancelling out the benefits of rail transport by using multiple trucks at the end of the journey, for example.'

The discussion then steered towards the drivers' dimension in the use of HCVs, in light of the structural shortage of drivers faced by the industry. Mr Ewals mentioned that these vehicles would improve their work conditions: 'The Duo-trailers need the same qualification as EMS vehicles. This concept would relieve driver shortages through what we call meaningful work. We can use multimodal transport for longer distances, when the Duo concept can be applied as a fixed route between two hubs. It ensures more plannable work and more predictability primary for the drivers but also for the customers.'

Finally, the speakers exchanged views on the decarbonisation of road transports and the possibility of using zero-emission trucks also for high-capacity transport. Mr Kraaijenhagen reminded participants that electric vehicles are still more expensive than conventional diesel trucks. However, using ZEV in HCT could reduce the costs for operators by transporting more payload with the same tractor unit. A wider discussion should be held amongst all the actors in the supply chain on issues related to the charging/refuelling infrastructure and the possibility of using electric trailers. However, high-capacity transport already reduces emissions today. 'Technically, every operator can start working with the Duo trailers, as it is fully interoperable and entry costs are low,' emphasised Mr Ewals.

Ms van der Jagt summarised the important takeaways of the panel debate: all stakeholders seek to reduce GHG emissions and congestion, to alleviate the shortage of drivers, and to improve road safety while absorbing the expected growth of freight transport demand. Therefore, she concluded, 'we need more pilots now to transport more with less vehicles in combination with smart technologies.'

About CLECAT

CLECAT is the leading voice of freight forwarding, logistics and customs services at European level. CLECAT published a [position paper](#) on the upcoming revision of the Weights and Dimensions Directive. The paper highlights the freight forwarding sectors' recommendation to improve efficiency of road logistics, notably by increasing the EU maximum permissible weight for border crossings to 44 tonnes, and 46 tonnes for lorries taking part in intermodal/combined transport operations, while continuing to allow countries to go beyond these minimum criteria where they seek to do so.

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