

Summary Report

CLECAT Brenner Pass Roundtable Webinar, 21 April 2021

On 21 April, CLECAT organised a roundtable webinar entitled “**Solutions for freight transport at the Brenner Pass - a (n)ever ending story?**”. The event gathered around 70 policymakers and industry representatives and heard experts’ views on short-, medium- and long-term solutions for European freight forwarders and logistics service providers for cross-Alpine transport. Due to the restrictions to heavy goods transport by road over the Brenner Pass, which is constantly being made stricter by the local authorities in Tyrol, the free movement of goods from Italy to the North of Europe is being put at risk. CLECAT has called for attention for these problems and more awareness on the lack of sufficient rail freight alternatives.

Speakers included MEP Barbara Thaler (EPP, Austria), Martin Zeitler and Andreas Nägele (Advisors in DG MOVE), Armin Riedl (CEO, Lokomotion), Alessandro Barbiero (CEO, Barbiero S.p.A.), Jurgen Huygh (International Trade Manager, Callebaut).

Meeting summary/conclusions

The event was opened by **Ms Nicolette van der Jagt, Director General of CLECAT**, who welcomed speakers and participants. She noted that CLECAT was particularly alarmed by the 80km traffic jams witnessed in December last year and the extension of existing traffic bans on heavy-goods vehicles driving through Tyrol in January 2021. In this respect, she referred to the stricter night driving ban (the removal of exemptions for Euro VI trucks on the A12 Inntal Autobahn) and the stricter Euro class driving ban. While freight forwarders appreciate that the Austrian government needs to address the air quality concerns in the region, they are confronted with a lack of alternatives, as there is a lack of capacity in rail freight, electricity and sustainable alternative fuels, as well as the respective charging and refuelling infrastructure, which is not widely accessible for HGVs along the Brenner.

MEP Barbara Thaler recalled that the Austrian government is well-aware of the importance of the Alpine corridor for the European economy and noted that for this reason Austria is heavily investing in suitable railway infrastructure. She underlined that she was hoping that the completion of the Single European Railway Area would offer a real alternative to road transport to cross the Alps. Ensuring that operations are as economical and efficient as possible is a condition if rail wants to compete with an increasingly competitive road sector.

Ms Thaler announced the launch of a European pilot project, called “*Single European Railway Area – Prototype Corridor Munich-Verona*”, which will demonstrate what rail freight transport can achieve on the route between Munich and Verona. Scheduled to start in the last quarter of 2021, the goal of this project is to identify and solve the operational and administrative shortcomings in the rail sector with the aim to surpass the performance of road on long-distance transport. She noted that the project will cover the entire transport environment from the three countries involved (Austria, Germany and Italy), including local authorities, shippers, railway undertakings, infrastructure managers and regulatory bodies. The pilot project will aim to establish a joint set of rules for the

Munich-Verona corridor and should not be held back by the numerous different national regulations. She noted that during the trial, freight trains on the Brenner route will for the first time be able to travel from Munich to Verona in a single time slot without being held up at the border, which is often the case at present because slots are only granted up to the national border. The pilot will be fully managed at European scale with careful performance management and cooperation between the rail network operators from Germany, Austria and Italy. By the end of 2022, data will be available on how quickly goods can be transported by rail between Munich and Verona and what this will cost. Based on that, it will be assessed how rail compares with truck transit via the Brenner Pass under good regulatory conditions. Ms Thaler concluded by saying that the route should set an example for other corridors in Europe and that the 25 railway networks in Europe operating independently should be merged into one single network, to serve customers on a level-playing field.

Mr Martin Zeitler, Advisor to Pat Cox, Coordinator of the Scandinavian-Mediterranean core network corridor, recalled that the Brenner pass is at the very heart of the corridor, and that the Brenner Base Tunnel (BBT), which will, when finalised, become the longest tunnel in Europe, is identified as a priority project for the whole TEN-T core network. He reminded participants that Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013 on the Union guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network establishes 'core network corridors' that are covering the most important long-distance flows in the core network and that are intended to improve cross-border links within the Union. This Regulation allows for the implementation of pilot projects, such as the one presented by Ms Thaler. The ongoing revision of the TEN-T guidelines will ensure that the deadlines for the completion of the network (2030 for the core network, 2050 for the comprehensive network) are respected. In this respect, he noted that the completion of the BBT should be ensured by 2030. Mr Zeitler welcomed the decision on the route alignment for the Northern Access Route, which is an important step forward. The Commission will also contribute to the issue with inputs from the Brenner Corridor Platform, which will in the coming months present tri-laterally agreed (DE/AT/IT) passenger and freight rail traffic forecasts for the whole Brenner corridor (Munich-Verona). This will show what is to be expected in terms of railway traffic along the corridor and where adaptations to the available capacity are necessary in the years to come.

Mr Andreas Nägele, Policy Officer in the road transport unit of DG MOVE, recalled that the Brenner Base Tunnel is the long-term solution to the problems caused by increasing heavy vehicle traffic volumes across the Brenner. Among those problems is the insufficient air quality in the Inn valley. Austria would have to improve air quality with short-term solutions in view of the EC infringement procedures against Austria, that was launched in 2016. Mr Nägele also referred to the recent statement by Commission President von der Leyen, confirming that the Commission would prefer joint solutions by the countries and regions along the corridor to the unilateral measures taken by Tyrol. The Brenner could become a flagship corridor for smart and green mobility.

Mr Armin Riedl, CEO of Lokomotion, shared his views on the issue as a railway operator, noting that there was a need to come up with workable solutions to ensure the movement of goods over the Alps. He focused also on the alternative means of transport and the pre-conditions needed to realise them, for instance, the political willingness, as well as financial support for rail freight infrastructure. He stated that currently 29% of freight is carried on rail, whilst 71% is transported by road freight transport. The modal share is not changing to the benefit of rail freight even though rail freight can be considered as the most efficient mode of transport on the land side. He called for a European approach for infrastructure investments and interoperability, from both an organisational and a technical point of view.

Mr Alessandro Barbiero gave the freight forwarders' perspective, noting that preventing the most environmentally friendly heavy-goods vehicles of today, without the appropriate alternatives in place, has disproportionate economic consequences and creates trade barriers for the countries neighbouring Austria. While he recognised the air quality issues and the need to address them, he did not see the rationale of banning EURO VI trucks at night, when congestion is low, leading also to less emissions. He also questioned the proportionality of the sectoral driving ban, which allows the transport of certain goods by road while forbidding other goods. Referring to the alternatives available for the freight forwarders, he noted that they do not really provide a solution: taking detours to other corridors is time-consuming and moves pollution to other areas; zero or low-emissions vehicles are not suitable for longer distances and rail freight does not provide sufficient capacity and is less efficient. When asked by Ms Thaler what could be a short-term solution for freight forwarders, Mr Barbiero called for a waiver of the driving ban on EURO VI HGVs at night, and a relief of the sectoral driving ban.

Mr Jurgen Huygh gave a shipper's perspective, noting that there is a need for a mental shift from shippers to allow for more flexibility in the organisation of transport. Shippers tend to put a lot of time pressure on their service providers, which favours road transport. Multimodality will never be a reality if this mental shift is not implemented. He also called for the upgrading of terminals to allow for easy access and sufficient capacity. Multimodality should be designed on the complete corridors across Europe and not only on certain specific parts of them. He also mentioned that rail freight is particularly interesting for long-distance transport, citing the example of the Suez Canal blockage in March this year, which forced shippers to consider shifting freight to rail freight options to Asia.

In responding to the various presentations, **MEP Barbara Thaler** said that, having listened very carefully to the industry comments, she understood the frustration and the needs. She shared the views of Mr Riedl on the uncertainty of rail infrastructure investments and the need for cooperation. She concluded by noting that she hoped that the pilot project would provide relief to the cross Alpine transport and support a further boost of rail freight corridors in Europe.