COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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INFORMATION NOTE

From: European Commission
To: Council
Subject: Strengthening the resilience of the European transport system: ensuring the uninterrupted mobility of passengers and goods in the event of a sudden transport crisis

- Briefing by the Commission

Delegations will find annexed an information note from the Commission on the above mentioned subject, which will be dealt with under "Any Other Business" at the meeting of the Council (Transport, Telecommunications and Energy) on 2 and 3 December 2010.
1. GENERAL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

1. The extraordinary Transport Ministers Council on 4th May 2010 agreed to welcome the Commission's intention to make concrete proposals in order to develop mobility plans for passengers and goods to be applied in case of a sudden transport crisis in the EU triggered by natural or man-made disasters.¹

2. On 24th June 2010, Vice President Siim Kallas informed the Transport Ministers that the Commission would report to the Transport Council before the end of the year about this issue.

3. To this end, the Commission has organised brainstorming meetings with stakeholders and Member States between June and September 2010 with a view to identifying the obstacles to pan-European mobility of passengers and goods in case of a major EU transportation crisis.

4. This note aims at opening up the debate about arrangements that could be set up to build greater resilience into Europe's transportation system to ensure a seamless mobility of passengers and goods.

2. EU TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM TODAY IS NOT SUFFICIENTLY RESILIENT

5. Transportation is the circulatory system of any economy. Today more than ever, transportation services in Europe play a key role in the field of economy and employment because of their strategic importance in matching of supply and demand. Meanwhile, helping to open up the corners of Europe and bringing people together, efficient transport services are a key ingredient for a better quality of life.

¹ Natural calamity or man-made catastrophe
6. One of the most important pillars of a modern economy is the capacity of its transport system to move goods and people on time in the most seamless possible way to the place they need or want to go.

7. Given the key role transport plays today, a transport disruption at EU level can have many detrimental effects on the economy and society, depending upon the scope, length and magnitude of the disturbance on the transportation system. In this respect, the recent ash cloud crisis has shown that the capacity of the EU transportation system to tolerate and absorb disruption triggered by natural or man-made disasters is not sufficient to fulfil its basic function, which is to ensure a seamless mobility of people and goods.

8. The lessons drawn from the ash cloud crisis suggest that, besides obstacles of a more structural nature which will be dealt with in the White Paper on Transport Policy, the vulnerability of the EU transportation system can be attributed to the inadequate level of preparedness and cooperation between all actors.

9. According to stakeholders, this low level of preparedness and cooperation has been felt at three levels:

   i. **Inefficient or inexistent crisis mechanisms**

10. The analysis of the recent crisis suggests that, at this stage, no Member State has currently in place emergency mechanisms to ensure the seamless mobility of passengers and goods in case of a major disruption of its transportation system. At the same time, stakeholders reported that most of involved transport operators have business continuity plans. However, since there is no systematic coordination between those plans, the mobility of passengers and goods - especially cross-border - is not necessarily ensured.

11. This low level of preparedness has resulted in a lot of "operational" obstacles to the timely and efficient re-routing of passengers and goods (no ease of some obligations such as night bans, not sufficient redeployment of staff at customs …). It has not allowed for a timely and effective re-routing of stranded passengers at EU level and has led to a suboptimal use of crisis-dedicated resources.

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2 Such as missing links in the transport network and the lack of Single Transport Area.
ii. **Inefficient information management (access, sharing and communication)**

12. In light of the experience of the ash cloud crisis, there is evidence that access to information as well as sharing and communication of information to/between involved actors is today not sufficiently efficient and timely. As a result, the quality of information made available to transport users, market operators and Member States is not adequate to take well informed decisions.

iii. **Insufficient institutional coordination**

13. The ash cloud crisis has shown that, in general, the reaction of Member States has been unilateral and uncoordinated. As a result, solidarity between Member States has been seen as a marginal option and, where existent, only at bilateral level. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that the Community Civil Protection Mechanism has not been activated\(^3\)\(^4\). The Management and Information Centre managed by DG ECHO has not been used as a platform for exchanging information. In this respect, stakeholders reported that the sharing of information between Member States about the size of the effects of EU transportation crisis, available transport means, transport needs and destination would have accelerated considerably the recovery phase.

14. In the absence of coordination between transport modes and Member States, the net effect of these separate actions has not been conducive to re-routing transport users in an effective and timely manner.

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\(^4\) After a meeting with the Commission on 17 April 2010, in the absence of any civil protection problem necessitating the activation of the MIC, no further concrete action has been decided.
3. CONCLUSION

15. On that basis, the Commission intends to develop concrete options and consult stakeholders with a view to defining an appropriate strategy to tackle this issue. In particular, four issues will need to be addressed in order to move forward on this file, namely:

- How can Member States ensure that their transport system is prepared to absorb major disruption triggered by natural or man-made disasters;
- Should we allow "operational" rules such as bans for heavy vehicles (night or weekend bans) or driving times to be temporarily eased to help the transport system to recover;
- How should the access to, the sharing and communication of the relevant information be enhanced;
- How should Member States cooperate better in such crisis situations.