



Transport white paper: SMEs welcome outline but warn about financial impact

UEAPME Transport Forum backs plans to increase sustainability of the sector, suggests support measures for small operators

Brussels, 28 March 2011 –The European Commission published today its White Paper on Transport. The paper, designed as a “roadmap to a single European transport area”, aims to make the European transport system more competitive and resource-efficient. The Transport Forum of UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers’ organisation, supports these aims and backs all measures which aim to ensure the sustainability of transport in the EU. However, UEAPME experts warned that this strategy will have a significant financial impact on transport businesses and will have to be carefully combined with support measures to avoid harming European SMEs.

“The Commission has presented a strategy which correctly outlines some of the major challenges which the European transport system will face in a very near future”, said Francesco Del Boca, Chairman of the UEAPME Transport Forum. “However, its approach to tackling these challenges fails to take into account that many transport businesses involved in transport of goods are SMEs with strong financial constraints. They have to deal with significant obstacles to investment and without support, for instance in the form of tax incentives and investment support schemes, they will be hit very hard by this strategy.”

In particular, the White Paper’s proposal to shift a third of road freight onto rail on distances of over 300 km by 2030 needs a reality check. The EU markets for rail and maritime transport will need significant improvements in capacity, opening of markets and interoperability before they become competitive. Before the White Paper’s aims in this respect are reached, decision-makers should refrain from all measures to impose further charges on the road transport sector.

UEAPME reminded that the opening of transport markets should always go hand in hand with correct implementation of social legislation, which will ensure a level playing field throughout EU Member States. In this respect the White Paper’s actions to promote quality jobs and working conditions are very welcome.

Though the vision for oil-free cities will create employment and growth for SMEs providing alternative mobility solutions, such as those active in sales and repair of electric vehicles, it also brings strong constraints for those operating in logistics or carrying out transport. Improvements to the energy efficiency of vehicles and the use of new technologies to make more efficient use of transport and infrastructure are all measures which will in the long-term reduce costs for SMEs. However in the short to medium term, small businesses will need support to bear the associated expenses.

“SMEs share the European Commission’s vision of a sustainable, competitive and safe transport system, but they will need help in achieving it. The recently adopted Energy Efficiency Plan recognises that SMEs have to face obstacles to investment. It is time that the ‘Think Small First’ principle is applied to the transport sector as well”, concluded Del Boca.

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EDITORS’ NOTES: The UEAPME Transport Forum is a co-operation platform bringing together small and medium-sized enterprises operating in the transport sector as well as the transport branches of several members of UEAPME, the employers’ organisation representing the interests of European crafts, trades and SMEs at EU level. For further information: <http://www.ueapme.com/>

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