

FREIGHT TRANSPORT AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The free movement of goods is a cornerstone of the trading systems that we have and want. Goods movement has increased steadily and at a faster pace than economic growth. Dismantling physical, fiscal and psychological barriers to trade will also undoubtedly lead to more traffic. More and more of these goods are moving by road. In twenty years, road transport in Europe had doubled and has increased its market share from just over a half to nearly three-quarters. In cities, where the vast majority of people live, almost all freight transport is by road. This trend is not likely to change since road transport responds best to present and emerging industrial demands.

But this is only one side of the story. It is now widely accepted that transport is a significant and growing source of environmental nuisance. There is an emerging hostility to trucks. Many people find them dirty, noisy and frightening. Progress in reducing polluting emissions from cars has not yet been matched for large vehicles. The share of air pollution emissions due to trucks is increasing and the prospects are worrying, in the short term for nitrogen oxides and particulate emissions and in the longer term for carbon dioxide.

It is therefore entirely appropriate that attention should focus on goods transport and its environmental consequences. So many questions need to be answered or clarified. Among these questions are: Why can we not use railways or waterways more? How can we charge prices that reflect total costs including the environmental costs? How can logistic trends be made more compatible with the environment? Can the environmental consequences of our industrial and trading habits be tolerated in the longer term? These and similar questions are high on the political agendas of Governments and Transport Ministers nationally and internationally. The papers in this volume do not answer them all but they make a valuable contribution to increasing knowledge and to raising the level of debate. They should be read carefully by all those involved in moving goods or in making transport policy so that the debate can be well informed and solidly based.

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