

**Perspectives of Traffic
Infrastructure Development in
Central and Eastern Europe**

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First of all I would like to thank the organizers of this conference, the Institute for the Danube region and Central Europe and RWE Solutions, for inviting me here today to speak at this conference.

1. New Opportunities in a Larger Europe – New Opportunities for Infrastructure

In the last 15 years we have witnessed enormous historical changes in Europe. First of all, the opening up of Eastern Europe and the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, and now – 15 years later – on 1st May the biggest enlargement in the history of the European Union. The division of Europe has now finally been overcome and the consequences of World War II irrevocably reversed. However, this has not eliminated a number of problems associated with these events.

EU enlargement has created new challenges for transport policy in our states; in terms of transport geography Austria is now officially emerging from the European periphery.

The expansion of cross-border transport infrastructure is a key prerequisite for the success of integration. Part of the challenge is to bring people and regions closer together through improved infrastructure. Unfortunately – and in many cases for mistaken ideologically motivated reasons – the expansion of transport infrastructure was not taken seriously enough for many years. Now the challenge is to make up for lost time and join forces to develop the necessary cross-border infrastructure as quickly as possible!

2. Infrastructure and Traffic Plans in the Neighbouring States

The forging of closer links between our states, but also the differences in wage costs, will, without a doubt, lead to an increase in the exchange of goods and the volume of passenger traffic.

In connection with traffic forecasts on this subject, I would like to warn against dramatisations such as the "avalanche of traffic from the East" or the "transit hell" that will roll over us. Of course, there has been an increase in traffic at the borders since the fall of the Iron Curtain, the level of which has continuously risen in line with economic growth in the East. But when talking about such horror scenarios one should not forget the original extremely low starting level of traffic on the Eastern borders. And secondly, the reason we are continuously expanding our motorways, highways and railway connections to the new member states of the EU is to ensure that they will be able to meet the demand predicted in the forecasts! Traffic figures for Austria's Western borders will remain significantly higher than those in the East for a long time to come.

And there is something else which has to be said in this connection too. Where is traffic from the new member states actually directed?

- **The Czech Republic** mainly looks to Germany and Poland.
- **Hungary** is relying on development in the East and wishes to develop links to Italy through Slovenia.
- **Slovenia** is pinning its hopes on Corridor V as it has demonstrated in connection with the priority TEN projects and in traffic terms tends to focus on Hungary and Italy.
- Only **Slovakia** is clearly oriented toward Austria and otherwise focuses strongly on developing internal east-west infrastructure.

What does all this mean? Austria has to be very careful that we are not bypassed. We must make a clear decision for ourselves about we would prefer: an increased but tolerable volume of traffic and links with the new economic regions in the new EU countries, or (possibly) a stable volume of traffic in exchange for extensive isolation from the new markets?

3. Traffic Development in Central and Eastern Europe:

I would therefore like to make four critical remarks concerning traffic development in Central and Eastern Europe, and at the same time, clear up a few misunderstandings.

1. Transit

If the media is to be believed, Austria's biggest traffic problem is "transit traffic." However, we have to ask ourselves whether it is even appropriate to talk about transit traffic these days. Do we not now live in a Europe without borders, in a Europe with a single market from which we all gain tremendous benefits? Should we not in fact speak of long distance freight traffic, which is simply an expression of Europe's economic success? But for the sake of argument let us define transit traffic as traffic which passes through a country and which has neither its source nor destination in that country.

In that case, let us stick to the facts: Namely, that road haulage currently accounts for less than 1 percent of all kilometres driven by cars and lorries in Austria.

2. Traffic in Urban Areas Versus Cross-Border Traffic

Although it is important to increase the efficiency of cross-border links, we should not completely forget traffic in urban areas. If we look at the burden of traffic on the roads for example, we see that almost 200,000 vehicles a day use the A23 autobahn in Vienna. In Nickelsdorf (A4 autobahn), on the border, the figure is less than 20,000 – and that is by far the most highly frequented border crossing to the new member states. Now let us extend the comparison to cover rail transport: each day the southern railway line in Vienna carries more than 50,000 passengers, the figure for Nickelsdorf is less than 2,000.

So if we want to talk about traffic flows we should not create the impression that these exist primarily in the border regions. Instead, we should note that the high volume of traffic is actually found mainly in urban areas. Of course, these low figures for traffic on the borders also relativise the traffic growth predicted for the future.

3. Leisure Traffic

In recent years leisure traffic as a percentage of total road traffic has increased steadily. According to the latest studies it already accounts for 40%. Nevertheless, this type of traffic still receives far too little attention both in terms of public opinion and scientific debate. The fact is that the vast majority of this traffic is carried out by car and is concentrated at peak periods, thus creating the traffic jams we complain about so much. Increasing prosperity will lead to increased levels of leisure traffic, both over short and long distances.

It is also to be expected that citizens of the new member states will start using their cars to go on holiday to a far greater extent than they do at present. In the case of Poland, for example, the distance from the Katowice region with 11 million inhabitants, to the Adria is far shorter than the distance from the Ruhrgebiet or Paris. From this it can be deduced that car traffic on Austria's roads will increase as a result of greater prosperity in the former East European states.

4. Road Traffic and Rail Transport

The goal of a modern transport policy must be to reduce the negative effects of traffic and not mobility. While railways cannot be seen as a panacea, we should still try to make them more attractive and increase the demand for them. With a relatively high share of rail traffic in the modal split, Austria holds a fairly good position compared to other countries in Europe. The percentage of rail to road traffic in Austria is 35 to 65% (calculated on the basis of tonne kilometres). To our knowledge, these figures are similar to those in the new EU member states – for the time being at least, as we have witnessed a dramatic change in recent years. It can be assumed that the percentage of road haulage traffic in the new member states will increase in the near future. It will, therefore, be all the more important to appeal to these states and persuade them to strengthen rail traffic and waterway transport.

Conclusions

What does all this mean for Austria?

- **Passenger Traffic**

At the national level we should once again pay greater attention to passenger traffic and leisure traffic – because it is these forms of traffic which are largely responsible for traffic problems and not just the "bad lorries." This is not just true of Austria, the EU as a whole should pay greater attention to passenger and leisure traffic. The fact is that with regard to Central and Eastern Europe the greatest increases in traffic volumes are to be expected in passenger traffic.

- **Goods Traffic in Central and Eastern Europe**

Goods transport in the new member states also shows significant growth rates compared to rail traffic. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, we witnessed a quasi reversal of the modal split from rail to road. Austria is clearly called upon here to act as a role model and to persuade its new partners to make greater use of railways and increase the efficiency of rail routes as well as of waterway transport on the Danube. The project for the development of the Danube in the East of Vienna is one example how Austria tries to strengthen waterway transport by ensuring reliable fairway conditions that are indispensable for competitive inland waterway transport. We very much hope that by raising the transport capacities on the Danube waterway we can set up a model for our Eastern and Central European neighbours. Of course, such efforts will only be successful if they have the support of the EU and the "old" member states.

- **Infrastructure Projects in Austria**

Within Austria we must make the necessary preparations for future traffic developments in and from Central and Eastern Europe by rapidly implementing the infrastructure projects set out in our Traffic Master Plan.

I believe that this conference will contribute to a more detailed analysis of the fields of action which I have addressed and encourage the development of solutions.

I thank you for your attention and wish the conference the necessary success!