Marco Polo – Transport

Growth in the transport of goods exceeds overall economic growth and road transport has, since the early 1990s, been the primary mode of transport in the EU. Reliance on road transport is a cause of heavy congestion and thus reduced economic efficiency, as well as being a major source of pollution and CO2 emissions in Europe. A series of EU programmes have been in place since the early 1990s to improve the environmental performance of the freight transport system.

Who can apply?

The programme is open to transport service operators, and commercial entities. Candidates for EU membership as well as the EEA EFTA States can apply to the programme.

Previous programmes

The first EU programme to promote intermodality was the PACT (Pilot Action for Combined Transport) programme. In operation between 1992 and 2001, the programme provided €53 million in funding for 167 projects.

The Marco Polo programme was proposed following the 2001 White Paper on Transport, in which intermodality was a key concept. It was launched in 2003 to improve the sustainability and efficiency of the transport sector.

The programme provides grants to transport service operators to facilitate a shift from the road to more environmentally friendly modes of transportation, such as short sea shipping, rail and inland waterways or to a combination of modes of transport in which road journeys are as short as possible. The idea is to assist supporting intermodal freight transport initiatives and alternatives to road-only transport in the early stages until they become commercially viable. It has been estimated that every 1 euro in grants to Marco Polo will generate at least 6 euros in social and environmental benefits.

Fifty-six contracts were concluded for the 2003-2005 period. From 2004 onwards, the EEA EFTA States have been participating in the Marco Polo programme. For 2004-2006, the EEA EFTA commitments were approximately €1.9 million of which Norway contributed approximately €1.8 million. Among the 56 projects supported so far by Marco Polo, one was led by a Norwegian consortium.

Marco Polo II 2007-2013

Marco Polo II, which will run from 2007 to 2013, is more ambitious than its predecessor. It has a larger budget and supports new types of actions in an extended area that includes neighbouring non-EU countries.

Marco Polo II’s budget 2007-2013 is €400 million, which represents more than a two-fold increase compared with the previous programme. Annual calls for project proposals will be published in the last quarter of the year and in the first quarter of the following year.

A novel feature of the Marco Polo II programme is the extension of the programme to third countries, such as Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, the Balkans and the Mediterranean region.

The programme will provide support for measures that reduce congestion, improve the environmental performance of the transport system and enhance intermodal transport. Marco Polo II contains two new types of action – the motorways of the seas and traffic avoidance measures – which were not included in the first Marco Polo programme. In all, 5 distinct types of action will be supported:

Modal shift actions: these aim to shift as much freight as economically meaningful under current market conditions from road to short sea shipping, rail and inland waterways. They may propose the start-up of new services or significantly enhance existing services. Under the first Marco Polo programme, modal shift actions accounted for approximately three quarters of the budget.

Catalyst actions: one of three types of actions supported through the original Marco Polo programme. The goal here is to change the way
non-road freight transport is conducted in the EU. Support will be provided to innovative proposals aimed at overcoming structural market barriers in European freight transport.

Common learning actions: the third type of action, found also in the original Marco Polo programme. The objective here is to enhance knowledge in the freight logistics sector and foster advanced methods and procedures of cooperation in the freight market.

Motorways of the sea actions: these aim to shift freight from long road distances to a combination of short sea shipping and other modes of transport.

Traffic avoidance actions: the objective is to integrate transport into production logistics. This should lead to a reduced freight transport demand by road with a direct impact on emissions. It is emphasised that actions of this type shall not adversely affect either output or the labour workforce.

EFTA good practice

Shortsea XML

The Norwegian company NorStella is leading the project Shortsea XML, funded through the Marco Polo programme 2005 selection procedure. The project aims to make European Short Sea shipping more competitive, by standardising and improving the efficiency of the way shippers, carriers and ports transmit information by:

- improving customer service;
- reducing transport administration costs by up to 10-15%;
- improving the utilisation of transport units.

This results in a modal shift from road to sea and water with the associated environmental benefits.

Implementation and promotion are an integrated part of the standardisation effort. The project is open to any interested parties. Promotion of the concept and project will be carried out in cooperation with the European Short Sea Promotion centres and European Short Sea network.

For more information see http://www.shortseaxml.org/ and http://www.shortsea.info/

Contact points

European Commission
http://ec.europa.eu/transport/

Icelandic Ministry of Transport, Tourism and Telecommunications
http://samgonguraduneyti.is/

Office of Trade and Transport
http://www.aht.llv.li/

Norwegian Ministry of Transport and Communications
http://www.regjeringen.no/sd/