

Q and A with Kallistratos Dionelis, secretary-general of road toll lobby group ASECAP

-- By Joshua Posaner
5/28/17, 5:00 PM CET

The EU has visions of a unified road tolling system allowing drivers to use highways from Portugal to Poland with a single onboard payment system.

That idea is “impossible,” counters Kallistratos Dionelis, secretary-general of road toll lobby group ASECAP, who argues that the market must be front and center of plans to integrate national road charging systems.

The European Commission will present its mobility package legislative bundle on May 31, and it will include new proposals for road tolling and a blueprint for a bloc-wide electronic system for collecting payments.

Dionelis represents the interests of companies that run 50,000 kilometers of highways across 20 countries; ASECAP’s mission is to promote ways of covering the cost of infrastructure upkeep.

He told POLITICO that his road managers shouldn’t be shut out of the policymaking process, pointing to [problems](#) with the last batch of EU-wide road tolling rules in 2009 that was overly ambitious in setting goals for a pan-European network.

You talk about the importance of getting legislation on road tolling right, but what’s the appropriate vision?

The Commission wanted every driver to circulate through the whole of Europe with one onboard unit in a vehicle and pay only once. That is impossible. That was a priority that the market proved could not work in a pan-European form. What you need to do is focus on clear regions. For example, in the Iberian region, Portuguese and Spanish road managers will create their own interoperable system and the cost of that regionalism is comfortable for both country’s citizens. The more interoperability, the more the costs increase. In theory you can have pan-Europeanism but in practice nobody will buy it.

So a fully-interoperable system for the EU is a long way off, but could we not see onboard units standardized?

The technology can always answer the requests of the market. But the market as such has a problem because even if the onboard units exist there is not enough traffic to have contracts with citizens. We are going to de-facto regional interoperability. This is what the policymaking machinery of the EU will produce now. They will suggest not a pan-European system but regionalism. They will say each region has its own market and it is clever enough to answer the priorities of the region. As each region grows we will smoothly make a [European] market without artificial interventions.

What about the plans for a revision to the European Electronic Toll Service (EETS) system, which aimed to create a system with one subscription contract, one service provider and one on-board unit for drivers?

Even if they call it the EETS, the first E will disappear and it will be the RETS — for regional. Everybody knows that the final, final objective is for a European system but to get there you need the regions. The intention is there and at the end of the day we live in an innovative era. We talk today about the technology of today, but perhaps soon we talk about automated cars and the priorities will be different. We have to look at what the society of the future will look like, and that's big cities. Each city is connected through us, the motorway, and that establishes the standards.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.