

COPER I

ASECAP Permanent Committee for the present and the future of the tolling and charging regimes. Role of the Transport Concessions.

AN ASECAP POSITION ON THE TRANSPORT CHARGING

Brussels, June 2003

Following the debates concluded on the White Paper concerning the Transport policy until 2010, ASECAP wishes to outline hereafter its views on the forthcoming dossier of the tarification of the use of transport infrastructure.

ASECAP is the voice of the European tolled motorways, tunnels and bridges. It represents 110 companies in 14 European countries managing around 21.000 km of toll roads, i.e. approximately 25 % of the total length of the TERN. Its members collect through tolls more than 20 Billion euros per year. ASECAP represents members with experience of years in the field of road financing, building, maintenance and operation.

ASECAP recognises that the European Institutions intends to build a sustainable transport system wherein the pricing schemes will be used as basic tools in re-equilibrating traffic flows and promoting more environmentally friendly modes of transport; it is therefore important to emphasize ASECAP's position on the system of toll roads, of road charging and of interoperability.

ASECAP & THE SYSTEM OF TOLL ROADS

ASECAP defines toll as the fee collected by a company upon categories of users of a road infrastructure for one or several of the following purposes : Financing, Building, Maintaining, Operating and Improving the road structure. Toll is mostly distance related.

The toll system mainly used in Europe and by ASECAP members results from a specific form of public-private partnership (PPP): the infrastructure is conceded by the public authority to a private partner wholly responsible for its existence. Within such an organization the fee collected is an asset of the companies' budget.

This system has brought objective benefits to the whole society under the form of:

- A road network mostly financed, in a fair way, by the user himself in a short duration of time;
- A successful internalisation of externalities (noise, soil, water protection) created by the user;

- A high-level of quality network, considering that the maintenance, the cost of wear and tear are fully covered by the users ;
- A well operated network, providing “road added service” containing information, safety, Electronic fee collection, other services, improving at the end the road safety, the comfort of the users and the decrease of congestion risks¹.

ASECAP & THE SYSTEM OF ROAD CHARGING

In a number of occasions the policy makers and high-level working groups have expressed the intentions to structure a legal framework within the transport sector so as to affect in an harmonious way all the modes of transport without any artificial constraints and to internalize the external transport cost.

ASECAP considers that the structure of such a legal framework should :

- Cover all the modes of transport in the respect of their economic identity.
- Promote a better and more sustainable transport policy.
- Guarantee the fair competition in the transport industry.
- Give incentives to the private sector to participate in the transport industry under a functioning and efficient PPP scheme.

In the case of the road transport and in compliance with the principle of the impact assessment of the Commission, ASECAP considers that a general system of taxation of lorries for their externalities all over Europe should take into account the existing toll organization and avoid a double-charging of trucks.

ASECAP believes to the contrary this road charging scheme should be restricted to the non-tolled primary network, wherein users do not pay nor their externalities neither the cost of the infrastructure. ASECAP believes also that the revenues collected through this road charging should be used mainly for the road infrastructures network improvement, maintenance and operation, .

ASECAP stresses the fact that the only known means to “protect” such a revenue from the craving of national budgets is the concession system. Therefore ASECAP proposes that the definition of a European road charging system protects the PPP and its ability to stimulate private partners’ commitment for building new sections of motorways, improving old sections or operating them.

ASECAP & THE SYSTEM OF INTEROPERABILITY

¹ Figures establishing those factual benefits are available on request.

ASECAP fully agrees with the aim of the Commission to reach a pan-European interoperability of toll collecting systems in the medium term.

After many years of work, partly through European projects, members of ASECAP have already developed toll systems which will be interoperable (in compliance with a forthcoming European technical standard). So will be the case between France, Italy, Portugal and Spain for instance.

These European systems are based on the DSRC technology which has currently a quadruple strong feature :

- It applies a charging technique to any kind of vehicle, as DSRC is the only mean acceptable for private car owners.
- It is as an economic solution of high-quality standard (the future Austrian system in place in 2003 will demonstrate the efficiency of this economic and reliable technique).
- It allows a free-flow collection.
- It is a technical means well adapted to innovations in traffic management, safety and information, which are already in development in a lot of countries and companies.

But ASECAP strongly points out that free-flow collection is only possible in countries wherein the legislation allows operators to take commercial and legal action against frauders. The use of a plaza with bars in some infrastructure is not a technical necessity of the DSRC system but the consequence for the road operator of the lack of legal means versus frauders. With a proper legislative support and a common legal enforcing basis in Europe, the DSRC technology would be applied everywhere on motorways without the need of artificial barriers. This would benefit as well to the fight against congestion.

At last, the technical requirement of a European interoperability will also have to take in consideration the future German GPS system of road charging. This satellite system will tax heavy lorries over 12 tonnes on the primary road network.

ASECAP reminds the European legislator that this satellite technology will only be viable for a small share of the road market (lorries over 12 tonnes) and as such will be far from being a major system of collecting fees. In its current shape, it will also hardly be extended to any type of vehicle, considering the existing technological difficulties and considering the citizens' concerns about the implications of the GPS technology to their privacy.

ASECAP believes the success of interoperability lies on a mutual recognition of the two collecting techniques, DSRC & GPS, as each of them is appropriate to specific purposes and network structures from one country to another.

CONCLUSION

ASECAP, regarding its experience, insists on the fact that concession toll is a tool for a well built, well maintained and well operated motorway network. This quality conforms to the expectations of a Sustainable transport.

ASECAP reminds the European policy makers not to confuse added value motorways networks, wherein a full service is offered to the users in counterpart of a payment, and “free roads” where the users do not pay their externalities.

ASECAP proposes that the definition of a European road charging system protects the PPP and its ability to stimulate private partners’ commitment for building new sections of motorways, improving old sections or operating them.

ASECAP confirms its long-term commitment in the development of Interoperability and believes its success lies on a mutual recognition of the two collecting technics – DSRC & GPS.

ASECAP reminds the need of a common legal framework to support enforcement all over Europe and also the need of a fiscal harmonization so that a full interoperability is achieved and national issuers are able to invoice locally for services rendered in other countries.