

Vital Nodes Policy Dialogue – report

On 8 November 2018, the Vital Nodes project¹ organised a Policy Dialogue about the role of the urban nodes in TEN-T corridors at the Vienna House in Brussels.

Background

According to the European Commission, urban nodes in the context of TEN-T policy are²:

- The origin and / or destination of most long-distance trips and a place where the majority of related challenges (congestion, air quality) persist;
- Locations of major transport nodes (maritime and inland ports, airports, other terminals);
- Interfaces of long-distance and local/regional transport, thus calling for innovative, sustainable, efficient and high-quality solutions.

A list of 88 Urban Nodes³ for the TEN-T network has been defined by the European Commission.

Vital Nodes aims to enable efficient, sustainable freight delivery across the TEN-T urban nodes (urban areas), by bringing together existing European, national and regional networks. It addresses specifically the multi and intermodal connection between long-distance and last-mile freight logistics. It also supports the deployment of innovations in the urban nodes, while establishing a long-lasting European expert network. In November 2018, Vital Nodes is half-way and has gathered the first results of the exchange with urban nodes after a series of 9 workshops in 8 different urban nodes.

The event

This meeting aimed to establish a robust policy dialogue with the EU institutions for strengthening urban nodes as integral parts of TEN-T Corridors. Dr Elisa Schenner, Head of EU Affairs of Wiener Stadtwerke GmbH moderated the event

European Commission officers, Corridor Representatives, Regional and National Representatives, Representatives of Urban Nodes, and Vital Nodes consortium partners took part in the meeting. The interest on this topic is high at the EU level, also in the light of the European Commission's legislative proposals "Streamlining TEN-T implementation" and "Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)", currently under discussion. The dialogue focused on concrete policy and funding actions to strengthen the development and integration of the Urban Nodes for successful delivery of the TEN-T.

Henriette van Eijl (European Commission (EC)), kicked-off the meeting presenting the EC strategy to support urban transport, in the framework of the European Year of Multimodality

¹ www.vitalnodes.eu.

² European Commission website: https://ec.europa.eu/inea/sites/inea/files/20170227_info-day2017_blending_urban_nodes.pdf

³ https://vitalnodes.eu/urban_nodes/

(2018)⁴, aiming at a sustainable and integrated transport system. She stated that the European Investment Bank estimates the annual investment gap in transport infrastructure in 240 bln: the Commission will include this aspect in the new Urban mobility package that will be released in 2019. Concerning capacity building, the main challenges are related to the lack of data for freight, an issue also identified in the framework of the EU-US twinning programme on urban freight⁵. Projects like Vital Nodes are encouraged to involve policymakers and help them understand what measures are adequate for the urban nodes, and what is not.

Sjaak van der Werf (Rijkswaterstaat⁶), the Vital Nodes project coordinator, presented the funding needs for urban nodes identified by the project so far. Those are focusing on: 1) complexity and livability issues of urban nodes in TEN-T project development, 2) integrated (metropolitan) governance as crucial element for successful urban nodes, 3) better integration of different types of EU funding.

At the Regional level, Françoise Guaspere, (Ile-de-France Region) emphasised the importance of the regional and local level for the TEN-T network. She highlighted that integrating the urban centres the TEN-T network should be a top priority at all corridors. Speaking about funding, she explained that regions and cities need to put a lot of work into successful proposals, as the current structure requires the funding delegation to the member states level. Ms Guaspere advocated an earmarking of dedicated funds to urban nodes projects, allowing the urban nodes, which are currently often bottlenecks to advance to the level required to successfully implement TEN-T.

Saara Nuotio-Coulon (City of Turku) and Jos Streng (City of Rotterdam) presented their respective local policies and measures supporting efficient, sustainable freight delivery in Urban Nodes. In cities, more inhabitants, more visitors, more businesses, more supplies and more waste bring compete for public space, that is in the ideal case freed by more efficient public transport. Therefore, there is a need for enforcing efficiency in addition to the elimination of local emissions. The energy transition ambition will require active cooperation of governance networks at various levels. Concerning future funding needs, although objectives might be clear, there are no business cases yet for sustainable energy distribution infrastructure for urban logistics, urban consolidation spaces and clean heavy-duty vehicles deployment. For funding, local authorities require more practical experience that might even include some risk of failure, to find the best way forward.

Mathieu Grosch, the TEN-T Coordinator for the Orient East Med, explained that the first contact point for corridor coordinators is the national level; therefore, the priorities of Member States are more visible at EC level than the ones of cities, regions and metropolitan areas. Urban Nodes on the same corridor need to develop a shared understanding and objectives. Vital Nodes is supporting this view, with the development of universal tools and the organisation of workshops for a preliminary alignment of stakeholder views and needs. In this regard, the European Commission encourages Vital Nodes to identify a stronger multi-governance approach to ensure communication between the corridors, national authorities,

⁴ European Commission website: <http://bit.ly/2rXa7Nx>

⁵ <http://civitas.eu/news/how-eu-and-usa-cooperate-urban-freight>

⁶ The Dutch Directorate-General for Public Works and Water Management

urban nodes and EU stakeholders. In the open discussion, Andreas Boschen, Head of the CEF Department at the Innovation and Networks Executive Agency of the Commission, supported the need for a stronger and more effective stakeholder dialogue at the corridor level.

In terms of funding, the CEF programme is essential, and both the EU Parliament and the Commission are aware of the need to devolve significant funding to urban areas improvements. However, more effective actions are required to convince the Member States that this is a priority within the corridors. Too many tools and too many different approaches at urban level jeopardise the deployment of a consistent and shared strategy, and often local authorities experience difficulties to manage the projects they get funded for. To overcome these issues, it is important to share information to improve the quality of projects and make them more visible and participative. Targets should be defined at the local level but supported at national and EU level. However, no policy can be effective unless mandatory measures are introduced, which may consist of regulation but also positive incentives.

This event was the first policy dialogue organised in the framework of Vital Nodes project; it will be followed by a second edition in 2019 highlighting the project's outcomes and recommendations. Based on the outcomes of the discussion, for next policy dialogue, the project will look into best practices that already exist, will involve the corridors stronger, and will try to start a dialogue among urban nodes on the same corridors.

For more information:

- Giacomo Lozzi, POLIS glozzi@polisnetwork.eu
- Michel Arnd, POLIS marnd@polisnetwork.eu
- Melanie Leroy, EUROCITIES melanie.leroy@eurocities.eu