



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Release

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Green paper on urban transport provides more questions than answers

Brussels, 26 September 2007. UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers' organisation, cautiously welcomed the European Commission's new Green Paper on urban transport published yesterday (Tuesday). UEAPME insisted on the need to fully respect the principle of subsidiarity in dealing with this sensitive policy issue, while the EC should maximise its added value by tackling issues such as the promotion of best practices, cooperation and coordination, as well as financial support and simplification of existing legislation. Moreover, UEAPME was not impressed by the lack of an in-depth analysis of the economic tissue of city centres, a significant part of which largely depends on small businesses operating in densely populated areas.

“European crafts and SMEs are particularly affected by the problems in urban transport identified by the European Commission in its Green Paper. This is particularly true as far as city centres' accessibility is concerned”, said **Oliver Loebel**, Coordinator of the UEAPME Transport Forum. *“However, SMEs could be equally hurt by premature measures limiting urban transport without weighing up all economic consequences.”*

Due to the diversity of urban areas throughout the European Union, common rules are bound to work well only for some cities, while they might be completely inappropriate in other cases, explained Mr Loebel. UEAPME therefore called on the European Commission to take its commitment to the principle of subsidiarity seriously, and restrict its measures on urban transport in a way that leaves all major competences in the hands of local, regional or national governments. The Green Paper seems to have taken this stance on board, but UEAPME reiterated its request to the EC to ensure that this approach is maintained in all upcoming legislative proposals.

Mr Loebel then went on to comment on some of the “themes” identified by the Green Paper. Urban transport, for instance, must be indeed made more accessible by implementing more intelligent and affordable mobility solutions. However, these solutions should not focus exclusively on the needs of private citizens as the EC seems to assume. As far as sustainability is concerned, Mr Loebel commented: *“At the risk of stating the obvious, the first concern of a small enterprise is survival by maintaining competitiveness. If this is not jeopardised, the enterprise will be naturally more inclined to contributing to a sustainable urban environment. Clean technologies will be adopted if their burden is not excessive or if it is reduced by fiscal or financial incentives.”*

Moreover, measures restricting access to urban areas should only be used as a last resort, said UEAPME. Congestion charges in particular would shift traffic to the periphery, while crafts and SMEs located in restricted areas would inevitably suffer from a decrease in customer numbers to the advantage of suburban shopping centres. Unfortunately, this issue is not tackled in the Green Paper, although suburban shopping malls are indeed one of the main factors behind the increase in local traffic in recent years. Demand management schemes and toll systems must therefore be carefully assessed and used only if the savings counterbalance the additional costs and the income generated is used to improve infrastructures rather than to cover gaps in municipal budgets.

Finally, UEAPME stressed that all the new initiatives in the urban transport sector should not lead to additional financial and administrative burdens, which would impact disproportionately on SMEs. In fact, compliance with the rules requires up to ten times more staff resources per employee in micro-enterprises than in large companies.

“A sustainable urban transport policy should leave city centres attractive and easy to reach for customers in order for urban SMEs to continue to exist and thrive. UEAPME will put forward an exhaustive series of comments to the Commission's Green Paper in the coming months, and hopes that its shortcomings will be redressed before any legislative proposal is put on the table”, concluded Mr Loebel.

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EDITORS' NOTES: UEAPME is the employers' organisation representing crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 84 member organisations, which represent crafts and SMEs across Europe, covering over 11 million enterprises with 50 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner.

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