



CIPRA Italia

Commissione Internazionale per la Protezione delle Alpi

Via Pastrengo 13 - 10128 Torino, Tel. 0039-011-548626 Fax 0039-011-503155

e-mail: cipra@arpnet.it internet: www.cipra.org

Milan, 18th November 2005

CROSSING THE ALPS WITH APPROPRIATE POLICIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THE TRANSFER OF FREIGHT TO RAIL

Why the Turin-Lyons HST line is the wrong answer to a real problem

*Damiano Di Simine
Chairman, CIPRA Italia
alpi@legambiente.org*

GENERAL TRENDS: AN UNSUSTAINABLE INCREASE IN ROAD TRANSPORT

The data of the annual snapshot taken by Alpinfo (www.arp.admin.ch) once again confirm this year the growth of transalpine freight: 155 million tons of freight crossed the Alps from Ventimiglia to Tarvisio in 2004, showing an increase of 5.1% compared to the previous year and against a growth which, in the ten years from 1994 to 2004 was equal to 42%. Unfortunately this increase is mainly due to road transport (which has grown by 60% in the decade) and to a far lesser extent to rail (+15%): consequently, in 2004, only 30% of the freight that crossed the Alps travelled by rail (37% in 2004). These figures summarise the unsustainable trend of transalpine freight transport, exacerbated by the particular conditions imposed by Alpine morphology and climatology: the orography "forces" the full volume of traffic to pass through a limited number of transit corridors, which correspond to the main valley routes and therefore the areas characterised by the greatest settlement density.

THE CONVENTION OF THE ALPS: ITALY FAILS THE TRANSPORT TEST

This unsustainability is acknowledged by the International Convention for the Protection of the Alps (ratified by Italy in 1999) and with respect to which the ensuing Protocol on Transport proposes actions agreed by the countries to build up a strategy for the reduction and transfer of traffic. If we were to evaluate the will of the countries on the basis of their acceptance of the Protocol, it would not take long to reach a conclusion: Germany, Austria, Slovenia and France ratified the transport protocol some time ago, Switzerland puts forward reasons regarding the traditional "nationalist" spirit of the Confederation whereas Italy, throughout the last legislature, deliberately showed its hostility to the specific measures of transferring freight to rail¹. In particular, Italy maintains that the principle of the 'truth of costs' which ought to result in differentiated taxation according to the means of freight transport as well as the principle of limiting the increase of road in favour of rail capacity, would be against the national interest which on the contrary would consist of continuing a policy of incentivising road transport (as confirmed by the last Budget) and the possibility of building new transalpine roads. In actual fact, no effectively new projects have been completely announced, but the

¹The Transport Protocol was already seen to be particularly controversial when examined at its first reading. The Transport Committee of the Chamber [of Deputies] had recommended it was dealt with separately, maintaining that the Protocol would have caused excessive limitation to road transport.' From the written answer of the Under-Secretary Giampaolo Bettamio to question no. 5 -04861 of Rt. Hon. Valerio Calzolaio, **8th November 2005**

statements by various government representatives converge on doubling the Frejus and Mont Blanc tunnels, the Cuneo-Nice road and, recently on the blind axis of the Cadore, with the eastward link through the Val Tagliamento and northwards by expanding the road network between Calalzo and Dobbiaco.

We can note briefly that the two principles stated above have also been taken into account at EU level, where the 'Van Miert report' puts them as the essential pre-condition for the EU funding of the major works proposed in the TEN network project, and specifically, the two Frejus and Brenner base tunnels.²

RAIL TRANSPORT, THE EXCELLENT SWISS PERFORMANCE

If we go back to the data on the increase in transalpine transit, we can find some other interesting points. One aspect that emerges is the **consolidated decline of freight transport at the Italian-French Alpine border**. The average annual decrease of freight through the Alps between Mont-Cenis and Mont Blanc is – 0.4% in the ten-year period. In the past year, the decrease has been far more substantial (-5.5%), with a figure that stands at about 31.2 million tons, of which 6.9 (22% of the total) transported by rail through the Modane pass. This decrease does not have an impact on the number of vehicles in transit, which remains virtually constant due to the simultaneous reduction in the efficiency of road transport. Therefore, although the amount of freight transported is reduced, the problem of congestion (and consequently of safety in tunnels) remains unchanged.

The other emerging aspect is the **great increase in the number of transits through Swiss territory, but by rail** (+15% of the tonnage transported in 2004) to a **far greater extent than by road** (+7.8%, and this increase took place without a substantial increase in the number of vehicles circulating, thanks to increased transport efficiency in terms of tonnage/vehicle): this historic inversion can only be attributed to the virtuous policies on transport adopted by Switzerland. A similar improvement in performance took place in the absence of improvements in rail capacity (the Loetschberg and Gotthard base tunnels will be opened respectively in 2008 and in 2016).

There is nothing new in the east, on the Austrian border: transport continues to increase steadily, with dynamics similar to those of previous years, namely by road far more than by rail.

THE UNRELIABILITY OF THE TURIN-LYONS LINE AND OF ITALIAN POLICIES ON TRANSPORT

The contradictory nature of a high speed tunnel between Turin and Lyons lies in the gap between the Swiss results and the French-Italian expectations.

On the one hand we have a country, Switzerland, which has stated (and put to repeated referendums) severe objectives to contain road transport and rail transport, subordinating to these objectives the introduction of legislative and infrastructure measures based on a twenty-year programme which is regularly verified and readjusted. This programme includes the introduction of a tax on road transport (with transversal aspects: the tax funds the rail infrastructure), the decision not to build new transalpine roads but also support for the development of a High Speed network for passengers and

²The economics of this section depend on a firm commitment of the countries concerned to promote a transport policy favourable to intermodality in the spirit of the Alpine Convention. The idea of new road capacities on competing routes is not compatible with this project. A coherent approach as regards infrastructure charging is in addition necessary' This is what is stated by the conclusive report of the High Level Group on the Trans European Network of 27th June 2003, with regard to the rail tunnel between Turin and Lyons.

building the Loetschberg and Gotthard base tunnels, with the aim of doubling the rail capacity crossing the Alps. We can note briefly that, with regards to the two long base tunnels, Switzerland immediately abandoned the idea of building them to “high speed passenger” standards, as this would have entailed a great loss of the capacity for freight. We can also note briefly that the “passenger” component on both tunnels is nevertheless extremely important (about 30 pairs of trains/day on the Bellinzona-Zurich route and on the Brig-Berne one).

According to the figures available, the Swiss model is producing results that are coherent with the expectations declared.

On the other hand, we have Italy, which gives priority to the High Speed/High Capacity Turin-Lyons line, without stating or following any objectives of transferring traffic, but on the contrary even promoting initiatives to double the capacity of the two main roads crossing the Italian-French Alps, the Mont Blanc and Frejus tunnels. Italy, far more than France, is taking a financial risk for works that have never been assessed by credible transport planning and which have not been required to meet agreed performance requisites with respect to the reduction of road traffic. Italy has also forgone constructing the prefigurations of scenario that would enable evaluating the efficacy and utility of the works. The only indications on this come from the French side and are not comforting: the study Alpetunnel commissioned from SETEC Economie (2000) states that a quota of modal transfer equal to less than 1% can be assigned to the tunnel and the new Turin-Lyons line on coming into operation! It is no coincidence that on several occasions France has stated a decline in its interest in the work, pushing our Minister for Infrastructure to take on two-thirds of the costs of the international stretch. No economic evaluation has proven the profitability of the investment nor has any scenario of priorities been constructed on the basis of which to allocate the resources. The great attention given to the international section of the line has put into the background what are, on the other hand, absolute emergencies: we can mention the Turin freight circuit, which represents the main ‘bottleneck’ for freight in transit, for which not even any preliminary projects exist for the time being, and the connection with the Bussoleno interport, for which the rails are not even drawn on the plan of the future Turin-Lyons line. All these elements lead us to say that the only real interest in the work is linked to the building of the infrastructure as such and not to its function.

The saturation of the Turin-Lyons line is not a problem of today or even tomorrow: the 7 million tons that travel on it represent one-third of the current rail capacity. The conclusion of the work to adapt the tunnels, which is already in progress, will produce a further increase in capacity (25 million tons) in 2008. The line’s problems of gradient can be overcome with technology and means of traction available on the market. There are not even any particular problems of conflict with passenger traffic, as the demand for transport is very small and even the increased attractiveness of the line following its auspicious improvement in performance does not entail problematic increases in traffic. At present the passenger service is offered only by three pairs of trains on the international line and, even if the demand for passenger traffic were to double, for such a sadly half-deserted line there would not be any problems of congestion. There is certainly no justification for investing in a high speed line. Once the Swiss tunnels are open to traffic, any risk of insufficiency of the rail network will be averted, because the three lines of the Mont-Cenis, Simplon and Gotthard can serve the same routes for freight. Therefore, it is possible to transfer large quantities of freight to rail today, without being concerned about constraints of capacity, and lightening the load of heavy vehicles on the Frejus and Mont Blanc motorways. Obviously, there has to be the desire to do so.

Of course, if a real policy of transfer of traffic were to be enacted by Italy, then the base tunnel could become a necessity the day after tomorrow. This is why it is necessary today to develop the geological studies for greater knowledge on the depths of the mountains and to be able to produce, if necessary, a project for a route that could find favour with the population of the Valsusa. But the real priority, on which the credibility of those proposing the infrastructure and the investment of Euro 15 billion is staked, is that of immediately enacting the policies and programmes of the transfer of freight to rail. defining quantitative objectives, time thresholds and obligatory measures of limiting road transport and incentives for rail and industrial logistics. There is no trace of any of this in Italy at present.

	Coppie treni Passeggeri Internaz. Pro die	Coppie treni Passeggeri Regionali Pro die	Merci 2004 mioT	Trend decennale merci ferroviarie 03/94	Variaz. 04/03	Merci strada su direttrici concorrenti MioT	Trend decennale merci stradali 03/94	Variaz 04/03
Moncenisio/Frejus/ m.Bianco	3	0	6,9	+0,1%	-11,2%	24,3	-0,5%	-3,6%
Loetschberg	7	17	6,8	+3,0%	+21,4%	12,5	+8,7%	+7,8%
Gottardo	7	24	16,1	+0,8%	+12,6%			
Brennero	7	10	10,1	+2,9%	-5,6%	31,5	+ 5,3%	+16,7%

Fonte: elaborazioni Legambiente su dati Alpinfo (www.are.admin.ch), sbb (www.sbb.ch), trenitalia (www.trenitalia.it)

Traduzione a cura del gruppo Verdi - ALE del Parlamento Europeo