

3 PRIORITIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF WATERWAY TRANSPORT

Inland waterways offer an already existing network with free capacity. Rivers and canals guarantee an alternative solution to the congestion problem by providing cost-effective, reliable, low-carbon and safe transportation opportunities. In addition, the sector provides jobs and job security to a wide skill set. INE and its partners work on maximising these sustainability benefits, aligning people, planet and profit for business and society.

We call on policy makers to help to make this happen by proposing and implementing measures that:

1. Upgrade and connect infrastructure

We need to remove the remaining bottlenecks on the congestion-free waterways and provide optimal connections to both ports and information systems. All this can be done with relatively limited financial resources. This investment will bring big returns, as research shows that in the past inland navigation has grown more than the other modalities on less investment .

Instruments: TEN-T guidelines (waterways are fully taken account of in the planning process on transparent and objective criteria) and TEN-T financial regulation (closing the financial gap between the capital needed and the capital attracted by offering good return for both public and private investors)

Result: The promotion of inland waterways is a win-win solution for all concerned, reducing congestion and emissions in transport and logistics whilst generating more return on investment. The development of inland waterways creates multi-purpose and integrated landscape solutions encompassing environmental protection, regional development, water supply, leisure, tourism and flood control.

2. Removal of red tape and distortions

At the moment, businesses wishing to provide multi-modal transport services have to find their way through a time-consuming, complex and costly labyrinth of administrative and planning regulations. Regulation and funding guidance should be streamlined, without decreasing protection and safety levels, to make multi-modal transport as easy as single modal transport. Waterway operators and users have to be able to compete on a fair economic level playing field.

Instruments: Conducting an effective administrative and regulatory barriers screening exercise aimed at reducing redundant costs for businesses, while still providing high sustainability standards (pro-competitive regulation) combined with an effective controls to ensure fair competition.

Result: The regulatory environment will be lean and flexible providing opportunities for business innovation.

3. Sound investment climate

Barge owners are dynamic and flexible small businesses but buying or investing in ships is much more capital-intensive than any other transport means. Easier and more tailor-made access to capital for investments in research, capacity and innovation is required. Creating an attractive and transparent investment climate would substantially lower the current threshold, enabling innovative operators and new market entrants to renew the inland shipping fleet and expand the market for innovative and sustainable freight concepts.

Instruments: We need to develop and publicise EU state aid guidelines for waterway transport and a EU waterway innovation fund, as well as provide an easier access for micro-size businesses to EU funds and national capital markets.

Result: Appropriate access to capital contributes to the expansion of innovative inland shipping services resulting in greener supply chains.