



Open letter

18 November 2011 – The EMS Platform deplores the recent publication of the report commissioned by the Community of the European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) on the Effects of the Introduction of Longer and Heavier Vehicles (1). The CER, with the publication of this report, has missed an opportunity to update its old, biased message against longer and heavier vehicles into a more realistic assessment of their societal and economic benefits and has failed to incorporate facts reported by EU Member States' governments already allowing their use or running trials.

Longer and heavier vehicles are also called EMS, which stands for European Modular System. It is a flexible concept whereby existing loading units (modules) of trucks are re-arranged into longer and sometime heavier vehicles – depending on the volume to be transported and roads to be travelled.

The EMS Platform considers that the use of EMS will contribute to realizing efficient co-modality in the supply chain. The European Commission has predicted a 50 percent increase in the amount of goods transported between 2000 and 2020. Therefore, all transport modes will be needed to accommodate the growth in transport demand. And all transport modes will have to improve their efficiency.

In view of the EU 20-20-20 goals and the 60 % GHG reduction target for the EU transport sector referred to in the EC White Paper on the Future of Transport, all modes of transport will also have to step up their efforts to become more environmentally friendly. Road transport, following the adoption of the revised Eurovignette Directive, will be charged more for its environmental impact. Another way to realize more efficient and subsequently greener road transport is the introduction of EMS. Dutch research institute NEA has found that deploying EMS (three regular trucks can be substituted by two EMS) would trigger a considerable decrease in GHG emissions and congestion as well as improved road safety (2).

While CER is shedding crocodile tears over the loss of single wagonloads, several of its own members are themselves replacing their marginal single wagonload business with road transport. In addition, CER's largest members, notably the German and French publicly-owned railfreight companies, are among the largest road transport operators in the EU. These railway companies also use EMS in Sweden and Finland and thus implicitly recognize its benefits. Meanwhile, users are left in the cold when insisting on more customer-friendly and more flexible rail transport solutions.

The CER commissioned report confirms the view of the CER that the market share of combined transport declines. CER regrets that decline. However, if CER would really like to turn the tide,

why does it remain silent while it should be pushing for TEN-T money to be invested to make intermodal terminals accessible to EMS?

Despite the emotional resistance of some against EMS, several EU Member States have started pilot projects with these longer and heavier truck combinations:

- Sweden and Finland, where the EMS concept was developed, have long since allowed EMS on their roads for environmental and efficiency reasons;
- Denmark initiated EMS on a trial basis in 2008. It will publish a report on the trial at the end of this year;
- The Netherlands has been experimenting with EMS for several years. Assessing its experience, it published a report which concluded that *"no reverse modal shift effects have occurred, and these effects will not occur in the foreseeable future either"*. Moreover, the report found that EMS *"can only be deployed on a limited number of journeys, and with the exception of road transporters, other supply chain parties hardly show any interest..."*. EMS will soon be integrated in Dutch national legislation;
- And last but not least, Germany will start a 5 year EMS trial on 1 January 2012.

Given the above, the EMS Platform is of the opinion that the debate about the deployment of EMS should take place in a more constructive environment. Facts, especially based on impact assessments in those Member States which have on-the-road experience with EMS, should be honored more than self-serving reports of the rail lobby.

- (1) Study on the Effects of the Introduction of LHVs on combined Road-Rail Transport and Single Wagonload Freight Traffic, 5 October 2011, K+P Transport Consultants, Freiburg/Karlsruhe
- (2) European Modular System, April 2010, NEA, Zoetermeer
- (3) Monitoring Modal Shift, July 2011, Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment, The Hague

Note to the editor: The EMS Platform is an informal group of shippers, freight forwarders, transport operators and vehicle manufacturers. It was formed in 2009. Website: <http://www.modularsystem.eu>