

## **CURRENT TRENDS IN THE ENVIRONMENTALLY-FRIENDLY MODES OF TRANSPORTATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC**

Transportation plays an important role in business and private life. Recently, environmental aspects of transportation receive an increased public attention. The share of transportation in air and noise pollution and greenhouse gas emissions is rising in many regions. There are some public policy measures and, perhaps, also some technological solutions that could decrease the negative effects. Effective public policies of promoting environmentally-friendly modes of transportation should reduce pollution and related negative health effects, as well as alleviate traffic congestion.

The modes of environmentally-friendly transportation are considered the following: rail transportation, public transportation and bike & walk. In our study, we assessed the available data from the year 1990 till the year 2008, and, understandably, were interested in the most recent years' development. The source data were published by the Czech statistical services.

The question „Is the share of environmentally-friendly modes of transportation increasing?“ has to be answered mostly negatively for the Czech Republic. The individual car transport is increasing, also in the most recent years, as well as the air transport. The rail freight was decreasing in the recent years (till 2008). Interestingly, the public transportation held steady in 2006-2008, with neither substantial decrease nor increase.

One of the reasons for the increase of the freight car transport, as well as decrease in rail freight, is the government policy of intense highway construction, and the neglect of railway transportation. Furthermore, the spread of multinational retail chains is accompanied by regular flows of goods across Europe. Also, the Czech Republic due to its geographical location became a major road transportation corridor for transient international traffic, with all associated negative environmental effects (air, noise, soil and water pollution, barrier effect, congestion), as well as increased highway maintenance costs. The road freight transportation kept to be heavily subsidized from public resources, through both construction and road maintenance costs. However, it needs to be acknowledged that the railroad transport has not exhibited much organisational innovation, and keeps to be inflexible. Also, there seem to be some resistance from the old establishment to allow newcomers into the railroads business, as the case of Students Agency transportation company suggests. The international air transportation continued to enjoy the unfair advantage of not paying the VAT tax, and its growth reflects the increasing affordability of air travel.

Some changes may be on the way, though. More public costs will be shifted onto the road users. The costs of maintaining roads for both the international and the domestic traffic seem to become excessive. In 2011, the Czech government came with a proposal to charge fee for a larger share of Czech roads (not only highways, but also minor roads). This politically unpopular measure is not motivated by an effort to reduce negative environmental externalities, but it is an effort to improve the public budget. In addition, if this measure becomes correctly implemented, it could have some positive environmental effects, and it also may help some local producers. The question of taxing the international air transport is still unresolved; there are some contradicting pressures within the European Union itself. The bicycle transportation still plays a very minor role in the Czech cities (compared to some other countries such as Holland or Denmark). We have no reliable countrywide data on the quality of foot transportation (the extent of pedestrian zones in the cities, sidewalks in the villages, safe and comfortable crossings, etc.).

1. ISSaR Information System of Statistics and Reporting (online: <http://issar.cenia.cz/issar/>)