

Multimodal transport terminals – a must for the future

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues,

It is an honor being invited as speaker for this Smart Move event and it is with pleasure that I present you here today our vision on transport terminals.

Intercity and long distance regular bus and coach lines have an important role in the objective of doubling the use of collective transport in the European Union. However, scheduled bus and coach transport in Europe is still struggling with many problems. One of these problems is the infrastructure preventing them from delivering the best of their mobility potential.

In some European countries, in particular from the old “EU core”, scheduled intercity and long-distance bus and coach transport has long been seen merely as a corollary and a “support mode” for other modes, thus leading to political, legislative and infrastructure neglect and underinvestment, which in turn leads to a poor image with the customer. Indeed, when talking about terminals there are still many countries and cities that do not have any of these facilities for coaches. The flexibility of our mode of transport too often results in directing the coaches to a lost part of town without

any decent link with other public transport for the passenger to continue his journey.

All our citizens are more and more directed towards the use of collective transport. Vice-President Kallas made it a main item to develop intermodal transport. Passengers in all modes get more rights –meaning for us more obligations- but without decent facilities we cannot fulfil their expectations; not from the Commissioner, not from the passengers. Even bearing in mind the current political and economic situation, the focus need to be on infrastructure and investment therein. Multimodal transport terminals are an essential link allowing all operators to offer a better quality and service to the traveller. And do the political responsible leaders realise that the transport terminal very often is the first impression people get when arriving in a town? It is a “business card” for their city. And Eurolines knows what is talking about as we bring a couple of million people to different European cities all year.

Ladies and Gentlemen allow me to mention some facilities a good terminal should provide.

First of all the facility should give easy access to all kind of passengers: young, old, with lots of luggage, disabled people. Indications inside should be clear and direct the traveller to

the desired mode of transport or shop. The environment, inside as well as outside, should be safe what can be realised by using enough light and make the building look spacious. The interchange between the different modes of transport coming together in that terminal should be organised in a smooth way.

If the politicians want to meet their objectives of greener travel they should start investing in multimodal terminals. On the EU level the TEN-T should be part of the solution. These programs should contain terminals amongst the eligible projects.

Multimodal terminals can in many cases be realised without massive public funding. All over Europe you find already terminals, for trains, busses or tram and metro. Most of them have the capacity to allow international coach lines to integrate their stops in or around the existing terminal. A minimum cost can create a great effect on the mobility of thousands of passengers. However, we have examples where this cannot be realised because of lack of political will. Or for reasons of competition. Still in too many cases the different modes see each other as a threat instead of an addition to the service they offer themselves. Only then, when all modes of transport have the adequate facilities they can offer the public the best way to travel. And allow them all the same

level playing field: harmonize and simplify on the medium term existing VAT-related procedures to facilitate intra-EU and international coach transport. Work towards a fiscal system that would incentivize the use of greener transport solutions and services, whilst preventing distortions of competition. And in the long run go for a zero rate VAT for all collective transport.

Ladies and Gentlemen I already mentioned the Passenger Rights now in force for all modes of transport and I said this meant more obligations for us. Eurolines Organisation has always been positive about these rights and we see the obligations as an enormous enhancement for the passenger. But it has to be clear that we are not capable to deliver what we want and should everywhere. If a coach stations or terminal does not exist, we are unable to offer the comfort and requirements of the Regulation. The more infrastructure is available to us, the better we can guarantee the information to the passengers and the respect of their rights.

In its conclusions the Smart Move High Level Group has mentioned that more specific we do need to focus on the infrastructure. Encourage the creation of a European one-stop-shop on-line database with a list of multimodal coach stations in Europe, their facilities and connections. Facilitate the integration of scheduled bus and coach services in current and future multimodal journey planners.

Especially for the decision makers: dare going for it and think about the realization of multimodal terminals. It will help to promote collective transport. We as important European coach operators are open for a constructive cooperation anywhere.