Interdisciplinary Summer School 2025

"The Future of Energy Systems in Austria and the Czech Republic"

TRANSPORT POLICIES: NATIONAL AND EU POLICIES

Seminar paper

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We declare on our honour that We have prepared our thesis independently and using the literature cited.

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Thesis assignment:

Analyze and compare transport policies at the national level (Austria and the Czech Republic) and at the European Union level, focusing on their main objectives, instruments, implementation, and mutual influences. The thesis should assess how EU transport policy affects national strategies and how individual states adapt to European requirements, especially in the context of sustainability, digitalization, and decarbonization of transport.

Abstract

This paper analyzes and compares transport policies at the national level-focusing on Austria and the Czech Republic-and at the European Union level. The research examines the main objectives, instruments, and implementation mechanisms of these policies, with particular attention to their alignment and mutual influences. It explores how EU transport policy, driven by the European Green Deal, the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, and the Fit for 55 package, shapes national strategies, especially regarding sustainability, digitalization, and decarbonization.

The study highlights the distinct approaches and challenges faced by Austria and the Czech Republic in modernizing their transport sectors, promoting modal shift, and integrating digital innovations. By evaluating the interplay between national priorities and EU directives, the paper provides insights into the evolving governance of transport in Europe and its implications for regional development, competitiveness, and climate objectives.

Keywords

transport policy; European Union; Austria; Czech Republic; sustainability; decarbonization; digitalization; modal shift; Green Deal; TEN-T; mobility; governance

JEL Classification

- R41: Transportation: Demand, Supply, and Congestion; Travel Time; Safety and Accidents
- R48: Government Pricing and Policy
- O52: Europe: Austria; Czech Republic
- Q58: Environmental Economics: Government Policy

1. Introduction

Transport policy plays a crucial role in economic development, sustainability, and regional integration. It's not only about prioritising the issue of quality and safety transportation, but it's also about sustainable and efficient work, which regulates as by the state, and the European Union institutions. In the European context, national transport policies are shaped not only by domestic priorities, but also by broader EU regulations and frameworks. The new challenges of globalisation, world's crises, and climate change brought the topic of transport policy to the path renovation and progressive development. The frameworks by the leading government, as well as European Commission pushing the member states into finding new solutions with the implementation of rechargeable batteries and greener infrastructure. This research examines the transport policies of the Czech Republic and Austria, analysing their national strategies, priorities, and challenges while considering the impact of EU policies on their transport systems.

Austria, with its strategic location as a transit hub in Central Europe, has developed a highly efficient and sustainable transport network, strongly aligned with EU climate goals. The Czech Republic, positioned at the heart of Europe, also relies heavily on transport infrastructure for economic growth, but faces different challenges in modernisation and sustainability. Both countries balance between national interests and EU directives, particularly those related to decarbonisation, digitalisation, and cross-border connectivity.

By comparing the national policies of these two states and evaluating their alignment with EU transport objectives, this research contributes to a broader understanding of how European transport policies shape national decision-making. It also explores how countries navigate the tension between economic efficiency, environmental sustainability, and social equity in transport planning. The findings will provide insights into the evolving role of EU transport governance and its implications for regional development, competitiveness, and long-term policy coherence across member states.

2. Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative comparative analysis of three key policy documents: the *Transport Policy of the Czech Republic (2021)*, *Austria's Mobility Master Plan 2030 (2021)*, and the *EU Transport Policy (2015)*. The comparison focuses on three transport modes - cars, rail, and aviation - by identifying characteristic national strategies and examining the degree of alignment with EU-level objectives. The methodology follows a thematic categorization approach to highlight both commonalities and country-specific distinctions in transport policy frameworks.

3. Transport Policy of the Czech Republic: National and EU Context

Vision and Main Objectives

Transport policy in the Czech Republic is designed as a strategic framework for the period 2021–2027 with an outlook to 2050[1], reflecting not only national priorities but also the requirements and ambitions of the European Union and the United Nations. The core vision is to provide a transport system that meets the needs of both passenger and freight mobility, supports sustainable economic growth, and promotes inclusivity, especially in structurally disadvantaged regions. At the same time, the policy aims to ensure that transport development is environmentally sustainable, neutral in terms of its impact on global climate change, minimally affects public health and biodiversity, and makes balanced use of renewable resources without increasing the burden on future generations. The main objective is not to restrict transport, but to transform it into a more energy-efficient and environmentally friendly system, decoupling economic growth from resource and energy consumption.

Strategic Priorities and Structure

The Czech transport policy is built around three strategic pillars: sustainable mobility, territorial cohesion, and the modernization of the sector in line with the principles of Society 4.0.[2] Sustainable mobility focuses on reducing energy intensity and emissions, promoting alternative fuels, and shifting transport from road to rail and public transport. Territorial cohesion emphasizes balanced infrastructure development across all regions, improving accessibility, and reducing regional disparities. The third pillar, Society 4.0, addresses digitalization, the introduction of intelligent transport systems, and support for innovation and automation in transport.[3]

Sustainable Mobility and Decarbonization

A central challenge for the Czech Republic is the high and growing energy consumption and emissions from transport, with road transport being the dominant contributor. The policy sets out to decarbonize the sector by gradually replacing hydrocarbon fuels with low- and zero-emission alternatives, such as electricity, hydrogen, and biomethane. The National Action Plan for Clean Mobility (NAP CM) outlines specific milestones for the adoption of electric and alternative-fuel vehicles, aiming for 250,000 electric cars by 2030 and up to 1 million by 2035[4], supported by the expansion of charging and refueling infrastructure and fiscal incentives.

The policy also promotes the internalization of external costs through the “user pays” and “polluter pays” principles, including differentiated tolls and taxes based on vehicle emissions, in line with EU directives such as the Eurovignette Directive. Energy savings are to be achieved not only by modernizing vehicle fleets but also by promoting public transport and active mobility, such as cycling and walking, especially in urban areas.

Sector-Specific Approaches

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[1] Transport Policy of the Czech Republic. (2021). In *https://md.gov.cz/* (No. 259). Ministry of Transport of the Czech Republic.
[2] *Czechia*. (2021.). EU Urban Mobility Observatory. https://urban-mobility-observatory.transport.ec.europa.eu/sustainable-urban-mobility-plans/member-state-profiles/czechia_en
[3] Transport Policy of the Czech Republic. (2021). In *https://md.gov.cz/* (No. 259). Ministry of Transport of the Czech Republic.
[4] Transport Policy of the Czech Republic. (2021). In *https://md.gov.cz/* (No. 259). Ministry of Transport of the Czech Republic.

Mode	Main Strategies and Measures	EU Alignment
Cars	Promotion of EVs, differentiated tolls/taxes, support for charging infrastructure, car-sharing, and fleet renewal	Follows EU Green Deal, Clean Mobility Package
Trains	Investment in rail infrastructure, electrification, high-speed lines, vehicle renewal, single ticketing	TEN-T, EU decarbonization targets, interoperability
Aviation	Focus on sustainable fuels, integration with EU aviation policy, and limiting domestic short-haul flights	EU Fit for 55, Sustainable Aviation Fuels Initiative

[5] Table 1

Infrastructure Development and EU Integration

Given its strategic location in Central Europe, the Czech Republic serves as a vital transit hub connecting Eastern and Western Europe. The development and modernization of transport infrastructure are therefore crucial, both for domestic economic growth and for fulfilling the country's role in the broader European network. Major investments are directed at expanding the motorway network, with the goal of reaching 2,000 kilometers, and at building a high-speed railway network of 700 kilometers, which will significantly reduce travel times between major cities and neighboring countries.

The integration into the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T)[6] is a key priority, with substantial EU funding directed towards eliminating bottlenecks, modernizing existing lines, and constructing new high-speed rail corridors. These projects not only improve cross-border connectivity but also align with EU objectives to shift freight and passenger transport from road to rail and waterways, thereby contributing to the European Green Deal's target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transport by 90% by 2050.

Regionalization and Public Transport

The Czech Republic has undergone significant decentralization in the organization of regional railway transport, with regional governments (kraje) now responsible for ordering and organizing services. This model, shaped by EU liberalization policies, has increased competition and service differentiation but also led to challenges in tariff integration and service consistency across regions. Nevertheless, the provision of public transport, particularly rail, remains a strong alternative to individual car use, and the policy aims to further enhance the quality, capacity, and attractiveness of public transport systems.

Urban and Rural Mobility

Urban mobility is addressed through the Concept of Urban and Active Mobility for 2021–2030, which promotes sustainable urban transport planning, the reduction of car dependency, and the expansion of infrastructure for public transport, cycling, and walking. The methodology for

[5] Transport Policy of the Czech Republic. (2021). In *https://md.gov.cz/* (No. 259). Ministry of Transport of the Czech Republic.
[6] Transport Policy of the Czech Republic. (2021). In *https://md.gov.cz/* (No. 259). Ministry of Transport of the Czech Republic.

Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP)[7] provides cities with guidance on how to achieve these goals, reflecting both EU best practices and local conditions.

In rural and peripheral areas, the policy seeks to ensure basic transport services, improve accessibility, and offer alternatives to individual car transport, including demand-responsive and shared mobility solutions. Special attention is given to the needs of vulnerable groups and to the removal of physical and informational barriers in transport infrastructure.

Digitalization and Innovation

A notable example of digitalization in Czech transport is the rapid development and deployment of integrated digital mobility solutions, especially in urban areas. Prague, for instance, has launched a comprehensive Mobility as a Service (MaaS)[8] platform through the Lítačka app, which unifies the registration and payment for all mobility services, including public transport, bike and car-sharing, taxis, and parking. This system not only streamlines user experience but also encourages intermodality and the use of sustainable transport options by making it easier for residents and visitors to switch between different modes of transport within a single application. The MaaS platform integrates real-time data, supports unified ticketing, and enables users to plan, book, and pay for multimodal journeys seamlessly.

Such digital innovations are aligned with the city's climate action goals and reflect a broader national commitment to leveraging smart technologies for more efficient, sustainable, and user-friendly mobility. These efforts are complemented by ongoing investments in intelligent transport systems, the expansion of 5G networks along key corridors, and the legislative groundwork for the introduction of autonomous vehicles on Czech roads, all of which position the Czech Republic as an emerging leader in transport digitalization within Central Europe.

Aviation and Sustainable Fuels

In the aviation sector, the Czech Republic aligns with EU policy by focusing on the use of sustainable aviation fuels, the integration of air transport with other modes, and the limitation of short-haul domestic flights where viable alternatives exist. The modernization of airports and air navigation systems is also part of the broader strategy to ensure safety, efficiency, and environmental sustainability in line with EU regulations.

Challenges and EU Influence

However, the Czech Republic's ability to modernize its transport sector is hampered by a range of structural and systemic obstacles. Infrastructure development, particularly in highways and railways, is progressing at a pace that lags behind both domestic needs and European standards,

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[7] *Czechia*. (2021.). EU Urban Mobility Observatory. https://urban-mobility-observatory.transport.ec.europa.eu/sustainable-urban-mobility-plans/member-state-profiles/czechia_en

[8] Transport Policy of the Czech Republic. (2021). In *https://md.gov.cz/* (No. 259). Ministry of Transport of the Czech Republic.

hindered by bureaucratic inefficiencies, lengthy approval processes, and inconsistent public procurement practices. Funding, while significantly supported by EU programs, is often insufficient to meet the ambitious targets for capacity expansion and modernization, especially in the context of high-speed rail and regional connectivity. Moreover, the focus of modernization efforts on strategic trans-European corridors sometimes leaves day-to-day regional and local transport[9] needs under-addressed, perpetuating disparities in service quality and accessibility.

The Czech Republic's commitments under the EU Green Deal, National Energy and Climate Plan, and other European frameworks require not only technological innovation but also a fundamental shift in energy use, modal split, and emissions reduction-targets that are proving difficult to achieve given current trends in rising energy consumption and continued reliance on fossil fuels. Thus, while EU directives and funding are indispensable drivers of progress, the real-world impact of these policies depends on the Czech Republic's capacity to overcome internal challenges in governance, planning, and execution, and to ensure that modernization benefits all regions and segments of society.

4. Transport Policy of Austria

Vision and Main Objectives

Austria's *Mobility Master Plan 2030* outlines a comprehensive vision to achieve climate-neutral mobility by 2040. This vision aligns with Austria's broader climate and energy strategies and complies with the Paris Agreement. It aims to establish a mobility system that is sustainable, climate-neutral, safe, resilient, gender-equal, and socio-economically viable[10]. The national climate target for the transport sector serves as a binding framework for action. All strategic planning and investment across all modes of transport must align with this target. To reach climate neutrality by 2040, Austria must reduce transport-related CO_2 emissions from approximately 24 million tCO_2eq (as of 2019)[11] to nearly zero. This transformation requires two core transitions: A transport transition, focused on avoiding unnecessary trips and shifting to more sustainable modes such as public transport, walking, and cycling, and an energy transition, involving the phase-out of fossil fuels and a complete switch to renewable energy sources in the transport sector. Together, these two transitions constitute the broader mobility transition needed to achieve the 2040 goal.

Since the previous national transport strategy was released in 2012, key societal changes have occurred: growing public awareness of the climate crisis, rapid digitalization, and evolving mobility needs[11]. The new plan responds to these changes with updated priorities and strategies.

A central objective of the plan is to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the transport sector, which currently contributes about one-third of Austria's total emissions[12]. Following the Avoid–Shift–Improve principle, the plan promotes sustainable mobility options such as public transport, active travel, and shared mobility services. Equity and inclusion are emphasized throughout

[9] Road Charging in the Czech Republic and EU and External Costs of Transport. (2012). In *Journal of Civil Engineering and Architecture* (No. 61). David Publishing.
[10] Federal Ministry Republic of Austria (2021), Austria's 2030 Mobility Master Plan
[11] International Energy Agency (2020), Austria 2020 Energy Policy Review
[12] International Energy Agency (2020), Austria 2020 Energy Policy Review

the plan, with specific attention to ensuring accessibility for rural populations and individuals with limited mobility. Innovation, especially in electric mobility and intelligent transport systems, is also seen as essential to driving the transition forward. Through this integrated approach, the Mobility Master Plan 2030 seeks to create a transport system that supports Austria's climate goals while enhancing economic competitiveness and quality of life.

Implementation Framework

Austria's *Mobility Master Plan 2030* provides a comprehensive framework for achieving climate-neutral mobility, with the "Avoid–Shift–Improve" principle as its foundation.[13] This three-pillar strategy addresses the challenges of the transport sector from the perspectives of minimizing the need for mobility (Avoid), encouraging the transition to sustainable transport modes (Shift), and improving technology and efficiency (Improve).[14] In this context: "Avoid" refers to reducing transport demand through spatial planning, digital alternatives, and shorter travel distances. "Shift" involves promoting a shift to environmentally friendly modes of transport, particularly public transit, walking, and cycling. And "Improve" focuses on clean technologies, energy efficiency, and innovation in vehicles and infrastructure.

However, the realization of these objectives faces structural challenges. First, infrastructure development (particularly for rail) requires long planning and construction periods, and the annual capacity for expansion is limited by labor, land-use, and environmental constraints. Second, the potential for modal shift is not unlimited; complex logistics and travel patterns can inhibit transitions, particularly in freight and peri-urban contexts. Furthermore, the transport sector's full decarbonization depends heavily on renewable energy. By 2040, only about one-third of the current energy demand from land transport can be met with sustainable domestic energy sources. This limitation calls for aggressive investment in renewable capacity and transformative efficiency gains across the system.[15]

The plan emphasizes that transforming the system is not limited to infrastructure and vehicle changes but requires a holistic transformation of the entire system, including urban structures, digital services, and people's behaviors. Through this, Austria aims to achieve a sustainable, efficient, and accessible mobility system for all.

Sector-Specific Approaches

Mode	Main Strategies and Measures	EU Alignment
Cars	- Shift mobility patterns to reduce private car use to 40% and increase eco-mobility share to 60%. - 100% zero-emission new vehicle registrations by 2030. - Develop nationwide charging / fueling infrastructure.	- Aligned with EU Green Deal and Fit for 55 objectives. - Supports EU targets for zero-emission transport and sustainable urban mobility.

[13] Federal Ministry Republic of Austria (2021), Austria's 2030 Mobility Master Plan
[14] Federal Ministry Republic of Austria (2021), Austria's 2030 Mobility Master Plan
[15] Federal Ministry Republic of Austria (2021), Austria's 2030 Mobility Master Plan

Trains	- Increase rail freight share to 40% through international cooperation. - Achieve full climate neutrality in rail transport by 2040, with major decarbonization by 2035. - Electrification of rail lines as the primary decarbonization strategy.	- Supports TEN-T objectives. - Aligned with EU targets for climate-neutral transport by 2050.
Aviation	- Achieve 100% climate-neutral aviation by 2040. - Promote sustainable fuel adoption. - Integrate aviation into the broader transport system with new mobility concepts and enhanced connectivity. - Support post-COVID-19 recovery focusing on fairness, environmental considerations, and competitiveness in the aviation industry.[16]	- Aligned with the EU Green Deal and Fit for 55 targets. - Supports EU efforts to reduce aviation's carbon footprint and promote sustainable aviation fuels.

Digitalization and Innovation

Austria has been advancing digitalization in mobility for over 25 years, not only in vehicle components but also in infrastructure such as traffic manageme1nt and travel information systems. The rise of a connected society has led to expectations for real-time, ubiquitous access to mobility services, demanding new cooperation models across public and private stakeholders.

In particular, automated mobility is positioned as a major pillar for the future. The Austrian Action Programme on Automated Mobility (2019–2022) [17] emphasizes the need for safe testing environments, transparent information policies, and an active public-sector role in shaping automation, including broad social dialogue. The plan lays the groundwork for the future deployment of Cooperative, Connected, and Automated Mobility (CCAM) technologies, aiming to ensure safety, sustainability, and user trust. These goals are supported by interdisciplinary research and pilot projects to gather experience and inform regulation. Alongside the *2011 ITS Action Plan*, Austria's "RTI Strategy Mobility 2040" and "RTI Agenda Mobility 2026" prioritize innovation in digital infrastructure, climate-friendly technologies, and improved access to sustainable and automated mobility, especially in rural and underserved regions.

Challenges and EU Influence

Austria faces multiple challenges in transforming its mobility system toward climate neutrality by 2040. Key issues include reducing transport emissions, especially from private cars, and promoting a modal shift to public transport, cycling, and walking. Ensuring accessible, integrated transport in rural and mountainous regions remains difficult. Moreover, the digitalization of mobility—through intelligent transport systems and automated vehicles—requires robust data governance and public trust.[18] Institutional coordination across federal, regional, and local levels adds further complexity.

[16] Federal Ministry Republic of Austria (2022), Aviation Strategy 2040+
[17] Federal Ministry Republic of Austria (2022), Action Plan Digital Transformation in Mobility
[18] Federal Ministry Republic of Austria (2022), Action Plan Digital Transformation in Mobility

Austria's mobility policy is closely aligned with the EU's strategy, and EU-wide coordination is essential, especially given the geographical location of the country with a high proportion of cross-border freight traffic (approximately 80%)[15] . Promoting a modal shift in rail transport will require Europe-wide efforts to improve the efficiency of the international rail network and to ensure cost transparency in all modes of transport. It will be difficult to reach the 40% rail share target by a single initiative.[19]

In addition, the European Green Deal (2019) and the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy (2020) define the direction of Austria's climate law and Mobility Master Plan 2030[20] , which aim to achieve climate neutrality, resource efficiency, and fair competition. Furthermore, fuel prices are lower in Austria than in neighboring countries, and the increasing “tank export” of fuels is diluting the effectiveness of individual countries' individual measures.[21] In light of these factors, progress in decarbonization and infrastructure development requires deeper policy coordination and partnerships across Europe.

5. Transport policy of the EU

Historical development and establishment of Common Transport Policy in the EU

The development of a coherent European transport policy was surprisingly slow in the early decades of European integration. Although the 1957 Treaty of Rome, which established the European Economic Community, explicitly identified transport as one of the Community’s main common policies, progress in this field remained limited for a long time (Treaty of Rome, 1957). By the 1980s, frustration with the lack of a European transport policy had grown significantly. The European Parliament appealed to the European Court of Justice to recognise the Council’s failure to act, culminating in the landmark Judgment in Case 13/83 in May 1985. The Court urged the Council to assume its responsibilities and to move towards establishing a common transport policy (ECJ, 1985). This judicial intervention marked a turning point. A year later, the Single European Act laid the foundations for dismantling physical and technical barriers within the transport sector and introduced common financing and fiscal principles (Single European Act, 1986). Despite these institutional advances, national interests continued to dominate. Nevertheless, by 1988, the Commission succeeded in promoting a modest plan involving a limited number of infrastructure projects. These were funded through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Investment Bank (EIB) (European Commission, 1988).

ERDF funds were confined to certain eligible regions, while EIB loans were granted according to strict, predefined priorities rather than as part of an overarching strategy. Adopting the 1992 Maastricht Treaty proved to be a decisive moment for the development of a common transport policy. The Treaty, by reinforcing the objective of completing the Single European Market, provided the political, institutional, and budgetary frameworks necessary for a genuine European transport strategy (Treaty on European Union, 1992). The Maastricht Treaty introduced the concept of the

[19] Federal Ministry Republic of Austria (2021), Austria’s 2030 Mobility Master Plan
[20] Federal Ministry Republic of Austria (2021), Austria’s 2030 Mobility Master Plan
[21] International Energy Agency (2020), Austria 2020 Energy Policy Review

Trans-European Networks (TEN), covering transport, energy, and telecommunications (European Commission, 1993). For the first time, the European Union had a mandate not only to coordinate but also to financially support major infrastructure projects at the continental level. Within transport, the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) took shape, identifying Priority Axes and horizontal priorities aimed at ensuring cohesion, interoperability, and improved access across Europe's regions (European Commission, 1996). This institutional momentum was reinforced by the 1992 White Paper, where the Commission proposed the development of the Trans-European Transport Network within a framework of open and competitive markets (European Commission, 1992). The document stressed the need to enhance interconnections, interoperability of national networks, and access, particularly for island, landlocked, and peripheral regions. The White Paper signified a paradigm shift: transport policy was about actively building a European transport system that supported economic, territorial, and social cohesion. By 1995, the European Commission began to reorient its infrastructure policies further, placing greater emphasis on social cohesion, sustainability, intermodality, safety, quality, and the needs of accession countries (European Commission, 1995). These new principles, alongside the original goals of market integration and network development, became especially important as the geopolitical and spatial realities of the EU changed. The Common Transport Policy became instrumental in unifying Europe's diverse regions into a single, integrated market.

This evolution of European common policy on transport culminated in the 2001 White Paper, a landmark document proposing sixty measures to create a sustainable and efficient European transport system (European Commission, 2001). A major innovation was the promotion of modal shift, aiming to achieve a better balance between different modes of transport by encouraging competition, eliminating bottlenecks, and putting users at the centre of policy considerations. The 2001 White Paper reflected a growing recognition that simply increasing mobility was not enough; rather, the EU needed to prioritise sustainable, high-quality, and user-oriented transport solutions. As the ten-year timeframe covered by the 2001 White Paper came to a close, the European Commission evaluated the progress made. Its 2009 Communication concluded that the Common Transport Policy had largely achieved its objectives. It had contributed significantly to the competitiveness of the European economy, to the opening and integration of transport markets, and to improving safety, security, passenger rights, and working conditions (European Commission, 2009). This assessment laid the groundwork for the 2011 White Paper, which has since served as the EU's main strategic reference for transport policy (European Commission, 2011). The institutional basis for EU transport policy was further strengthened by the Lisbon Treaty of 2007, which amended both the Rome and Maastricht Treaties. Lisbon formally listed transport as an area of shared competence between the European Union and its Member States (Treaty of Lisbon, 2007). This recognition solidified transport's position at the heart of European integration, enabling the EU to take a more active and coordinated role in shaping the future of mobility across the continent.

Green Deal and the EU's Transport Policy Transformation

The European Union's transport sector has undergone a period of profound transformation during the 2019–2024 mandate of the European Commission under Ursula von der Leyen. In an era defined by urgent climate imperatives, technological innovation, and mounting geopolitical pressures, the Commission pursued an ambitious agenda aimed at reducing transport emissions, advancing

digitalisation, and asserting Europe's strategic autonomy (European Commission, 2019a). As the EU enters a new political cycle, attention shifts from designing legislative frameworks to the challenging task of their implementation. The evolving political climate, combined with external pressures from global competition and conflict, now demands a reassessment of priorities and a renewed focus on resilience and competitiveness (European Commission, 2024a). During the previous Commission's term, transport policy was deeply intertwined with the European Green Deal's overarching ambition: achieving climate neutrality by 2050 (European Commission, 2019b). Within this framework, the Smart and Sustainable Mobility Strategy set the objective of reducing transport-related emissions by 90% by mid-century (European Commission, 2020a). Eighty-two concrete policy measures were introduced, organised around the pillars of sustainability, digitalisation, and resilience.

Key initiatives such as the Fit for 55 package, the extension of the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS) to new sectors, the Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation, and stricter CO_2 emissions standards for vehicles collectively reshaped the legislative landscape for transport (European Commission, 2021a, 2023a). Maritime and aviation sectors were targeted through dedicated acts promoting the uptake of renewable fuels, while investment in the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) sought to better integrate all EU regions into a sustainable and cohesive infrastructure (European Commission, 2021b). Parallel to these efforts, digitalisation emerged as a critical driver of transformation. The Commission sought to modernise European transport systems through intelligent transport systems, better traffic management, and seamless mobility services (European Commission, 2022a). The creation of the European Common Mobility Data Space and the adoption of the Data Act and AI Act provided the regulatory scaffolding for a data-driven transport ecosystem (European Commission, 2022b, 2023b). These initiatives aimed not only to improve the environmental performance of transport, but also to bolster Europe's competitiveness in an increasingly digitised global economy.

However, the years following 2019 were marked by an unexpected series of global shocks that deeply impacted transport policy. The COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, and rising tensions with China and the United States disrupted supply chains, undermined energy security, and complicated efforts to decarbonise mobility (Draghi, 2024; European Commission, 2022c). Geopolitical realities necessitated new responses: the EU closed its airspace to Russian aircraft, sanctioned Russian maritime and road operators, and faced major logistical bottlenecks in sourcing critical raw materials essential for the green transition (European Commission, 2022d). Simultaneously, competition with China intensified, particularly regarding electric vehicles, leading to anti-subsidy investigations and the imposition of tariffs on Chinese EV imports (European Commission, 2024b). Relations with the United States also shifted, especially with the return of Donald Trump to the presidency, bringing uncertainty over green technology cooperation and fears of increased tariffs on European exports (Politico Europe, 2024). These geopolitical developments exposed vulnerabilities in Europe's transport and industrial sectors and prompted the European Union to adopt new strategies. Initiatives such as the Global Gateway sought to strengthen strategic partnerships and secure supply chains, while foreign direct investment screening mechanisms were reinforced to protect critical infrastructure and technologies (European Commission, 2021c; 2024c). The Draghi Report underscored the need for urgent investments in multimodal transport networks, digitalisation, workforce skills, and innovation projects such as zero-emission aircraft and automated

rail transport (Draghi, 2024). These strategies reflect a broader trend: the realisation that Europe's green transition must be complemented by efforts to ensure industrial competitiveness and strategic resilience.

Current Challenges and Changes

As the new Commission under Commissioner for Sustainable Transport and Tourism Apostolos Tzitzikostas begins its term, its mandate is often referred to as the "Implementation Commission" (European Commission, 2025a). The legislative framework for greening and digitalising transport is largely in place; now the focus turns to ensuring that laws translate into tangible progress. This task, however, is complicated by several factors. The EU's electricity grid must be strengthened to accommodate a growing fleet of electric vehicles; battery production capacities and supplies of renewable fuels must be expanded; and the socio-economic impacts of the transition on industries and regions must be managed carefully (European Commission, 2025b). Moreover, the political balance in Europe has shifted. The rise of right-wing and more industry-friendly forces in the European Parliament and several Member States suggests a legislative agenda more attuned to business needs and less open to new regulatory burdens (Politico Europe, 2024). Simplification of existing rules and reduction of administrative red tape will become key themes, without abandoning the EU's broader climate objectives.

Against this backdrop, several policy priorities stand out. Revitalising the European rail sector is one of them. The Commission plans to develop a truly integrated high-speed rail network connecting capitals and major cities, alongside measures to encourage the uptake of night trains and improve multimodal ticketing systems through a new regulation (European Commission, 2025c). Another urgent area is the future of the automotive industry. Faced with intense global competition, the EU will implement a Strategic Dialogue on the Future of the Automotive Industry, aiming to scale up electric vehicle infrastructure, promote corporate fleet electrification, and support second-hand markets for zero-emission vehicles (European Commission, 2025d). Maritime transport and ports will also receive increased attention. A new Industrial Maritime Strategy and an EU Port Strategy will focus on making Europe's maritime sector more competitive, resilient, and secure, particularly in the face of growing international competition (European Commission, 2025e). Aviation, meanwhile, faces perhaps the greatest challenge in terms of decarbonisation. Meeting ambitious environmental targets will require significant investments in renewable and low-carbon fuels, alongside efforts to improve the efficiency of European airspace through the Single European Sky initiative (European Commission, 2025f). Funding remains a central concern across all transport modes. The future of key programmes like the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) depends on negotiations over the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), where political divisions between Member States could impact the resources available for critical transport infrastructure (European Commission, 2025g).

6. Conclusion

The development of transport policy in the European Union demonstrates a clear trajectory from national policies toward strategic integration, rooted in the principles of

sustainability, cohesion, and competitiveness. While early efforts were constrained by institutional limitations and national interests, successive treaty reforms and policy milestones—such as the Maastricht Treaty, the White Papers of 2001 and 2011, and most recently, the European Green Deal—have enabled the EU to establish a robust Common Transport Policy. Today, transport policy is central to the EU's climate ambitions, digital transformation, and strategic resilience. Yet, the implementation of this ambitious agenda requires strong coordination with Member States, whose individual strategies reflect both shared goals and unique national contexts.

Austria's Mobility Master Plan 2030 exemplifies deep alignment with EU climate and transport priorities, particularly the Smart and Sustainable Mobility Strategy. With its dual focus on a transport transition (Avoid–Shift–Improve) and an energy transition, Austria has set one of Europe's most ambitious targets: achieving climate-neutral mobility by 2040. Its integrated approach—emphasizing innovation, modal shift, equity, and systemic change—illustrates how EU-level frameworks can guide comprehensive national reforms. However, Austria's progress is tempered by structural constraints such as infrastructure bottlenecks, renewable energy limitations, and cross-border freight challenges, underscoring the importance of European coordination, especially within the TEN-T framework and Fit for 55 package.

The Czech Republic's transport policy, while also aligned with EU objectives, follows an infrastructure-focused path. It has prioritized expanding road and rail networks, improving safety, and enhancing regional connectivity, particularly through EU co-financing mechanisms like the Cohesion Fund and the Connecting Europe Facility. Although environmental considerations are increasingly present—such as in the National Recovery Plan and the Clean Mobility Package—the Czech approach remains more cautious in pursuing decarbonization.

Together, these three levels of policy—European, Austrian, and Czech—highlight the multilevel governance structure underpinning transport transformation in the EU. While the EU sets strategic direction and provides funding and legislative tools, Member States retain discretion in implementation, leading to varying levels of ambition and capacity. Achieving the EU's climate and mobility goals will therefore depend not only on visionary frameworks, but also on effective national execution, cross-border cooperation, and sustained political will to reconcile environmental imperatives with socio-economic realities.

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