

# The right to compete in transport infrastructures

Galicia

## Transport infrastructures governance: between the boosterist model and sustainable mobility

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*Galicia enjoys a regime of autonomy within the Spanish state which is materialized in an effective decision-making capacity by the Galician government in relation to roads and secondary ports, and to transport on rias, the latter currently an underused method. The main roads, including certain metropolitan roads and the country's main communications axis (the Atlantic motorway), and the main ports, are attributed to the state, which moreover controls all of the airport and railway infrastructures. The town councils have prerogatives such as the regulation of taxis or urban public transport, but their radius of action is insufficient in relation to the real spheres of metropolitan mobility, so the serious congestion problems which are recorded in the main developed spaces of Galicia (especially Vigo-Pontevedra, A Coruña-Ferrol and Santiago) do not have an adequate management and decision-making framework.*

*Since Galicia gained autonomy, there has been a spectacular development in the land transport physical infrastructures, to a large extent as a result of the investment effort deployed by the new Galician government. An effort that was considered justified given the generalized perception that the country was in a situation of economic backwardness. Later, the state added to this construction dynamics and executed the access dual carriageways from and to the Castilian plateau. The notable delay suffered by these external connection infrastructures is one of the reasons which contribute to the generation of a feeling of grievance, widely extended socially and amplified in the political and media spheres, among others. This grievance leads to a certain obsession, very evident in Galicia, with the construction of major transport infrastructures and, in particular, with the country's connection to Madrid, a preference which often comes before the improvement in the internal connections.*

*With the main dual carriageways inaugurated, attention turned toward the high-speed train, fundamentally considered as a connection between Galicia and Madrid. Almost all the political and journalistic controversies on transport issues in recent years concern this major infrastructure. Most of the public resources, above all from the state Budget, assigned to Galicia have precisely been diverted to the construction of the high-speed train.*

*Because of the excessive backing of roads, and the private vehicle, the country's main mobility problems, above all in urban and metropolitan areas, have tended to worsen, and symptoms of change are not detected. There is no suburban railway or light railway service, public transport by road is inoperative, and the investment priorities are focused on the high-speed train and the high-capacity routes, which do not exactly contribute to solving the problems. This can be seen from the fact that the transport agenda still appears to be centred on a boosterist model, while sustainable*

This study was concluded in November 2008. Obviously, with the change of government in March 2009 and the consequent restructuring of the organization chart of the Xunta administration, there may be changes.

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*mobility is a truly unresolved matter. This obsolete agenda is not just attributable to journalistic insistence or to political dynamics, but also to the traditional weakness of Galician civil society.*

*In terms of governance, greater both vertical and horizontal cooperation is essential. Vertical because better collaboration mechanisms between administrative levels are crucial, for example between Xunta (autonomous government) and state or between Xunta and municipalities. As for horizontal cooperation, mobility in urban and metropolitan areas necessarily requires the creation of supramunicipal structures in which coordinated work is carried out. In particular, horizontal cooperation should allow the striking localisms present in certain municipalities to be overcome, and thus the polycentrism of Galicia to be assumed not only with the morphology that the Galician urban network takes but also as the receptacle and the language of spatial policies, including those of transport and mobility. The Xunta is responsible for encouraging and leading both a new governance and an agenda in accordance with the real problems present in Galicia on transport infrastructure matters.*

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## **Introduction: the framework of transport powers in Galicia**

Galicia is an autonomous region (community in constitutional terms) within the Spanish state, and therefore has a substantial degree of autonomy to develop its own policies in different sectors. Although apparently Galicia has full powers in subjects such as education, health and tourism, in relation to transport and infrastructures it has to share them initially with the central government, in accordance with the principle of the general interest of the state. This principle of distribution starts from the basis that there are two main groups of transport infrastructures in Galicia (like in other Spanish autonomous regions). On the one hand, those whose fundamental mission is the internal structuring of Galicia; and, on the other hand, those which moreover link population centres and spaces which – in view of their (strategic, demographic, economic, politico-administrative, social, etc.) importance on a state level – are directly controlled by the state. The Ministry of Public Works (Spanish Government) thus has powers for roads from the State Network of General Interest (known as RIGE), which link the main population centres (provincial capitals, important cities). The rest of the road network is distributed between the autonomous government (*Xunta de Galicia* or Galician Government), the provincial councils (*deputacións*) and the municipalities (*concellos*).

In relation to the road public transport services which operate in Galicia, the situation is similar to the road infrastructure. Indeed, the state reserves control of the long-distance services which link Galicia with other regions. These services operate under a concession administrative regime. As for the rest of the public transport services which link the different population centres of Galicia, the control is by the Dirección Xeral de Transportes (General Directorate of Transports, Regional Ministry of Spatial Policy, Public Works and Transport of the Galician Government or Xunta), which commissions the operation of the different routes from different companies under a concession regime.

On a municipal level, the most populated municipalities of Galicia (urban municipalities) have local public transport services. In accordance with the legislation in force, the provision of urban transport services is the responsibility of the local authority. The same situation exists for taxis, regulated by the city councils. The fact that the urban development of the main Galician urban areas has already exceeded for some decades the administrative limits of the central city raises the need to achieve joint powers on a metropolitan level. The Xunta is currently working on the so-called Metropolitan Transport project, with the aim of achieving the single management of all the means of transport in the sphere of the seven big towns which, in decreasing order of population size, are Vigo, A Coruña, Ourense, Santiago de Compostela, Lugo, Pontevedra and Ferrol.

As for ports, there is also a dichotomy between the ports considered as strategic for the state as a whole, mainly managed by the Spanish government, and those which are not. The latter are controlled by the Xunta, through the company Portos de Galicia.

In actual fact, the above-mentioned principle of distribution of powers between the Xunta and the central state administration is only fulfilled in the road and port areas. Indeed, the air and rail transport infrastructures are completely controlled by the state. The most worrying situation occurs with rail transport. Despite having two big

built-up spaces (according to the initially approved project of the Spatial Guidelines for Galicia, these spaces are A Coruña–Ferrol and Vigo–Pontevedra),<sup>1</sup> Galicia continues not to have a suburban railway service. It does, on the other hand, have a regional train service (now called Medium Distance), including the A Coruña–Santiago–Pontevedra–Vigo line, operated by Renfe Operadora, like all the others which cover services within the autonomous region (except the Ferrol–Oviedo line, operated by Ferrocarriles Españoles de Vía Estrecha, FEVE). In recent years the government of Galicia announced the future creation of a public Galician Railways company, on the basis of the provision in the 1981 Statute of Autonomy that the railway lines which run entirely within Galicia can have autonomous management and services, but their creation has been postponed *sine die*. Because of the priority given to road infrastructures and in general to road transport – maybe on needing less initial investment, within a policy of temporary remedies for the problems of mobility, which in any case increase each year –, the autonomous government railways have not yet been set up.

In relation to airports, and as occurs in the rest of the state, they are all controlled by AENA (Spanish Airports and Air Navigation), a public organization accountable to the central government which manages all the commercial airports. This control implies depersonalization of the management and the adoption of global and mass-produced strategies, which lead to negative phenomena such as competition between the three airports existing in Galicia for the same markets, or the inability of the airports to carry out their own independent promotion or marketing. An additional problem should also be mentioned which is particularly serious in the Galician case: the absence of coordination between the three airports, which is fundamental in so far as in Galicia these infrastructures are arranged along the Atlantic Motorway, that is to say on the same linear axis with a length of just under 150 km.

A peculiar case in Galicia is sea transport, an exclusive power of the Galician executive. This is not a very important means of transport in absolute values, but it is in relative terms. Some services operate both in the Rías Baixas and in the Rías Altas, under a concession regime of the Xunta of Galicia, starting from its own legislation enacted by the Galician Parliament.<sup>2</sup> The most well-known is the service operated in the Ría de Vigo, between Cangas do Marrazo and Moaña, on the north bank, and the city of Vigo – currently the most populated in Galicia –, on the south bank.

## Notes on the Galician infrastructures: from deficit to surplus?

At the time of the end of the Franco dictatorship (1975), Galicia was characterized by having considerable transport infrastructure deficiencies. These deficiencies should

<sup>1</sup> The draft Spatial Guidelines for Galicia (*Directrices de Ordenación do Territorio de Galicia* in Galician) were presented in June 2008. In September of the same year the document was initially approved (DOG no. 180, 17.09.2008) and the two-month public information process was opened. Its final approval is foreseen before the end of the VII Term of the Galician Parliament (2005–2009).

<sup>2</sup> The last legislative provision in this respect is the Act developing the free provision of sea passenger transport services in the internal waters of Galicia (No 2 of 2008, as at 6 May 2008) (*Lei 2/2008, do 6 de maio, pola que se desenvolve a libre prestación de servizos de transporte marítimo de persoas en augas interiores de Galicia*).

be related first to a deficient external accessibility, and second to a poor internal accessibility. At a time when air transport was still very minority and elitist, the weak role of the railway and the deficient quality of the Galician road network contributed to promoting the image of a periphery isolated from the rest of Spain and from Portugal, at the same time as lacking internal cohesion.

Within the process of decentralization experienced with the arrival of democracy, in 1981 Galicia was equipped with its own Statute of Autonomy. The attainment of self-government implied, for the first time in its contemporary history, being able to access the control and management of part of its transport infrastructures. Within the autonomous government of Galicia (the Xunta), one of the departments (regional ministries) with the most weight has always been the Regional Ministry (Consellaría) of Spatial Planning and Public Works – equivalent to the current Ministry of Public Works on a state level – and now called the Regional Ministry of Spatial Policy, Public Works and Transport. The huge budgets that this department has always handled have been devoted to the planning, construction and maintenance of an internal road network which would be capable of banishing the classical image that Galicia was a territory lacking cohesion. Obviously, as we have already said, the state reserved control of the roads of the RIGE, but the Xunta, in cooperation with the provincial councils and the local authorities, took over control of a good part of the structure of Galicia.

The majority of the authors who had worked on the economic situation of Galicia in the 1960s and 1970s had precisely attributed a good part of the “economic backwardness” of Galicia to the chronic absence of transport infrastructures. According to these authors, who include Xosé Manuel Beiras (with his classic *The economic backwardness of Galicia (O atraso económico da Galiza)*, published for the first time in 1973), the lack of modern transport infrastructures would have been the key to explain the difficulty in forming an internal Galician market, and likewise the weakness of the exchanges with the rest of Spain. Taking into account that Portugal (a natural trading area and logical way out from Galicia to the south) was an independent state, it would then be understood why the Galician economy would have remained self-centred and stuck with its backwardness, in the face of the lack of modernization and contact with other more advanced economies.

This excessive role granted to the transport infrastructures on explaining the lower development of Galicia in relation to other parts of Spain has gradually taken root since then in Galician society. Infrastructures are a necessary condition for economic development, but are not a sufficient condition. However, many authors and researchers granted the infrastructures a much greater role than they actually have, an overvaluation that was then transferred to public opinion and to Galician civil society. This feeling of injustice has often been expressed in the systematic denunciation of abandonment by the state as regards the provision of major infrastructures, and the weakness of the connections between Galicia and the Castilian plateau have fundamentally been denounced. This fact is particularly important in so far as it has made the Galicia–Madrid connection the main priority, above any other transport connection, whether external or internal.

As for the infrastructures on the Atlantic Axis (a space of axial development in which 75% of the population of Galicia lives, where 80% of its wealth is generated and which includes five of the country’s seven big towns), they experienced a great boost with the arrival of democracy. In 1979 the first section of the Atlantic Motorway was

inaugurated, between Santiago and Pontevedra, and in 1981 it was extended to A Coruña and Vigo, which represents a milestone in the improvement of accessibility in the western half of Galicia. The strategic nature of the structuring of the development poles – A Coruña, Vigo and Vilagarcía de Arousa – declared at the end of the Franco regime in the framework of the regional development instruments, and the topographic factor, explained the fact that the structuring of the Atlantic Axis was prior to the construction of the modern high-capacity routes with the Castilian plateau, which had to cross the eastern mountain ranges: Os Ancares-O Courel to the north and the eastern ranges of Ourense to the south.

The progress of the Atlantic Motorway thus contrasted with the situation of what were then known as the “Accesses to Galicia” – a highly indicative name, by the way. At that time it was a tough and gruelling task to cross the Pedrafita pass (access to Galicia on the N-VI, the main road from Madrid to A Coruña), with many kilometres of narrow roads, curves, the road surface in bad condition and the impossibility to overtake. At that time the state fixed the structuring of the Galician coastal urban areas as a priority, before the issue of solving access to Galicia. The major link between A Coruña and Santiago (the capital of Galicia passed to Santiago with the arrival of autonomy) and the important functional links between Vigo and Pontevedra (separated by only 21 kilometres) explained this choice. Whatever the case, the assignment of resources to Galicia was scarce in comparison with other parts of the state.

The difficult issue of road accesses to Galicia was thus sacrificed in favour of the Atlantic Motorway, making a commitment to the cohesion of the urban network of Western Galicia, and it was a question of favouring the natural expansion of Galicia toward the north of Portugal, all the more so when from 1986 (on joining the European Economic Community) the foundations were laid for the free movement of persons, goods and capital between one side and the other of the Miño. These decisions gave more and more arguments to a public opinion and to a civil society which continued to denounce the marginalization of Galicia in relation to other regions and which were unanimously crying out for dual carriageways as the only way to make a break once and for all with the age-old backwardness. The dual carriageways demanded were the northwestern one, from A Coruña to Madrid, and the Rías Baixas one, from Vigo to Madrid, both starting in Benavente, in Castile and León.

For its part, during the 1980s, the Galician government converted the improvement in the internal Galician road network into its great obsession. The investment in roads was one of the main priorities, partly from need but also due to the political profitability of inaugurating kilometres and more kilometres of roads, expressways and dual carriageways. Spain joining the European Union and the fact that from the beginning Galicia was declared as Objective 1 Region implied the arrival of substantial European funds, which were invested to a large extent in major road infrastructure works. The 1980s and 1990s were the golden age for the construction of road works in Galicia, helped by the existence of an economic model in which construction was of great importance, and by the visibility and electoral profitability of the public works. We can even say that certain sectors were neglected (education, the information society, continuing education and the environment) and an excess investment was made in roads.

New roads were built in the 1980s, but there was especially a commitment to the improvement of the conditions of the existing road network (construction of extra

lanes, improvement of the road surface, etc.). The 1990s, with Manuel Fraga as president of Galicia, were characterized by the great boost given to the construction of roads, in the framework of the preparation and implementation of the Third Road Plan of Galicia (1991–2000). Xosé Cuiña, regional minister of Spatial Policy in successive governments of Manuel Fraga for over a decade, was the emblematic politician responsible for this deployment of roads. The Xunta sought “*A vertebración solidaria dun país*” (the structuring of the country with solidarity), as announced by the institutional advertisement inserted in newspapers and other media at the time. During the 1990s, the Galician government tried to bring the inland and the coastal areas of Galicia closer together, with works such as the Santiago – Lalín motorway and the Lalín – Monforte de Lemos corridor. In coastal Galicia, the deficient accessibility of highly populated areas such as O Barbanza, O Salnés and O Morrazo was resolved by building their respective expressways (currently being transformed into dual carriageways), which joined the main axis of the Atlantic Motorway (a state-run toll infrastructure). Finally, in the metropolitan areas of A Coruña and Vigo, the Xunta built two dual carriageways (the AG-55 between A Coruña and Carballo and the AG-57, between Vigo and Baiona, with the aim of structuring and relieving traffic congestion in these emerging metropolitan areas).

Parallel to this modernization of the internal road network, there was a slow improvement and updating of the state road network in Galicia. During the 1990s it was not possible to see the completion of the two dual carriageways offering access to Galicia, and it was necessary to wait for the 21<sup>st</sup> century for Vigo and A Coruña finally to be linked by a dual carriageway with the Castilian plateau. Despite the fact that these two major infrastructures were carried out from the territorial logic of the whole of Spain, they represented major progress in the internal structuring of Galicia. The Northwest Dual Carriageway allowed a spectacular reduction in the time needed to travel between Lugo and A Coruña, and something similar occurred in relation to the Rías Baixas Dual Carriageway and the Ourense–Vigo link. Likewise, the accessibility of a good part of the districts of the province of Lugo and Ourense affected by the two dual carriageways was improved notably in relation to the main cities of Galicia. There were, however, districts of Galicia which were “left behind” in this major increase in accessibility. This occurred, in the case of Lugo, with A Mariña and the south of the province (Terra de Lemos, Terra de Chantada and O Courel districts); in the case of Ourense, Valdeorras and most of the districts of the north and the east of the province are still today doomed to suffer from great isolation.

Overall, in relation to road infrastructures, we can offer an indicative detail which at the time was perceived as important by Galician society. In 2000 it was already possible to travel by motorway all along the Atlantic Axis, between Ferrol (in the north) and Tui (in the south), and from the latter to Lisbon. On the other hand, the connections with Madrid were still not complete, after years of works. There was therefore the paradox that it was possible to travel by motorway between Santiago (capital of Galicia) and Lisbon (capital of a foreign state) before you could between Santiago and Madrid (capital of the own state).

As soon as the Atlantic Motorway and the Northwest and Rías Baixas Dual Carriageways were completed, the time of the railway began. Andalusia had been connected to Madrid with a high-speed train (AVE) since 1992. Once the perception existed that the state had already settled the historical road debt with Galicia (thanks to the construction of the dual carriageways towards the Castilian plateau), the high-speed train took over. As had occurred before with the dual carriageways, there was

unanimous agreement throughout Galician society (politicians, civil society, the media, etc.) on the need to demand the urgent arrival of the AVE from Madrid. The Ministry of Public Works, in the same way as in the debate between the Atlantic Motorway and the dual carriageways offering access to Galicia, gave priority to the high-speed train on the Atlantic Axis over the Galicia–Madrid AVE, using arguments along the same lines as those mentioned above.

At present (autumn 2008), 35% of the sections of the AVE between A Coruña and Vigo have been completed, and tenders have been held for almost all the sections (with the exception of the accesses to Vigo). This situation contrasts with the Galicia–Madrid high-speed train line, where the project for the section Ourense–Lubián (Zamora) was awarded in September 2008 and where the works are advancing much slower. The central government states that the Madrid–Galicia AVE will be completed and in service in 2012. However, the current context of the crisis and the successive delays experienced by this kind of infrastructures (as occurred in the past with the dual carriageways) make us think that this date is not realistic.

In any case, the current situation suffers from serious dysfunctions, the most important being the excessive commitment to roads and the private vehicle and, above all, the constant delays and the lack of an overview when it comes to offering a final solution to the problem of mobility in urban spaces. The Atlantic Motorway, the main backbone structuring the most dynamic spaces of Galicia, urgently needs an expansion, and moreover has one of the highest tolls in the state. In the two big developed spaces of A Coruña–Ferrol and Vigo–Pontevedra, the private car is practically the only effective means of transport for compulsory daily mobility, in view of the non-existence of suburban railway services and the ineffectiveness of public road transport.

It is precisely the absence of efficient and high-quality public transport which explains the huge traffic jams which are increasingly recorded in the accesses to the cities. The situation is especially serious in A Coruña, a city conditioned by its specific setting and orography, with a bottleneck (Avenida de Alfonso Molina) as the main access; in Vigo, a very complex metropolitan space where there are over 80,000 inhabitants residing in rural-urban parishes of the same municipality, in addition to the hundreds of thousands in the metropolitan area; or in Santiago de Compostela, where a third of the population of its urban area resides in areas of scattered development or in dormitory towns in other neighbouring municipalities, with public transport of deficient quality. The delays in setting up the metropolitan transport systems by the Xunta will determine the future of these metropolitan areas. The lack of commitment of the licensee companies and of the mayors, and a certain *laissez faire* and preservation of the status quo by the Galician government administration (which continues not to take clear measures promoting public transport) reduce the possibilities of turning this situation around in the near future.

Outside these metropolitan areas, there has likewise been an excessive commitment to roads. Since the arrival of democracy not a single kilometre of new railway line has been built in Galicia (except for the laying of double tracks or an alternative route for those already existing, such as the high-speed lines being built), with the exception of the Pontevedra–Porto de Marín branch (only suitable for freight). This is especially serious if we take into account not only the considerable need for suburban railways in the metropolitan areas mentioned, but also the complete absence of a railway

service in broad territorial areas such as the Costa da Morte, O Barbanza, O Morrazo and O Baixo Miño, with important accessibility and mobility needs.

In addition, the complete commitment to roads has represented the promotion of private transport. The scarce attention paid to public transport has implied an important lack of mobility for segments of the population such as the elderly, children or people without a driving licence. With the change of governmental majority in 2005, the Xunta of Galicia has begun to change its policy and has set up measures with an important symbolic content, such as the introduction of transport services on demand in rural areas, transport for the handicapped and the integration between the school transport services and the regular passenger services. All this is intended to give more importance to public transport in general and to encourage the changeover from the private car.

Finally, we should point out the spatial effects of this x-ray of the infrastructure policies that we have just set out. Road and rail investment continues to respond to a dual logic. On the one hand, strategic infrastructures for the state as a whole, and, on the other hand, infrastructures concentrated in the urban areas and in particular along the Galician Atlantic Axis. This leads to an increase in the imbalances between the two Galicias (western and eastern, approximately equivalent to the provinces of A Coruña and Pontevedra, on the one hand, and of Lugo and Ourense, on the other hand).

We can also say that some foundations are laid for a change of tendency and a decisive commitment to public transport. The Spatial Guidelines for Galicia, in the public participation phase in autumn 2008, contain useful conceptual guidelines to evolve gradually toward a new model, where the suburban and regional railway, and the sea and coastal transport obtain the importance that they have lacked to date. This should be accompanied by the necessary promotion of public transport by road.

## Transport infrastructure investments: a quantitative approach

When it comes to assessing the infrastructure and transport policies carried out in the past years in Galicia, one of the fundamental aspects is the investments aspect. We have already mentioned that the idea of a classical marginalization by the state in relation to the provision of transport infrastructures is very widespread in Galicia. It is therefore relevant to analyse the evolution of the investment figures in Galicia in transport, both by the central government and by the government of Galicia.

Table 1 shows the overall investment in transport in Galicia in a series of key years. Information is presented for 1990 and 2000, and there is subsequently a series of annual data starting from 2004 inclusive.

**Table 1: Overall investment made in transport in Galicia (thousands of current euros) since 1990**

|             | 1990   | 2000    | 2004    | 2005    | 2006    | 2007    |
|-------------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| State Roads | 98,386 | 185,791 | 170,391 | 183,954 | 281,270 | 265,162 |
| Railway     | ND     | ND      | 239,547 | 391,416 | 403,054 | 542,599 |

|                             |         |         |         |         |         |         |
|-----------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Airports and air navigation | 4,129   | 12,994  | 9,829   | 16,978  | 27,319  | 29,505  |
| Ports                       | ND      | ND      | 110,228 | 52,170  | 78,487  | 107,343 |
| TOTAL STATE                 | 102,515 | 198,785 | 529,995 | 644,518 | 790,130 | 944,609 |
| Xunta Roads                 | 86,960  | 91,757  | 250,886 | 309,553 | 301,295 | 333,407 |
| Xunta Ports                 | 16,343  | 19,425  | 27,590  | 26,414  | 25,447  | 23,067  |
| TOTAL XUNTA                 | 103,303 | 111,182 | 278,476 | 335,967 | 326,742 | 356,474 |

Note: ND = no data

Source: Spanish Ministry of Public Works.

We can draw several conclusions on analyzing the data contained in this table:

a) The overall state investment in Galicia has almost doubled in the last 4 years (from 2004 to 2007), going from 529 to 944 million euros. The explanation for this doubling is firstly related to the increase in investment in public works in general in the whole of Spain, and fundamentally to the boost being given in the past years to the railway (almost exclusively the high-speed train), having completed the network of the state as a whole with a dual carriageway network. Despite the fact that we do not have the figures for railway investments prior to 2004, we can appreciate a substantial investment volume in 2004 itself, which exceeded by far the investment in the road network. Secondly, starting from 2005 there was a political renewal in the Xunta, which moreover coincided with the co-existence of governments of the same political colour in Madrid and in Santiago de Compostela, which favoured public investment by the state in Galicia. Other variables of a political nature moreover come into play. An example is the fact that in this IX Term of the Spanish Parliament (which began in 2008, therefore outside the series of data presented), the parliamentary proceedings (October 2008) of the 2009 Budget by the Spanish government required the support of the Basque Nationalists (PNV, *Partido Nacionalista Vasco*) and of the Galician Nationalists (BNG, *Bloque Nacionalista Galego*). The compensation for this support of the government by the BNG was precisely the attainment of an additional 125 million euros for Galicia, which will be above all for the investment in the Atlantic Axis AVE. This support by the BNG (a government partner of the PSOE in the Xunta) for the PSOE in Madrid therefore implies an increase in the investment effort of the state, which is added to the quantity initially allocated in the draft 2009 Budget. Therefore, the interplay of alliances and political compensation on a state and autonomous level has important implications in the distribution of public investment in infrastructures, an aspect to which public opinion, as already indicated, is especially sensitive.

b) The relationship between the total state investment and the total investment of the Xunta in transport infrastructures has varied notably over the past years. In 1990 (without including the State Ports chapter, for which we do not have data), the investment effort of both administrations was very similar, with little more than one million euros in difference (in favour of the Galician executive). However, in 2004 the state investment practically doubled the investment of the Xunta. In 2007, the state investment almost tripled that of the Galician Government. This increase in the state's investment effort in Galicia is related to the factors and the elements that we mentioned above.

c) As regards investment in roads by the state, we observe a sequencing of the figures explained by the nature of the major projects carried out at each moment. Thus, the 98 million in 1990 are almost doubled (in 2000) due to the priority granted

to completing the two dual carriageways linking up with the Castilian plateau (Northwest and Rías Baixas). Once these two strategic road infrastructures had been completed, the volume of investments went down, as can be seen in the figures corresponding to the years 2004 and 2005. The years 2006 and 2007 again show a substantial investment effort by the state in roads, with numerous accounts for the construction of new roads and the maintenance of those already existing.

d) In relation to state investment, the most significant aspect is undoubtedly the evolution of the investment in railways. Although we only have figures starting from 2004, it is obvious that the railway has become the main priority for investment in transport by the state in Galicia. Although on the one hand we should be pleased that the high-speed railway receives the due attention by the public powers, on the other hand we should note the investment delay in high speed in relation to other regions where the AVE already exists today. In any case, the figures contained in this table show great growth in investment in the period 2004–2007, where the final investment in 2007 is more than double the investment of 2004, with over 500 million euros.

e) The investment in airports and air navigation, totally dependent on the Spanish Ministry of Public Works, has likewise had an expansive evolution in the period considered, although it experiences ups and downs (in 2004 it recorded a reduction of more than 3 million euros in relation to 2000). In any case, the investment volume in 2007 tripled that of 2004. Something similar happened with the investment in State Ports, which in the series 2004–2007 went down in 2005 and slowly recovered in the following two years.

f) As for the investment of the Xunta of Galicia in infrastructures, the huge increase in the overall budgets also stands out. Indeed, considering the investment in the road network and in ports ruled by the Galician Government (the two chapters where the Xunta has powers), it goes from 103 million in 1990 to 356 million in 2007. In the series that we looked at, the main leap occurred from 2000 to 2004, when the overall investment practically tripled. The considerable increase in the contribution to the construction of roads stands out especially, going from 91 to 250 million euros. This huge increase is due to the prioritization of the construction of road infrastructures by the Xunta, as we indicated above. In the coming years the Galician cabinet will promote the construction of public civil engineering work to counteract the loss of jobs and the loss of dynamism in the private construction sector, which will tend to intensify this trend. We should stress that – following the general trend of the past years – the investment in roads by the Xunta clearly exceeds that of the state (in 2007, for example, 333 million compared with 265 million euros), which is due not just to the prioritization of the construction of road infrastructures by the Xunta but also to the change of objective by the state, with the high-speed train as its goal.

As regards the state as a whole, and as can be observed in Table 2, at present there is overall a greater investment in roads by the state than by the autonomous regions (3,581 million compared with 2,701 million euros).

**Table 2: Overall investment in transport in 2007 in Spain (thousands of euros)**

|                                     |           |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| Total road network                  | 7,256,604 |
| State roads                         | 3,581,696 |
| Autonomous Communities roads        | 2,701,620 |
| Provincial Councils roads           | 973,287   |
| Railways                            | 8,192,299 |
| Airports and air navigation         | 2,163,753 |
| State Ports                         | 1,012,302 |
| Ports of the Autonomous Communities | 159,566   |

Source: Spanish Ministry of Public Works.

The situation being experienced in Galicia, where the road investment of the Xunta exceeds that of the state, is explained by the policy excessively focused on road infrastructures which is being implemented by the government of Galicia, and also by the fact that it is currently the “time of the AVE in Galicia”, an investment that is being carried out by the central government. Moreover, the priority being granted to the railway as a means of transport can be observed for the state as a whole, taking into account that 8,192 million are allocated for infrastructures and rolling stock, compared with the 3,581 million euros allocated to the state road network. As for investments in airports and air navigation, and in ports, they maintain a similar relative position both as regards the whole of the state and Galicia.

## **Transport infrastructures and governance in Galicia**

### **Unequal distribution by decision-making levels and absence of cooperation mechanisms**

Below we will analyze the key instruments of the transport policy in Galicia, in accordance with each level of power. We are interested in knowing the degree of freedom that the actions have in each of them, that is to say their true room for manoeuvre on making decisions.

In relation to road transport, as we have already said, there is a fairly well-delimited distribution between the powers of the state and of the autonomous government. The Xunta manages the internal road network of Galicia, which joins together the main regional towns and equips all the regional districts with accessibility. The state, on the other hand, is responsible for managing the main road infrastructures of general interest. The control by the state of the road infrastructures which structure the main urban spaces (the main towns) means that the central government has a great decision-making capacity in relation to the infrastructures which actually make up the urban and metropolitan areas of Galicia. The draft Spatial Guidelines for Galicia propose a well-defined territorial model, in which the metropolitan areas of A Coruña–Ferrol and Vigo–Pontevedra would receive a boost, and for this they would have to be organized with new infrastructures. However, the Xunta actually has very little room for manoeuvre, as the road network which structures these spaces depends to a large extent on the Spanish Ministry of Public Works. This is the case

of the AP-9 in the accesses to A Coruña, Ferrol, Pontevedra and Vigo, which acts as a route of peri-urban organization. It also occurs with the A-6 around A Coruña or with the A-52 in the accesses to Vigo. As for the high-capacity routes in these metropolitan spaces, the Xunta only manages two autonomous government motorways, the AG-55 and the AG-57. This general lack of control by the Galician Government over the key infrastructures which structure the most dynamic spaces of Galicia means that the Xunta tries to counteract the situation with its own plans, such as the Vigo Integra plan, a true sectoral plan which programmes road works for the coming years in the area around Vigo.

As for urban public transport, the main problem is the absence of a clear and coordinated territorial sphere of decision-making. To fight against the fragmentation currently represented by the existence of the municipal sphere of the central cities (where the powers are of the corresponding city councils) and of the sphere of the neighbouring municipalities (where the powers are of the Xunta) the creation of supramunicipal transport consortia is considered. These consortia should have the sole institutional leadership of public transport on a regional level, with full decision-making powers. Only thus will it be possible to tackle public transport planning and operation in an efficient manner in metropolitan areas. The consortia should of course include the sea (coastal) means of transport and of course taxi services. One of the main dysfunctions raised in relation to the provision of public transport services is precisely concerning taxi services. As the number of licences is proportional to the number of inhabitants of a municipality and as the number of licences is granted within the municipal sphere, there are dysfunctions such as the lack of taxis in A Coruña airport (because it is in the neighbouring municipality of Culleredo, with less than 20,000 inhabitants).

In relation to rail transport, the state has exclusive decision-making powers. This explains the priority granted to the high-speed train, which will join the most important cities together, to the detriment of the structuring of the territory on a regional and local level. The current stagnation of regional trains could be greater in the future, when the commissioning of new sections of track adapted to the AVE is carried out by dismantling many already existing sections of track. This situation has been condemned by the Xunta, as it represents rejecting the possibility of developing true regional and suburban services taking advantage of the already existing infrastructure. However, the state has full powers in this subject, through the Railway Infrastructure Administrator (ADIF). The regional minister of Spatial Policy recently declared that “what the Xunta says is that not one metre of track that we already have should be taken up.”<sup>3</sup>

As for air transport, the state also has complete control of the airports, with scarce room for manoeuvre by the Xunta, which has been characterized by its passivity to date. Indeed, only the General Directorate of Tourism has considered this problem. The situation of the airport subject implies a lack of coordination of the three Galician airports, which jeopardizes their future due to the increasing competition carried out in the whole of Galicia by Oporto Airport, situated in the north of Portugal.

Finally, as regards sea transport, the lack of control by the Xunta of the main ports makes it impossible to implement its own policies as a country. Proof of this includes the current parallel (at the same time) construction of two outer harbours in A Coruña

<sup>3</sup> Fragment of the interview with María José Caride, regional minister of Spatial Policy, Public Works and Transport, published in the Galician edition of *El País* journal (26.10.2008).

and Ferrol, situated at a distance of some 25 km as the crow flies. From the point of view of the structuring of Galicia and of the fair distribution of infrastructures in Galician territory, it appears to be difficult to find an explanation for this fact, which is due to decision-making criteria external to the real needs of Galicia, to the prevailing localisms, to a certain “investment obsession” and to the general passivity of Galician civil society.

The situation described requires the existence of greater both vertical and horizontal cooperation. The former is related to the degree of interrelation and transfer between the different levels of the administrations. The latter is concerned with the development of cooperation mechanisms between territorial bodies of a similar level, mainly municipalities. Vertical cooperation is one of the main issues pending. In general, we can say that there is a tacit distribution of powers between the Xunta and the state, but there is a lack of adequate spaces for dialogue which allow the actions to be coordinated and planned in a joint manner. At present the cooperation is basically limited to meetings which result in specific agreements, on subjects which in many cases are of strategic importance. This occurred, for example, with the agreement reached between the Xunta and the Spanish Ministry of Public Works for the elimination of tolls on the AP-9 in Rande and A Barcala (metropolitan areas of Vigo and A Coruña). As a result of the high-speed railway works, the creation of a monitoring commission (as demanded by the BNG and the PP) was promoted by the Galician Parliament with the opposition of the PSOE, but it was brought to a standstill by Madrid. In its absence it was replaced by the commitment of the Spanish Minister of Public Works to hold a meeting every three months with the President of the Xunta in order to assess the progress and execution of the works.

Cooperation strategies are likewise missing between the Xunta and the city councils, as can be seen in the difficulties to obtain a true metropolitan transport system capable of guaranteeing mobility in high-quality public transport. The politicization of the relations between the FEGAMP (Galician Federation of Municipalities and Provinces) and the Xunta has led to the exhaustion of this framework of negotiation. At present the Galician Government dialogues directly with the mayors of the corresponding municipalities, on an individual level, which makes it difficult to reach agreements and to speed up the negotiations. As for transport for the disabled, the Vice-Presidential Department of the Xunta devoted to equity and welfare issues (*Vicepresidencia da Igualdade e do Benestar*) cooperates with the town councils through the Galician Equity and Welfare Consortium (*Consortio Galego da Igualdade e do Benestar*). This is the legal formula chosen for a modern and innovative management of the social services, integrating the Xunta with 263 Galician municipalities which have joined this consortium.

An example of good practices in relation to vertical cooperation is the case of Santiago de Compostela, where the Santiago Consortium (*Consortio de Santiago*) brings together the three levels of the public administrations (state, Xunta and city council). The Consortium has its own budget and is a privileged instrument for decision-making and for the execution of strategic infrastructures for Santiago de Compostela, a city which is a World Heritage site and the main tourist destination of Galicia (high-capacity road accesses to the city, urban road network, coach parking bays, etc.).

Horizontal cooperation is undoubtedly another of the main issues pending as regards transport in Galicia. The inability of the mayors of the municipalities which form the

main urban and metropolitan areas to reach satisfactory agreements compromises the mobility of the citizens. The need to create supramunicipal structures in which to develop a true network of work between the different town councils appears to be urgent.

## **The current challenges for the governance of transport and mobility infrastructures in Galicia: the weakness of the planning and the absence of civil society**

There is a perception that the current transport and mobility model has been exhausted in Galicia. The considerable urban growth of the last decades has been accompanied by an unprecedented increase in mobility, due to the uncontrolled expansion of the cities through the neighbouring municipalities (both with high and with low densities). Faced with this constant increase in mobility of the citizens, the response of the different administrations has been to improve the road network and an almost exclusive commitment to individual transport, which has involved favouring the car, despite the fact that it is not a universal means of transport. The situation is unfair bearing in mind that public road transport still has a notable margin for improvement. This situation has led to a fairly unsustainable situation, in which the lack of accessibility in public transport is characteristic of rural spaces. That is to say that if a citizen does not own a car or cannot travel as a passenger, they suffer from serious restrictions to their mobility. In cities the situation is somewhat better, as there is better public transport on offer, but in any case serious problems systematically arise which are seen in day-to-day life.

The main problem is congestion and traffic jams in the access roads to the big Galician cities. This situation is particularly serious in A Coruña, Santiago and Vigo, where we encounter journey times in their urban and metropolitan areas much longer than what should be expected in accordance with their demographic size. One of the aspects to be highlighted is the juxtaposition of short and long-distance traffic on the same routes. Both the Northwest Dual Carriageway and the Rías Baixas Dual Carriageway register considerable traffic jams in the accesses to A Coruña and to Vigo, respectively, as they channel metropolitan traffic and at the same time are routes of general interest of the state used daily by hundreds of long-distance goods vehicles. This affects especially the Atlantic Motorway (AP-9), the true backbone of the urban system of Galicia along the Atlantic Axis, at present clearly saturated, and where it is increasingly usual to encounter traffic delays at the accesses to the cities. The fact that it is a toll motorway causes great frustration among the Galician citizens, as they internalize the fact that they are paying constantly to use a strategic and fundamental infrastructure for the development of Galicia, and which moreover suffers from serious failings: frequent saturation, deficient road surfaces, abundant road works, etc.

Moreover, and as far as the AP-9 in particular is concerned, the fact that there are other toll-free infrastructures of similar characteristics (dual carriageways) encourages the sensation of resentment among the frequent users of the Atlantic Motorway. The announcement of the completion by 2020 of an alternative toll-free dual carriageway does not satisfy public opinion, firstly due to the long time horizon and secondly due to the characteristics of the route of this infrastructure, which will foreseeably be quite distant from the current route of the AP-9. At present there is an

important debate in the media on the need for the Galician Government to take over control of the AP-9, something which does not appear likely as the motorway concession was extended by the previous government until the year 2048. The concession belongs to AUDASA, a company belonging to Itinere Infraestructuras, which in turn is a subsidiary of Sacyr Vallehermoso.

Returning to the specific issue of metropolitan transport, it should be said that in cities public transport deficiencies and the mass use of the car cause great difficulties for parking. A vicious circle is thus created and the population tends to perceive transport and mobility as one of the main day-to-day problems. Frustration is beginning to be installed in many sectors aware of the need for a true public transport system, due to the non-existence of a suburban railway and to the imminent dismantling of the regional services. In this context of difficult urban and metropolitan mobility, the majority of transport investments are going to the high-speed train, which is not going to solve any of the pressing problems of mobility in the most populated spaces of Galicia. In addition to the deficiencies of rail transport, we have to add the underuse of the possibilities of sea (coastal) transport, a means of transport to which the European Union allocates substantial lines of aid. Although it is true that the media amplify the role of the AVE, there is an increasing number of citizens who perceive that the day-to-day transport problems are getting worse, not only in urban areas but also in rural areas.

Finally, the Galician airport model is another of the sources of dissatisfaction for citizens. The fact that the three Galician airports compete among themselves prevents the creation of a truly competitive large-sized airport, which obliges many travellers to pay more expensive rates, to suffer from penalties in the form of more transfers in their journeys (almost always passing through Madrid–Barajas) or to travel to Oporto Airport (in Portugal). It is moreover necessary to stress the deficient accesses to the Galician airport terminals. None of the three Galician airports has a railway connection, and none is planned with the arrival of the AVE, despite the fact that – at least in one of the three cases – the southbound departure of the high-speed train from Vigo to Oporto will pass close to the airport. As for public transport services connecting the airports to the city centres, the rigidity of the system of concessions in force results in the existence of low-quality services, not in accordance with current demands.

Many of the problems that we have referred to do not come to the surface and remain within the sphere of the individual. Curiously, they are issues which affect the day-to-day life of all the citizens much more than others which are considered to be conflicts and which occupy a good part of the political agenda and space in the Galician media. In general, urban and metropolitan transport issues tend to be relegated below the issue of major infrastructures, such as the dual carriageways in the past and now the AVE. As we have already said, for the Galician politicians and for the media the latter are the priorities. The conflicts on the lack of investment in the Galician AVE or on the delay in the execution of the works are therefore expressed with great attention by the media. At present the main Galician newspapers tend to devote several pages a day to analyzing the state of the works of the AVE, both in the news sections and in the editorials, with frequent headlines on the front page in this respect. On the radio, many talk shows analyze these matters. The different television channels in Galicia also offer great coverage to this issue. The question of the communication infrastructures with the Castilian plateau

has been, and continues to be, in short, a preferred subject for opinion in all the media.

As far as infrastructure policy is concerned, conflicts are frequently expressed with controversy and accusations between the different political parties, aware of the strategic value of these issues among public opinion. Depending on the political colours of the governments of Santiago and Madrid, in autonomous policy regular cross accusations are made on the supposed submissiveness of the Xunta to Madrid (when the political allegiances of both governments coincide) or, on the contrary, on the lack of political weight of the Xunta in the state capital (when the two institutions are run by different political parties).

On a municipal level, the existence of mayors who defy their own party whip to take on demands for transport infrastructures which benefit their town council is fairly common. This is the case of the former mayor of A Coruña, Francisco Vázquez, who negotiated the construction of strategic transport infrastructures for the city directly with the Spanish Ministry of Public Works. This situation caused unease in his own party in Galicia, because it was considered that this was not the correct procedure from the political point of view.

Other channels for expressing conflicts are statements or the holding of press conferences by different groups and associations, especially the employers' confederations and associations, which tend to demand more investments in infrastructures on considering them the fundamental priority, and they therefore persevere with the traditional arguments of political and media forums: investments in roads, connections with the Castilian plateau, etc. Various platforms are also formed periodically, some (the least) with more general characteristics and others (the majority) in fundamentally local spheres, as we will have the occasion to explain below.

Generally speaking, it can be stated that public opinion is much more sensitive to the problems of external infrastructures – above all of connection with the Castilian plateau – than to the numerous deficits in the provision of internal transport infrastructures in Galicia, which also includes the daily mobility problems. Despite official authorities and media insisting that the external infrastructures “continue to be” a pending issue, the fact that public opinion does not realize what the true transport and mobility challenges are in Galicia is not only attributable to media and political insistence. The traditional weakness of Galician civil society becomes a notable explanatory factor. Indeed, there are currently few groups and associations in Galicia which tackle critically the question of transport and mobility infrastructures, so in general civil society does not present its own voices with a pertinent discourse in relation to the distance existing between major investments in infrastructures, political debates and journalistic tribunes, on the one hand, and real needs and problems, on the other hand. We can group the scarce groups which deal with this issue in two main sectors: the platforms and the environmental groups.

As concerns the platforms, most of them arise in an eminently local environment, motivated by the need to defend the interests of a group of neighbours, who consider at a given time that an infrastructure project threatens their interests or the interests of their living space, almost always through compulsory purchases. This Galician formulation of the NIMBY (Not in my Back Yard) movement is fairly common, given the deeply-rooted sense of property in Galicia, the great fragmentation of plots and the prevalence in many cases of the individual interest, which almost always comes

before the general interest. In any case, the demands of these neighbours often have a sound base. The model of development chosen implies a commitment to the construction of numerous physical infrastructures, instead of backing soft-type solutions (improvement to the public transport services, coordination, diffusion of the information, etc.). In a densely populated and occupied area such as the Galician coast, the execution of a new infrastructure almost always represents a series of allegations and impacts which are channelled through these platforms.

There are other platforms which respond to more general interests and which have existed for longer and are therefore more stable. They also have a broader sphere of action, they appear in the media and bring together the participation of several hundreds or thousands of supporters. One of the most famous platforms in Galicia is “Never Again” (*Nunca Más*), established as a result of the Prestige oil tanker disaster. We can moreover highlight the existence of the Galician Platform in favour of Railways (*Plataforma galega en defensa do tren*); and there is also the “Galicia is not for sale” (*Galiza non se vende*) group, which condemns different types of aggressions on the environment and on Galician landscapes in general, including the major transport infrastructures.

This leads us to deal, finally, with the environmental groups, and fundamentally the two main ones, which form part, together with others of a more local sphere, of the Galician Environmentalist Federation (*Federación Ecoloxista Galega*). They are ADEGA (Environment Defence Association of Galicia, *Asociación para a Defensa Ecolóxica de Galiza*) and *Verdegaia*. These two groups have a Galician sphere of action and both have transport committees or commissions. They carry out work criticizing the current transport and mobility model in Galicia. In this respect, they have repeatedly condemned the fact that the majority of the investments are devoted to the three most pollutant means of transport: the car, the high-speed train and the plane. These groups carry out actions, marches and acts of protest, but they have a low level of social and political impact both quantitatively and qualitatively.

It can therefore be concluded that Galician public opinion continues to have approaches very close to those presented by political, media and business groups, approaches which to a large extent can be considered as distant from the real challenges that the transport and mobility infrastructure system faces in Galicia. To manage these challenges well, it would first be necessary to detect and internalize them, which would contribute to establishing a more appropriate agenda than the current one. Maybe civil society – without counting the business sector – can play an active role in this direction.

## **Territorial discourses and governance of the transport infrastructure system in Galicia: the polycentric region discourse in the face of localist discourses**

As for the predominant discourses on the territorial model of transport systems, in academic spheres there is a clear consideration of Galicia as a polycentric region. In accordance with this idea, it is understood that the transport system is called upon to play a key role, on structuring the different cities and towns (main regional towns) and thus achieving an effective organization of the territory. This consideration of Galicia as a polycentric space is reflected perfectly in the Spatial Guidelines for

Galicia, which will foreseeably be passed shortly. This document, the peak of spatial planning in Galicia, defines different levels or stages of the system of settlements and above all works with the idea of urban networks (of cities and of towns), which should channel the flows of people, goods and information and favour the circulation of innovation. In the face of the model of the big regional or national city (Barcelona in relation to Catalonia, Zaragoza in relation to Aragón, Paris in relation to France ...), Galicia presents a specific spatial organization, characterized by the existence of cities of a more modest size and with numerous medium and small-sized settlements right down to the hamlet (the last step). It is not in vain that Galicia has more than half of all the population centres of the whole of Spain.

But this vision of Galicia as a polycentric space, where the transport infrastructures should contribute to the cohesion of the urban network within a country project, despite being the official vision (although only recently), is not the only discourse. Indeed, a Galician particularity (which has been demonstrated throughout the past centuries) is the existence of strong localisms, arising precisely from the absence of a strong city capable as acting as the sole driving force of the territory. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the arrival of the railway in Galicia had suffered from considerable delays due to the rivalries between the north and the south of the country. Subsequently, there have always been tensions between Vigo and A Coruña, modulated by Santiago de Compostela as the balance half way between the two big cities. With the arrival of democracy and the attainment of self-government by Galicia, in 1982 the autonomous region institutions were located in Santiago de Compostela, after a tense discussion on the first Act passed by the Galician parliament.<sup>4</sup> In the city of A Coruña (which until then had housed all the institutions representing the central government in Galicia), this was experienced as an injustice. The mayor of A Coruña since 1983, Francisco Vázquez, became, during his 23 years in office, the main champion of the cause and implemented a policy of a very local type. This style of doing politics, called “coruñesismo” or “vazquismo”, was based on considering the city of A Coruña as a self-sufficient space, like a classical city-state. Apart from other considerations, in relation to transport infrastructures he ignored the necessary Galician dimension of strategic planning. He thus backed the construction of an outer harbour in A Coruña, very close to the one in Ferrol, and he made a huge investment in A Coruña airport, with deficient operating conditions. As a country, it would have been more appropriate to limit the outer harbours of Galicia to just one or to try to strengthen Santiago de Compostela airport. Moreover, the localist style of Vázquez favoured the appearance of similar forms of governance in other cities of Galicia, with the negative consequences that it is easy to observe.

At present, a greater loyalty of the mayors to the Xunta, and the recent initiation of the process to approve the Spatial Guidelines for Galicia – pending since the appropriate Act of Parliament of 1995 –,<sup>5</sup> outline a new scenario in which an overview of Galician territory appears to prevail. In this setting, the image of a polycentric country appears to be establishing itself and this may in the end imply medium-term changes in the model of transport infrastructure governance.

<sup>4</sup> Government Seat Establishment Act (No 1 of 1982, as at 24 June 2008) (*Lei 1/1982, do 24 de xuño, de fixación da sé das institucións*).

<sup>5</sup> Galicia's Spatial Planning Act (No 10 of 1995, as at 23 November 1995) (*Lei 10/1995, do 23 de novembro, de ordenación do territorio de Galicia*).

## **By way of conclusion: an assessment of the transport infrastructures and services in Galicia**

A good part of the problems suffered by the transport sector in Galicia arises from the great rigidity of the legal framework existing. Thus, for example, the existence of exclusive long-term concessions with road passenger transport companies with difficulties to adapt to a changing market and environment is one of the main obstacles encountered by the Xunta in its effort to modernize the sector. A large part of the attempts to reformulate the public transport policy – both as regards the whole of Galicia and the main urban and metropolitan areas – has clashed with the legitimate right of the licensee companies to continue operating under the conditions agreed in the past. In this context, the current proposal made by the Xunta to limit the new concessions to ten years (as the old ones gradually expire) comes up against the outright rejection of the transport companies. The legislation likewise places obstacles to the introduction of combined transport services (goods, people, postal service) in rural areas, as it establishes the necessary requirement to separate these three types of transport. The possibility is thus lost to optimize the resources already existing and guarantee greater mobility for the inhabitants of the rural spaces, as already occurs in other countries, such as Ireland. The taxi service is another of the paradigmatic examples of the rigidity of the legislation, which prevents its modernization. In addition to the municipal nature of the provision of the service (which is not adapted to the real environment of functional mobility), the licence concession system suffers from serious deficiencies and vices, which arise from the strong trade-union interests of the taxi entrepreneurs. The opportunity is thus lost for the taxi to perform a true public service role, that is to say for it to become in practice an affordable means of transport for all citizens. As regards these public transport services, their evolution and their general contribution to the mobility of the whole of the population will depend on the degree of involvement that the Xunta demonstrates in the negotiations, committing itself to solving problems which are deadlocked, as demonstrated by the failure to date of the metropolitan transport or the serious deficiencies in the operation of the taxi services.

To obtain an improvement in mobility in metropolitan environments, it appears to be necessary to advance toward greater involvement and coordination of the different levels of the administration in transport and mobility. One interesting line of work would be to sign contracts and agreements between the Xunta and the local authorities, in the sphere of a Galician Transport Consortium or a similar formula (similar to what exists for the provision of transport related to the social services, as mentioned above). In this respect, metropolitan transport consortia could be established in the built-up spaces, with the aim of managing to unify the planning and management of sustainable infrastructures and means of transport, capable of responding to the demands of the population. It is up to the Xunta of Galicia to play a role of leadership, taking into account the weakness of the local authorities, the almost complete dissolution of the district level (promoted by the former Galician government of the PP, and being dismantled by the current PSOE–BNG executive)<sup>6</sup> and the obvious slowness of the definition of the future Vigo–Pontevedra and A

<sup>6</sup> In this respect, read the bill on district council dissolution currently being discussed in the Parliament (autumn 2008), entitled *Proxecto de lei polo que se modifica a Lei 7/1996, do 10 de xullo, de desenvolvemento comarcal e a Lei 5/2000, do 28 de decembro, de medidas fiscais e de réxime orzamentario e administrativo*.

Coruña–Ferrol metropolitan areas. In this respect, the change from an agenda obsessively focused on the question of the connections with the Castilian plateau to an agenda more in line with the challenges existing in Galicia in relation to transport and mobility is above all the responsibility of the Xunta. The experts on the subject agree that this new agenda should include, in the end and without censure, subjects which have been taboo to date such as the creation of underground or light railway networks in Vigo or in A Coruña, already timidly requested by A Coruña and a reasonable consideration in Vigo, especially in the current situation of the construction of the southbound departure of the high-speed train – through the urban and metropolitan fabric of Vigo – towards Portugal.

One of the great opportunities existing is the liberalization and the opening-up of sea transport, which is being promoted by the European Union. The promotion and the creation of these services will be fundamental to obtain a truly high-quality public transport service in the metropolitan areas of A Coruña–Ferrol and Vigo–Pontevedra. The development of new and imaginative means of public transport may constitute the best contribution possible to environmentally sustainable transport policies. To date (since the arrival of autonomy), an excessive commitment has been observed to the construction of road infrastructures, relegating public transport to a secondary level. The official discourses over the past decades have stressed above all the number of kilometres of high-capacity routes existing or the fact that it is possible to travel by dual carriageway between certain population centres, so a universal value has been granted to mobility using individual transport. However, these discourses have almost always lacked considerations of a social or environmental nature. In the same way that attention has not been paid to the need to obtain universal mobility for the whole of society, special attention has not been granted to the environmental issue either. It is indeed difficult to combine the commitment to major road infrastructures and the intention to give greater weight to public transport.

As regards the physical characteristics of the new communication routes planned or being executed, lately authorized voices have made themselves heard on demanding greater control over their environmental impact. The Dean of the Association of Civil Engineers of A Coruña, Carlos Nárdiz, has repeatedly demanded responsibility from the Xunta when it comes to minimizing the environmental and landscape impact of the new dual carriageways that the Galician government is going to undertake in the coming years, for example in inland Galicia, between Ourense and Celanova – a town which joins Ourense with the north of Portugal –, the work on which is due to begin in 2009. Whatever the case, most of the new autonomous government dual carriageways are currently being built as a widening of the former expressways, generally passing through highly developed coastal spaces. This implies the need to transfer their route several kilometres away from the coast line, with the consequent need to carry out major clearing work and to create banks which represent a considerable impact.

In any case, in the past years a new spatial culture has been detected and felt, together with a greater presence of landscape, urban planning and environmental issues, not just by the Xunta, but also in the media. The passing of the Spatial Guidelines for Galicia in 2008 or the coming into force of the Act on urgent measures of spatial planning<sup>7</sup> are very important actions in this direction. Likewise, the

<sup>7</sup> Urgent Measures on Spatial Planning and Coasts of Galicia Act (No 6 of 2007, as at 11 May 2007) (*Lei 6/2007, do 11 de maio, de medidas urxentes en materia de ordenación do territorio e do litoral de Galicia*).

Regional Ministry of Spatial Policy, Public Works and Transport is carrying out a campaign whose slogan – “It matters where we live” (“*Onde vivimos, importa*”) – is used as the backdrop for public appearances and publications, a campaign which recalls the overall need for greater public commitment to spatial sustainability in general.

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