

Transport: the challenge of decarbonising while remaining competitive

At the Mobility & Logistics Roundtable during the Connact Autumn Workshop (Brussels, 13 October 2026), European institutions and industry representatives discuss the impact of EU policies on the Italian transport system.

Transport accounts for 31% of the European Union's greenhouse gas emissions: 1,039 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent in 2023. This is one of the figures from the overview compiled by CNR-STEMS for the Mobility & Logistics Roundtable at Connact's Autumn Workshop, "Revitalising European Competitiveness", which brings together European policy-makers and industry representatives. The key issue is how to reconcile the reduction of emissions with the competitiveness of key sectors of the economy, while ensuring that transport prioritises people, safety, and access for all.

The key European initiatives under discussion include: strategies for ports and the maritime industry; the aviation package; high-speed rail and the single ticket scheme; the revision of the AFIR Regulation on charging infrastructure and alternative fuels; measures for road transport; and the strategy for military mobility.

Road transport accounts for three-quarters of the total. Road transport accounts for 72.9% of the sector's emissions: 52.4% cars and vans, 20% heavy goods vehicles. Shipping and aviation account for 13.4% and 13.1%, respectively, while rail and other modes account for 0.6%. Lorries are the most complex sector to decarbonise: electric for short-haul journeys, green hydrogen for long-haul journeys, with a need to develop charging and hydrogen refuelling stations, keep the costs of new vehicles down and strengthen the electricity grids. Transporting goods by rail and sea can reduce emissions by between 30% and 60%.

The maritime transport path. Since 2024, ships are included in the European Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS), and in 2025, the FuelEU Maritime regulation came into force, providing for a gradual reduction in the greenhouse gas intensity of fuels, up to -80% by 2050 compared with 2020. The rules apply to ships of more than 5,000 t tonnage calling at EU ports: these account for 55% of ships, but 90% of the sector's CO₂ emissions.

Military transport: half the funding goes to the railways. The European strategy aims to enhance capabilities in the naval, submarine, military and dual-use mobility sectors, in order to strengthen security and resilience. EU funding for military mobility under the CEF (Connecting Europe Facility) programme totals around €1.75bn: half of this, 874M, goes to rail, 31% (548M) to road transport, 10% (164M) to aviation, 8% (145M) to maritime transport and 1% (16M) to inland waterways.

Aviation. For air transport, the key driver is sustainable aviation fuel (SAF), which could account for up to 65 % of CO₂ reductions by 2050, compared with 5-21% from new hybrid, hydrogen or electric engines, and 10-19% from CO₂ removal. The ReFuelEU Regulation sets the target at 2% in 2025 and 70% in 2050. For airports, four priorities have been identified: sustainable fuels and innovative aircraft, renewable energy and energy storage, airport efficiency, and intermodal transport with integrated ticketing.