

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

New push for infrastructure projects

The requirements of eastern German economic reconstruction generate demand for policy and funding shifts.

Soviet Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov asked the key question of German Economics Minister Jürgen Moellemann in Moscow Feb. 13: "How is it possible that the German government spends DM 10 billion for bombs, but claims not to have money for new credits?"

Pavlov asked this with an eye toward new credits for German exports to the Soviets, naturally; but the question is also relevant for the domestic situation in Germany.

The drastic condition of the former East German economy, and the need to prevent unemployment in the range of 25-40% in the industrial centers, has refocused public debate on domestic economic strategy in the newly united Germany. The need for developing transport infrastructure as the key to rapid economic recovery, which had been pushed aside during the past six months of the Persian Gulf crisis, is again high on the political agenda. An increasing number of people are convinced that "Germany's Gulf lies right here," that the fight Germany has to launch is an economic one.

Four important developments can be reported in this context. In mid-February, new German Transportation Minister Günter Krause presented a blueprint for crash development of the transport infrastructure in the five eastern states of Germany. Krause proposed that DM 54 billion be spent on the restoration and modernization of the key routes connecting East and West. DM 8 billion should be invested in the eastern rail grid this fiscal year, Krause said.

This includes the construction of a high-speed route from Hanover to Berlin, the restoration of the traditional (not high-speed) route for freight from the industries in the west (Rhine/Ruhr) and those in the east (Saxony), and the modernization of the links from Berlin to the northern ports (Hamburg, Kiel, Rostock) and to southern Germany (Stuttgart, Munich).

Highway projects in eastern Germany, Krause said, should be funded to the tune of DM 20 billion, and the waterways (emphasis on Elbe River and Mittelland Canal modernization) with another DM 3-4 billion.

This proposal still must be approved by the cabinet and the parliament, but Krause has a growing lobby behind him.

In a Feb. 20 report, the BDI, Germany's national industry association, outlined perspectives for rapid development of the German economy. "It will take a gigantic financial effort," the report said, "because for rail and road alone, financial requirements of more than DM 200 billion are projected, to restore the infrastructure in the new states of Germany substantially. In addition to qualitative improvements, the linking of all transport systems in east and west is on the agenda. This is also a chance for new transport technologies like the Transrapid maglev train."

A strong endorsement of railroad development, especially freight transport, was also given in the weekly *Der Spiegel* on Feb. 18. A ten-page feature portrayed the new railway era that will begin in June when the German ICE high-speed train begins operation.

Another initiative was launched by the prime minister of the state of Thuringia, Josef Duchac, in late February. He proposed the construction of a new rail connection between Berlin and Frankfurt passing through Leipzig and Erfurt. This, he said, should be based on the technology of the next century, the magnetically levitated train, which is currently being developed in Germany along with the Transrapid project.

The advantage of the maglev system—less noise, less energy use, and a much higher speed of up to 500 kilometers per hour—would be ideal for rapid passenger travel on the longer, almost 600-kilometer route between Frankfurt and Berlin, Duchac said. Faced with a need to replace domestic airline routes, the Transrapid, with its speed, would provide a "flying on the ground" connection between the airports of Frankfurt and Berlin.

International air traffic would be connected by the Transrapid, through the big airports like Berlin or Frankfurt, to the huge industrial trade fair of Leipzig. A stopover of the maglev train in Erfurt, the state capital of Thuringia, for some of the tours, would connect this central pivot of intra-German rail routes which run east and west, with routes which run from north to south.

The costs of constructing such a maglev route, a project of an estimated DM 8 billion, could be funded by the increase of passenger traffic between Berlin and Frankfurt, which have populations of 5 million each, Duchac suggested.

In any case, Germany would need a show-case route to promote the export of the Transrapid system abroad—a multibillion market, experts say. The decision to build such a track is long overdue after 22 years of experimentation with the maglev technology in Germany.