Urban Policy Harmonisation in the Italian Emilia-Romagna Region

In brief

The NOVELOG project — *New Cooperative Business Models and Guidance for Sustainable City Logistics* — aimed to bring together and analyse knowledge and understanding of urban freight distribution and service trips. NOVELOG — which started in mid-2015 and ended in mid-2018 — has...
gone beyond the state of the art by developing an evaluation framework, collecting data, and developing software tools to support cities. In addition, it has undertaken demonstrations and case studies and developed guidelines to support cities in the take-up of improved urban freight distribution measures.

One of the most relevant pilot actions — the focus of this case study — has been tested in the Emilia Romagna region (Northern Italy). The pilot action implemented by the Emilia-Romagna region and the Institute for Transport and Logistics (ITL) focused on the better harmonisation of procedures for urban freight transport policy at the regional level; the benefits of this were already visible by the end of the project. The case study is one element of a broader set of regional polices on freight policy, in which area the Emilia Romagna region has been very active in recent years. This has included implementing several policy measures and interventions, such as:

- the enforcement of the integrated regional transport plan[1] and the regional air quality programme[2];
- the coordination of the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP) (and the Sustainable Urban Logistic Plans (SULP)) of its cities (i.e. the regulatory framework for controlling access to restricted areas, the replacement of private fleets, eco-driving & ITS, information about mobility); and
- the promotion of an innovation regional cluster (which includes city logistics[3]).

The project that is the subject of this case study resulted in the improved harmonisation of access permission procedures for freight across the region, by focusing on the development of a single web portal for the whole region that connects, in a user-friendly way, residents and businesses to the cities’ services. The initiative contributes to the simplification of the municipal administrative procedures associated with urban logistics across the region, by sharing and harmonising information and procedures between cities in terms of their access restrictions for freight vehicles in the context of the various urban vehicle access regulations (UVARs) that exist.


Context

Before NOVELOG, the cities in the Emilia-Romagna region and the regional government had already signed an agreement aimed at improving the way in which the access of urban freight transport to city centres was regulated. In particular, this agreement sets a common framework for the time during which urban freight is allowed to access the areas subject to the UVARs in the various cities. The agreement already covered the definition of: (i) common time windows for freight deliveries; and (ii) the category of trucks that were not allowed to enter the cities.

This was a novelty at the time it was developed (2012-2013). Later, through NOVELOG, the Emilia-Romagna region worked towards a further important step, by researching and developing a centralised web portal that enables transport providers to request the verification or modification of their permit to access the cities of the region. The web portal is a means through which transport
providers can easily connect with municipalities, which control access into UVARs through the issue of permits.

During the preparation of the study several key facts emerged — notably that, at the outset, the cities of the region had approximately a hundred different types of permits relating to urban logistics. Transport operators were already asking local administrations — whose main aim is to reduce traffic and congestion inside the urban area, along with its associated problems — for a simplification of procedures through the use of digital tools. The benefits of such an approach are manifold: a better harmonisation of procedures (standardisation of documents and of communication method); improvement of digital skills for employers; support for integrated policy interventions to reduce the impact of transport in cities and the labour market; an increase in paperless interactions and a reduction in errors and costs (both for public and private players).

In action

The project made use of an existing consolidated freight network, which involved different levels of public institutions. During the implementation of the project, the 12 main cities of the region worked together with ITL, the Emilia-Romagna Region and Lepida SpA (the in-house Emilia-Romagna ICT infrastructure provider, which was responsible for analysing the feasibility of, and implementing, the portal). During the first phase of the project, ITL and the region organised an in-depth analysis of the city logistics regulations in the cities of Emilia Romagna. The research provided an updated overview of the various access permission procedures by interviewing those responsible in each municipality and reviewing relevant public websites in order to bring together the various documents that freight operators needed to obtain permission to access the various regulated areas.

The different procedures that were used to grant freight transport access to the cities were then analysed, with the objective of defining a proposal to harmonise these at the regional level. In parallel, an in-depth study was undertaken to understand how to develop the web portal. The stakeholders opted for a web-based, centralised portal that was connected with the IT systems of the municipalities’ other public databases and services. The web portal gives access to users through either a regional or national system that identifies individual users digitally — similar to that already in place for other kinds of services, such as e-health — and which also integrates e-payment systems (e.g. PayER, which is used in Emilia-Romagna region). The prototype has been tested in some cities and an action plan for the future involvement of additional cities has been drafted.

Results

The regional telematics portal developed by the NOVELOG project provides a single digital access point to allow transport operators to verify permit requirements, check active permissions and request new permits, as well as to request the modification or renewal of an active permit. It is composed of a regional database of the specifics of the permits by city, including a regional multi-stakeholder platform between the regional government, ITL, Lepida SpA and experts from the
municipalities involved.

The benefits for the public administration are evident. From here on, any future software development provides the opportunity for a shared solution between the region and the municipalities, leading to standardisation and cost reduction. In a wider context, many municipalities are currently aligning their approach to the provision of online services for companies and citizens to national rules.

Other municipalities across Italy are keen to implement UVARs in the near future and a ready-to-use set of measures will help to save time and costs in doing this. It will also enable better implementation of new actions on the regulation of freight traffic within UVARs, as well as of digital services and in optimising inclusive access to these.

Operators benefit from this simplification, as they only need to use a single interface for accessing information on all of the region’s cities, and they also benefit from a standardisation of the necessary procedures. The potential benefits to operators of the wider adoption of such a system are clear, especially considering that to access the UVARs of all the regional cities previously required more than 100 different freight permits.

The case study has produced a win-win outcome, providing advantages to both public administrations and private operators. For the local authority, there has been an improved service level with no change in costs (a 5% increase in the reliability of deliveries and an 8% reduction in traffic). Another improvement is the removal of the need to issue permits manually; this is now done online, reducing administrative and resourcing costs for the local authority.

**Challenges, opportunities and transferability**

As explained above, the case study deals in concrete and practical terms with the lack of homogeneity and interoperability of procedures to access to UVARs, and the fact that the different systems used in cities in the region and across Italy limits the potential for transferability and adoption by other cities. Smaller municipalities may have difficulty in providing such advanced services (such as online services) as they may not be able to make the necessary investments in technology. But digitalisation is crucial to facilitate the harmonisation of UVAR access permits and represents an opportunity to implement standardised and interoperable ICT tools in municipalities and regions.

The concept and the entire process, including the data analysis, the involvement and cooperation of stakeholders in the process and the development of the prototype for the IT solution are all fully transferable to other Italian regions. Indeed, some other regions have already contacted the Emilia Romagna region since the end of the project. The portal should be seen as the first step in providing a complete digital service at the regional level. In the future, the intention is that it will be possible for all permits for UVARs (and also for residents and for vehicles needing access for special events) to be requested through this portal.

**In Depth**

https://www.fondazioneitl.org/project/novelog/

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**Keywords**

City logistics
urban delivery
freight distribution
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