

The Committee on
Transport, Building and
Housing

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Foreword



Mobility, housing, the development of Eastern Germany. These are just three of the key topics of the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing, which deals with a wide variety of issues. Is a bypass to be built, are new traffic regulations to be introduced, is the rent allowance to be increased, how will the law on building planning affect the use of a plot of land, how is the problem of vacant housing in the new *Länder* (new federal states) to be overcome, and how can traffic safety be improved? The topics of the Committee meetings relate directly to our daily life. Which is why many members of the public turn to me and the Committee with their worries, their suggestions and their criticism. It is important to the Committee to know what you, the public, think. Only then can it reach decisions that are in your interest. It is likewise

important to the Committee to inform you about its work, so that you can get to know what it does for the public, its possibilities, and also its limits. Consequently, our aim in publishing this brochure is to give you an insight into the topics dealt with by the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing, how it exerts an influence, what it has achieved in the past and what it does in its everyday work. On that note, I hope you will find this brochure both interesting and informative reading.



Eduard Oswald, Member of the
German Bundestag
Chairman of the Committee on
Transport, Building and Housing

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Introduction

With 40 members, the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing is again one of the largest permanent committees of the German Bundestag in the 15th electoral term. The Committee was set up at the beginning of the 14th electoral term (1998 to 2002), taking on the responsibilities of the former Committee on Transport and the former Committee on Regional Planning, Building and Urban Development. The new Committee thus faced the challenge of efficiently combining the spheres of work of the two predecessor Committees. The tasks of the former Committee on the Affairs of the New Länder were additionally assumed at the beginning of the 15th electoral term (October 2002). The common basis for all

three spheres was responsibility for Germany's infrastructure. In their respective spheres of work, the predecessor Committees on Transport, on Regional Planning, Building and Urban Development, and on the Affairs of the New Länder made decisive contributions to establishing the infrastructure in the Federal Republic of Germany - the Transport Committee mainly in relation to the planning, construction and maintenance of the transport infrastructure, the Building Committee in the fields of housing construction, urban development, building planning and regional planning law, and the Committee on the Affairs of the New Länder in connection with establishing the infrastructure in the new Länder.



The Committee

Political topics of the Committee

The Committee on Transport, Building and Housing has an extensive and varied sphere of work, including not only the fields of transport, housing and building, but also cross-sectional tasks relating to the development of Eastern Germany. The Committee plays a decisive role in shaping a modern, efficient and environmentally compatible infrastructure in the Federal Republic of Germany, thus contributing to establishing important prerequisites for maintaining economic success, the quality of life and mobility, as well as for harmonising living conditions in the old and new Länder. As a result, the Committee is responsible for a field in which more than half the Federal Government's total investments are made (over 13 billion euros of a total of roughly 25 billion euros in 2002). Being responsible for the rent allowance and publicly assisted housing, it has a significant function as regards securing public housing. In the sphere of traffic and building planning law, it reaches decisions on issues that affect each and every citizen.

This wide variety of topics results in an extensive range of tasks for the Committee, whose work focuses on several key areas.

Transport policy as policy for the future

One of the major concerns of the committee as regards transport policy is to safeguard the increasing mobility of the public as part of the

quality of life and a prerequisite for growth and employment. Consequently, it repeatedly deals with future-related issues regarding the preservation, expansion and financing of an environmentally compatible and efficient, integrated transport system in Germany.

The key topics in this context are the planned Federal Government investments in transport routes and the switch from tax-funded financing to user-funded financing of transport routes. To this end, the results of the Government Commission on »Transport Infrastructure Financing«, the Federal Government's »Anti-Congestion Programme«, the »Act Introducing Distance-Based Fees for the Use of Federal Motorways by Heavy Goods Vehicles« (»HGV Toll«), the »Investment Programme for the Expansion of the National Railways, National Trunk Roads and National Waterways in the Period from 1999 to 2002« and the Federal Government's »Programme for Investing in the Future 2001 to 2003«, in particular, were discussed during the 14th electoral term. The discussion of individual transport infrastructure projects, such as the development of the A 8 motorway and various »Priority Traffic Projects German Unity«, is another focus of the Committee's work.

Modern transport policy for the public at large demands that the Committee also look into the more distant future. In years to come, the mobility of the individual will be more

dependent than ever on intelligent traffic information and traffic control. Every traffic jam not only causes delays, but also damages the national economy. Consequently, the Committee time and again examines questions relating to the intelligent control of traffic flows - by satellite-based navigation systems and electronic traffic control installations, for instance. The topic of »traffic telematics« and the plans for »Galileo«, the European satellite navigation system, were discussed at length with traffic experts during the 14th electoral term.

The Federal Transport Infrastructure Plan 2003, the investment projects for all traffic carriers, and also the impact of the impending eastward expansion of the EU on traffic flows and their management in Germany, are other topics of the Committee for the future. They will dominate the work of the Committee in the 15th electoral term.

Road traffic

The road is Germany's No. 1 traffic carrier.

Therefore, road traffic safety is a central topic for the Committee. The subjects debated include, among other things, the education of road users about road safety, lowering the blood alcohol limit for drivers in road traffic, speed limits on motorways, programmes for more safety on the roads, stiffer penalties for traffic violations, and the special situation of young road users.

The main items on the agenda regarding the subject of »goods transport by road« are

currently issues relating to the competitiveness of Germany's road haulage industry, the HGV toll, Alpine transit traffic, the driving and rest periods of HGV drivers, the relaxation of the ban on Sunday driving for HGVs, at which the EU is aiming, and the fight against illegal employment in the goods transport sector. However, the topic of »goods transport by road« is often also associated with the debate on linking one means of transport to another, the benefits of combined transport and the prerequisites in terms of the road infrastructure.

On the subject of »road infrastructure«, the Committee also advocates the promotion of bicycle traffic in Germany. The deliberations are based on, among other things, the »Bicycle Report of the Federal Government«. The Committee recommends further promotion of bicycle traffic by means of targeted measures.

Rail traffic

Rail traffic and the railway reform are further key areas of the Committee's traffic policy deliberations. The »future of the railways« is also intensively discussed with the Board of Deutsche Bahn AG and railway experts. The current debate on the railway as an attractive alternative to the road is currently dominated by issues relating to the separation of the rail network from railway operation, non-discriminatory access to the rail network for all railway companies and expanded control powers of the Federal Railway Office in order

to improve competition on the railways, as well as matters relating to the transfer of traffic from the roads to the railways. Other »railway topics« that repeatedly occupy the Committee are the expansion of the rail network, especially in Eastern Germany, the future of combined traffic, the preservation of Deutsche Bahn AG railway repair shops, the safeguarding of long-distance and local public rail transport, noise abatement on railway routes and the ticket pricing system.

The subject of the safety of rail traffic also occupied the Committee regularly during the 14th electoral term. It engaged in a particularly intensive discussion of the conclusions to be drawn from the disastrous train crashes in Eschede (1998) and Brühl (2000). In the 15th electoral term, the Committee will deal not only with all these subjects, but also with the harmonisation of the framework conditions for rail traffic in Europe.

The use of magnetic levitation (maglev) railway technology in Germany will continue to be a subject of intensive debate in the future. In this context, it is mainly a question of financing applications in Germany, and also of the technical advancement of the system. In the framework of a delegation trip, the members of the Committee gathered information on the progress of the pilot project involving the construction of a maglev railway line in Shanghai/China with German participation.

Shipping

The shipping topics discussed by the Committee also attract special interest among the public. In addition to examining the framework conditions for the competitiveness of German shipping lines, the Committee devotes particular attention to safety in shipping. The central importance of this topic is clearly illustrated by major shipping accidents and their disastrous consequences for the environment. Therefore, the Committee repeatedly dedicates extensive deliberations to the subject of the safety of shipping in the North Sea and the Baltic, e.g. in the Kadet Channel. In this context, it is mainly a question of accelerating the introduction of double-hulled tankers, the Emergency Response Command Office, the place-of-refuge strategy, the introduction of automatic identification systems and compulsory pilotage on certain shipping routes in the Baltic Sea, as well as the adaptation of the law on maritime accident investigations to international provisions.

The Committee attaches no less importance to inland shipping. The issues involved in this area include the development of the Danube, Elbe and Saale rivers and the impact of such a step on the competitiveness of Germany's inland shipping compared to the European competition, as well as the question of the environmental burden involved, the financing of such projects and the overall benefit for the national economy.

Air traffic

Especially since the terror attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001, the discussions on air traffic policy have mainly focused on aspects of air traffic security. By discussing various, internationally coordinated measures, the Committee makes an essential contribution to improving air traffic safety. Also to be seen in this context are the deliberations concerning the creation of a single European airspace for air traffic control with the aim of harmonising civil aviation at the European level. The Committee also endeavours to make a contribution to securing the competitiveness of Germany's airlines and the aviation industry. Numerous meetings are held at the international level for this purpose.

Building and housing policy for more quality of life

With its building and housing policy, the Committee establishes essential prerequisites for a need-based, financeable supply of residential accommodation. Its future-oriented building and housing policy takes demographic change into account, as well as the resultant developments in the demand for housing.

The reform of the law on publicly assisted housing, which the Committee discussed during the 14th electoral term, aims to adapt publicly assisted housing construction to prevailing needs and to improve the efficiency and socially accurate targeting of promotion in

favour of low-income sections of the population. However, the Committee devotes its attention not only to the demand for housing, as in the rent allowance debate, but also to the supply side. Current topics in this context include the situation of the housing industry, especially in the new Länder, the large amounts of vacant housing, and assistance for house-building associations in the new Länder in coping with their pre-unification debts.

Being aware of the significance for the national economy of the level of orders received by the building industry, the Committee also repeatedly looks into the possibilities for promoting building activity by means of investment programmes, as well as the tax-related framework conditions for housing construction. In addition, an important role is played by issues relating to possible ways of saving energy and cutting CO₂ emissions, as well as matters concerning the reduction of building costs and compliance with, and improvement of, quality standards.

The towns and communities are of crucial importance for economic and cultural development. Their attractiveness in the public eye has a direct impact on the development of towns and the quality of living they offer. Regional planning and urban development are thus of high-ranking importance to the Committee. This is expressed in the regular deliberations on the Regional Planning Reports of the Federal Government, the update of the Regional Planning Forecast and

the programmes for the promotion of urban restructuring and neighbourhood development. The Committee also deals with the »European Spatial Development Perspective ESDP« and the »INTERREG III Community initiative«, which develop ideas and solution approaches for sustainable development and better exploitation of the development potential of towns and regions.

Development of Eastern Germany

Deliberations on questions relating to internal unification, the progressing development of the infrastructure in Eastern Germany and the harmonisation of the living conditions in Eastern and Western Germany will be an additional focus of the work of the Committee during the 15th electoral term. The Committee sees this as being a cross-sectional task and would like to arouse greater sensitivity for the special problems faced by the federal states in Eastern Germany. To this end, the Committee also deliberates on initiatives for improving the framework conditions for industry and commerce, the infrastructure and the labour market in the new Länder, as well as the Annual Reports of the Federal Government on the State of German Unity.



A committee meeting

Structures

The basis for the work of the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing, as well as for the other permanent committees appointed for the duration of an electoral term, is Rule 54, para. 1, sentence 1 of the Rules of Procedure of the German Bundestag (GOBT), which states that the Bundestag “shall set up permanent committees for the preparation of its deliberations”. The permanent committees are also described as “bodies responsible for preparing the decisions” of the Bundestag (Rule 62, para. 1, sentence 2 GOBT).

Functions of a permanent Bundestag committee

In view of the wide range of items to be dealt with by Parliament – primarily draft legislation, motions, Federal Government

reports, and European Union printed papers on a variety of policy areas – the specialized committees’ main function is to prepare the way for decisions by, and thus relieve the burden on, the plenary. In the Bundestag, the bulk of the substantive work is undertaken in committee. This applies especially to the legislative process, for in practice, no law is adopted by Parliament without having been deliberated and voted on by the committees responsible.

According to the Rules of Procedure, “The business of a committee shall consist of all items and questions within its terms of reference that have been referred to it” (Rule 64, para. 1 GOBT). The referral of items takes place following a decision by the plenary. In accordance with the agreements reached in the

Council of Elders, it is decided which committee will be the committee responsible and which will be the committee asked for an opinion. Only the committee responsible may report to the Bundestag on the deliberations (Rule 63, para. 1 GOBT). This takes the form of a recommendation to the plenary for a decision, i.e. to adopt or reject the item, and a report describing the content of the draft legislation or motion and the progress of the deliberations in the committee responsible and in the committees asked for an opinion.

The task of the committees asked for an opinion is to assist the committee responsible to deliberate an item by providing expertise. For this purpose, it submits its comments to the committee responsible. So that the committees asked for an opinion have enough time to deliberate the item, the committees concerned and the committee responsible agree an appropriate time limit for the submission of their comments (Rule 63, para. 2, sentence 2 GOBT).

Meetings of the committees of the German Bundestag are in principle not open to the public (Rule 69, para. 1 GOBT). This is intended to ensure a free and open debate. However, the committee may decide "to admit the public during the discussion of a particular item of business or parts thereof" in the interests of greater transparency for citizens.

The other equally important function of the committees, alongside their legislative activities, is the exercise of parliamentary

control over the Federal Government. However, the committee members can only exercise this control effectively if they have the requisite information at their disposal. Committees may therefore hold public hearings of experts, representatives of interest groups and other persons who can furnish information (Rule 70, para. 1, sentence 1 GOBT). They may also "take up other questions falling within their terms of reference" (Rule 62, para. 1, sentence 3 GOBT). This "right of committees to take up an issue on their own initiative" also gives the committees the opportunity to obtain information.

A further instrument for the exercise of control over the Federal Government is the right to summon, which is set forth in Article 43, para. 1 of the Basic Law. In accordance with this Article, the Bundestag and its committees may require the appearance of any member of the Federal Government. Conversely, the Federal Government has the right to send representatives to all sessions of the committees and to be heard at any time. In practice, however, the exchanges with the Federal Government's representatives at the committee meetings are regulated by agreement. Both the Committee and the Federal Minister of Transport, Building and Housing attach great importance to a regular exchange of views. The Minister therefore attends the Committee's meetings frequently and takes questions from its members. Almost every committee meeting is attended by

several Parliamentary State Secretaries.

Establishment of a permanent Bundestag committee

All the permanent committees are newly appointed at the start of each electoral term following a decision by the German Bundestag. The composition of the committees and the appointment of the chairpersons are in proportion to the strengths of the parliamentary groups (Rule 12, sentence 1 GOBT). All the committees thus reflect the numerical strength of the parliamentary groups represented in the Bundestag. It is a well-established tradition that the committees' areas of work mirror the Federal Government portfolios. This means that for each ministry, the Bundestag establishes at least one specialized committee. The size of the specific committee is primarily determined by its terms of reference.

Regular and substitute members

The parliamentary groups are responsible for appointing committee members and their substitutes (Rule 57, para. 2, sentence 1 GOBT). The Committee on Transport, Building and Housing has 40 regular members and is thus one of the largest committees, also in the 15th electoral term. It comprises 17 members from the SPD parliamentary group, 16 from the CDU/CSU, 4 from Alliance 90/The Greens and 3 from the FDP. An equal number of substitute members

is also appointed to each committee. Just like a regular member, a substitute member may attend and participate actively in the committee's meetings and act as rapporteur, for example. However, they only have the right to vote in committee when representing a regular member from their parliamentary group who is unable to be present.



The Chairperson at a committee meeting (on the Chairperson's left is Parliamentary State Secretary Iris Gleicke; on his right is the Head of the Committee Secretariat

The Chairperson

The committees shall appoint their chairpersons and deputy chairpersons in accordance with the agreements reached in the Council of Elders" (Rule 58, para. 1 GOBT). The key factor determining how many committee chairpersons are appointed from a parliamentary group is its size. If the parliamentary groups are unable to agree on which of them will appoint the chairperson – as occurred at the start of the 13th and 14th electoral terms, for example – the procedure which applies is that the parliamentary groups decide, in order of rank, which of the remaining vacancies they wish to fill. In the 15th electoral term, as in the previous electoral term, Eduard Oswald (CDU/CSU parliamentary group) has been appointed Chairperson of the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing. In the current (15th) electoral term, his deputy is Annette Fasse (SPD).

"The chairperson shall prepare, convene

and preside over committee meetings and implement the committee's decisions" (Rule 59, para. 1 GOBT). The chairperson may convene committee meetings on his own authority within the scope of the timetable drawn up by the Council of Elders and determine the date and agenda unless the committee decides otherwise in individual instances (Rule 60, para. 1 and Rule 61, para. 1, sentence 1 GOBT). The Chairperson of the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing conducts the meetings impartially, although this does not mean that he cannot play an active role in the Committee's deliberations in his capacity as a Member of the Bundestag. In presiding over the committee meetings, his function is comparable to that of the President of the German Bundestag at plenary sessions.



The Chairperson, his deputy and the parliamentary group spokespersons]

Parliamentary group spokespersons

The Chairperson of the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing attaches importance to close and constructive cooperation with the parliamentary groups. His main partners, in this context, are the working groups set up by the parliamentary groups and their spokespersons. The spokespersons act as a link between the Committee and the working groups. They play a crucial role in preparing the committee meetings through their involvement in the working groups and the spokespersons' meetings. The spokespersons in the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing are Reinhard Weis (Stendal) for the SPD parliamentary group, Dirk Fischer (Hamburg) for the CDU/CSU, Albert Schmidt (Ingolstadt) for Alliance 90/Greens, and Horst Friedrich (Bayreuth) for the FDP.

Committee Secretariat

The Committee Secretariat is a separate organizational unit within the Bundestag Administration. The Secretariat staff are civil servants. The Secretariat's role is to support the work of the Committee and its Chairperson in organizational and substantive terms. To this end, the staff perform all the functions necessary to prepare, support and follow up the Committee's work. For this purpose, the Secretariat inter alia maintains contacts with other committee secretariats, the relevant working groups set up by the parliamentary groups, the Federal Government and the Bundesrat. It is responsible for organizing fact-finding missions by committee delegations and making the arrangements for visits by delegations from foreign parliaments to the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing.



View into the Committee's meeting room

Committee work

Although the work of the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing is extremely diverse, preparing, managing and following up the committee meetings are its primary tasks.

Spokespersons' meetings

The first step in preparing a committee meeting is the spokespersons' meeting, which is convened by the Chairperson. At the spokespersons' meeting, all the major organizational issues of relevance to the Committee are discussed, along with the agenda for the committee meeting. In the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing, the spokespersons' meeting generally

takes place immediately after a committee meeting. Apart from the Chairperson, his deputies and the spokespersons of the parliamentary groups, these meetings are also attended by policy advisors from the parliamentary groups, representatives of the Federal Government and staff from the Committee secretariat.

The spokespersons' meetings begin with a discussion of the agenda for the next committee meeting. The items to be deliberated, the order of the agenda, the rapporteurs and the start of the meeting are agreed at this point. The meeting then moves on to other issues concerning the coordination of the committee work, such as a

parliamentary group's request for the Federal Government to report to the Committee on a specific theme, or requests from foreign delegations or from associations, companies and other institutions to hold talks with the Committee. The spokespersons almost always adopt their decisions on the basis of consensus.

Agenda

Based on the outcomes of the spokespersons' meeting, the Chairperson sets the agenda. The agenda is the basis for the proceedings during the committee meeting. It states the time and venue for the next committee meeting, the subjects for discussion, and the rapporteurs for the specific agenda items. Almost 700 copies of the agenda are printed and distributed to the Committee members and to other committees, the Federal Government, and the Bundesrat, etc. It can also be accessed on the German Bundestag's Intranet and the Internet (www.bundestag.de).

Organizational preparations

In order to ensure that the committee meeting proceeds smoothly, many other preparations are required. For example, committees asked for their opinion are requested to submit their comments on items on which the Committee wishes to conclude its deliberations. Any remaining printed papers required for the meeting must be printed and distributed, and all the organizational units providing technical or organizational support at the meeting must

be coordinated. A dossier is compiled of the key documents required by the Chairperson during the meeting, and the most important information is summarized in writing.

If any of the committees responsible request comments after the agenda has been distributed, or if parliamentary groups submit a motion for other referred items to be discussed, or if current events mean that new topics need to be debated, the agenda can be extended by the Chairperson by means of a notification of amendment.

On complex draft legislation in particular, the Committee and its Secretariat work closely with the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Housing. For example, at the Committee's request, the Ministry produces a synopsis which sets out the current legislation alongside the proposals put forward during the legislative process. Often, the Committee will substantially alter the text of a draft law. In these cases, the Ministry compiles a summary of the original draft law and the Committee's proposals.

The parliamentary groups' preparations for the committee meetings

The day before the committee meeting, the working groups set up by the parliamentary groups discuss the individual items on the Committee's agenda. If necessary, the entire parliamentary group will deliberate the topic at its meeting, which generally takes place on

Tuesday afternoons, in order to coordinate the positions of the individual working groups. On legislative matters in particular, these discussions are preceded by intensive consultations, primarily with the other working groups involved.

As a rule, after the meeting of the working groups, the parliamentary groups submit the written motions which they wish to table in committee the following day, and which deal with the items to be deliberated at the committee meeting. On legislative proposals and when debating the federal budget, these motions can be very complex and contain numerous proposed amendments. If the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing is the committee responsible, the motions are also transmitted to the committees asked for an opinion. If the Committee is itself asked for an opinion, the committee responsible transmits the motions for amendments tabled there. Often, even complex amendments are still being received shortly before the committee meeting.

In the afternoon before the meeting, the parliamentary groups indicate to the Chairperson their current views on how the meeting should proceed.

Proceedings

The meetings of the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing generally take place on Wednesdays during weeks when the Bundestag is sitting. They usually start at 9.30 hrs and last around four and a half hours

without a break.

Before embarking on the agenda, the committee meeting normally begins with a discussion of procedural matters relating to the meeting, general information, etc. At this point, it is also agreed which agenda items should be dropped or postponed, which should be debated jointly, and which items can proceed directly to a vote without a debate. The Chairperson then announces the individual agenda items; in doing so, he may deviate from the order set out in the agenda.

At the start of each agenda item, the rapporteur concerned outlines the substance of the item, provides background information, responds to any proposed amendments from the parliamentary groups, and supplies an assessment, also on behalf of his or her parliamentary group. After this, a representative of each of the other parliamentary groups speaks. Once each parliamentary group has had an opportunity to put forward its views, the Chairperson calls the speakers in the order in which he receives the requests to speak. The Committee could vote to conclude the debate when each parliamentary group has spoken once. In almost every case, however, the Chairperson, through his management of the debate, has already ensured that the debate can be concluded within the time available. A representative of the Federal Government – usually a Parliamentary State Secretary from the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Housing – generally speaks at the end of the debate.

The deliberations on an agenda item conclude with a vote on the item and on any relevant motions tabled in the Committee. After deliberating communications of the Federal Government (which include EU items), the Committee often notes them without a formal vote. A vote is always taken on draft legislation and motions tabled in the plenary. The votes can be very complex, especially on draft legislation (with votes being taken on the separate provisions) and during debates on the

budget of the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Housing (Departmental Budget 12). In these cases, the order of the votes on the individual points is agreed in advance. In close votes, it is especially important for the parliamentary groups which have the majority to ensure that all their Members who are entitled to vote are present. If there is no clear majority, the Opposition often demands an individual count of the votes.

Follow-up

After a meeting, there is a great deal of follow-up work to be done. The Chairperson implements the Committee's decisions with the support of the Committee Secretariat. On items being dealt with by the Committee as the committee responsible, draft recommendations for a decision and draft reports to the plenary of the German Bundestag must be prepared. Comments have to be drafted for committees responsible. The President of the German Bundestag must be informed of communications which have simply been noted by the Committee. In some cases, on important legislative matters, a recommendation for a decision and the Committee's report must be distributed to all Members of the German Bundestag on the day of the Committee's vote, because the item is timetabled for a plenary debate within the next two days. The drafts therefore have to be prepared in advance, voted on, and amended while the committee meeting is still in progress.

Finally, minutes have to be drawn up after each meeting. In the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing, a summary record is produced for non-public meetings which provides a synopsis of the proceedings as well as the motions and decisions adopted.

Hearings

Hearings are committee meetings held so that committee members can obtain information from experts on subjects under debate. For the Committee, they are an important means of supporting the parliamentary opinion-forming process and a key instrument in its exercise of control over the Federal Government. Where an item of business has been referred to it as the committee responsible, the Committee is obliged to hold a hearing if one quarter of its members so demand. This means that a hearing can even be forced through against the majority in the committee, making it an important method by which the Opposition can influence the deliberations on an item. However, where the hearing does not concern an item of business that has been referred but a topic which the committee is addressing on its own initiative, a majority must vote in favour of holding the hearing. The hearings arranged by the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing are almost always open to the public. This means that in principle, any interested citizen can attend. Once the Committee has voted to hold a hearing, the President of the German Bundestag must also give his consent.

An important step in preparing a hearing is nominating the experts who will attend. Deciding on the total number of experts requires a careful balance to be struck between the desire to obtain a comprehensive overview of all standpoints, on the one hand, and the

practicalities of completing the hearing in the available time, on the other. As a rule, experts are nominated on the basis of a cross-party agreement. Otherwise, the Committee specifies the total number of experts, and the parliamentary groups can then nominate a number of experts in accordance with their strength on the Committee. Between 12 and 20 experts are generally invited to attend the hearings of the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing.

The Committee usually prepares a catalogue of questions on the topic of the hearing, which is intended as preparation for the experts. Here too, every effort is made to reach agreement between the parliamentary groups; otherwise, each parliamentary group submits its own questions as a separate part of the catalogue.

The Chairperson invites the experts on behalf of the Committee. As a rule, the experts are pleased to accept the invitation, which they view as special recognition of their professional expertise, an opportunity to promote the interests of the associations they represent, or at least their civic duty to support Parliament in its work. The Chairperson also requests each expert to submit a written statement on the topic in preparation for the hearing.

At a hearing, the proceedings differ considerably from those of a normal committee meeting. In the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing, it is customary for the Chairperson to begin by

introducing the experts, outlining the planned timetable for the hearing, and providing a short introduction to the topic. After that, the experts briefly summarize their position, and then the rapporteurs of the parliamentary groups have an opportunity to put their questions to the experts. This is followed – depending on the time available – by further rounds of questions in which all the Committee members (and, if appropriate, the members of committees asked for an opinion as well), may put questions to the experts. Through his management of the meeting, the Chairperson tries to ensure that the time available is used as effectively as possible for the Committee's information-gathering purposes.

Interested citizens can attend the public hearings arranged by the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing, provided that they register in advance and there is space available. Instead of the summary record, an edited stenographic record is produced after the public hearings which is also distributed to interested citizens and associations in individual cases.

During the 14th electoral term, the Committee held 13 public hearings, six of which took place in the last year of the electoral term alone.

Citizens and the Committee

Many citizens contact the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing and its Chairperson with their concerns and requests. For the Committee, this is an important source of information in shaping policies which are close to citizens.

The submissions range from comments on basic building and transport policy to demands concerning current political issues, questions about the progress made in the Committee's deliberations, and requests for specific practical advice. Many citizens and citizens' groups also contact the Committee on matters relating to the expansion of traffic routes in their region. Sometimes, the Committee is contacted both by supporters and opponents of a specific legislative initiative or transport project. There is a particular high level of public interest in the consultations on the Federal Transport Infrastructure Plan and the plans under the Trunk Road Extension Act and the Federal Railway Extension Act. For example, around 1300 submissions were received during the consultations on the Federal Transport Infrastructure Plan in 1992.

The Committee takes the submissions from citizens seriously and makes every effort to respond appropriately to each one. At the same time, however, it must bear in mind that under the Basic Law, it is the Petitions Committee which is responsible for dealing

with requests and complaints addressed to the German Bundestag (Article 17 and Article 45 c of the Basic Law). This generally also applies to submissions which are addressed directly to the Committee or its Chairperson. The Committee therefore refers these petitions to the Petitions Committee. The Petitions Committee requests the comments of the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing if the petition relates to a subject under discussion in this specialized committee (Rule 109, para. 1 of the Rules of Procedure of the German Bundestag). In cases where the submission may be of relevance to the shaping of the political will, the Chairperson also informs the parliamentary groups' spokespersons on the Committee.

The Committee cannot supply information of a confidential nature or provide (legal) advice. Nor are the minutes of non-public committee meetings available to the public in principle. Nonetheless, there are many opportunities to obtain information about the work of the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing. Committee agendas, recommendations for decisions and reports, as well as press releases, are published on the Internet (www.bundestag.de). In addition, the German Bundestag's Press Centre reports on many of the committee meetings in "heute im Bundestag (hib)" ("Today in the Bundestag") and in the newspaper "Das Parlament" ("The Parliament").

Interest groups and the Committee

The contacts with associations and companies from the Committee's sphere of competence are extremely important for the Committee's work. They enable the Committee to obtain key information from the standpoint of the people who have to apply, or are directly affected by, legislation. For example, representatives of associations and companies are invited as experts to hearings or asked to attend committee meetings in order to discuss topical issues. But outside the committee meetings, too, an exchange of views takes place between the Committee members and leading representatives of associations and companies. The Committee members regularly meet representatives of many key institutions to exchange information. Another forum for an exchange of views are the parliamentary working groups set up by Members with an interest in a specific topic, where Members meet with experts in order to discuss issues such as rail transport or inland shipping.

International contacts

In a world in which the exchange of goods, services and information is constantly increasing, where more and more journeys are being undertaken, and where the importance of international cooperation is steadily growing, a well-functioning international

transport system is essential. In order to be able to guarantee this, close and positive relations between the countries concerned are important. The Committee on Transport, Building and Housing contributes to this process through its wide range of international contacts. Issues such as the harmonization of competition conditions for commercial transport in Europe, the safety of international air traffic, cooperation on air traffic control, agreements on takeoff and landing rights for aircraft, cooperation on the avoidance and management of shipping disasters, building and improving road and rail links with Eastern Europe, and transit through the Alpine regions are important subjects for discussion in this context. Through its international contacts, the Committee also obtains information on how problems are being resolved in other countries. This provides a great deal of fresh impetus for its own work.

The contacts with countries which are currently preparing for EU accession must be emphasized in particular. The Committee has visited Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovenia, among others. Delegations from the Czech Republic, Romania, Hungary and Poland have also visited the Committee for talks.

The contacts are maintained primarily through discussions with foreign delegations or representatives of international organizations in Berlin and through fact-finding missions by committee delegations

abroad. As a rule, a delegation undertaking a fact-finding mission consists of six members of the Committee. On its return, the delegation prepares a comprehensive report to inform all members of the Committee about the outcomes of the visit.

Fundamental policy positions of the parliamentary groups on the political topics of the Committee

SPD parliamentary group

by Reinhard Weis (Stendal),
Member of the German Bundestag

We pursue the guiding principle of sustainable, environmentally friendly and climate-compatible mobility. Top priority is attached to the establishment of an integrated transport infrastructure that strengthens the long-neglected railways. The central tasks for the coming years are the opening of the European rail network and the doubling of goods transport by rail by the year 2015. The price of mobility must be geared to the costs it causes; introduction of the HGV toll in 2003 plays a prominent role in this context.

Mobility is crucial for people's quality of life and freedom, as well as for strengthening the economic power of our highly developed industrial society. All traffic carriers need fair conditions in competing with each other and in relation to their European partners. An end must be put to price and wage dumping in road haulage. Mobility must become safer: we want to cut accident figures and, in particular,

strengthen the rights of the weakest road users, namely children and the elderly.

Towns and communities worth living in are the goal of our transport, building and housing policy. This includes a sufficiently need-based supply of affordable housing. By creating attractive, economically strong and family-friendly towns, we make a noticeable contribution towards increasing the quality of life and strengthening social bonds in our towns: we associate a functioning housing market with social security. Cost reduction in housing construction, climate protection and energy-saving, and the mobilisation of building land. We will continue to develop the reorientation of urban development and housing policy, geared to the guiding principle of sustainability. An attractive public transport system is the backbone of mobility in towns and communities.

CDU/CSU parliamentary group

by Dirk Fischer (Hamburg),
Member of the German Bundestag

- In the transport sector, elimination of the enormous deficits by need-based budgets for the expansion and maintenance of our transport infrastructure. Promotion of private financing models and user-funded financing to supplement budget-funded financing.
- Improved networking and cooperation of the traffic carriers in keeping with their specific strengths. To this end, also use of Transrapid technology in Germany.
- Reduction of fiscal burdens in commercial road haulage in Germany (competition-promoting compensation for HGV toll and eco-tax), harmonisation of the EU competition conditions, as well as protective transitional regulations in connection with the eastward expansion of the EU.
- Resolute implementation of the railway reform, including separation of the rail network and railway operation, in order to handle more traffic on the railways by increasing competition in rail traffic and to reduce the expenditure of the taxpayers.
- Increased utilisation of environmentally compatible technologies in reducing pollution and in noise abatement.
- Intensive traffic safety work in road, rail and air traffic.
- In the building sector, elimination of framework conditions that inhibit investment, in order to counteract the emergence of housing supply bottlenecks and resultant, above-average rent increases.
- A return to widespread home ownership in the interests of social peace, asset formation, private provision for old age and the promotion of families.
- Preservation of town centres worth living in as the goal of urban development policy (mixture of residential and business occupancies, prevention of social trouble spots, consideration of demographic changes).

Alliance 90/The Greens parliamentary group

by Albert Schmidt (Ingolstadt),
Member of the German Bundestag

Green policy is based on the integration of building, housing development and transport.

In an open society, mobility is a fundamental prerequisite for individual development, and equally for social and economic participation. However, unrestricted traffic growth leads to major ecological damage and burdens the national economy.

Alliance 90/The Greens pursue the guiding principle of sustainable mobility. The Federal Government has set the right course by investing record sums in the transport infrastructure, putting the roads and the railways on an equal footing, and taking important, fundamental decisions in favour of an integrated transport system. We want to make the transport system more environmentally friendly as a whole, thereby also contributing to climate protection.

Following years of neglect, the railway network of Deutsche Bahn AG is being thoroughly modernised. The HGV toll also establishes equal opportunities among the traffic carriers, so that the railways and inland waterways can gain market shares. We are strengthening

bicycle traffic by means of a National Bicycle Traffic Plan 2002 - 2012.

Green building and housing policy pursues the guiding principles of sustainable development of towns and regions and the »town of short distances«. We want to strengthen the centres, take steps to limit space consumption and avoid traffic, mobilise fallow areas in towns for housing construction, intensify investments in the modernisation of existing housing and strengthen social bonds in our towns.

Demographic change and the increasing regionalisation of housing markets confronts building and housing policy with major challenges. Through the reform of publicly assisted housing construction, the Urban Restructuring in the New Federal States Programme and a comprehensive promotion programme for modernising the energy supply systems of existing housing we have already successfully set the course for a flexible housing policy geared to the existing housing pool. We intend to continue on this path.

FDP parliamentary group

by Horst Friedrich (Bayreuth),
Member of the German Bundestag

For the FDP parliamentary group, mobility is a part of freedom and a prerequisite for quality of life, progress and economic growth in Germany. In recent decades, 40% of the increase in productivity achieved in Germany would not have been possible without more mobility. In future, transport policy must be regarded more as a prerequisite for growth. If at least one line were built for a maglev train, Germany would be the leader in this advanced technology. From the point of view of environmental policy, it would be a good alternative to flying in the long term. Especially in the context of the eastward expansion of the EU, a lot more traffic will make its way through Germany. The expansion of the transport infrastructure must be accelerated in order to do justice to the resultant requirements, specifically in the field of road haulage. This can only be achieved by privatising the construction and maintenance of traffic routes and by increasing investments. However, in order not to jeopardise jobs, this must not result in the transport industry suffering. If Deutsche Bahn is to keep pace with other traffic carriers, it must face up to the competition and accept the separation of the rail network and railway operation.

The burdens of switching to a different system for financing the transport infrastructure must be distributed more fairly in future, also at the

European level.

In the field of building and housing, the FDP parliamentary group advocates an initiative for strengthening home ownership as part of private provision for old age. In addition to the privatisation of publicly owned housing, the following items are also of importance to the Liberals: retention of the promotion of privately owned housing, the amendment of home ownership law, the reduction of bureaucracy in building law and the reapportionment of funds for intensified restructuring of town centres.

Short biographies of the Chairman, Deputy Chairwoman and Spokespersons



Eduard Oswald

Christian Social Union (CSU)
Chairman of the Committee on
Transport, Building and Housing

Born on 6 September 1947 in Augsburg; Catholic, married, two children. Attended commercial school, completed an apprenticeship as a retail salesman. Graduated in business administration at Munich University of Applied Sciences, studied teaching at the University of Augsburg. Worked as a teacher at a *Hauptschule* (secondary school for 10- to 16-year-olds). Member of the CSU since 1966. From 1972 to 1998 member of Augsburg county council. From 1973 to 1999 chairman of the Augsburg county branch of the CSU. From 1978 to 1986 Member of the Bavarian Parliament. Member of the Bundestag since 1987; member of the

executive committee of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, from May 1992 to January 1998 Parliamentary Secretary; from 14 January to 26 October 1998 Federal Minister for Regional Planning, Building and Urban Development. Chairman of the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing since 13 November 1998. on Transport, Building and Housing since 13 November 1998.



Annette Faße

Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD),
Deputy Chairwoman of the
Committee on Transport, Building
and Housing

Born on 6 September 1947 in Imsum, Langen; Protestant; married; two children. Passed final examination at intermediate secondary school. Qualified as a state-registered child care and social work assistant. Worked as head of a nursery school, learning-support teacher at a school for physically disabled children and in the field of adult education. Member of the following bodies: the Union of Building, Agricultural and Environmental Employees (IG-Bau), the National Association for Workers' Welfare, the Business Community of the Port of Cuxhaven, the Nautical Association, the women's self-help organisation Frauen helfen Frauen, the Weisser Ring support organisation for victims of crime, the Association for Women in Inland Navigation, the Association for Seafarers' Wives, and Honorary Secretary of the Familie in Not support organisation for families in distress. Joined the SPD in 1972; chair of the

subdistrict branch of the party, deputy chair of the district branch, member of the party council. Member of Cuxhaven county council. Member of the Bundestag from 1987 to 1990 and since 1994.



Reinhard Weis

Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), Spokesman of the SPD parliamentary group on the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing

Born on 12 March 1949 in Tangermünde, Stendal, in Saxony-Anhalt; Roman Catholic; married, two children.

Obtained Abitur (school-leaving certificate giving right of entry to university) and trained as an electrical fitter in Merkers/Rhön. Graduated as an electrical engineer at Ilmenau College of Advanced Technology. Employed as a power station manager and chief energetics specialist in production preparation, project design and commissioning of power stations. Joined the SPD (SDP) in November 1989; founder member of the Stendal local branch in December 1989. Member of the People's Chamber from 18 March to 2 October 1990. Member of the Bundestag since 3 October 1990.



Dirk Fischer

Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU), Spokesman of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group on the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing

Born on 29 November 1943 in Bevensen, Uelzen; Protestant, unmarried. Obtained Abitur (school-leaving certificate giving right of entry to university) in 1964 at the Ostsee grammar school in Timmendorfer Strand. From 1964 to 1966 completed military service (currently reserve lieutenant). Studied law at Hamburg University, passing the first state examination in law in 1975 and the second in 1978. From 1978 to 1980 worked as a legal advisor at a wholesale firm in Hamburg. Admitted to practise as a lawyer in 1982. Member of the CDU and Young Union (youth section of the CDU/CSU) since 1967. From 1970 to 1977 Chairman of the Hamburg branch of the Young Union; since 1972 member of the executive committee and since 1976 Deputy Chairman of the Hamburg branch of the CDU; since 1974 Chairman of the Hamburg-North branch. Member of the Parliament of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg from 1970 to 1981. Since 1992 Chairman of the Hamburg branch

of the CDU.

Member of the Bundestag since 1980; since 1989 Chairman of the working group on transport of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group.



Albert Schmidt

Alliance 90/The Greens
Spokesman of the Alliance 90/The Greens parliamentary group on the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing

Born on 13 February 1951 in Uffenheim/Central Franconia; Catholic; married, two grown-up children. In 1969 completed Abitur (school-leaving certificate giving right of entry to university). From 1969 to 1976 studied education in Nuremberg and Eichstätt; graduated in education and as an elementary and secondary modern school teacher (second state examination). Worked as a research assistant at Eichstätt Catholic University from 1976 to 1978; from 1978 to 1994 worked as a teacher for elementary and secondary modern schools, teaching a range of ages; since 1982 member of local works council. From 1982 to 1990 toured Bavaria as a musician, lyrics writer and composer with *Liederbayern Band* musical cabaret; brought out four LPs, one solo LP and the CD "a different kind of *heimat* song".

Member of, and involved with, the Union of Persons Employed in Education and Science, the German Association for Environmental and Nature Protection, the Munich

Environmental Institute, the German Child Protection Association, the German Transport Club (VCD) and the cultural policy society. Became a member of The Greens in 1982, via the peace and ecology movement; from 1986 to 1991 spokesman for a cross-party citizens' initiative calling for a site to be used as a conservation park rather than to station nuclear weapons. From 1985 to 1994 served as a member of Eichstätt district council.

Member of the Bundestag since 1994.



Horst Friedrich

Free Democratic Party (FDP)

Spokesman of the FDP parliamentary group on the Committee on Transport, Building and Housing

Born on 12 October 1950 in Bayreuth; Protestant; married, two children.

Attended elementary school and intermediate secondary school, obtaining school-leaving certificate at 16. Completed apprenticeship as a commercial employee at a company producing concrete and prefabricated units in Bayreuth. Undertook further study in business administration at the Academy of Administration and Economics in Bayreuth. Completed military service in mountain infantry battalion 231. Worked for many years as a commercial employee in the company where he served his apprenticeship, including five years as head of personnel. Since 1983 self-employed company representative. Member of the FDP since 1984; chairman of the Bayreuth branch of the FDP from 1985 to 1995; from 1987

to 1998 district treasurer; chairman of the district branch since 1998; chairman of the Land specialised committee on transport and housing; since 2000 deputy chairman of the Bavarian FDP; Member of the Bundestag since 1990; Chairman of the working group on transport, regional planning, education and research policy, building, urban planning, environmental protection, nature conservation and nuclear safety, as well as spokesman on transport policy for the FDP parliamentary group.

The source for the short biographies was the Official Handbook of the German Bundestag - last updated in May 2003.

Members of the Committee in the 15th electoral term

Chairman: Eduard Oswald, Member of the Bundestag (CDU/CSU)

Deputy chairwoman: Annette Faße, Member of the Bundestag (SPD)
SPD spokesman Reinhard Weis (Stendal), Member of the Bundestag
CDU/CSU spokesman Dirk Fischer (Hamburg), Member of the Bundestag
Alliance 90/The Greens spokesman Albert Schmidt (Ingolstadt), Member of the Bundestag
FDP spokesman Horst Friedrich (Bayreuth), Member of the Bundestag

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