

Update

about the events of the Campaign of the Clean Air Action Group for more environment-friendly freight transport in Hungary

(October, 2006)

In the first four months (September–December, 2005) we prepared our campaign. Then, in the beginning of 2006 we made first of all a concentrated TV and newspaper campaign. The campaign created considerable stir throughout Hungary. The look and creative design of the campaign is the work of a young Hungarian team.

The campaign title is: “Kamionstop” (“Heavy Truck Stop”)

The campaign slogan is: “A sínek tovább bírják! Ön meddig bírja?” (“Rails will endure more! How long can you endure it?”)

Main events of the campaign

- First, we collected information on the issue both at national and international levels.
- Just before beginning the campaign the Hungarian Gallup Institute (whom we contracted for this purpose) made a nationwide representative opinion poll. The result of the poll showed that public opinion on the issue is generally the same as ours. Most of the Hungarian people agree that heavy trucks cause serious damage to our roads and our health, and that the operators of these vehicles do not pay all the costs they cause, and that a substantial kilometre tax should be introduced on heavy motor vehicles.
- We created a website on the topic: www.levego.hu/kamionstop. All important documents related to our campaign can be found here. In January, the website was visited by 4000 persons – this can be regarded as a success in Hungary. Although the number of visitors gradually dropped as the nationwide advertising campaign had to be finished (at the end February, due to financial reasons), even in August 2006 there were 600 visitors. We are continuously expanding the website of the campaign with new information, including some of the letters we receive and also our answers.
- We wrote and published a 6-sided leaflet, and we sent it to all Hungarian local governments (about 3200), and also to a number of other politicians. In this leaflet, the campaign's key features are formulated in a short and easy-to-understand manner. We printed it in A/5 format in 5000 copies. The leaflet can be downloaded from <http://www.levego.hu/kamionstop/rovid.htm>.
- We compiled and published an information brochure (it can be downloaded from <http://www.levego.hu/kamionstop/kamionkiadvany1.pdf>, and its English version from <http://www.levego.hu/kamionstop/eng/kamionbooklet1.pdf>), and we distributed it during meetings, public forums, environmental festivals and other events. This is in fact a 36-page study, which uses official statistical data to thoroughly explore the extent of environmental, health and other damage caused by heavy trucks in Hungary, and it also describes in detail the possible measures which may be applied to tackle this problem. It is written in an easy-to-understand manner. We printed it in A/4 format in 1000 copies.
- We broadcasted many times a 30-second and a 10-second TV spot on the Hungarian national television channels “MTV1”, “TV2” and “Duna”, as well as on “Spektrum” television channel.

- In addition, 300 giant posters were posted along the main roads throughout Hungary to call the attention to the problem and to our website.
- We inserted 2 advertisements in newspapers: one of them in “Heti Világgazdaság”, which is the most popular Hungarian economic weekly magazine, and the other one on the front page of the publicity magazine “Budapesti Piac” which is received by all households in Budapest.
- We published information on the topic each time in our quarterly magazine Lélegzet, and regularly reported about our activities and related news in our monthly electronic newsletter Lélegzetnyi which we send – among others – to more than 2000 journalists.
- We posted the campaign's banner on the title-page of the two most widely read Hungarian Internet journals (www.index.hu and www.origo.hu) for two weeks.
- Once all elements of our campaign were prepared, we organized a very spectacular campaign kick-off press conference, which was held in a railway container. The press conference was attended by news staffs of all major Hungarian television channels, and it was covered by several daily newspapers, weeklies and other magazines. In the press conference, we delivered a lecture and showed our TV spot to representatives of the press, who also received our 6-sided leaflet and our information brochure.
- Additionally, in the months afterwards numerous newspaper articles covered the subject, and dozens of radio and television stations broadcast interviews about our campaign.
- A telephone “hot-line” and an e-mail “hot line” are operational on a continuous basis, and provides answers to any questions of the press, the general public and officials concerning the topic.
- We spoke about the issue to the Minister of Economy and Transport, we had several times discussion with the State Secretary (i.e. Deputy Minister) for Transport, talked about it with Members of the Parliament, state officials etc.
- We participated at several public forums organized by local governments and residents about heavy truck traffic. The most notable among them, and at the same time one of the most important results of our campaign, has been the events along road number 86 (Western Hungary, near the Austrian border). An enormous heavy truck traffic is passing through the towns and villages along this road. (This traffic abruptly increased on this road after Austria had introduced a kilometre charge for trucks on its motorways.) Having heard about our campaign, a local citizen contacted us, and afterwards he initiated a local action. As a result, citizens and local mayors from 12 towns and villages along the road formed a committee to fight against the huge traffic. We provided them with expertise and information material, and took part in one of their demonstrations, and at another time in their public forum where several members of the Parliament and officials from the Transport Ministry took part. We helped the local committee to write and send a letter to all members of the Parliament. Now they are preparing with our legal help a lawsuit demanding compensation for the damages as well as forbidding the further causing of damages.
- As a result of our campaign many local citizens and NGOs wrote us or called us about their related problems and asked for help. About 40 mayors of various towns and villages also complained to us and asked for our assistance. We devoted much time to answering these letters, providing more information and also legal advice. With the help of lawyers we formulated model letters which could be sent to the authorities concerned, and also described the possibilities of turning to court.
- Quite a number of letters came also from individual hauliers and hauliers’ organizations who generally criticized our campaign. We also answered all these letters, explaining that our campaign is not directed against the people working in the road freight transport industry, but it aims at creating a better and more environment-friendly transport system.

- We have closely followed the events relating to the preparation and acceptance of the new Eurovignette Directive of the European Union. We worked closely together with the European Federation for Transport and Environment (T&E), and contacted the Hungarian members of the European Parliament asking them to support the environmentally most positive variants of the proposed directive. We also sent a letter and spoke personally with the competent Hungarian state officials asking their support for a better decision at the European Council. The final directive is a compromise, but it is much better than the old directive, and it could have been much worse if environmental NGOs (especially T&E and its member organizations, including CAAG) hadn't worked hard to improve it.
- We also communicated our activities in English to NGOs and individual environmentalists so that our experiences could be used in other countries, too. Among others we published information about it in the Green Budget Newsletter (<http://www.eco-tax.info/2newsmit/index.html>) which is sent by e-mail to several thousand addresses all over Europe. We presented our campaign and the tv-spot during several international conferences in Hungary and abroad.

Other results related to the campaign

1. Kilometre fee on heavy trucks.

After the first two months of our campaign the government announced plans to introduce a kilometre charge for trucks in 2007 or 2008. We do not know how much our campaign influenced this decision, but it certainly helped its public acceptance. Besides, during our meeting with the Minister of Economy and Transport in September, 2006, he promised to investigate the possibility of introducing the charge earlier than planned, and on all roads, not only on motorways, as planned until now. On July 1, 2006 a fee for heavy trucks has been introduced by two Budapest districts. This means that any truck entering the district must have a special permit for which a fee has to be paid that depends on the permitted total weight, the number of days, and to a certain extent on the kilometers driven.

2. The improvement of the financial and technical situation of railways freight transport.

The freight division of Hungarian Railways (MÁV) became financially and administratively independent from the rest of MÁV, which will certainly make it more competitive. Besides, several small railway freight companies appeared on the market, which will certainly help, too, the increase of goods transport on rail.