

Connecting Europe



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VENEZIA <small>SEZANA</small>	 EuroCity	10.25	3
SEŽANA <small>PIVKA DIVACA</small>	POTNIŠKI	10.35	3
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K TIROM TO THE RAILS

Towards sustainable
European Transport
Networks

Priority Projects of the trans-European Transport Networks
Map: EU-Commission, DG TREN 2004



The European Union invests substantial amounts of money in transport infrastructure. But do all these motorways, bridges, railways, and waterways really make sense? Experience shows that the hopes for economic benefits are often disappointed and that they do not justify the enormous environmental risks of these Megaprojects.

The Trans-European Transport Networks

Connecting Europe ...

78.000 km railways, 75.000 km roads, 330 airports, and 480 ports – by building the Trans European Transport Networks (TEN-T) the European Union has a lot of work to do. When finished the TEN-T are expected to carry around one half of all the passenger and freight transport in the EU. The TEN-T are supposed to better connect the European regions in order to stimulate the exchange of goods and people between the regions.

Undoubtedly, there is a need to improve connections between European regions since there are still archaic barriers between them. Various standards in gauge, electricity and safety, nebulous pricing policies as well as missing links and travel times longer than those in the 1920ies make Europe's railway system look very fragmented. But do Europe's citizens and regions really benefit from gigantic transportation projects fragmenting the landscape?

European transport policy has to follow the principles of the EU's Sustainable Development Strategy as well as the EU's White Paper on Transport. The roads, railways and bridges within the TEN-T can only really connect Europe if they meet environmental and socio-economic standards .

... or asphaltting Europe?

Infrastructure projects partially paid for by the EU are to function in many ways. National politicians as well as bureaucrats in Brussels expect economic growth, employment, and prosperity in the concerned regions. While these expectations remain vague, negative impacts on human health, the environment and public budgets are quite clear. Increasing traffic volumes generate many undesirable effects such as air pollution, noise, and landscape fragmentation, all of which have become serious problems in recent years. In Western Europe regions and cities are finding it more and more difficult to cope with these problems and are trying to reverse some of the planning mistakes made in the past.

In the new member states in Central and Eastern Europe the situation of the transport networks is alarming. While an upgrading of rail and road networks is urgently needed, many governments are investing in new road projects and closing down down rail lines at the same time, because of a lack of funds for refurbishment.

All over Europe states are suffering from immense budget deficits and TEN-T projects worsen this situation. The European Commis-

Traffic generating jobs?

Who pays the bill?

sion expects the entire network to cost about 600 billion €. The maximum EU co-funding, currently at 20% has to be supplemented by the member states' national budgets. Other sources of funding for the TEN-T are the Cohesion and Structural Funds or loans. Member states and the European Commission increasingly prefer Public-Private-Partnerships (PPP) and want to enhance these by giving loan guarantees to the private sector. This policy fast-tracks economically unviable projects, because the investor carries no risk but receives all the possible revenue. Thus the risk of the investment is covered by public budgets – and therefore by the taxpayers. In consequence the member states push projects of national prestige ignoring the real economic benefits and environmental risks. As a result the European taxpayers not only have to deal with the loss of quality of life resulting from negative influences on nature and environment, but they also have to pay for the risks of private investors.

The silly six: Examples of controversial TEN-T projects

The Via Baltica threatens sites of global importance

Via Baltica, Poland

One of a number of controversial transport projects planned in the new Member States is to upgrade the Via Baltica road corridor to expressway status (Helsinki Corridor I from Helsinki to Warsaw). The Polish Government is ignoring Polish and EU legislation, disregarding requirements for environmental impact assessments, restrictions for nature conservation and environmental protection. The planned route via Bialystok threatens the Biebrza and Narew Marshes and the Augustow and Knyszyn Forests-sites listed in the Annexes of the Birds and Habitats Directives and eligible for designation as Natura 2000 sites. Rather than enhancing economic development in the region the route is likely to destroy the region's greatest asset – the tourist attraction of Poland's wild northeast. All four sites are currently protected under Polish legislation and home to threatened bird species (such as Greater Spotted Eagle, Corncrake, Great Snipe and Aquatic Warbler) and big mammals (such as Elk, Wolf, Lynx). Alternatives: The optional route for the Via Baltica through the city of Lomza would bypass the endangered sites. This alternative is not only 30 km shorter than the Bialystok route, it would also lessen the impact on the protected sites thus making it economically and environmentally preferable.

Fehmarn Belt Fixed Link, Germany

The Fehmarn Belt fixed link is another huge rail and road bridge project connecting the island Lolland to Germany. The projected costs are: 4,3 billion € plus an additional 1,5 billion for the connecting routes from/to Hamburg and Copenhagen. The Fehmarn Belt is a very important migratory bottleneck for an estimated 6 million waterbirds, birds of prey and passerines. Fehmarn is also a very popular tourist destination in Germany. A large number of jobs in the tourism and ferry industries are at stake without any adequate replacement. It is expected that there will be a significant drop in tourist numbers – and in the associated income of local communities. Therefore local communities are opposed to the bridge. The alternative: Upgrading the current ferry links between Germany and Denmark would be more sensible from an economic as well as an environmental perspective. Moreover, this option is much more in line with the EU's stated objective of shifting transport modes from road to more sustainable alternatives.



*Threatened by the Fehmarn Belt bridge:
waterbirds*

Environmental and Public Participation standards are rarely met

Kresna Gorge, Bulgaria

The Kresna Gorge Valley is a 17 km long rock valley in southwest Bulgaria and home to rare protected species, such as bears, wolves and 17 bat species – more than in the rest of Europe combined. The unique habitat of the gorge is threatened by a motorway running between Sofia (Bulgaria) and Thessaloniki (Greece) as part of the the TEN-T corridor No. 4. The construction of the motorway will result in direct habitat destruction, erosion and wildlife disturbance. It will be a barrier to migrating animal species and cause air and noise pollution in the town of Kresna, where it will be routed only 30 m away from buildings. The construction of a 20–30 km section of the motorway has already started violating the EU Commission’s request for a thorough Environmental Impact Assessment and the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment. The alternative: A route outside of the Kresna gorge would only be a few kilometres longer but would save the unique nature of the gorge and the potential for developing environmental tourism in the region. A feasibility study of this route has been commissioned by Bulgarian NGOs because of the government’s reluctance to assess alternatives.

Messina Strait, Italy

This Italian bridge project would link the southern tip of Italy with Sicily by rail and motorway. The bridge would be the biggest suspension bridge in the world, standing 64 metres above the strait of Messina and is expected to cost 4.6 billion €. The Messina Strait is the third most important site in Europe for migratory birds of prey and storks. The existing environmental impact assessment was completely inadequate and there is hardly an economic case for the road and rail crossing. The bridge is funded entirely by public funds with the main burden placed on the state railway company who is to pay a set fee of 4 bn. € over 30 years. This burden may result in even less attractive rail connections and tariffs on Sicily, where infrastructure and service are already in a poor condition. The project is also closely monitored by citizen's groups and state prosecutors who are worried that public money will end up lining the pockets of the area’s notorious Mafia groups.

Motorway Prague–Dresden, Czech Republic/Germany

The Prague–Dresden motorway (A17 resp. D8), currently under construction, runs parallel to an efficient rail connection right through valuable landscapes and popular tourist destinations on both sides of the border. Assessments of alternative routes were neglected by both the Czech and German governments. At the same time the governments failed to introduce measures for shifting transport from road to rail in the sensitive and protected nature areas such as the Czech Middle Mountains thus encouraging the increase in road freight transport along the heavily populated transit routes. The rail freight system „Rolling Road“ (Rollende Landstraße), which moved trucks by train over the Czech–German border was closed down as soon as the Czech Republic acceded the EU’s internal market. Since then road freight transport has increased dramatically, placing heavy burdens not only on the environment but especially on the people in towns and villages along the transit routes on both sides of the border.



Along the Prague–Dresden motorway: the EU way of preserving cultural values ?



What needs to be done for sustainable European transport networks?

Connecting Europe is not making Europe pay for your favourite road

EU-Commission and Parliament need to:

- ▶ stop accepting wish lists: The trans-European Transport Networks should connect Europe, not finance projects of national prestige.
- ▶ stay true to their principles: As stated in the White Paper on transport the decoupling of economic and transport growth is necessary for a sustainable transport system. Nevertheless the commission clings to the illusion that TEN-T projects will generate growth and jobs.
- ▶ consider community legislation for nature conservation: Plans for the TEN-T must not affect Natura 2000 sites or conflict with the Birds, Habitats and Water Framework Directives.
- ▶ effectively monitor the TEN-T development process: The EU has to monitor whether all the relevant principles and guidelines are correctly implemented by the member states.
- ▶ ensure that private money is invested at private risk.

Focus on sustainable mobility!

The member states need to:

- ▶ be rational: Stop planning economically unviable and environmentally harmful infrastructure projects.
- ▶ strengthen regional networks: Expensive transport routes used for transit do not help regional economies in the long term. Improving regional networks is much more likely to generate sustainable growth in the European regions.
- ▶ set sustainable priorities: The preferred treatment of road projects has to end.
- ▶ promote concepts of sustainable mobility: Public transport, cycling, car sharing, taxis and better links between them urgently need more political and financial support.

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<http://vorort.bund.net/verkehr/>
to get to know more about the trans-
European transport networks

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