

TEN-T days 2011

30 November 2011, 09:00-10:30h

Alpaerts Hall

WORKSHOP 6: Transport and environment: together striving towards a sustainable infrastructure. Natura 2000 success stories

The aim of this workshop is to demonstrate the common objective of European transport and environment policies: to have an efficient and sustainable transport system in Europe. This workshop will not discuss aspects of the TEN-T covered in other workshops, for example, the economic or political rationale underlying TEN-T policy. Instead, it takes the policy as a given and solely identifies and discusses the best possible practices available to achieve mobility while at the same time avoiding environmental damage to selected transport modes at Natura 2000 sites.

Transport contributes significantly to a number of environmental problems in the EU. The environmental impacts of transport are varied; they can be not only direct, by the use of different transport modes (emissions, climate change at local level etc.), but also indirect by the existence of the infrastructure itself. The central challenge of modern transport and environmental policies is to shape an environmentally sustainable mobility that also fulfils social demands. Transport is a necessity in our everyday lives but at the same time it can have harmful environmental impacts. This dilemma has been taken seriously by policy makers at the European level as well as in the Member States, regions and communes: many laws and decrees ensure safeguarding of the natural habitat of animals and plants, minimization of possible impacts on the environment from infrastructure construction, reduction of emissions.

Natura 2000 is the EU-wide network of nature conservation areas set up to ensure the survival of Europe's most valuable species and habitats. It is not restricted to nature reserves, but based on a much broader principle of conservation and sustainable use, where people and wildlife can live together in harmony. The network comprises more than 26.000 sites, covering approximately 17,5% of the total land area of the EU - around 750.000 km² - plus almost 200.000 km² of marine environment. The network is founded on two pioneering pieces of EU legislation: the 1979 Birds Directive and the 1992 Habitats Directive.

Prior to the construction of infrastructure projects, European Community Law requires assessments as to whether Natura 2000 areas are likely to be significantly affected. If yes, the project can be approved only if it is ascertained that it will not have significant negative impacts on the sites e.g. by undertaking effective mitigation measures; otherwise alternatives should be sought. If there are no alternative solutions, the project can be authorised only if there is an overriding public interest and compensatory measures are implemented. Compensatory measures, however, should be the last resort, to be done only when all possible alternatives have been exhausted.

Four impressive real-life cases (Botniabanan – railway project in Sweden; Calarasi-Braila – inland waterway project in Romania; Maasvlakte 2 – sea port project in the Netherlands; constructions in the Saale-Elster-Meadow – railway project in Germany) will demonstrate how to create environmentally sustainable infrastructure. These contributions aim to stimulate an interesting exchange of views, practical experiences and challenges between players of

both ongoing and implemented TEN-T projects of different transport modes. This workshop should address important issues such as: How to exchange relevant best practices? How to transpose them from one transport mode to another? What more could or should be done at the planning stage of projects? What additional steps could or should be taken by the EU or Member States to improve the process? What are the most important aspects of international cooperation in the cases of cross-border projects? A subsequent discussion will offer the possibility to discuss these issues also with the audience.

We have the privilege of having Mr. Laurens Jan Brinkhorst, European Coordinator of the Priority Project Nr 6 and former Director General of the Directorate General of Environment, as moderator of this workshop.