Large transport infrastructure projects in the EU

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The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the own-initiative report by Andrey NOVAKOV (EPP, BG) on large transport infrastructure projects in the EU - implementation of projects and monitoring and control of EU funds.

Major transport projects in the EU

Members pointed out that large infrastructure projects play a **crucial role in implementing TEN-T policy** and are of instrumental importance in removing bottlenecks and eliminating missing links, particularly on cross-border sections.

The report stressed that **extending the European transport network corridors to non-EU partner countries** in the neighbourhood (such as Ukraine, Moldova, Northern Macedonia, Albania, etc.) would considerably improve the seamless functioning of the TEN-T. It called for Bulgaria and Romania to be swiftly integrated into the Schengen area, as this would considerably improve north-south connectivity in Eastern Europe. It called on the Commission to support Ukraine and its efforts to strengthen rail connections between Ukraine and the EU with a view to the future integration of Ukraine's transport infrastructure into the TEN-T.

EU funding and implementation

Over the period 2007-2020, the EU has allocated more than EUR 109 billion to transport infrastructure projects on the TEN-T, regardless of their size. The European Investment Bank provided EUR 151 billion in loans for transport projects in the EU over the period 2007-2020.

The report pointed out that the EU is currently experiencing an unprecedented situation whereby **numerous sources of funding must be absorbed simultaneously** and that Member States often do not have the administrative capacity to handle all the funding available from the Recovery and Resilience Facility through the national recovery and resilience plans, while trying to absorb EUR 392 billion of cohesion policy funding before the end of 2027. Members called for synergies between cohesion funds and the recovery and resilience facility.

Concerned about the risk of misalignment between the EU’s and Member States’ strategic priorities, Members called for the **role of European coordinators to be strengthened** in order to facilitate the deployment of infrastructure projects along the TEN-T corridors and to ensure cooperation and the smooth delivery of cross-border projects. In addition, Member States should ensure consistency between their national transport and investment plans and the EU’s transport objectives. Members called on Member States to prioritise the completion of the core TEN-T network in its entirety by 2030, rather than to completing the extended and the comprehensive networks.

Members regretted that major infrastructure projects co-financed by the EU are, on average, experiencing **longer delays** than comparable transport projects worldwide. They urged Member States to implement the Smart TEN-T Directive to enable simplified and harmonised permitting procedures and prevent delays in projects.

The report called for the **Connecting Europe Facility** budget to be increased to meet the additional costs arising from inflation, as well as to take account of other geopolitical and transitional needs and challenges affecting the implementation of the TEN-T, including cross-border sections.

Main priorities and recommendations

Members consider that international experience in financing and implementing major infrastructure projects deserves to be analysed and called for the lessons learned from this analysis to be taken into account in the architecture of future policies (post-2027). In particular, they believe that a **systematic risk-based monitoring system** for large transport projects would help to better address the significant delays of large transport infrastructure projects in the EU and would contribute to further improvements in managing cost overruns.

Adequate monitoring of the implementation of funds is necessary, as infrastructure projects are exposed to the risk of irregularities, including corruption. The report called on the Commission and the Member States to **make mandatory the use of a single integrated and interoperable information and monitoring system**, including a single data mining and risk calculation tool, to assess and analyse relevant data, including information on beneficial owners, and to increase the reliability of control. It called for increased collaboration between the European Public Prosecutor's Office and the European Anti-Fraud Office, with a view to improving monitoring and control systems under shared management and preventing the possibility of mismanagement of funds.

The Commission is invited to **further strengthen the ex-post evaluation indicators**, where possible, by introducing criteria such as road safety; reduction of the number of deaths and serious injuries; reduction of emissions; reduction of noise pollution; increase in economic activity in terms of income and employment benefits for local businesses and population; benefits in terms of time and cost of transport for people and freight; and other social benefits. For each major transport infrastructure project, a thorough socio-economic cost-benefit analysis and environmental impact assessment should be carried out.

Members called for **close alignment between the Union's strategic priorities and those of the Member States**. They called for the Commission to have greater oversight over the planning and implementation of projects along transport network corridors. **Priority treatment** (with shorter deadlines and simultaneous and/or simplified procedures) should automatically apply to TEN-T projects where such a framework exists in a national legal framework. Member States whose national legal frameworks do not provide for such priority treatment should introduce it for transport projects. The benefits of having a designated authority to streamline administrative procedures at national level are highlighted.

Concerned that long waiting times at the EU's internal borders have a negative impact on EU-funded infrastructure and reduce its overall usability, Members called for an **EU-wide standard of one minute** on average to be set for the processing and control of EU-registered heavy-duty vehicles at the EU's borders.

Members called for the swift adoption of the European cross-border mechanism, as it would improve the effectiveness of EU investment in cross-border transport infrastructure. They called on the Commission to set up a European fast-track procedure for infrastructure projects along the core and comprehensive TEN-T network.