

Ohrid – Peshtani expressway project, Macedonia

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The Ohrid- Peshtani expressway project involves the construction of a new section between Ohrid and Pestani on the A3 express ‘Kosel’ to the Albanian border crossing at Ljubanishta. The new 12.5 kilometre section is at a higher elevation than the existing coastal road and towns and is planned to pass through the Galicica national park. This project is part of the second tranche of the EBRD-financed National Roads Programme, a sovereign guaranteed loan of up to EUR 160 million.

Risks to the National Park

The Galicica national park is a rare and important natural site with abundant biodiversity, listed as an emerald site (a future Natura 2000 site), an Important Plant Area and a Prime Butterfly Site. In 2014, Galicica was designated part of UNESCO’s World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

Under the current management plan, the Galicica national park is divided into four zones, and the expressway is planned to pass through two of these - the zone of active management and the zone of sustainable use. Over 95 per cent (310 hectares) of the total area of the project is located in the park and would require re-zoning and the destruction of over 75 hectares of forest. According to the law on nature protection and the management plan for the park, construction activities including roads, highways and expressways are not allowed in the zone of active management.

At its 38th session in Doha in 2014, the World Heritage Committee adopted a decision (38 COM 7B.58) in which it expressed concerns with several major infrastructure projects planned within the park, including the Ohrid-Peshtani road. The committee requested that technical details, including the Environmental and Heritage Impact Assessments (EIAs/ HIAs) be submitted for review, in accordance with Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines, prior to any decisions that would be difficult to reverse. To date, no Environmental and Heritage Impact Assessments for the project have been submitted to the World Heritage Committee for review. The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the draft management plan, which envisions changes to the zoning of Galicica national park, is under review and thus has not been sent to UNESCO.

The draft SEA report on the proposed changes to the management plan stresses the negative impacts of these changes. The report concludes that **in the long-term, the proposed changes might lead to the loss of category II status as a national park and UNESCO World Heritage site.** Also the SEA report notes that **the construction of the expressway will lead to significant fragmentation of areas with natural values, including the forests of “Quercus trojana,” which are included in Annex I of the EU’s Habitats Directive and the only functional habitat of its kind on the west side of the park.**

In a similar case, the rezoning of the Mavrovo national park was done to accommodate infrastructure projects, including the Boskov Most dam, in direct breach of the Macedonian law on nature protection. This is

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unacceptable and should not be supported by EBRD.

Possibilities for sustainable, innovative and low-carbon transport

The 'no action' option in the SEA is currently undeveloped and does not include alternatives that are more environmentally-friendly and sustainable than auto transport. We propose that traffic congestion issues in Ohrid can potentially be completely resolved and Galicica national park can move towards sustainable, innovative and low-carbon forms of transport mobility via a strategy that combines increased public transport and cycling together with a reduction in the need for travel. To this end we present a concept "SMART OHRID: towards sustainable transport in Galicica national park" that further assess this goal (see Annex).

Breach of the law on nature protection and the Aarhus convention in order to enable implementation of the project

The 'Public Institution National Park Galicica' initiated amendments to the 2011-2012 management plan and the zoning of the park in order to enable this project. This initiative was started after the government's decision to construct several infrastructure projects in Galicica. The proposed changes in the management plan and to the zoning are not in accordance with the law on nature protection, since re-zoning of the park can be approved only after a study of the natural values finds that the area has already lost its natural values. Currently there are no legal provisions that enable the change of zoning in the park.

Additionally, the government's decision for

amending the management plan is in breach with Article 6, paragraph 4 and Article 7 of the Aarhus convention on access to information, public participation and access to justice since the decision for implementation of the projects as such has never been subject to early public debate and consultations with all options open. The Aarhus Compliance Committee notes that "Once the decision to permit a proposed activity has been taken without public involvement, providing for such involvement at a following stage could under no circumstances be considered as meeting the requirement under article 6, paragraph 4, to provide for 'early public participation when all options are open.' This is the case even if a full EIA procedure is subsequently to be carried out. It is not in accordance with the Convention to provide for public participation only at the stage of the EIA procedure if the decision to permit the activity has already been taken, as it results in reducing the public's input to only commenting on how the environmental impact of the project could be mitigated and precludes the public from having any input on the decision on whether the projects should be at the selected site in the first place."

Corruption in Macedonia's transport sector

Corridor X, another transport project in Macedonia, was recently associated with a potential case of corruption case (<http://www.oecd.org/daf/anti-bribery/Greece-Phase-3bis-Report-EN.pdf>). This project was also implemented with the support of the EBRD, the European Commission and the European Investment Bank. In light of these initial concerns, the bank should regularly update its integrity assessment and disclose it to the public.



We therefore ask the bank not to approve the loan for the Ohrid-Pestani road.

Annex 1: SMART OHRID: Towards sustainable transport in Galicici national park

This concept note is being suggested in response to the need for reducing traffic congestion in Galicici national park – one of the starting points of the recent proposal to construct an express road between Ohrid and St Naum, resulting in a Strategic Environmental Assessment of changes in the Management Plan of Galicici national park.

In contrast to the SEA, where the construction of a new road is seen as the best means of resolving congestion in the area, we are proposing a series of measures that would result in the reduction of the need for car mobility in the park and a modal shift to other sources of transport.

Our proposal is based on the widely accepted principles of transport management in developed societies, where it has been long recognized that the construction of new roads leads to further traffic congestion due to induced demand (e.g. see <http://www.vtpi.org/gentraf.pdf>).

In putting forward this proposal we also wish to introduce a range of new alternatives to the ‘no action’ option in the SEA, which is currently undeveloped and does not include alternatives that are more environmentally friendly and sustainable than car transport.

We propose that traffic congestion issues in Ohrid can potentially be completely resolved and Galicici national park can move towards sustainable, innovative and low-carbon forms of transport mobility via:

- The introduction of seasonal congestion charging (only in the summer months) for all automobile traffic other than local residents in the zone between Biljanini Izvori and Trpejca, alongside improvements to the existing road (in terms of road alignment and paving);
- Significant improvements to the frequency and quality of bus links in this zone, particularly during summer months. This could include park and ride facilities at the Ohrid entrance to the national park (and possibly in Trpejca from visitors entering

from Albania);

- The construction of a dedicated pedestrian and cycle path between Ohrid and St Naum, including the possibility of using electric bikes for less physically able users (this could allow for sections of the path to be moved above the lake shore - into and near the surrounding settlements);
- Improvements in water transport, using solar/electric boats such as the Serpentine or Hamburg Solar Shuttles (<http://www.solarshuttle.co.uk>)

The entire system could potentially (and prospectively) be managed via a smart urban system that would allow for an integrated co-ordination of the various transport technologies with real-time mobility needs. As a whole, this proposal is:

- Environmentally friendly and sustainable: other than a car park, bike and pedestrian bath (mostly using existing links) no new infrastructure would need to be constructed on the territory of the park. Thus, biodiversity, landscape, water and noise impacts are much lower compared to the construction of new roads. At the same time the movement away from car mobility would have significant impacts on carbon emissions;
- Low cost: other than the prospective introduction of a smart management system, all of the technological and infrastructural improvements suggested here have lower capital investment and maintenance costs compared to the construction of a new express road;
- Economically beneficial: Congestion charging would provide a much needed source of revenue to the National Park, and the improvement of bus and cycle infrastructures would be a source of revenue for local businesses. The entire project can be assisted or realized via Ohrid’s burgeoning sustainable mobility sector. Local people and hotels would benefit from lower congestion and noise despite maintaining car access;
- Original and innovative: The introduction of a sustainable and integrated transport system in a Balkan national park and UNESCO World Heritage Site would set an important example that others could follow. It would provide a tourist attraction in its own right.

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