



Inland waterway Seine-Scheldt

Improving the link between the Seine and Scheldt rivers will connect the Paris region and the Seine basin with the entire Benelux inland waterway network.

What is the axis?

The link between the Seine and Scheldt rivers forms part of a vital transport route in a highly-developed economic and industrial region, connecting in particular the ports of Le Havre, Rouen, Dunkirk, Antwerp and Rotterdam. However, one obstacle to promoting inland waterway transport between Benelux and the Paris region is the bottleneck to the north of Paris, between Compiègne and the Dunkirk-Scheldt canal.

Navigability on that section is at the lower end of international standards, with access restricted to vessels of no more than 400 to 750 tonnes on some stretches. The project centres on the construction of a large-gauge canal, running for about 100 km, allowing the passage of barges carrying up to 4 400 tonnes. The route selected is clear of valleys and inhabited areas, thus limiting the impact of the project on the natural environment.

Belgium also plans to improve navigability on the axis north of this bottleneck to give access to vessels of up to 4 400 tonnes. The length of this section is 80 km. These works will ensure full accessibility between the inland waterway basins of northern France and the Benelux countries.

What are its expected benefits?

The axis will not only facilitate transit traffic and alleviate road-transport congestion but will also benefit the adjacent regions, where transport platforms could be developed. Numerous jobs could be created, perhaps 8 000 over five years according to estimates.

These estimates suggest that removing the French bottleneck could help free up 15 million tonnes of freight in the first year of operation thereafter. Going from a maximum gauge of 750 tonnes to 4 400 tonnes could reduce the transport costs from EUR 30–40 per 1 000 tonne-kilometres to a cost of between EUR 10 and 15 per 1 000 tonne-kilometres once work is completed on French territory. The positive impact on the environment and the population, through improved diversification of modes of transport, would also be considerable.

What is its current status?

Preliminary studies on the new section of canal in France (North Seine Canal, linking Compiègne with Cambrai) were launched in 2004, under the direction of the French Inland Waterways Authority. Government approval to build the canal is expected to be granted in 2007.

The French government is developing an innovative financing model for the project – through a transport infrastructure fund managed by AFITF, the Financing Agency for transport infrastructure, which was set up on 1 January 2005. The agency is managing an investment programme totalling EUR 7.5 billion for the period 2005-12, or almost EUR 1 billion per year. The agency's funds are essentially drawn from the dividends of the companies which hold motorway concessions. These currently amount to EUR 250-300 million per year, and are growing, given the age of the motorway network and that the companies' debts are close to being paid off. Additional funds will come from the government.

In Belgium, work on the project has already started with the building of a second lock at Evergem on the Ghent Ring Canal (2001-07), and the heightening of the lifting door on the lock at Sint-Baafs-Vijve (2004).

Two bridges were raised in spring of 2005. In the period 2005-07 some studies are still to be done to obtain planning permission by 2008, allowing the remainder of the project to be completed.

Priority section	Type of work/status	Distance (km)	Timetable	Total cost (million EUR)	Investment up to 31.12.2004 (million EUR)	TEN-T contribution, including studies, up to 31.12.2004 (million EUR)
Deulemont–Ghent	Improve navigability	80	2001–16	324	23	0
Compiègne–Cambrai	New canal	105	2007–16	2 170	0	3
TOTAL		185		2 494	23	3

