PP27 - “Rail Baltica”/”Rail Baltic” axis Warszawa-Kaunas-Riga-Tallinn-Helsinki

This report only represents the opinion of the European Coordinator and does not prejudice the official position of the European Commission.
SUMMARY

"Rail Baltica" is a strategic and sustainable rail project linking four of the new Member States of the EU - Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, as well as Finland. It is the only rail connection between the three Baltic States, as well as between them, Poland and the rest of the European Union. To the north, Helsinki can be connected by ferry services across the Gulf of Finland forming a connection to the countries of the Nordic Triangle. The length of the current track is approximately 1,200 km by the most direct existing route from Tallinn to Warsaw. A variety of track and operating systems are currently in use: single and double track, electrified and non-electrified (of which single track non-electrified is the most common system). The line passes through a variety of different terrain: urban areas surrounding the cities of Białystok, Kaunas and Riga and rural areas such as the Podlaskie region of north eastern Poland and southern Lithuania, as well as northern Latvia and the south of Estonia. Rail Baltica connects three major Baltic seaports - Helsinki, Tallinn and Riga - and has a short rail connection to a fourth, the Lithuanian main port of Klaipeda. Priority Project 27, Rail Baltica, has been co-ordinated by Pavel Telička since 2005.

1. Introduction

The year 2011-2012 was marked by important developments and a shift in emphasis from the original Rail Baltica 1 (the step-by-step upgrading project on the original 1520 mm alignment where works are complete in Estonia and are progressing in Latvia and Lithuania), towards the new higher speed 1435 mm UIC gauge direct line project (now known as "Rail Baltic") from Tallinn to Warsaw via Pärnu, Riga, Kaunas, Elk and Białystok¹. Following the publication of the International Feasibility Study in August 2011², the partner countries took several important steps during the year towards the realisation of the new line, including publishing a Joint Statement of the Baltic Prime Ministers and a Declaration of Intent by the Ministers of Transport of the three Baltic States which both highlighted the political will to proceed with the new project. Developments in 2011-2012 also took place against the backdrop of the EU Council of Ministers adoption of general approaches on both the Commission's proposal for revised TEN-T Guidelines as well as the accompanying financial measure - the Connecting Europe Facility. The Guidelines lay down a completely new structure for the TEN-T based on national comprehensive networks and international core corridors linking the strategic parts of the enlarged EU (which will include Rail Baltic). These corridors have been proposed by the European Commission in order to implement the Core Network, which includes the Baltic-Adriatic Corridor. The new policy was presented to the partner countries on 19 October 2011 and was discussed in detail at the 2012 TEN-T days held in Antwerp on 29-30 November 2011. Currently (October 2012), the two Commission proposals are with the European Parliament where they will be voted in committee on 27 November and in plenary early in 2013.

However all of these developments have to be taken in the context of the political discussions on the European Union budget – the future Multi-Annual Financial Framework(2014-2020), which should be agreed before the end of 2013. The allocations to the TEN-T and the CEF can only be finally established once the total EU budget is known.

¹ This line is known as either "Rail Baltica 2" or as suggested by Vice-President Siim Kallas: "Rail Baltic"
² For details see Annual Report 2010-2011
2. Improving the existing 1 520 alignment

2011-2012 was the penultimate year of the second mandate for coordination of PP 27 and several advances were made in upgrading the existing line in a step-by-step approach to achieving an average operating speed of 120 km/h. In Estonia, construction work was already completed in 2010-2011 with the finalising of the last elements of the upgraded track - including entry into Valga/Valka station - and aligning the platform heights in other stations to UIC standards.

In Latvia, work resumed following the pause caused by the economic and financial crisis and consisted of concluding the contracts for the supply of materials and works. Total financial expenditure is in the order of €18.9 million. On 4 October 2011, the Latvian authorities reported the conclusion of a contract for the supply of rails. All rails within the planned reconstruction scope of the project have now been supplied. A further contract for the supply of sleepers with elastic fastenings was concluded on 9 March 2012. A total of 35,040 sleepers were supplied in 2012. These supplies will continue in 2013. A contract for the supply of railway ballast was concluded on 11 July 2012 and immediately executed. A works contract for the reconstruction work was concluded on 28 June 2012.

Work carried out in 2011-2012 is therefore as follows:
- Cleaning of the rail ballast on the Jelgava-Meitene railway section has been completed;
- Installation of the rail grid on the Jelgava-Meitene railway section has started;
- Cleaning of the rail ballast on the Sigulda-Ligatne railway section has started;
- Replacement of the rail fastenings on the Sigulda-Ligatne section has been carried out;
- Welding of rails in the SIA LDZ Infrastruktūra welding centre has been carried out;
- The first welded rails (800 m) for installation on the Sigulda-Ligatne railway section have been unloaded;
- Necessary repair works of railway crossings on the Sigulda-Ligatne railway section have been carried out.

The detailed design is now complete for 36 km of reconstructed track. The construction permit for reconstruction work has been obtained and the status report for 2011 has been approved by the TEN-T Executive Agency. The project is therefore on track to be completed in accordance with the planned schedule by the 31 December 2015.
In Lithuania, following the opening of the first dual gauge track section between Mockava and Sestokai in August 2011, work on installing the same dual gauge from Sestokai to Kaunas has slowed in 2012 and this is a matter of concern. The Lithuanian administration cites environmental issues as the reason and difficulties with bridge crossings in the area. Nevertheless, if the aim of linking Kaunas with the UIC gauge by the end of 2015 is to be achieved then Lithuanian Railways (LG) must move forward with the upgrading work at a faster pace.

In Poland, the European Coordinator is happy with the positive attitude towards the project being shown by the administration and during the year the Coordinator had several productive meetings with the Under-Secretary responsible for railway infrastructure. In particular, the Coordinator appreciated the realistic approach of the administration towards the general reconstruction of the Polish rail network, including Rail Baltic.

3. The new direct higher speed 1 435 mm UIC gauge line - Rail Baltic


Early achievements in the year in question were the two declarations on the new line in the Baltic States.

On 10 November 2011, at a meeting in Tallinn attended by Vice-President Siim Kallas, the Prime Minister’s Council of the Baltic Council of Ministers issued a Joint Statement. Within a framework of wider cooperation in the field of transport, the Prime Ministers welcomed the Commission’s initiative to include the Rail Baltic corridor Tallinn-Pärnu-Riga-Kaunas-Warsaw in the pre-identified projects list of the Core Network (see below for details).

The Prime Ministers:
- "Declared the importance of finishing the preparatory phases and starting with the construction of the new Rail Baltic standard gauge (1,435 mm) railway line during the next EU Financial Framework 2014-2020;
- Agreed that a Joint Venture would be established between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania before the end of 2012 at the latest;
- Agreed to start spatial and regional planning; tasked their respective national authorities with preparing and implementing the necessary steps that the planning, including adjustments to routing solutions, must ensure real connections between the key nodes and that the new corridor should not only complement, but also leverage the existing transport infrastructure;
- Agreed that the EU financing for the project should be allocated outside the national cohesion fund envelopes and that the EU co-financing intensity should be around 85%;
Invited Poland to join in the full implementation of the new Rail Baltic corridor;
Reaffirmed the intent to finish the construction works and start preparations to operate interstate passenger trains on the existing railway infrastructure by 2016.

Finally the Prime Ministers authorised their respective Transport Ministers to agree a memorandum of mutual understanding at their meeting on 7 December 2011 in Tallinn.

3.2. Declaration of Intent of Baltic Transport Ministers 7 December 2011
This Declaration underlines the importance of the Tallinn-Warsaw corridor, and
• Agrees that coordination between Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland is crucial for full implementation of the new alignment of the project;
• The parties invite the EU Coordinator to launch immediately the negotiations to reach the agreement on coordination;
• Foresees the creation of a joint venture to focus on and speed up the implementation of the Rail Baltic project and agree that by 16 January 2012 Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania should appoint two representatives to a special Task Force;
• That this Task Force should decide upon the establishment of a Rail Baltic joint venture involving project stakeholders and work out detailed plans for a management structure, financial issues and the coordination of long and short work plans.

The document goes on to welcome the idea of a further study (co-financed with the EU under the current Financial Framework 2007-2013) to draft detailed documentation for the Rail Baltic joint venture to support the activities of the Task force. The Ministers also agreed that an inter-ministerial coordination group of Member States and EU representatives should be established to steer the planning process. Finally the Ministers declared that they wanted current upgrading work on the existing alignment to be finished by 2016 so that preparations to operate interstate passenger trains can be started.

3.3. The setting up of the Task Force and the inaugural meeting in Tallinn on 13 June 2012
Following the Declaration of Ministers, each country appointed representatives to form a special Task Force to oversee the project and to establish a Joint Venture.

The first meeting of the Task Force took place under Estonian Chairmanship in Tallinn on 13 June 2012 and was composed of delegations from all four partner countries. Following a general presentation by the Commission, the meeting went on to discuss a draft set of terms of reference for a study on setting up the Joint Venture, followed by a dialogue on the common principles for spatial planning and preparatory works. In the end three documents were adopted (with amendments).

These are:
• Terms of Reference for a Rail Baltic Joint Venture study (JVS)
• Common principles for a Rail Baltic 1435 mm railway Spatial and Territorial planning and preliminary design study (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) (STP)
• Protocol to the above agreed also with Poland

It was agreed at the meeting that the next step towards the realisation of the project would be to commission a study drawing on best practices to suggest the most appropriate structure for a joint venture structure that would manage at an international level the design, construction and putting into operation of the new line within the framework of the revised TEN-T guidelines and financing packages. An open tender would be launched to select a suitable consultant to draft such a study. It was agreed that Estonia would finance the JVS from existing TEN-T supported funds. It was also agreed that the Task Force would act as a Steering Committee for the contract and that the reports would be presented to the Task Force. Both the successful consultant and Commission representatives will take part in relevant meetings of the Task Force.

The meeting then agreed that the following step would be to lay down the common principles for the spatial and territorial planning and preliminary design – a sketch map - of the steps to take with suitable deadlines and timetabling (STP). This would be a major study which would carry the project forward up to 2015 and prepare the way for the
final technical design which is the last step before building work is carried out. A common agreement is crucial to provide the partner countries with a unitary framework and with the agreement of mutually ensured deliveries. The Latvian delegation presented additional technical comments dealing with the access of the new Rail Baltic line to the Riga area and these amendments were accepted by the Task Force.

A further text relating to Poland was also adopted. The Polish perspective on the preparatory works is different from the three Baltic States and this needs to be taken into account. The Polish representatives explained that the 1435 mm line up to the Lithuanian border will be reconstructed in sections with feasibility studies. The first stage of reconstruction will be undertaken with financial support from the Cohesion Fund for the existing 2007-2013 Financial Framework. The main focus will be on the line to Białystok. The development of the rest of the line to speeds in excess of 120 k/ph depends largely on the perspective presented by the Rail Baltic development. To determine these perspectives it is important for Poland to be part of the Rail Baltic development activities. For Poland, the advantage of the project is that it carries the possibility of modal shift from road to rail but higher speeds are required to create an effective freight corridor. It was agreed that by the next meeting of the Task Force there would be a draft of the formal procedures for discussion and this document would take account of the particular position of Poland.

In the accompanying text of the STP relating to Poland, it was agreed that Poland will develop the connecting Warszawa-Białystok-Elk-Suwałki-Trzińsk-LT border route. Poland will abide by the EU provisions relating to interoperability of the EU rail system. Also, the most feasible interstate border crossing points must be identified in each of the partner countries, including that at the border between Lithuania and Poland.

It was also proposed that there should be a ministerial meeting between the four Transport Ministers before the end of 2012 in order to reflect on project progress and if necessary to clarify any of the outstanding issues with the mandate of the Task Force.

A final issue discussed was the possible involvement of Finland in the Task Force as Finland has expressed both economic and political interest in the Rail Baltic project. It was agreed that Estonia would formally invite Finland to take part in the next meeting of the Task Force.

3.4. The second meeting of the Task Force in Warsaw on 14 September 2012

The second meeting was also chaired by Estonia and hosted by Poland at the headquarters of Polish Rail PKP. 24 representatives from Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Finland as well as from the European Commission and the TEN-T Agency attended.

The Polish delegation explained that all the Rail Baltic tracks in Poland will be upgraded from 120 to 160 km/h for passenger trains and all upgraded tracks will be electrified with a common 3 kV electric system. The preparation works will be planned for the next financial perspective because there are still some unsolved questions at local level. Problems in Masuria and the Rospuda valley were currently being addressed and decisions will be forthcoming following the preparatory works.

In the three Baltic States the next step is for two further studies. The first is for a study to propose the most suitable form of Joint Venture structure for Rail Baltic. There was a legal delay to the final decision on the appointment of the winning tenderer but the study should be finalised before Christmas 2012. The second study would be for spatial planning activities, environmental studies and site investigations where the main outcome expected of the contract is to be the full preliminary design of the railway by the end of 2015. The meeting felt that this schedule was tight, but possible. The Estonian delegation explained that for Estonia the tender announcement for the study for the thematic regional plans and the preliminary railway design was published on 9 August 2012. The study will cover the route from Tallinn to the border with Latvia through Pärnu. The substance of the tender is to find the best candidate for
the preparation of thematic county plans for counties where the line passes through, as well as the relevant detailed plans, strategic environmental assessment, environmental impact assessment, preliminary design of the railway and the preliminary designs of the railway-related buildings. The deadline for submitting a proposal under the tender is 4 October 2012. Financing will be covered by the Estonian government and the TEN-T.

The Latvian representative stated that the draft for the study tender is ready and the winner would be announced in September 2012. He assured that the work should be finished by the end of 2015, in accordance with the timeline. Estimated costs would be in the region of €1.5 million. This was felt to be rather a low figure for a study of such scope.

The Lithuanian delegation reported that it had divided the preliminary works procurements into three sections - environmental impact assessment, spatial planning and environmental assessment. The deadline to announce the tender is now April 2013. The work should be completed by the end of 2015. The preliminary design will be part of the technical design in Lithuania and the scope of the works will be presented in hard copy by the end of September 2012. Lithuania is planning to finance the project with finance from national sources and from the TEN-T and estimates the cost of preparatory works to be approximately €8 million.

3.5. Financing the two studies

The two studies will be financed by an amendment to the existing financing decisions for each country and in the case of Estonia and Latvia also an application for funding under the 2012 Annual Call.

Estonia has almost completed its modification proposals on the existing Decision, while Latvia is still working on some technical issues. Lithuania is almost ready with modifications and a first draft should be ready by the end of September. The TEN-T Agency representative pointed out that even if changes were proposed to the initial Decision then the original focus must remain. The European Commission presented the timetable for the Annual Call 2012. The application procedure (which is entirely online) is expected to open at the end of November 2012 and be closed by the end of February 2013. The information day is planned for 29 November. Decisions are expected to be announced during summer 2013. The Polish representative also stated that Poland will be asking for funding for freight corridors.

The port of Klaipeda, Lithuania - A Core Network Port connected to the Rail Baltic
4. TEN-T revision and the Connecting Europe Facility

On 19 October 2011, the Commission adopted a package of proposals, made up of the Connecting Europe Facility\(^3\), the revised TEN-T guidelines\(^4\) and a proposal to launch a pilot phase of the Project Bonds initiative\(^5\).

The TEN-T Network consists of two layers: a Core Network to be completed by 2030 and a comprehensive network feeding into this, to be completed by 2050. The comprehensive network will ensure full coverage of the EU and accessibility of all regions. The aim is to ensure that progressively, and by 2050, the majority of Europe's citizens and businesses will not need more than 30 minutes' travel time to access this comprehensive network. The Core Network will prioritise the most important links and nodes of the TEN-T. Both layers include all transport modes: road, rail, air, inland waterways and maritime transport, as well as intermodal platforms and ports.

The implementation of the Core Network will be facilitated using a corridor approach. Corridors will provide the basis for the coordinated development of infrastructure within the Core Network. Covering at least three modes, three Member States and two cross-border sections, these corridors will bring together the Member States concerned, as well as the relevant stakeholders, for example infrastructure managers and users. European Coordinators will manage the implementation and bring together all the stakeholders. Ten corridors were identified (see map).

The proposed new Rail Baltic will form the northern most section of the new Baltic – Adriatic Corridor. This Corridor will start in Helsinki/Tallinn and continue to Bologna and Ravenna via Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Austria. There will also be a branch from Warsaw to Gdansk on the Baltic Sea coast (see dark blue route on map).

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5. The Environment

It has always been made clear by the Coordinator that while rail provides intrinsic environmental improvement (sustainability, low carbon emission, small land purchase demand etc.) any new construction involving Rail Baltic should still have environmental considerations as a priority. Environmental impact assessments are in any case mandatory for all EU financed projects and all the partner countries must be aware of this.

In any event, Rail Baltic can be a main transporter of heavy freight, easing the environmental impact by taking freight off the region’s road network. The Commission and the Coordinator believe that the environmental element is vital to the development of a successful project.

Also the first of January 2015 will fundamentally change shipping costs in the Baltic Sea Region. Thereafter, vessels travelling in the Baltic Sea can only use bunkers with a content of 0.1% sulphur. This will bring millions of euros of extra costs for the Baltic Sea shipping. The time of cheap short sea shipping transport may be undergoing change and this will have an important effect on the use of rail in the Baltic region.

6. Stakeholders

6.1. The Rail Baltica Growth Corridor (RBGC)

2011-2012 was an active year for stakeholder activity in the project. Developments in the initiative of the Baltic Metropoles Network (which includes the cities of Helsinki, Tallinn, Kaunas, Białystok, Warsaw, Łódź, Poznan, Berlin and St. Petersburg) to create a Rail Baltic Growth Corridor continued throughout the period, culminating in a meeting in Vilnius on 24 November 2011 entitled “First Transnational Roundtable”. The group continues to help the project by publicising the benefits of the corridor and promoting its image, particularly in the major nodes such as Helsinki and Tallinn. The group’s research is part financed by the ERDF. The main theme of the meeting was EU transport policy perspectives in the light of the October 2011 announcements on the Core and Comprehensive networks. During the year 2011-2012 there were also RBGC meetings in Lodz and Saint-Petersburg relating to the RBGC extensions to the Rail Baltic axis.

The RBGC has created a cooperation platform - the Rail Baltica Transport Forum - to enhance interaction and policy dialogue between high-level decision makers in the field of transport and regional development within the Baltic Sea region. The Rail Baltica Transport Forum is working to create a Rail Baltic growth strategy, which communicates perspectives and challenges of transport and economic development, and gives direct input for local and regional development plans. The strategy strives to observe the needs of both the transport sector and customers in line with the Green Corridor principles. The RBGC invites cities, regions, transport sector, and ministries to build a common action plan to gain momentum for the introduction of a truly transnational, customer-friendly, effective and sustainable Rail Baltic connection.

6.2. The Baltic-Adriatic Corridor-Connecting Europe and beyond

This meeting on 6 December 2011 was the first session of a new parliamentary stakeholder support group to promote the new Baltic-Adriatic Corridor. It was organised by a group of MEPs from the EPP and PSE groups and speakers included members from Italy, Austria, Estonia, Poland and the Czech Republic. The aim of the meeting was to highlight the significant importance of the Baltic-Adriatic Corridor for the European economy and competitiveness.

6.3. The European Parliament’s Baltic Region Intergroup

Chaired by Latvian MEP Robert Zile, this group brings together Baltic State MEPs and others interested in the development of the region. The Group held a meeting in 2012 to discuss the 2011 Feasibility Study for the new 1435 mm Rail Baltic line.

6.4. The Baltic-Adriatic Axis (BAA)

The Baltic-Adriatic Axis was formed in October 2006, when the transport Ministers of Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria and Italy signed a Letter of Intent on the development of a Baltic-Adriatic Transport Corridor, suggesting a prolongation of PP23 and PP25 to northern Italy. The Baltic-Adriatic Transport Corridor should connect Gdańsk via Warszawa with Bologna at the most southerly point, including branches via Ostrava/Brno or Zilina/Bratislava to Vienna and passing by Graz, Klagenfurt, Villach and Udine with another branch to Trieste. It will connect at the northern end in Warsaw with the proposed new Rail Baltic line forming the Baltic-Adriatic Corridor.
7. Activities of the European Coordinator
During the period under review the Coordinator made seven visits to the four partner countries. During this period, he had discussions with the Prime Minister and Transport Minister of Lithuania, the Transport Ministers of Estonia and Latvia and with two Undersecretaries of State from Poland. He also attended the TEN-T days in Antwerp and the EIB Conference in Vienna on the Eastern Partnership for Growth.

8. Work objectives for 2012-2013
The main objectives for the next year will be
- Help coordinate the work of the Rail Baltic Task Force,
- Monitor the on-going reconstruction work on the existing alignment in Latvia and Lithuania in an effort to ensure completion by the end of 2015,
- Act as an interface between the EU institutions and the partner countries in the continuing discussions in Brussels on the revised TEN-T guidelines and the Connecting Europe Facility.

9. Conclusions and recommendations
In general, the Coordinator is satisfied with the progress made this year and in particular with the transition of the partner countries’ emphasis from the reconstruction of the existing 1,520 mm alignment to planning the new higher speed 1435 mm project. The partner countries have taken a pragmatic approach in setting up the Task Force to oversee the planning stage and organise the various tenders for the Joint Venture Authority and the Spatial and Territorial Planning studies which are the crucial next steps towards final realisation of the project.

There also seems to be general support for the corridor concept created by the new structure which will extend across national boundaries and be truly international in character. The corridors will also be very long and link all of Europe. The Rail Baltic corridor will now form the northern section of the Baltic-Adriatic Corridor, linking Helsinki/Tallinn with Venice, Bologna and Ravenna via Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria and Slovakia.

As far as the work to upgrade the existing alignment is concerned, in Estonia the work is virtually complete. In Latvia, the Coordinator hopes that authorities will be able to catch up on the two year break in the work caused by the economic crisis, so that the average operating speed of 120 km/h can be achieved by 2014-15. In Lithuania, it is hoped that the work to install the dual gauge sections from the Polish border to Kaunas can be speeded up with the same aim in view. In Poland, the Coordinator is encouraged by the positive attitude of the Polish authorities towards the project.
Priority Project 27

“Rail Baltica”/“Rail Baltic” axis Warszawa-Kaunas-Riga-Tallinn-Helsinki

Completed: Upgrading existing line
Completed in 2011
Works ongoing
Works to start between 2012 and 2013
Works to start after 2013

Trans-European transport network. Achievement of the Priority projects
## Ongoing and completed projects financed by the 2007-2013 TEN-T Programme
(TEN-T support figures refer to the initially adopted Decision)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>Member State(s)</th>
<th>TEN-T Support (in million)</th>
<th>Project Status</th>
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<tr>
<td>Building of new European gauge line on the cross-border section PL border - Marijampole 2) cross-border section Siauliai - LV border. Reconstruction/Upgrading</td>
<td>LT</td>
<td>€72.8</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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<td>Reconstruction/upgrading; cross-border section north Valmeira - Valka abd cross-border section south Jelgava - LT border. 2) Reconstruction/upgrading Jugla (Riga city border station) - Valmiera</td>
<td>LV</td>
<td>€22.3</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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<td>Studies for Rail Baltica, Lithuanian part: a)section PL border - Marijampole in European Gauge; b) Improvement of existing line; c)contribution to global Rail Baltica study for European Gauge</td>
<td>LT</td>
<td>€16.1</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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<td>Cross-border section Tartu - Valga railway reconstruction/upgrading</td>
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<td>€10.8</td>
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<td>Studies for a European gauge line (Latvian section)</td>
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<td>Studies for a European gauge line for Rail Baltica (Estonian section)</td>
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<td>€1</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>€124.1</strong></td>
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### Completion status of works (km)
Total length = 1,129 km

- 458 km (41%) Completed by the end of 2010
- 498 km (44%) Completed in 2011
- 488 km (44%) Ongoing
- 174 km (15%) To start between 2012-2013
- 0% Timetable: To start after 2013
Data cut-off: 31 October 2012 (please note that this report does not contain any financial data)

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