European Committee of the Regions

Network of Regional Hubs for EU Policy Implementation Review

# 21st Century Rules for 21st Century Infrastructure

## Overcoming obstacles to transport, digital, and green infrastructure deployment

RegHub special report on

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*Overcoming obstacles to transport, digital, and green infrastructure deployment*

*This report does not represent the opinion of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) or its members. The CoR's Subsidiarity Steering Group has approved the content of this report on 11 April 2022.*

# Contents

# 1 Key messages

These key messages are drawn from a special consultation on the obstacles local and regional administrations encounter during the rollout of infrastructure projects. It was organised by the European Committee of the Regions' Regional Hubs Network, following a special request of European Commission Vice-President and Chair of the Fit for Future Platform, Maroš Šefčovič. The consultation consisted of two phases and was conducted in the spring and autumn of 2021.

***Transport infrastructure***

In general, the local and regional authorities that are part of the Network of Regional Hubs support the objectives of the EU's Smart and Sustainable Mobility Strategy, and they highlight their importance for regions and cities, however they also highlight the following:

- Infrastructure investments need to be more targeted to avoid disparities between regional railway infrastructure and mainline networks.
- Legal certainty regarding the notion of State aid for TEN-T infrastructure operators should be increased by clarifying core concepts and checklists.
- State aid is essential for facilitating **infrastructure investments in regional rail networks** such as intermodal terminals, energy distribution infrastructure, (development of) digital systems for integrated and intermodal journey planning and freight distribution, and smart urban logistics.
- In general, the Hubs perceive the application of the current **State aid rules** as not optimal for the co-funding, operation and further development of public recharging infrastructure; the Hubs state that a future review should consider **investment costs** to be eligible for public support. In this context, it should be noted that after the Hubs had answered to this consultation, the European Commission adopted its Guidelines on State aid for climate, environmental protection and energy (CEEAG), which include rules for aiding investments in alternative fuels refuelling and recharging infrastructure. Their effect on fostering recharging infrastructure deployment may be subject to a future implementation review.
- The realisation of the TEN-T core and comprehensive networks suffers from missing links, particularly in **cross-border areas**, which are often not prioritised at national level. Increased funding for the comprehensive network, as well as an EU approach to cross-border links would improve connections with rural and peripheral regions.
- Non-rail transport, including cycling infrastructure should be included in TEN-T and hence be eligible for co-funding from the CEF.

- **Intermodal and small-scale infrastructure projects for freight and passenger transport** are crucial for the mobility transition and their rollout should be supported by making them more accessible to public funding.
- The introduction of direct approvals by the European Rail Agency (ERA) requires an increased ERA efficiency and capacity; in the meantime, an extension of the validity of existing safety certificates and vehicle authorisations – if underpinned by an approved Safety Management System (SMS) – can reduce delays.
- A better inclusion of local and regional authorities in the corridor planning, development and management is needed and must be reflected in governance structures; the role of European corridor coordinators should be strengthened; direct communication between the ERA and local and regional authorities should be enabled.

***Green infrastructure and EU environmental law***

Environmental assessment policies are generally appreciated by the Hubs, because they often reduce the overall environmental impact implied by infrastructure projects. However, the following should be taken into account if environmental assessment and infrastructure planning are to go hand in hand:

- Frequent changes of documents relating to the implementation of **the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (EIA) and the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (SEA)**, create uncertainty and increase administrative burden. Such changes may occur at the national or at the regional level, when legislation and guidelines are transposed in their respective context. Furthermore, reducing information requirements under the EIA and SEA Directives, to what is really useful (e.g. a detailed project description for EIA) could help to lighten administrative burden. To reduce delays and duplication, only the most directly involved authorities should be targeted.
- **Plan and programme monitoring** under the SEA Directive are perceived to be too burdensome for small local and regional authorities; funding allocated to the digitisation of plans, the development of monitoring platforms and training for municipal staff would facilitate good and effective monitoring.
- There is a **lack of awareness of the Commission's EIA/SEA and** green infrastructure **guidance documents** among local and regional public administrations and they are not specific enough to meet the level of information required for the cases dealt with by the Hubs. The Commission and the Member States therefore have to step up their efforts to better disseminate them and better take into account the perspective of local and regional authorities in future revisions.
- The Hubs consider the Commission's **'one-in-one-out approach'** a chance to lighten administrative burden and simplify legislation by avoiding duplication and inconsistencies, **if**

**certain conditions are met**: an up-to-date overview of existing burdens, environmental standards that build up on each another, no watering down of environmental standards and a case-by-case assessment.[1]

- **Proper implementation monitoring of EU law, supported by control and monitoring experts,** can be an essential element to reduce administrative burden relating to environmental assessments at the level of managing authorities of EU funds. Despite the useful guidelines published by the Commission, these authorities are sometimes overwhelmed by their responsibility to check the compliance of projects and should therefore receive additional support to acquire the necessary skills and (legal) knowledge, i.a. through training of staff, early inventories and planning.

***Digital infrastructure***

The current rules on provision of State aid for deployment of non-terrestrial (fixed wireless) connections are well-functioning and the current revision of GBER and Broadband Guidelines is a step in the right direction. The following improvements could further accelerate the rollout of broadband infrastructure:

- In light of recent adjustments, in particular the recent revision of the GBER and the ongoing revision of the Broadband Guidelines, **additional simplification and clarification of State aid rules** are still needed.
- Bearing in mind the specification of rules of aid for broadband infrastructures, introducing threshold speeds for alternative types of investment through the amended Article 52 GBER, **further clarification of minimum reliable download speed in the revised Broadband Guidelines is desirable**.
- The interoperability **of ledgers needs to be improved** also in the areas such as transport and energy management and **a close interconnection of all public registers** is required as well.

***Public acceptance***

Public acceptance and public participation are an important factor when it comes to infrastructure projects: they hinder or accelerate a project. In the past, the Commission has already highlighted the potential role of local and regional authorities in better regulation, including in consultations. The Hubs voice observations across the three policy areas above. Among them:

- Successful public participation requires early provision of comprehensive, user-friendly, easily accessible and detailed information and participation mechanisms.

[1] It should be noted that the Commission's Communication provides that the approach should not be applied mechanically.

- It is important to raise awareness about the benefits and cost-effectiveness of infrastructure projects.
- A better involvement of local and regional authorities in infrastructure development and rollout is required, in particular when the deployed technologies (e.g. 5G) are controversial and/or rejected by parts of the public.
- A systematic exchange of good practices between public authorities, can improve their approach to public participation and project planning and ultimately increase the public acceptance of controversial projects.

# 2 Introduction

## 2.1 The Network of Regional Hubs

Since the launch of its pilot phase in 2019, the **European Committee of the Region's Network of Regional Hubs** (RegHub) has come a long way. It has published numerous reports on the implementation of several policy areas that matter to Europe's regions and cities. These reports contain relevant granular data that has proven to be very useful for the Committee's policy work. This data is collected thanks to the Network's unique consultation method: a group of 46 public officials working in local and regional administrations, spread out over 19 Member States, reach out to stakeholders who implement EU law on a daily basis and can thus give relevant feedback that is based on their 'user experience'.

After a positive evaluation of the Network's achievements, the Committee has decided to mainstream it in 2021 (RegHub 2.0). Today the Network consists of 46 members, represented by contact points in their local and regional administrations, 10 observers and 1 associate.

Over the years the value of RegHub's consultations and reports have also been acknowledged by the Committee's institutional counterparts, including the European Commission. This has led RegHub to becoming a standing subgroup of the **Commission's Fit for Future Platform** (F4F) in 2021.

## 2.2 A special report on infrastructure

In addition to its contributions to the F4F Opinions, the F4F Chair, Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič, has requested RegHub to produce a **special report on the obstacles local and regional administrations encounter during the rollout of infrastructure projects**. The Regional Hubs took up this opportunity and have risen up to the challenge.

Obstacles to infrastructure projects is clearly a very important and topical subject. Indeed, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the EU has mobilised previously unseen financial resources to boost its infrastructure and to pave the way for the green and digital transitions. Regions and cities are at the forefront of infrastructure deployment. The Regional Hubs are therefore well placed to identify bottlenecks that slow down, hamper or even put a halt to infrastructure projects that are meant to make a real difference on the ground. That is why the Regional Hubs have been very keen to help translate the EU's ambitions into reality for their cities and regions.

In order to identify those infrastructure projects that matter most to the Hubs' territories, we have conducted a **first consultation in the spring of 2021**. The Hubs were asked to highlight the types of infrastructure that are key for their cities' and their regions' development and we asked them which EU laws strongly affect the rollout of that infrastructure.

Based on the results of that first consultation and on subsequent meetings with the Hubs over the summer, a **second consultation round took place in the autumn of 2021**. The purpose of this second phase of the consultation was to dig deeper into issues related to **transport infrastructure, broadband deployment as well as environmental impact assessments and green infrastructure**. In these areas we have questioned the Hubs on the relevant parts of the EU legal framework that governs certain aspects of the aforementioned infrastructure projects.

The Hubs and their stakeholders have not only highlighted barriers that should be addressed according to their experience, but they have also put forward possible solutions and identified many opportunities to improve the implementation of EU rules in the infrastructure sector.

As was suggested by Commission Vice President Šefčovič, special attention was given to the issue of **public acceptance**. The Hubs were asked how this aspect of public infrastructure projects is handled in their territories and what ideas they wanted to share on this element, which is crucial for infrastructure development.

This report will be presented to Vice President Šefčovič and shared with the F4F members, but we hope this will not be the endpoint of our work. On the contrary, the purpose of this report is to be the **starting point of an intense dialogue** between the Committee and the Commission as well as other (institutional) actors. The aim of that dialogue is obvious: to speed up and increase the efficiency of the rollout of infrastructure that will be necessary for achieving the green and digital transitions. In that quest, the Regional Hubs, the Committee and the Commission can become close partners and this report can help facilitate that partnership.

# 3 Analysis

## 3.1 Transport infrastructure

This chapter analyses the Regional Hubs' answers to the transport questions of the consultation, focusing on their experience while implementing transport infrastructure at the local and regional level. It touches upon railway interoperability, network planning and co-financing, as well as the interaction between the green transition and mobility.

The legislation contained in the 4th Railway Package aims to remove the remaining barriers to the creation of a single European rail area. The main objective of its "technical pillar" is to improve the interoperability and safety of European rail. This covers the reduction of administrative burden and of procedural costs for operators and manufacturers as well as the establishment of the European Railway Agency (ERA) as one-stop-shop for authorisation and monitoring and for the development of the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS).

The "market pillar", on the other hand, concerns the governance structure and provisions for the opening-up of the passenger market. It aims to strengthen the infrastructure managers' role and independence as well as the harmonisation of safety and operation standards of rail networks. Since the end of 2019, its most important innovation has been to open the domestic passenger market to railway operators across the EU. According to the Commission, the resulting competitive pressure should lead to better service quality and higher train frequency.

***Railway interoperability***

*Question 1: Which of the legislative acts, belonging to the technical pillar of the fourth rail package are hindering or having a negative impact on local/regional infrastructure development and rail transport? Please explain how and why.*

Several Hubs comment on the risk of **increasing divergence** between parts of rail networks falling within the scope of the 4th Railway Package, and regional rail lines, falling outside of it. Some Hubs provide suggestions for increasing the financial support for upgrading regional rail infrastructure and to avoid significant disparities in rail safety standards across the infrastructure of a given Member State.[2]

The Hubs mention the impact over time of the **more advanced and harmonised technical standards** for mainline rail networks on the availability of less technically advanced components required for regional rail lines. The Community of Madrid emphasises in this regard that the harmonisation of European rail management systems towards the implementation of the European Rail Traffic

[2] Murcia, Community of Madrid.

Management System (ERTMS) excludes local public transport systems from its scope. These local systems continue to run on a diversity of less-advanced components, which – given their decreasing share on the demand side – lose their competitiveness vis-à-vis mainline rail networks. This may eventually lead to a reduction of supply of those components, indirectly penalising local public transport systems for their non-standardised safety certificates.

Difficulties are also highlighted in relation to the **priority accorded to freight traffic** on certain corridors. This places restrictions on the development of regional and suburban rail services.

Some Hubs point to the need for a more precise **definition of "regional railway"** (as used in Regulation 1315/2013 – Guidelines on the development of the TEN-T). The Bodensee Hub states that a more precise definition of "regional railway" is desirable in order better distinguish exemptions from the scope of application. Therefore, Hub suggests to add specifications, e.g. in the TEN-T Regulation. Emilia-Romagna, in this regard, points to problems arising from industrial tracks and sidings falling outside the scope of the Safety Directive, while the approval process for public sponsors is negatively influenced by the Safety and the Interoperability Directives (Directives (EU) 2016/798 and (EU) 2016/797), namely through delays induced by change in documentation requirements for vehicle and infrastructure certification. It suggests to extend the scope of the Safety Directive to include private/industrial tracks and sidings. Also according to the Hub, the issuance of authorisations for entry into service is sometimes considerably delayed, due to an inflexible documentation process for amendments.

In the context of **sustainable urban development**, several Hubs highlight the need to **relocate existing passenger stations and particularly freight terminals** outside dense urban areas, or to build such facilities where none exist at present. Such relocation is considered indispensable to improve interconnectivity within and between territories, where network coverage is fragmented at present. At the same time, such (relocation) construction measures involve many actors and affect the local economic structure, which requires planning to be very timely and agile.[3] According to those Hubs, these requirements are currently not sufficiently taken into account by the provisions of the 4th Railway Package.[4]

Some Hubs also comment on the **market pillar**, in particular the opening-up of European passenger markets and the mandatory tendering of public service contracts. Some Hubs consider that it poses fundamental challenges to the operation of customer-oriented regional rail services. One stakeholder from Brandenburg raises his concern about any further liberalisation of the regional railway sector. Based on his experience, he fears that the introduction of competition in the regional railway sector

[3] Barcelona Provincial Council.

[4] Thessaly.

could risk pushing operators to make significant compromises on safety and working conditions. Brittany indicates in this regard that it has delayed the opening up of regional services to competition in order to ensure that the lowest possible prices for passengers are maintained. The Hub further mentions **difficulties experienced in mobilising EU funds** to support certain rail projects.

The Hubs put forward several suggestions to improve the above-mentioned problems arising from the implementation of the technical pillar of the 4th Railway Package.

The Community of Madrid suggests introducing mechanisms to guard against mainline rail networks having a dominant influence on the **rail supply market** to the detriment of local and regional networks, which operate with less advanced and more diverse technical standards.

It appears that peripheral and lesser-connected regions should benefit more fully from the **digital transition** in the railway sector. To achieve this, Hubs referred to the need to increase direct communication between the ERA and local and regional authorities, for instance through the creation of a 'Digital Rail Interoperability Platform' at EU-level to ensure a strong three-way cooperation between regions, service providers and EU regulators.

On the market pillar, Brandenburg voices that the introduction of competition in the regional railway sector can impede the re-allocation of rail services in accordance with the goal of encouraging a modal shift in passenger transport. To avoid this, Brandenburg suggests that **more direct awards should be allowed** as well as the prioritisation of certain passenger rail services that may not be considered economically viable, but which could play a crucial role in responding to demand and in encouraging a modal shift in the passenger sector from cars to public transport.

Several Hubs emphasise the strategic importance of the **internalisation of the external costs** of transport: If externalities of other transport modes were incorporated into their costs, this would create a level playing field between rail and those transport modes, which may in turn help make rail a more attractive investment prospect for certain public authorities. Others underlined the need for provisions to place greater emphasis on rail interconnections and compatibility with other transport modes in the context of **multimodal travel**.[5]

*Question 2: What have been the effects of the establishment of the European Union Agency for Railways in your experience to date?*

While recognising the benefits of a single certification system for interoperability and application of uniform standards across the EU, several Hubs report that the introduction of direct **ERA approvals** (i.e. for safety certificates, trackside approvals, vehicle authorisations) has increased processing time

[5] Thessaly, Brandenburg

for applications, leading to long delays, as well as increased administrative burden[6]. In addition, some point to very long processing times by **National Safety Authorities (NSAs),** e.g. if a submission of amended or additional documents results in procedures having to be repeated.

In order to increase the ERA's efficiency, Hubs put forward the following suggestions:

Alentejo considers that an **extension of the validity of existing safety certificates and vehicle authorisations** until the ERA has reinforced its capacity in relation to its new competences for processing approvals, would allow regions to timely invest in and build up the transport infrastructure needed to make the modal shift from road to rail.

Emilia-Romagna suggests introducing reduced processing times as a rule in certain cases, for example for those authorisations which are essentially renewals or not particularly innovative and where an applicant's safety authorisation or safety certificate is underpinned by an **approved SMS** (Safety Management System).

The idea to create a 'Digital Rail Interoperability Platform' at EU-level for interoperability between governance levels highlights the **possible need for a dedicated IT platform**. Such a platform would allow e.g. to centralise applications, facilitate addressing cross-border questions, etc.

Some Hubs further request more **direct cooperation between ERA and local and regional (transport) authorities** as an essential prerequisite, going beyond the current mandatory public information provision.[7]

***Transport infrastructure network planning and co-financing***

*Question 3: Is your region/city sufficiently involved in network planning and in corridor development (for CEF core network corridors)?*

While the Member States are the principal entities in charge of creating and maintaining infrastructure, according to the Regulation on TEN-T development, "the interests of regional and local authorities, as well as those of local civil society affected by a project of common interest, should be appropriately taken into account in the planning and construction phase of projects."

The Hubs are rather positive when answering the question on local and regional involvement in railway projects, confirming that in general the local and regional level is involved in network planning and development. However, the Hubs consider there is room for improvement, especially when it comes to the corridor management.

[6] Bodensee Hub, Emilia-Romagna.

[7] Alentejo, Community of Madrid.

One example put forward by Brittany is that peripheral/maritime regions without a core-network corridor cannot be observers in the core network corridors to which they have the closest connection. In the case of Brittany, this, however, is important for the region because its hinterland and short-sea shipping connections depend on the core network corridor. The Hub further calls into question the tendency of the corridor network to concentrate transport flows and thereby increasing the vulnerability of transport networks and ultimately the single market. In its view, maritime transport could be a means to relief highly-frequented transport axes and make the network more resilient to external shocks.

Several Hubs call for a better inclusion of local and regional authorities in the corridor planning, development and management that must be reflected in the governance structure. They underline the need to make available all relevant information and involve local and regional authorities more closely. The Community of Madrid suggests to communicate with local and regional authorities beyond mandatory public information, in order to create the political will needed at the administrative level to develop the TEN-T network. Thessaly underlines the need for strengthening of the role of the European corridor coordinators, which it believes address the lack of involvement of the local and regional level.

*Question 4: What are the main requirements, from the local/regional perspective, for accelerating the realisation of the TEN-T network, especially the comprehensive network? Are there any procedures that could be improved or simplified at EU level?*

There is broad agreement among the Hubs that missing cross-border connections and the lack of prioritisation for the comprehensive network are the biggest obstacles to the development of the TEN-T network.[8]

According to the Bodensee Hub, cross-border routes are particularly demanding because their implementation is more difficult due to diverging national transport policy objectives, and a diversity of actors and methods involved. In this regard, the EU should play a more active role to facilitate the coordination of cross-border connections and provide financial incentives.

Brittany and Alentejo have also underlined the need to better connect peripheral and less-developed regions to the TEN-T core network corridors in order to achieve a higher level of diversity in transport, create more job opportunities and provide better connectivity to citizens in remote areas. In this regard, a more active role of the EU in cross-border connections, especially in the comprehensive network, has been demanded by some Hubs.[9] Another impediment for cross-border connections seems to be the lack of a concrete political will at the national level to remove these bottlenecks and the missing communication across all levels. To this end, Brandenburg and the Community of Madrid emphasise the need for transparency and better communication with local and regional authorities and all entities

[8] Baden-Württemberg, Brittany, Community of Valencia, Alentejo, Bodensee Hub.

[9] Bodensee Hub, Brittany.

involved. This would foster political will as an impetus for infrastructure development at the administrative level.

Concerning the lack of prioritisation for the comprehensive network vis-à-vis the core network, many Hubs underline that traffic must not ne centralised in the main corridors, because such centralisation disadvantages peripheral and remote regions.[10] Several Hubs are thus in favour of more opportunities for transport projects, which are connected to the TEN-T network, but not directly to the specified roads. Moreover, they highlight the need for better co-financing and funding of the comprehensive network. Timiș County Council, for example, points out that in Romania only the main railway lines along the IV corridor receive funding, and that smaller networks can therefore not be developed and modernised.

Another often cited aspect is that the last-mile connection, both for passenger and freight, that should be a priority, together with multi-modal (freight) terminals close to nodes of the TEN-T network.[11]

The administrative burden in the process of co-financing from the EU has been noted by some Hubs. Especially the application process for the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) is burdensome and the follow-up process of co-funded projects is considered too detailed. Brittany in this regard, underlined that the requirement for Member State validation of each CEF application is another problem as it adds uncertainty and an additional administrative layer for applicants. It suggests to replace Member State validation of candidate dossiers by an obligation to inform. This would provide project proponents with more time to prepare their application and it would reinforce pan-European transport network planning.

Umbria highlights another issue, which has been raised by the Technical Aid Coordination of the Italian Conference of the Regions: legal uncertainty regarding the notion of State aid for infrastructure, including the TEN-T infrastructure. To improve certainty in this context, the following concepts should be clearer and infrastructure checklists should be updated accordingly:

- State resources and discretion of the Member States in the financing of such infrastructure;
- Economic activity versus public strategic infrastructure (conditions);
- Impact on exchange between Member States versus strategic infrastructure of European interest.

*Question 5: Do the TEN-T regulation's eligibility criteria for co-financing sufficiently reflect all components of the transport chain and all transport modes (e.g. ports and ports infrastructure, which are crucial for maritime regions)?*

There is no clear indication whether this is a problem for the Hubs as the positive and negative replies were distributed very evenly. Also in terms of eligible infrastructure, there are differences in the

[10] Alentejo, Brittany, Emilia-Romagna, Bodensee Hub, Community of Valencia.

[11] Community of Madrid, Alentejo, Baden-Württemberg

infrastructure development in the various Hubs. Some Hubs, for example, deplore the concentration of funding on road projects, while others underline the need for more funding for road infrastructure.

Concerning eligibility for co-financing, a number of Hubs underline again that too much of European co-financing is reserved for the core network.[12] By only developing the long-distance core network, there is a risk that some regions are left out and become mere transit regions due to missing local and regional connections.

For maritime and port infrastructure, regions like Brittany, with comprehensive network ports, underline that the priority for funding of the core network widens the gap between the bigger ports that are already commercially successful and the smaller ones (comprehensive network ports). This is because even more funding is allocated to the core network ports, while the comprehensive network ports receive less funding, but still have to comply with TEN-T infrastructure requirements and to adapt to new environmental rules. Moreover, Brittany points to the need to accelerate the transition of ships and equipment solutions in synergy with that of infrastructure, because otherwise, EU transition objectives will not be achieved. To this end, the Hub calls for new funding opportunities for the adaptation of ships to more energy-efficient transport modes. Furthermore, applicable sectoral regulations (in particular for fishing vessels and fishing harbours) should be updated accordingly.

Murcia adds in this regard that the limited funding for motorways of the sea also does not help the TEN-T ports, since the references to port infrastructure are not sufficient.

Finally, the demand to include cycling infrastructure in the TEN-T (and therefore in the eligibly for co-funding from the CEF), is voiced by Umbria and Emilia-Romagna. According to them, even good rail connections along TEN-T lines are insufficient if they are not integrated with local public non-rail transport and the European, national and local cycle road system. To make TEN-T resources accessible also to these infrastructures, would enhance the interchange nodes and it would further promote and facilitate the shift from the road to more sustainable transport modes.

*Question 6: Are the reporting requirements for the EU funds associated with the TEN-T, notably the centrally managed Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), adequate?*

The majority of Hubs is apparently not directly involved in the progress reporting on co-funded projects and only the Bodensee Hub noted that too much detail is required and too much focus is put on co-funded action rather than the progress of the overall project.

[12] Emilia-Romagna, Friuli Venezia Giulia.

***Green transition and mobility***

*Question 7: Are there any specific areas linked to the mobility transition at local and regional level where you consider State aid is likely to be essential to deliver the objectives of the EU's Smart and Sustainable Mobility Strategy (i.e. objectives re. alternative fuels infrastructure, shift to rail, clean buses, etc.)? If so, please specify the areas.*

The Hubs' replies to this answer covers a variety of aspects and areas, which are closely linked to achieving the objectives of the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy (SSMS). Overall the Hubs agree with and support these objectives as well as the framework they provide for the mobility transition. The respondents also agree that the establishment of the necessary infrastructure requires major public intervention. According to Friuli Venezia Giulia, the European Commission's proposals regarding the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER), including articles on State aid for recharging or refuelling infrastructure and the purchase of 'clean' or zero-emission vehicles, is a first yet insufficient step. In particular, the Hub points to the ban on financing adaptation to standards already in force and the incremental calculation method, which it considers to limit aid and thereby jeopardise Green Deal objectives.[13]

Almost all replies mention alternative fuels (refuelling) infrastructure and recharging infrastructure as a key area requiring State aid to deliver on the SSMS. Several Hubs in particular underlined that for rural and peripheral regions it will not be feasible to finance such infrastructure from private sources since there will be a low investment interest in areas were few people live.[14]

All Hubs agree that public transport needs to be made more attractive and a number of them underline that the Clean Vehicles Directive will require substantial State aid to allow operators to comply with the targets.[15] In connection with heavy-duty vehicles, some Hubs underline that investment into technologies will only be made if they are mature enough and if the relevant refuelling infrastructure is in place and maintained. The limitation of some funds to electric and hydrogen technologies only will not make other alternative fuels markets ready to contribute to/participate in the expansion of refuelling infrastructure needed to support the transition to smart mobility and substantial emission reductions.[16] In this context, Baden-Württemberg adds that the conversion into lower-emission e-vehicles and hydrogen vehicles will need even more support and commitment in the future, otherwise the relevant stakeholders (e.g. bus companies or municipalities) will not be able to make the fundamental decision

[13] It needs to be flagged in this context, that the European Commission only recently adopted the Guidelines on State aid for climate, environmental protection and energy (CEEAG), including rules for aiding investments in alternative fuels refuelling and recharging infrastructure. Their effect on fostering recharging infrastructure deployment may be subject to a future implementation review.

[14] Alentejo, Community of Madrid, Brandenburg, Baden-Württemberg, Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen.

[15] E.g. Brandenburg.

[16] Catalonia, Baden-Württemberg.

to convert their vehicle fleets. Public refuelling stations currently do not have enough return on investment and would need public support according to some respondents. The Barcelona Provincial Council further states that public support to develop vehicle charging infrastructure in less densely populated areas is needed, because they are required for trips with zero-emission vehicles.

Italy, unlike Germany, does not yet have legislation approved by the EU for the allocation of subsidies for the construction of public recharging infrastructure. Thus, undertakings are not allowed to receive support above the de minimis regime. According to the Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen, this is an issue that should be solved between the state and the EU and which has so far undoubtedly hampered the construction of charging stations.

According to most Hubs, there is a need for substantial State aid to deliver on the EU's ambitious **shift to rail objectives at local and regional level**. Several Hubs point to the need for State aid support to ensure **adequate energy provision installations**, including:

- full electrification of the rail network and storage[17];
- infrastructure for recharging and refuelling stations for hydrogen-operated trains;[18]
- bidirectional charging infrastructure (vehicle-to-grid) ;[19]
- deployment of renewable energy systems (including for use in stations).[20]

Thessaly further suggests supporting the generation of alternative forms of energy, such as biomass made from agricultural residues and livestock manure. In the municipalities of the Thessaly region, the agri-food sector is a key economic pillar and could generate fuel for public transport vehicles across the region.

Other Hubs comment on the essential nature of State aid to enable the **intended levels of modal shift from road to rail/water-borne modes**.[21] Examples cited include:

- support for the construction of rail terminals for redirecting freight traffic from road to rail;
- **improving inter-modality** by investing in connections between hinterland rail networks and ports; [22]
- and developing digital data exchange systems for tracking and tracing in the freight sector.[23]

[17] Thessaly, Bodensee Hub.
[18] Bodensee Hub, Mazovia.
[19] Thessaly.
[20] Community of Madrid.
[21] Emilia-Romagna, Vukovar-Srijem.
[22] Community of Valencia, Brittany.
[23] Emilia-Romagna, Mazovia.

In the passenger transport sector, areas where State aid is considered necessary include the promotion of inter-modality with other transport modes and the development of integrated information systems (connections between passenger transport, bike-sharing schemes, etc.).[24]

State aid support is also considered necessary to maintain and increase **network capacity**, for ensuring that essential sidings/connecting tracks are retained, and for the rapid replacement of single-track lines with double-tracks in order to increase capacity between smaller towns in rural areas and urban centres in particular.[25] Some also referred to the need to support the adaptation of rolling stock to facilitate carriage of wheelchairs, bikes and scooters.[26]

Another area where many Hubs consider public support will be needed for the transition to sustainable mobility is the upgrade and construction of **multi-modal interchange terminals** for passenger transport.[27] Several Hubs also mention freight, i.a. the development of combined transport terminals.[28] Brandenburg refers notably to improved interconnections between rail services and other passenger transport modes) while Thessaly specifies that these include micro-mobility networks and active mobility, such as cycling and walking, for first and last mile services. Priority should therefore be given to low-nuisance transport like low-traffic roads, pavements and cycling lanes.

For **urban nodes**, public support will be required for logistics centres and smart coordination of good flows in order to cope with rapidly increasing e-commerce volumes and to avoid profusion of unregulated urban delivery services.[29] Some Hubs comment on the pertinence of earmarking revenue from charges levied on delivery services and other road users in urban areas for investments in urban sustainable mobility systems.[30] The need for public support for providing collective transport services as feeder services capable of offering genuine alternatives to private cars in less densely populated areas, as well as in more remote and rural areas is also highlighted.[31]

Concerning both the passenger and freight transport sectors, several Hubs comment on the need for State aid for the **development of digital systems and the use of Internet of Things (IoT)**, including for example the interconnection of transport infrastructure and smart city applications, which enable digital customer services and an integrated management of maintenance.[32] In this context, the Barcelona Provincial Council considers it crucial to **enhance open data generation mechanisms**, which are

[24] Thessaly, Umbria.
[25] Baden-Württemberg, Umbria.
[26] E.g. Umbria.
[27] Barcelona Provincial Council Baden-Württemberg, Umbria.
[28] Baden-Württemberg, Umbria.
[29] North-Rhine Westphalia, Barcelona Provincial Council.
[30] E.g. Barcelona Provincial Council
[31] Vukovar-Srijem, Barcelona Provincial Council.
[32] Thessaly, Community of Madrid, Umbria.

accessible for public administrations, in order to take full advantage of existing data (e.g. telephony, GPS etc.). Moreover, in order to achieve a harmonised mobility system, these data must be standardised at EU level.

*Question 8: Have you encountered any practical difficulties in relation to the use of State aid to support investments in green transport infrastructure in your region/city? Can you specify any problems that originate at EU level and how they can be addressed?*

The Hubs' answers to this question are again wide-ranging, including general governance issues as well as practical examples from their experience.

According to Catalonia, the main problem is the discrepancy between the administrative ownership of the measures (belonging to the central state) and the real impact, taking place at the local and regional level. This means in practice that the central government retains most of the European funding in its jurisdiction, resulting, for example, in **regional rail operators being excluded from aid for urban rail transport**.

Many Hubs list the **ineligibility of smaller projects** from aid from European and national funds as the main difficulty. Others identified the long approval process and payment for State aid, which makes planning difficult.[33] According to the Hubs, smaller projects are also penalised when it comes to EU funds, since investment costs are not eligible. Therefore, they will not become mature enough to secure EU level funding whereas bigger projects have it easier. They are thus in favour of widening the scope of application and loosening eligibility conditions such as the minimum number of inhabitants.[34] Concerning the application process, the Community of Madrid adds that the justification requirements for accessing European aid may create technical difficulties, in particular at the level of smaller administrations. This view is also shared by Brandenburg.

A similar comment was made again (see question 7) with regard to the **incremental calculation method**, which is considered too cumbersome and to result in insufficient aid intensities. The Hubs also commented on the need for more clearly drafted and less complex rules to facilitate the use of State aid instruments. Such simplification would avoid discouraging smaller administrations to apply for support and it would reduce the excessive administrative burden resulting from the uncertainty of rules.[35]

In particular, the Hubs point to **complex and sometimes long notification processes** citing in particular difficulties linked to the 'justification for carrying out the activity', the 'eligibility of local intermediate authorities', and the 'fulfilment of the purpose of the aid', especially when existing technological and

[33] Baden-Württemberg

[34] Alentejo, Community of Madrid.

[35] E.g. Friuli Venezia Giulia

technical constraints are not taken into account.[36] In the context of the transition to green mobility, Friuli Venezia Giulia highlights that the non-eligibility of measures for adapting to standards already in force could be counterproductive. Moreover, the Hub emphasises that excluding certain categories from financing may imply a simplification for the European Commission, but not for the implementing administrations, which would prefer **clear boundaries to the State aid concept**, allowing a correct assessment of permitted funding. Instead, priority should be given to identify simplified and streamlined provisions, which can be applied case-by-case.

One concrete example given by the Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen, is the co-funding of electric public recharging infrastructure, which currently can only be financed under the *de minimis* regime. The Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen has therefore carried out calls for tenders, resulting in **publicly-owned recharging stations**, which the Hub considers not to be a desirable model in the long run. Consequently, State aid rules applying to the operation of public infrastructure and transport services may also risk to hinder their further development.[37]

Another concrete example that was mentioned several times is **cycling infrastructure projects**: the Hubs deem it desirable to simplify access to aid also for this kind of infrastructure.[38]

Several Hubs point to challenges in the **maintenance of both digital and physical interface infrastructures** beyond the initial installation stage, and called for such services to be eligible for State aid support in future.[39] Without this, the objective of improved interoperability between rail transport and other passenger transport modes, which are critical for last mile connections, cannot be achieved.

There was also a more general comment made by Baden-Württemberg on the need for clearer rules to ensure that State aid is used to exclusively support investments in green transport modes.

*Question 9: How will investments in sustainable transport infrastructure affect transport and mobility planning in your region/city and are there any actions at EU level that could help support this aspect of the 'green transition' on the ground?*

The main effect that is mentioned by several Hubs is that higher investment in an attractive public transport system would determine the direction of transport infrastructure development at the local and regional level, increase the attractiveness of regions and cities for investors, and create new opportunities for economic activity and employment. It would also help reduce pollution by promoting sustainable modes of transport, and thus improve the life quality of citizens.

[36] Baden-Württemberg, Emilia-Romagna, North-Rhine Westphalia, Community of Madrid, Barcelona Provincial Council.

[37] Cf. Footnote 13.

[38] Baden-Württemberg, Emilia-Romagna, Community of Madrid, Umbria.

[39] Brandenburg, Alentejo, North-Rhine Westphalia, Bodensee Hub.

However, there is still a **competition for space** between the modes of transport, a **low level of awareness** of the impacts of each mode of transport and a **high minimum threshold for projects to receive public funding** that limits investment.

Measures called for by Hubs include:

- Improved interconnection of the TEN-T core and comprehensive networks;[40],
- An increase in overall funding available under CEF and Interreg;[41]
- Increased co-financing rates ;[42]
- Concessional loans for green infrastructure projects such as rail networks, fast cycle connections, e-charging points for buses, electricity paths, tractions stations etc.;
- Simplified application processes for EU funding calls and faster processing of project applications ;[43]
- Simplification of GBER (Regulation (EU) 651/2014) provisions on expenditure on environmental and energy investments in view of their application to infrastructure investments, and increased aid intensities for these; [44]
- Implementation of transnational programmes and pilot projects at EU level, incorporating good practices.[45]

[40] Friuli Venezia Giulia

[41] Emilia Romagna, Brandenburg, Bodensee Hub, Community of Valencia

[42] Emilia-Romagna, Vukovar-Srijem

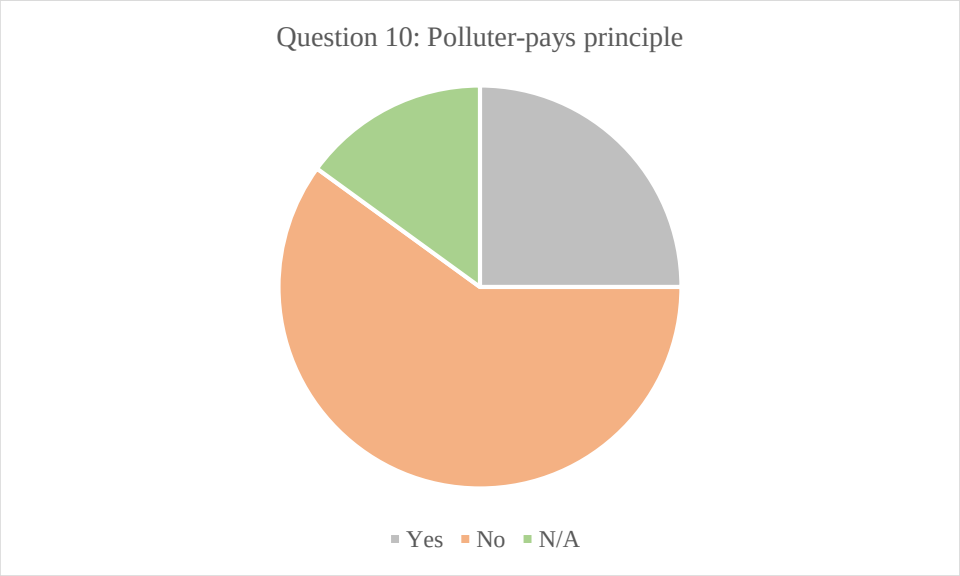
[43] North Rhine-Westphalia, Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen.

[44] Umbria indicates that the Conference of the Italian Regions has prepared a more detailed position paper on this point which was submitted to the respective national authorities in November 2021 in the context of the proposed revision of GBER (Regulation (EU) no. 651/2014).

[45] Thessaly.

***Polluter-pays principle for vehicle emissions***

*Question 10: Is there a polluter-pays or equivalent charging scheme linked to vehicle emissions in place in your region/city?*




Only six Hubs indicate that a polluter-pays principle is applied in their Member State, region or city.

- In the Timis County Council, this takes the form of a road tax for vehicles over 3,5 tonnes, which is levied in the home county of the vehicle. According to the Hub, this tax is, however, inadequate and should be extended;
- Similarly, the Barcelona Provincial Council explains that it consists of a greenhouse gas emission tax for motor vehicles, which is, however, not sufficient to change purchasing behaviour;
- The Community of Madrid has established a classification system, which discriminates vehicle types according to their pollution emission level. According to the Hub, this has proven to be an effective tool for public administrations to manage the access to urban areas and centres, and benefiting only the cleanest vehicle types;
- The Community of Valencia points to national subsidies awarded to authorities setting up environmental management systems or benefits for rail transport as less polluting means of transport. Other affirmative replies were less concrete and let assume a relatively immature application of the principle;
- In the Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen, there are exemptions from motor vehicle taxes depending on the level of carbon dioxide emission. Owners of purely electric vehicles are even fully exempted from paying the tax for a duration of five years.

When asked for further challenges in this area, some regions call for EU measures to **facilitate implementation of restrictions on more polluting vehicles at local and regional level**, applying not only to emissions, but also to noise pollution. The Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen emphasises in this regard the sensitivity of remote Alpine regions, which require a higher level of protection.

*Question 11: If there are any further challenges you are facing with regard to, or benefits you obtained from EU law related to sustainable transport infrastructure development in your region/city, please mention them here.*

As outlined before, several Hubs mention that the current transport system, mainly relying on individual motorised transport, is the biggest challenge and changing this will require a fundamental change in public acceptance of alternative mobility. To **promote the use of public transport and reduce the use of private vehicles** appears therefore imperative. In order to achieve sustainable infrastructure development, Baden-Württemberg further emphasises the need to preserve any legislation ensuring environmental standards (in particular EIA/SEA Directives, cf. infra).

As has been mentioned above, the Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen calls for an EU legal framework to allow more restrictive measures at local level (e.g. introducing traffic bans for polluting vehicles). With regard to the development of electric mobility, the Hub points to Italian rules for the electricity grid, which prevent the spread of electric mobility due to high price-levels. The Hub is therefore in favour of an **EU framework for regulating connections to the electricity grid**. [46]

Mazovia states as a further challenge for its region that the financing of rolling stock purchases through national programmes is impossible, and that regional programmes are not sufficient to compensate for this lack. Likewise, the Hub experiences issues with regard to maintenance and repair sites for rolling stock.

The availability of land and space for construction of new alternative mobility infrastructure is another problem, which is identified by Alentejo.

[46] In Italy, connections to the electricity grid are limited to 3 kW/h for households, leading to ever-increasing prices, according to the Hub.

### 3.2 Green infrastructure and EU environmental law

Environmental assessments ensure that before decisions are taken, their environmental implications of are taken into account. Environmental assessments can be undertaken for individual projects on the basis of the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (EIA), or for public plans or programmes on the basis of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (SEA).

The common principle of both Directives is to ensure that plans, programmes and projects likely to have significant effects on the environment are subject to an environmental assessment, prior to their approval or authorisation.

This chapter covers the Hub's experience with environmental assessments and better regulation in the context of the roll out of green infrastructure.

***Application of EIA/SEA Directives and other environmental assessments for infrastructure projects, plans or programmes***

*Question 14: Did you apply the EIA/SEA Directives for infrastructure projects, plans or programmes?*

The vast majority of the Hubs (17 out of 19) applies the EIA/SEA Directives for infrastructure projects, plans or programmes and they highlight the fact that the assessments are compulsory. Moreover, compliance with these procedures is also mentioned as a prerequisite to be eligible to certain financing programmes.

When asked for concrete environmental damages that were avoided through the application of the two Directives, the Hubs indicate a variety of areas of application and give some concrete examples.

As regards the projects, plans and programmes for which the EIA/SEA Directives were applied, transport infrastructure is the most frequent answer and road infrastructure in particular[47], but the Hubs also mention railway infrastructure[48], urban mobility strategies[49], metro projects[50], port infrastructure,[51] and long-distance cycle constructions[52].

[47] Vukovar-Srijem, Barcelona Provincial Council, Baden-Württemberg, Umbria, Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano, Emilia-Romagna, Bodensee Hub, Mazovia.

[48] Umbria, Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano, Emilia-Romagna, Bodensee Hub.

[49] Barcelona Provincial Council.

[50] Community of Madrid, Thessaly.

[51] Friuli Venezia Giulia, Brittany.

[52] Baden-Württemberg.

Various aspects of land use planning are mentioned by the Hubs, among them: urban development strategy[53], building plans[54], spatial plans[55] and zoning plans[56].

Other Hubs mention electrical power installations (photovoltaic, thermo-solar, hydropower plants, marinas, aquaculture facilities, wind farms)[57] and one Hub puts forward pipeline infrastructure such as for electricity and gas, or aqueducts[58].

Waste management[59] and waste water management (e.g. master plans for sewerage)[60] are both mentioned twice, whereas hospital and health infrastructure[61] and tourism infrastructure (hotels, ski areas, shopping centres)[62] are quoted once.

The Hubs report different kinds of minimised or avoided damages thanks to the application of the EIA/SEA Directives. The Hubs cite the reduction of noise, dust, emissions into the atmosphere, electromagnetic radiation, vibration, and waste stream to be landfilled as examples of the overall reduction of environmental impact[63].

Several Hubs report that the application of the EIA/SEA Directives ensured that the impact of infrastructure projects on the landscape was mitigated[64]. Concrete examples of such mitigating measures are given for the following aspects:

- **Biodiversity**: cycle paths for roads and fish ladders for hydraulic works interrupting the ecological corridor;[65]
- **Noise**: acoustic barriers, sound-absorbing asphalts, speed reduction;[66]
- **Atmosphere**: compensatory measures for $CO_2$ absorption, road enclosures.[67]

A few Hubs share concrete feedback on the advantages they benefited from as a result of the application of the EIA and/or SEA Directives.

[53] Thessaly.
[54] Baden-Württemberg.
[55] Vukovar-Srijem, Valle d'Aosta.
[56] Barcelona Provincial Council, Brandenburg.
[57] Murcia, Bodensee Hub, Baden-Württemberg.
[58] Umbria.
[59] Thessaly, Mazovia.
[60] Barcelona Provincial Council, Thessaly.
[61] Community of Madrid.
[62] Bodensee Hub.
[63] Thessaly, Umbria, Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano, Emilia-Romagna.
[64] Umbria, Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano.
[65] Brittany, Emilia-Romagna.
[66] Emilia-Romagna.
[67] Emilia-Romagna.

Thessaly provides a tangible example of benefits directly stemming from the implementation of the EIA/SEA Directives: The Municipality of Trikkaia applied both Directives for a waste processing unit project. According to the Hub, adjusting the technical characteristics of the project has led to several benefits. Firstly, **technical benefits** in the form of a reduction of the waste stream to be landfilled, subsequently an increase in the lifespan of available landfill space, and material recovery for reuse/recycling. Secondly, environmental benefits in terms of **emission reductions** (particles, radiation, noise, vibration, dust), which improve the quality of life. And thirdly, an **improved overall waste management**. Moreover, the Hub indicates that the upstream consultation of citizens has raised the awareness on environmental issues in the community (cf. the chapter of this report dealing with public acceptance). Finally, the project created **new high skill jobs**. In general, Thessaly notes that those projects and strategies for which an EIA/SEA was implemented, have improved the natural and urban environment, as well as the quality of life.

The Barcelona Provincial Council mentions as advantage that the Directives make it possible to **promote sustainable development** by ensuring that an environmental assessment is carried out with regard to certain plans and programmes, which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.

Brittany gives a concrete example regarding port infrastructures: the positive impact on the **management of dredging sediments** and on preserving biodiversity.

Overall, it can be stressed that many Hubs underline that the SEA and EIA are valuable in order to take the possible environmental impacts into account while developing projects, and subsequently to develop solutions to minimize the identified impacts. In particular, Umbria highlights that the SEA is important to **assess the 'cumulative' effects of certain measures**. For example, taking into consideration the cumulative effects of a power line on top of those of another power line, which has multiple impacts on schools, hospitals, etc. The EIA, according to the Hub, has the advantage of reducing **especially noise and dust emissions during the construction phase**.

Baden-Württemberg reports that, from the point of view of environmental associations, the avoided environmental damage is low, since environmental considerations are often ignored as part of the balancing exercise between economic and environmental interests.

Besides the positive impacts identified above, several Hubs list problems they are facing and that need to be overcome, including at the national or regional level where the Directives are transposed. One that is mentioned recurrently by several Hubs is the fact that the implementation of **EIA and SEA extend the length of the procedures and cause considerable delays**[68]. However, as the Community of Madrid notes, there should be a constant long-term review, because of the evolving technical progress, which makes it necessary to (re-)assess the long-term effects of some technologies, which are

[68] Brandenburg, Umbria, Community of Madrid, Bodensee Hub.

considered to be 'clean' at a specific moment in time. In addition to the mentioned delays, Brandenburg highlights as negative aspects the costs and general incomprehension associated with the application of the two Directives. The Community of Valencia mentions that there is a **systematic rejection during public consultation procedures** of any new infrastructure due to its territorial impact. Furthermore, due to a lack of constructive participation culture, the results of public consultations are missing constructive inputs and tend to give a distorted view on the reality of projects. As a solution to that specific problem, the Hub suggests to balance the value of these one-sided inputs, gathered during the consultation process, with other inputs (reflected e.g. in social media) on actions of general interest in the decision-making process (cf. the chapter of this report dealing with public acceptance).

Umbria presents several aspects that could be improved:

- Currently, an **excessive amount of information is required for environmental reporting** and for compliance with the Directives. This gives rise to copious reports, extending the time needed by administrative authorities. They stress that the procedures are burdensome for those who draft the assessments and, what is more, not very useful for the recipients. As a solution, they suggest that **quality be preferred over quantity**, reducing information to what is really useful (e.g. in the case of the EIA, a detailed description of the project and its location);
- To date, a **high number of authorities has to be consulted**, as a consequence of the broad definition of Article 6 of the EIA Directive, leading to longer consultation times and possible discrepancies between the opinions of the various authorities involved. This makes it more difficult to adopt the EIA measure and, consequently, to authorise the infrastructure project. For example, for the same infrastructure project, the opinion on the impact on the landscape is expressed by the region, the province, the municipality and the state administration in charge of carrying out activities to control landscape assets. As a solution, Umbria suggests to **limit the required opinions to the authorities most directly concerned** by the project, in order to avoid long delays and duplication;
- Environmental compatibility of plans and projects tend to be highlighted by the proposer, and might therefore not always be objective.;
- Currently, there is a **difficulty to implement effectively the monitoring of the implementation** of plans and programmes over time (Article 10 SEA Directive). This is particularly true for small local authorities, who have lower levels of human resources and expertise. Those are not sufficient to ensure a good monitoring, which includes shared tools and appropriate expertise. The perception of a substantial lack of staff at the level of small administrations is shared by numerous Hubs. Umbria states that in order to address these issues, it is working with the Italian Ministry of the Environment to develop indicators and shared monitoring arrangements. Moreover, the region organises trainings for municipal technicians. In the Hub's view, resources from the Recovery and Resilience Fund should be allocated to the

**digitisation of plans, the development of monitoring platforms managed by the region, and programmes to continue and strengthen the training of municipal staff**;

- There seems to be a tendency of national legislation transposing the two Directives, to **shorten the time limits for the completion of authorisation procedures**, which may be detrimental to the quality of environmental assessments, especially when it comes to large infrastructure projects. Moreover, in a process such as SEA, the reduction of time limits **affects the possibility of good consultation** (Article 6 SEA Directive).

Finally, Emilia-Romagna mentions a specific issue it faces, namely that the need to offset the impact on the 'air-environment' component, for example by constructing wooded areas, was accompanied by the difficulty of removing agricultural land and ensuring adequate maintenance over time. It also confirms that the Italian State introduced a modification of the national rules transposing the Directives in order to ensure quicker and more certain deadlines for the completion of the assessment procedures for infrastructure projects to tackle the problem of excessively long procedures.

*Question 15: Did you apply environmental assessments under EU legislation other than the EIA/SEA Directives (e.g. under the Habitats Directive or the Water Framework Directive) for infrastructure projects, plans and programmes?*

Most Hubs (14 out of 19) have applied environmental assessments under EU legislation other than the EIA/SEA Directives (e.g. under the Habitats Directive or the Water Framework Directive) for infrastructure projects, plans and programmes.

The Hubs indicate that mainly three EU legislations have been used to apply environmental assessments under EU legislation other than the EIA/SEA Directives: The Habitats Directive (also referred to as "Natura 2000"),[69] the Water Framework Directive[70] and the Birds Directive[71].

Thessaly reports in detail how the applicable Directives are transposed and implemented in its region: for every project having a local or regional scope and which concerns protected habitats, a specific ecological assessment is drawn up in order to obtain a permit under EU and/or national law. However, if such a project involves water resources, the planning will be fully aligned with the requirements of the River Basin Management Plan of the Thessaly Water District[72], which takes precedence.

[69] Vukovar-Srijem, Brandenburg, Emilia-Romagna, Valle d'Aosta, Barcelona Provincial Council, Baden-Württemberg, Umbria, Bodensee Hub, Murcia.

[70] Thessaly, Barcelona Provincial Council, Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano, Community of Valencia.

[71] Umbria.

[72] The River Basin Management Plan of the Thessaly Water District transposes Directive 2000/60/EC and is based on implementing Law No 3199/2003 and Presidential Decree 51/2007.

The Hubs report a variety of infrastructure projects, plans or programmes for which these other assessments were used:

| Infrastructure | Habitats Directive | Water Framework Directive | Birds Directive | Example |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| County Development Plan | X | | | Vukovar-Srijem County |
| Railway infrastructure | X | | | Bodensee Hub |
| Urban planning | X | X | | Barcelona Provincial Council |
| Electrical power installations (photo-voltaic, thermo-solar, wind, marinas, aquaculture facilities) | X | | | Murcia |
| Road construction/ maintenance; Fitting-out of slopes to make roads safe; Electricity and gas lines, Methane pipelines; Excavations for broadband | X | | X | Umbria |
| Hydro-electric installations | | X | | Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen |
| Port infrastructure | X | X | | Community of Valencia[73] |

Only a few Hubs specify the concrete environmental damages which were minimised or avoided.

The Bodensee Hub mentions in particular that **impact on species had been minimised** thanks to compensatory measures in railway infrastructure projects.

A few Hubs mention advantages and problems that they encounter with the application of the above-mentioned Directives or identify possible solutions.

Brandenburg mentions as an advantage avoiding mismatches in the Habitats Directive and Birds Directive. As disadvantages, Brandenburg states that the Directives are too time-consuming. As possible solutions, the Hub suggests to **improve the legal knowledge of project promoters and to enhance early inventory and planning in the process**.

In this context, Umbria mentions the scope of the **screening activity** resulting from Article 6 (3) of the Habitats Directive: It requires up-to-date databases on habitats and species, detailed knowledge of the conservation objectives of Natura 2000 sites, and ad hoc monitoring activities. All this is costly in terms of staff, expertise, tenders and agreements to be activated. For all these activities, **adequate financial resources** are needed.

The Hub considers that Article 6 (3) of the Habitats Directive lacks specific rules in order to carry out the screening. Consecutively, the Hub reports that the screening procedure is governed by the guidelines

[73] The Hubs concretises that the Water Framework Directive has been applied in a subsidiary way, by applying guidelines emanating from water management plans and applying quality objectives laid down for Natura 2000 areas.

of the Italian Ministry of the Environment. As a downside, it is noted that those guidelines had to be transposed by administrative acts of the individual regions, resulting in a **wide variety of rules**. The solution was to standardise screening procedures at national level using formats to be filled in by the evaluating authority. It should be noted that the European Commission has made available several documents regarding the implementation of Article 6, notably Article 6 (3).

Another problem mentioned by Umbria is the **mismatch between political responsibility and actual access right**: The region is responsible for the conservation of biodiversity and habitats, without taking into account the fact that some changes in these habitats cannot be directly controlled by the region, e.g. cessation/alteration of certain economic activities, such as the cessation of livestock on a farm, resulting in pastures becoming forest. This is not taken into account by the Directives.

Thessaly, in the context of **competing land use**, e.g. the clash between renewable energy resources (RES) and other uses such as agriculture, livestock, forestry and protected species and habitats, explains its solution to the problem: The solution is the spatial planning of RES regardless of their economic value, the recording of agricultural land of high productivity, as well as the elaboration of management plans for pastures.

Hubs who indicate that they did not apply the (transposition into national law of) Directives such as the Water Framework Directive, the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive, note that they are either not involved in the corresponding assessments[74] or, in some cases, that the Directives are not applicable for the concrete projects in their remits[75].

*Question 16: Did you use any EIA guidance/SEA guidance documents in the planning of plans, programmes or projects?*

In order to promote the application of EIA and SEA in the EU the European Commission initiates and contributes to studies, reports and guidance documents. These can be of interest to authorities, developers, consultants, researchers, organisations and to the wider public and are available on the website of the European Commission.

A narrow majority of the Hubs (11 out of 19) answer they have used some of the EIA or SEA guidance documents of the European Commission in their planning, programmes and projects.

However, some of the Hubs consider that there is a **lack of awareness of and knowledge about those documents**, which might be explained by the fact that not local or regional administrations themselves, but service providers lead the environmental evaluation.[76] Moreover, the competent services may

[74] Vukovar-Srijem.
[75] Barcelona Provincial Council.
[76] Brittany, Bodensee Hub.

instead refer to **national or regional guidance documents**, as the Directives are transposed into national or regional law and the guidance documents might not be used directly at the level of the Hubs, but indirectly by other levels of government.

When asked for areas of application and concrete experiences with the existing guidance documents, some answers refer simply to the application of the EIA/SEA Directives, others to national guidance documents, underlining again the **scattered awareness** at the level of regional authorities and a **lack of dissemination** of the guidance documents. Nevertheless, there are a few concrete examples, namely: transport planning, cable way infrastructure planning, port infrastructure and construction planning.

As Umbria reports, another explanation for the little use of the guidance documents is that contain only **very general indications, which are of limited use in the specific cases dealt with by the Hubs**. In addition, the Hub argues that the documents do not apply to certain projects or that they were too complicated to implement.

***Guidance documents on green infrastructure***

*Question 17: Focusing specifically on green infrastructures, were you aware of the existence of guidance documents on green infrastructures issued by the European Commission (see examples here)?*

The European Commission has issued guidance documents on green infrastructure, notably the following:

- *Guidance on a strategic framework for further supporting the deployment of EU-level green and blue infrastructure (SWD(2019) 193 final)*

  The Action Plan for Nature, People and the Economy aims to improve the practical implementation of the EU nature legislation and accelerate progress towards the EU 2020 goal of halting and reversing the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services. Action 12 of this Action Plan foresaw the development of a guidance providing a strategic framework for further supporting the deployment of EU-level green infrastructure so as to enhance the delivery of essential ecosystem services throughout the EU territory.

- *EU Guidance on Integrating Ecosystems and their Services into Decision-Making Summary for Policymakers in Government and Industry (SWD(2019) 305 final)*

  The guidance is applicable to all ecosystems across EU landscapes and the marine environment. It aims at helping decision-makers who are seeking to improve the impact, cost-effectiveness and sustainability of their policies, plans and investments. The guidance provides an overview of the steps and available tools to assess and integrate these benefits into policy and planning decisions.

Almost two-thirds (12 out of 19) of the Hubs are not aware of the existence of guidance documents on green infrastructures issued by the European Commission. This points to the need to strengthen the efforts to disseminate the existing tools. However, as mentioned previously, it might also be explained by the fact that many of the Hubs do not deal with the procedures themselves.

Thessaly highlights that the documents are in principle very useful for helping local authorities to design and implement key infrastructure projects that are fully adapted to the policies of the European Union and to the needs of citizens. However, the Hub notes the **documents are not known across public authorities**. Brittany states for its region that methodological tools, such as Brittany's bibliographic dossier, providing national, regional and local references,[77] are developed at the regional level. While references to European frameworks may be part of them, they are not widely known.

Out of the seven Hubs (7 out of 19) that answer that they are aware of such documents, six specified which ones:

- ✓ Guidance on a strategic framework for further supporting the deployment of EU-level green and blue infrastructure (European Commission, SWD(2019) 193)
- ✓ EU Guidance on Integrating Ecosystems and their Services into Decision-Making Summary for Policymakers in Government and Industry (European Commission, SWD(2019) 305)
- ✓ Guidance on good practice to limit, mitigate and compensate soil sealing (European Commission, SWD(2012) 101)
- ✓ Technical guidance on the application of 'do no significant harm' under the Recovery and Resilience Facility Regulation (European Commission, 2021/C 58/01)
- ✓ Mapping Ecosystem Services (Joint Research Centre)
- ✓ Nature-based solutions in Europe: Policy, knowledge and practice for climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction (EEA Report No 1/2021)
- ✓ Green infrastructure handbook (Interreg Central Europe Project MaGICLandscapes, 2019)
- ✓ Best practices on flood prevention, protection and mitigation (European Commission, 2003)

*Question 18: Did you consider these guidance documents on green infrastructure in the planning of the projects mentioned in question 17?*

In line with the answers to the previous question, around two-thirds (12 out of 19) of the Hubs state they have not considered the guidance documents on green infrastructure in the planning of projects.

[77] https://bretagne-environnement.fr/dossier-bibliographique-trame-verte-bleue-bretagne

Among the seven Hubs who answer they are aware of the documents, only three report they have considered them in project planning. Only one reply indicates that the documents were too complicated to implement.

Other explanations for the non-use of documents were:

- The competent services might consider national or regional guidance documents;
- The competent services might not use those documents – even if they are aware of them –, because they are not responsible for the design of projects[78].

Overall, it can be stressed that the local and regional authorities are not always aware of the existence of EIA/SEA guidance documents and of guidance documents on green infrastructure and – even when they are aware of them –rarely make use of them. This could be because of the transposition of European legislation and guidelines into national legislation and guidelines, and the subsequent use of adapted regional or local documents. For all Commission documents directly dedicated to the implementing level – the authorities and service providers – however, this implies a **need on the part of the Commission to improve their dissemination**. Moreover, possible future reviews of these Commission guidelines and documents should consider the perspective of local and regional authorities more thoroughly.

***Better regulation and environmental standards***

*Question 19: In your opinion, what can the CoR do, as an institutional representative of local and regional authorities in the EU policy-making process, to encourage improvements of the EIA/SEA Directives and other environmental legislation?*

From the Hubs' answers, one can see that local and regional authorities, that are implementing EIA/SEA Directives and other environmental legislation **expect to be consulted by the EU institutions** about the implementation of the legislation, and to **receive more targeted information and assistance**, e.g. through specific guidance documents, a dedicated European helpdesk, and financial assistance[79]. It should be noted, however, that some of these expectations fall outside of the CoR's remit and beyond the area of environmental legislation.

In general, the Hubs highlight the need for dialogue, understanding and cooperation between local and regional authorities, and other relevant actors in the decision-making process. In this context, they consider the CoR and the RegHub Network to be in a particularly suitable position to bring together the different perspectives from across the EU in a differentiated manner. In Thessaly's view, this is even

[78] Bodensee Hub.

[79] Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano, Diputación de Barcelona, Brittany.

more true for the implementation of the EIA/SEA Directives: Through the diversity of socio-economic conditions and experiences of its members, the **CoR can help to make legislation more territorially sensitive and adaptive to the conditions 'on the ground'**.

The Bodensee Hub underlines that the RegHub Network offers important potential in **facilitating the involvement of local and regional authorities in the simplification of EU rules**. This potential is also stressed by Brandenburg, which believes that the CoR should play a more decisive role linking EU legislation with local and regional authorities, in particular by ensuring **consistent and efficient communication between relevant authorities**. The Hub believes that this would lead to the streamlining of EU legislation or its abolition when it is ineffective.

Brittany adds in this context that temporary consultations alone, are not sufficient to tackle the implementation difficulties faced by the local and regional level. The Hub suggests to **establish a European helpdesk**, which explicitly assists local and regional actors in implementing EU legislation, provides consistent guidance, and thereby identifies implementation problems. Eventually, this could lead to a **better detection of problematic legislation** and provide input for planning the EU's simplification exercises.

On the more practical side, the Barcelona Provincial Council and Brittany suggest that the CoR could play a role in the swift transposition of Directives and of their implementation at the local and regional level, by **drawing up guidelines and recommendations** on how to implement them.

Other elements, touching upon the role of the CoR as institutional representative of local and regional authorities in the EU policy-making process have been suggested as follows:

- Presenting local experiences, voicing obstacles and concerns from the local and regional bodies implementing EU legislation to the European Union's institutions[80];
- Contributing to protect the role of regions in the decision-making process regarding nature threatening factors[81];
- By proposing simplifications of legislation, contributing to more precise definitions, and a rationalisation of environmental obligations, the CoR – in its role as consultative committee – can help to adjust EU legislation to local conditions, and ensure that the EIA and SEA Directives contain measures and policies adapted to the local and social conditions of Member States [82];

[80] Vukovar-Srijem, Thessaly, Bodensee Hub, Umbria, Community of Valencia.

[81] Alentejo .

[82] Community of Valencia, Thessaly, Vukovar-Srijem, Friuli Venezia Giulia.

- Continuing working on the ground review of the strengths and problems of the EIA/SEA Directives to see whether they have actually helped to minimise environmental damage, exploring the mechanisms to be put in place to help mitigate the effects of climate change[83];
- Contributing to standardising legislation between Member States, avoiding differences in procedure and timing[84];
- Contributing to ensuring the universalisation of nature protection and conservation principles, as it is critical for achieving significant Europe-wide environmental protection[85];
- Contributing to switching the focus from economic development to environmental protection[86];
- Contributing to guaranteeing competitiveness equality between regions[87];
- Ensuring more communication at the level of decision-makers within local and regional authorities, providing training, raising awareness[88];
- Identifying and spreading good practices (e.g. experiences of successful participation and implementation)[89];
- Organising dedicated and topical events for local and regional representatives responsible for EIA/SEA Directives and other environmental legislation with the representatives of the EU institutions in charge of preparing the legislation. Third parties, experts, universities, press and others could attend such events[90].

Overall, the Hubs' answers illustrate their **request for a more active role of the CoR** with regard to both its institutional and practical role. This encompasses not only the channeling of information from the local and regional level to EU policy-makers, but also practical support from the CoR to local and regional authorities, when it comes to the implementation of EU law and exchange of good practices.

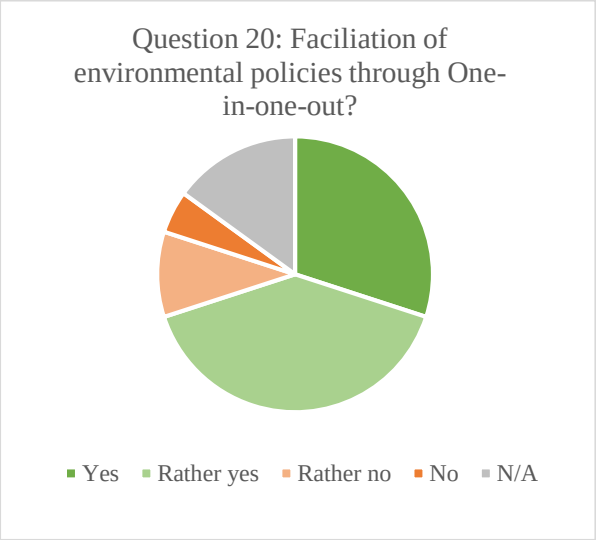
***Questions 20 and 21: The One-In-One-Out approach and environmental policies***

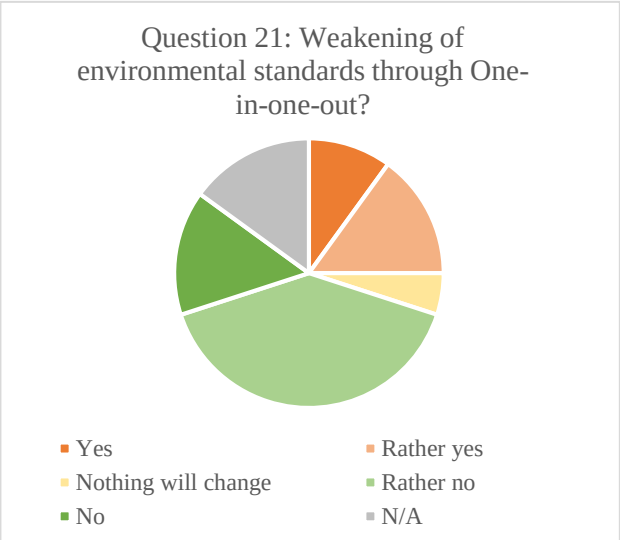
The ‘one-in, one-out' approach consists of offsetting any new burden resulting from the Commission's proposals, by removing an equivalent existing burden in the same policy area. The objective of this approach is to ensure that regulation achieves benefits, it is targeted, and it is easy to comply with and it does not add unnecessary regulatory burden (read more here). This also applies to environmental policies.

[83] Barcelona Provincial Council.
[84] Valle d'Aosta.
[85] Alentejo.
[86] Emilia-Romagna.
[87] Alentejo.
[88] Timiș, Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano.
[89] Timiș, North Rhine-Westphalia, Vukovar-Srijem.
[90] Alentejo.

*Question 20: Would you support such approach as a tool to facilitate the implementation of environmental policies in the context of infrastructure projects, plans and/or programmes?*

Most respondents are in favour (6 out of 19) or rather in favour (8 out of 19) of the 'one-in, one-out' approach as a tool to facilitate the implementation of environmental policies in the context of infrastructure projects, plans, and programmes.




*Question 21: On the basis of your experience, are you concerned that the 'one-in, one-out' approach might weaken environmental standards?*

The aim not to lower standards in implementing the "one in, one out" approach is included in the Better Regulation Communication.[91] A majority of Hubs (12 out of 19) is 'not' or 'rather not' concerned that the one-in-one-out approach will lead to weaker environmental standards. They welcome the idea that such an approach could **reduce administrative burden**[92], simplify legislation by **avoiding duplication and contradictions**,[93] and lead to a **greater clarity and transparency of legislation**[94]. This clearly indicates that currently, there are too many and too complex rules in place, leading the Hubs to call for their simplification and for less, but more "concrete" rules.

Although they broadly welcome the fact that the one-in-one-out approach is intended to reduce administrative burdens, the Hubs express two main concerns.

First, several Hubs explain that such an approach might be detrimental to environmental action and to fighting climate change.[95] Baden-Württemberg, for example, refers to the **risk of watering down**

[91] Better regulation: Joining forces to make better laws, COM/2021/219 final.
[92] Vukovar-Srijem, Community of Madrid.
[93] Barcelona Provincial Council, Umbria.
[94] Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano.
[95] Baden-Württemberg, Alentejo, Emilia-Romagna, Bodensee Hub, Mazovia.

**existing environmental standards**, which it considers already to provide only a minimum level of nature and species protection. Moreover, the Hub perceives a **risk of preventing the adoption of meaningful environmental legislation**. Mazovia is also of the opinion that the one-in-one-out approach is inappropriate for the environmental sector. In view of the need to step up efforts to combat climate change, in particular by introducing additional environmental standards, the approach should therefore not be mandatory.

Second, some fear that the approach will miss its target, as it seems **unlikely it will be possible in some policy areas to mechanically abolish legislation or to replace it with an equivalent**.[96] The Bodensee Hub believes it is more important to examine regulations for their meaningfulness and effectiveness. Brandenburg adds that this is especially true in the context of nature conservation, where the application of a one-in-one-out approach is highly questionable scientifically, as the conditions for habitat diversity and species' sensitivity to disturbance are not divisible and cannot be replaced or exchanged.

To meet these challenges and **prevent the dilution of environment standards**, the Hubs add some caveats to their replies and specified conditions under which the approach might be successful:

- the approach must be applied in a coherent way and imply an overview of existing burdens;
- new environmental standards must build on existing standards to improve them and make them more effective;[97]
- the approach should not be used to weaken legislation;[98]
- the approach must be assessed on a case-by-case basis.[99]

***Challenges and benefits arising from EU law***

*Question 22: If there are any further challenges you are facing with regard to, or benefits you obtained from EU law related to environment assessments for infrastructure development in your region/city, please mention them here.*

Overall, it becomes clear that the Hubs value the objectives and general requirements provided for by EU environmental legislation and its positive effects both on planning and on conservation activities in the context infrastructure projects. They highlight that applying environmental assessments based on EU law has allowed to:

[96] Mazovia
[97] Community of Madrid, Barcelona Provincial Council
[98] North-Rhine Westphalia, Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen Thessaly
[99] Brittany

- achieve sustainable development, environmental protection, sound and environmentally friendly decisions[100];
- prevent harmful infrastructure projects or to make them more sustainable[101];
- ensure greater participation of citizens[102];
- achieve higher quality planning[103];
- develop peer-to-peer learning by making it possible to find other regions and projects that have already happened and try to take their experience out of it[104];
- achieve more awareness-raising, making it accepted that interventions in the natural budget must be taken into account in infrastructure measures[105].

Finally, the Barcelona Provincial Council mentions a specific benefit, namely the creation of the Spatial Data Infrastructure (SDI) in the Province of Barcelona, in compliance with the INSPIRE Directive, which enables the sharing geographical information.

Despite these advantages, however, the Hubs point to several shortcomings of the policy framework currently in place: The **excessive complexity of regulations**, the **frictions between the regulations**, and the **lack of administrative capacity at local and regional level**, which together, make it difficult to implement EU law.

Consequently, several Hubs highlight administrative burden as the main challenge they are facing,[106] because it has consequences on procedural duration, which also affects projects that have a positive impact on climate, such as e.g. railway infrastructure or bypass roads. In worst cases, this leads to these projects not being realised.[107]

Umbria, for example, explains the **difficulty to articulate the SEA and the EIA in practice**. It argues that when they both need to be carried out on the same project, one at the planning stage and the other at the project stage, it works well when the measures are described with a certain level of precision in the plan and the SEA indicates the scenarios and possible alternatives to the planned measures. In this way, the proposer draws up the final project, which will be subject to an EIA, already having clarity on how to comply with environmental standards. However, the Hub underlines that **in practice, infrastructure planning suffers from the availability of financial resources**. Sometimes concrete planning is designed in successive stages as financial resources become available. In these cases, it is

[100] Baden-Württemberg, Vukovar-Srijem, Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano, Bodensee Hub.
[101] Baden-Württemberg.
[102] Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano.
[103] Baden-Württemberg.
[104] Alentejo.
[105] Baden-Württemberg.
[106] Bodensee Hub, Alentejo, Brittany.
[107] This is reported by Brandenburg regarding a bypass road in its jurisdiction.

not possible for the SEA to provide alternative solutions and all issues related to the impact of the infrastructure arise only at the time of the EIA. At that point, however, the project is already in the final design phase and the proposer has spent resources and energy. The Hub argues that it is therefore more difficult to ask for compliance with environmental legislation. In conclusion, when the SEA cannot identify alternative solutions, the **application of a double assessment is not useful** and creates difficulties at the time of the EIA.

Without questioning the purpose of environmental principles, Brittany reports another problem: the Hub deems the **accumulation of environmental principles** to further increase administrative burden. The introduction of the 'do not harm principle' and the 'energy efficiency based principle', in its view, creates new burden because managing authorities will **need to acquire new skills or call on external service providers** in order to be able to check the compliance of projects. In this context, it has been pointed out also by other Hubs that the constant change of rules implies an ever higher level of administrative burden.[108]

Regarding the lack of administrative capacity, the **absence of (legal) knowledge and experience** were mentioned as further challenges[109]. Brandenburg, for example, stresses that some problems related to authorisation procedures arise only due to a low level of procedural and legal knowledge. Moreover, in the context of environmental assessments, any potential 'trivialisation' of environmental standards can lead to long-term failures in ecological interrelationships and interactions.

In the context of administrative burden, Brittany mentions another kind of challenge: managing authorities of EU funds have to carry out a **large number of screening activities**, in order to ensure the correct implementation of EU regulations and the legitimate allocation of EU funds. This task is constantly complicated by the above-mentioned extension of the legal framework. In sum, managing authorities carry a heavy responsibility regarding the implementation of EU regulations, without being institutionalised control bodies.

The following paragraph summarises the Hubs' suggestions with regard to the shortcomings mentioned above, in the order of their appearance:

- **Double assessment of projects (cf. supra)**: According to Umbria, two environmental assessments (SEA and EIA), when plans are not yet designed in detail, should be avoided; detailed planning requires the concrete availability of financial resources, and thus often occurs step by step. It is possible to incorporate the main corrective measure, into one single step. The challenge is to ensure that environmental assessments are substantiated, avoid mere slogans, and encourage technical and scientific debate. If this shortcoming is not corrected, there is a

[108] Alentejo.

[109] Alentejo, Brandenburg.

risk that decisions taken by environmental bodies are becoming indisputable and it would be difficult to challenge them, even if they are not sufficiently substantiated;

- **Excessive administrative burden for managing authorities**: Brittany suggests reducing this administrative burden through appropriate implementation monitoring carried out by proper control bodies;
- **Lack of administrative capacity**: To avoid delays in administrative procedures as well as to enable well-informed and environmentally sound decisions, Brandenburg advocates an increase in the legal knowledge of project promoters, as well as early inventories and planning.

Brittany further underlines that EU regulation is not the only way to encourage green and sustainable investment. In this context, the Hub suggests that the **CoR should support green budgeting at the local and regional level to foster greener investments**, and to account for the role local and regional authorities can play in modernising the approach to future infrastructure projects. It also suggests that the **CoR should help regional authorities to better understand the impacts of the green taxonomy** for regional authorities, as well as for local economic actors, in particular regarding the non-financial reporting obligations. Brittany reports on its participation in a OECD-led project that can expand the region's technical and scientific knowledge base and ultimately improve and modernise its approach to sustainable infrastructure projects. [110]

[110] More information (in French): https://www.ihest.fr/les-methodes-de-lihest-au-service-de-la-region-bretagne-pour-acculturer-les-decideurs-politiques-a-la-budgetisation-verte/.

### 3.3 Digital infrastructure

This chapter looks into some aspects of the current legal and technical framework for the rollout of broadband infrastructure in the EU. The Hubs and their stakeholders were asked to share their implementation experiences and their views on issues such as State aid, interoperability and dispute resolution.

***State aid to broadband***

*Question 25: How do the current rules cover granting of State aid for the deployment of non-terrestrial (fixed wireless) connection? If you answered that the current rules need improvements, please provide comments and specify those improvements.*

The purpose of this question has been to provide an overview of how the deployment of non-terrestrial (fixed wireless) connection is covered by the State aid rules currently in force. The question has been formulated on the basis of previous replies from relevant stakeholders (during the first phase of the consultation) and on the need to assess further granting of State aid for the Fixed Wireless Access (FWA) in view of the ongoing modernisation of the State aid rules[111].

At the time of the RegHub consultation, granting of State aid to broadband was covered by two main legislative frameworks:

1. General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER): The Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty, amended most recently by the Commission Regulation (EU) 2021/1237 of 23 July 2021, which entered into force on 4 August 2021;
2. Broadband Guidelines: Communication from the Commission - EU Guidelines for the application of State aid rules in relation to the rapid deployment of broadband networks 2013/C 25/01;

When it comes to the concrete answers to the questions set out in the questionnaire, a large majority responds either that the current rules are sufficient or that they need some improvements. Only four answers indicate that considerable improvements are needed or that the rules are not sufficient at all. In one case, a Hub says it is not directly concerned by the deployment of the FWA.

Although the rules are generally considered sufficient, the respondents reveal a number of possible improvements, grouped into several clusters:

[111] State Aid: revision of broadband guidelines (europa.eu)

First, there is a persistent issue with the **complexity of rules** and their implementation in practice, hindering the introduction of new technologies. On the one hand, the State aid rules, including those recently introduced by the GBER amendment[112] (Art 52c – consumer vouchers), need to be simplified as the Hubs find their application burdensome. On the other hand, according to Friuli Venezia Giulia, there is a perception that the **simplification measures introduced are suitable mainly for the European Commission's role as the enforcer of State aid rules, but not for national authorities**. This applies in particular to consumer vouchers used in Italy, as natural persons covered by these vouchers need to be encoded into a national State aid register.

In addition, Thessaly mentions that procedures applied by providers to ensure a high-quality, **dense networks without white areas need improvement too**. According to the Hub, the inability to provide network services or low-speed network services makes it impossible to develop digital infrastructure, driving people to discredit it and hindering the adoption of digital policies and applications.

Adding another aspect, Brandenburg states that pipeline construction is treated as road construction, making the administrative permitting procedures complicated and expensive.

Second, Baden-Württemberg considers that the **current definition of a Next Generation Access (NGA) is no longer in line with national and European Broadband targets** in relation to gigabit speeds and should therefore be narrower. Moreover, given the current and foreseeable needs, the NGA network definition should, according to the results of the consultation, be limited to non-eligible technologies. Respondents also state that a separate new category should be created for transferable technologies (FTTH[113], FTTB[114], possibly HFC[115]).

Third, the broadband infrastructure has been tackled in the Hubs' comments as well: Umbria argues that an **obligation to share infrastructure (poles) between the various telecommunications operators should be introduced** into the current rules, and Valle d'Aosta claims specific incentives are needed for the implementation of satellite connections, in particular for mountainous areas with difficulties in establishing terrestrial connections. The consultation highlights that in these areas, the rules should be more flexible if market failures are more pronounced.

The issue of broadband coverage is also raised by the Community of Madrid when referring to peri-urban and rural areas. In some other large municipalities, like the Community of Valencia, many white areas (with no fast broadband infrastructure in place or credibly planned in the near future) are still not covered.

[112] Friuli Venezia Giulia.

[113] FTTH: Fibre to home network.

[114] FTTB: Fibre to the building.

[115] HFC: Hybrid fiber-coaxial.

Finally, Murcia notes that it has not been involved in defining white areas eligible for investment and Friuli Venezia Giulia notes that since the entry into of force of the GBER amendment last August, the new rules have still not been applied in its territory.

***Categorisation of intervention areas***

*Question 26: The current rules set the criteria of categorisation of intervention areas (white, grey and black areas) for the Next Generation Access (NGA) definition. In order to align the NGA definition with current and expected technological and market developments, what are the preferred values for defining minimum reliable download speed to be used for defining the white target area of interventions?*

This question aims to assess whether the current definition of the minimum speed threshold for so-called "white areas" is sufficient for local and regional authorities and whether it is still in line with the current and expected technological and market developments.

As to date, the Broadband guidelines define "white areas" as " […] those in which there is no broadband infrastructure and it is unlikely to be developed in the near future. The Commission targets for the DAE aim for a ubiquitous coverage of basic broadband services in the EU by 2013 and of at least 30 Mbps by 2020. […]" This definition is subject to a revision put forward by the public consultation on the revised Broadband Guidelines (see above). **The new definition, as put forward in the draft revised Broadband Guidelines, does not refer to any minimum speed** as it suggests that: "White areas are those in which there is no ultrafast broadband network and such network is unlikely to be developed in the relevant time horizon."

When it comes to the GBER, its revision provides the following definition of an eligible type of investment in Art 52 (3) (a): "fixed broadband network deployment to connect households and socioeconomic drivers in areas where there is no network able to reliably provide speeds of at least 30 Mbps download (threshold speeds) present or credibly planned to be deployed within three years from the moment of publication of the planned aid measure or within the same time horizon as the deployment of the subsidised network, which shall not be shorter than two years."

The answers to this question are much more evenly distributed than those to the previous question: Five Hubs consider the speed of 30 Mbps as sufficient, nine prefer 100 Mbps, seven prefer 300 Mbps and twelve suggest that 1 Gbps should be used as threshold speed. These answers have repercussions for the potential State aid to be awarded: The higher the threshold speed, the more areas will fall under eligible areas for State aid and, therefore, public authorities will be able to grant more aid (if financial resources are available).

However, State aid can give a company a distortive advantage over its competitors and is therefore only justified in exceptional cases. **Increasing the threshold speeds for "white areas" would allow a high number of undertakings to receive State aid.**

Furthermore, a majority of Hubs expressed their wish to increase the target speeds to 300 Mbps or 1 Gbps for white areas. Such are not provided for by the proposed revised Broadband Guidelines, which currently provide only for a target speed of 30 Mbps for white areas. However, the revised Broadband Guidelines provide for a flexibility in assessing what an "ultrafast broadband network" means. Nevertheless, State aid granted in accordance with the Broadband Guidelines shall still be assessed by the European Commission as these cases will need to be duly notified.

***Interoperability and linking of permitting and mapping ledgers***

*Question 27: How do you perceive linking and interoperability of permitting ledgers (ledgers used to process and store data on permitting, including the option of direct uploading of electronic versions of documents) and mapping ledgers (interactive maps storing different layers of information, such as on State aid granted, cadastral records etc.)?*

This question's objective is to assess interoperability and interconnection of different systems: permitting ledgers, used by public authorities to process permitting claims on the one hand, and mapping ledgers on the other hand, which, through different layers, can link different information at multiple dimensions and attribute them to a specific area. The notion of interoperability is based on the European Interoperability Framework (EIF) as part of the Communication on the implementation of the EIF (COM(2017)134) the European Commission adopted on 23 March 2017. The framework gives specific guidance on how to set up interoperable digital public services.

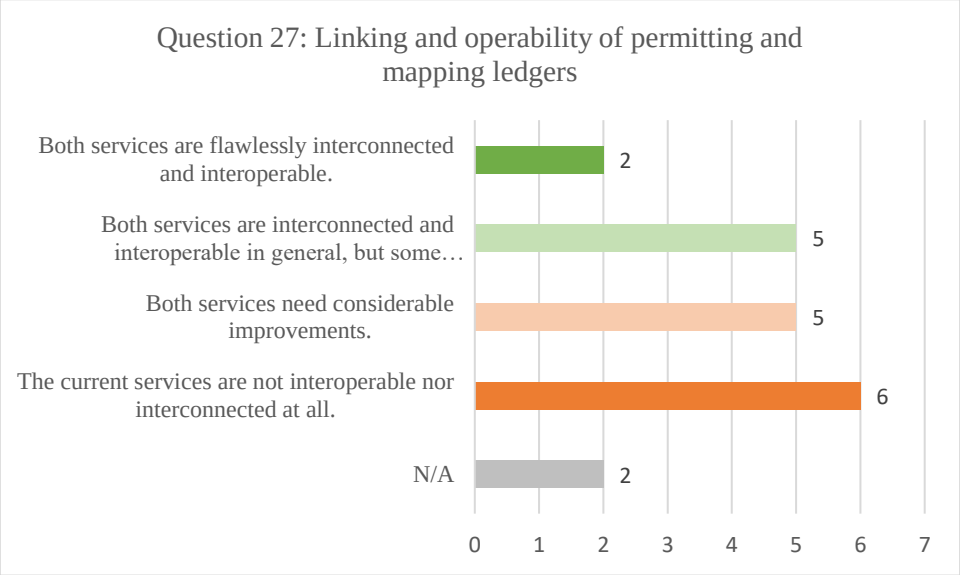
The EIF offers public administrations 47 concrete recommendations on how to improve the governance of their interoperability activities, establish cross-organisational relationships, streamline processes supporting end-to-end digital services, and ensure that both existing and new legislation do not compromise interoperability efforts.

The EIF is based on four key aspects, which, if fulfilled, should ensure a full interoperability of (public) services:

- Legal interoperability (organisations operating under different legal frameworks, policies and strategies are able to work together);
- Organisational interoperability (public administrations align their business processes, responsibilities and expectations to achieve commonly agreed and mutually beneficial goals);
- Semantic interoperability (what is sent is what is understood);

- Technical interoperability (to be ensured, whenever possible, via the use of formal technical specifications).

As regards concrete replies to this question, the answers are evenly distributed, highlighting different experience of Hubs with interoperable ledgers:




Thessaly indicates systems are generally speaking interoperable and provides the following comments as regards potential improvements: Over the past two years (throughout the pandemic), major steps forward have been taken, but some **gaps have been observed during the automated generation of data**, which need to be addressed. In addition, the Bodensee Hub mentions that such systems connect information on existing infrastructure, potential projects and their financing from different sources (federal, national, EU), there is still a **need to provide additional layers of data** regarding other sources of financing (regional etc.). Thessaly provides a list of possible improvements, encompassing **further digitalisation of services**, **speedy registration and connection**, improvement of **training of officials** and **insistence on electronic processes**.

The Barcelona Provincial Council describes its information systems, where main geographical data is kept in an Oracle database, using a tool programmed in Java. Customer programmes allowing access to geographical information are also programmed in Java and are therefore based on the same programming language. The data are not currently shared with any external information systems, but are still synchronised. Another solution was presented by Murcia, where information from regional administration networks is updated via a web-based application.

According to respondents, **interoperability of ledgers needs to be improved also in the areas such as transport and energy management**. In Brandenburg for example, for the energy transition, all relevant data on energy networks is currently being merged with the Federal Network Agency, but a respondent points at the fact the merger needs considerable improvements. According to the

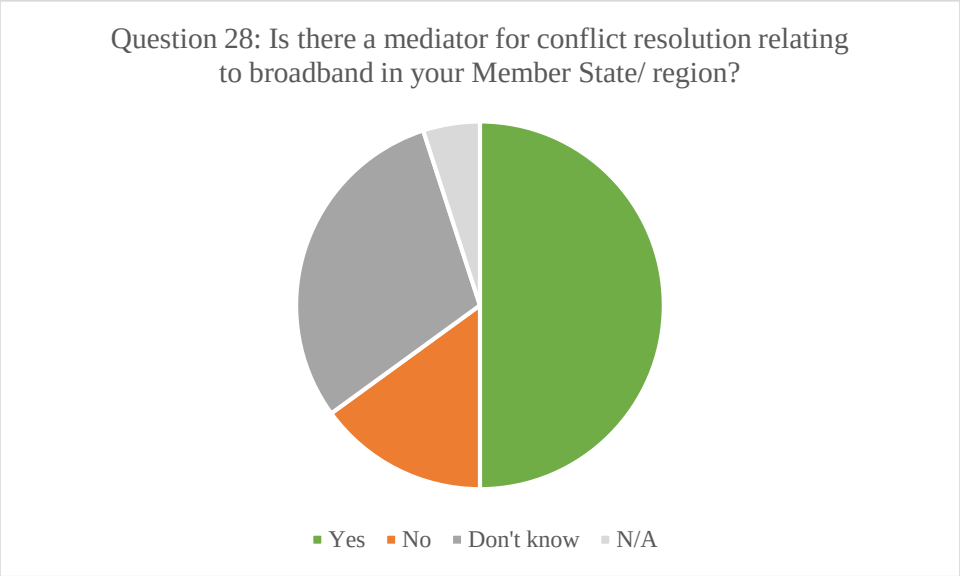
Community of Madrid, with regard to transport, there should be an interoperable, intuitive and reliable system between authorisation records and cartographic records, while the latter should be improved.

Those respondents who have indicated their systems needed considerable improvements and that their systems were not interoperable at all, have not provided exhausting comments or suggestions for improvements, but a common denominative in their responses points at the **need of a close interconnection of all public registers**. In addition, where such interoperability already exists, it could be extended to further systems, as Friuli Venezia Giulia suggests.

***Independent mediators for conflict resolution***

*Question 28: Is there a mediator in your member state/region to organise or facilitate the resolution of disputes in relation to building permitting for broadband infrastructure? If yes, what is his role and how do you evaluate his functioning?*

This question's purpose is to get an insight into how disputes in building permit procedures for broadband infrastructure are settled. In most of the cases, disputes over building permits are being handled by courts, which is often burdensome, lengthy and hampers the cooperation between disputing parties after the dispute has been settled. An independent mediator could speed up procedures without negative impact on disputing parties' further relations.




In Brandenburg, there are various (private) intermediaries for broadband deployment disputes. However, it is not possible to conclusively assess whether these are not known or are not used in the city/area in question. Mazovia noted that they were primarily used for financing issues.

Baden-Württemberg answered that a regulatory authority exists, but its Ministry of the Interior has repeatedly offered to act as a neutral intermediary and to assist in negotiations with private telecommunications companies.

There is a mediator in Vorarlberg (part of the Bodensee Hub): The federal conciliation and regulatory body works as part of the regulatory authority; however, the Bodensee Hub has no experience with this mediator.

When asked for the potential usefulness of an independent mediator and the role it should assume, the responding Hubs made a number of remarks:

- In Valle d'Aosta, there is no such mediator, and the Hubs suggests it could raise awareness among public infrastructure partners to facilitate digital infrastructure interventions.
- A suggestion has been made by Umbria: An Ombudsman should facilitate compliance by public authorities and quality assurance by operators.

Finally, it has to be noted that some replies to this question were not very detailed and somewhat pointed to a lower awareness of the Hubs about the existence and role of mediators, meaning that **mediators might indeed be useful, but are currently not well-known.**

***Further challenges to digital infrastructure***

*Question 29: If there are any further challenges you are facing with regard to, or benefits you obtained from EU law related to digital infrastructure development in your region/city, please mention them here.*

This question aims to gather feedback from the Hubs on other challenges and/or benefits that cities and regions have been facing and/or obtained from digitalisation and which have not been (sufficiently) covered in previous questions.

The responses covered a wide spectrum: from examples of the benefits that digitisation has brought to citizens and public administration, to problems identified, to suggestions for improvements that could be introduced.

As regards positive examples, Catalonia provides details of deploying a fibre optic network for a private company, **making spare capacity available to the market** in accordance with State aid rules. Since its arrival, this network, in addition to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public services, has boosted the market and the supply of services in white/grey areas, leading to a more digitally cohesive territory. In addition, the Barcelona Provincial Council, identifies **WiFi4EU, EU4Digital and the EU Cybersecurity Strategy** among the benefits of EU legislation related to the development of digital infrastructure.

Moreover, according to Brittany, **public support interventions** contributed to compensate the lack of private investment, **mainly in rural areas or areas with low population density**, where operator investments are less profitable. The Community of Madrid notes that EU legislation has made it possible to implement the Recovery and Resilience Mechanisms and to articulate the transfer of Next Generation EU funds.

Mazovia provides a concrete digitalisation example funded by EU resources: "E-Health for Mazovia 2" consists in the **digitalisation of the voivodeship's health services** by June 2023, contributing to the overall objective of the digital transition through the development of electronic communication infrastructure and IT, and communication technologies.

Several Hubs listed concrete challenges they are facing and that need to be overcome. These relate to different aspects of digitalisation: Financial support of projects, broadband infrastructure in general, communication to and with citizens and (a lack of) human resources. Baden-Württemberg and the Community of Valencia find the **funding procedures bureaucratic and burdensome**: Small municipalities in particular highlight the additional efforts the broadband rollout requires of them. It has been added to their normal everyday business without any further expertise being acquired; it is also difficult to determine where the bankable network infrastructure starts, where State aid starts and whether it is at all eligible.

Human resources are also mentioned as an impeding factor by the Region of Umbria: While it considers the European legislation on digital infrastructure and its national transposition in general as well-designed and simplified, it points at small administrations facing organisational and administrative difficulties, mainly due to the **lack of qualified human resources**.

Vukovar-Srijem reported two additional issues, which may be explored further: First, **citizens not knowing their rights** with regard to digitalisation measures, as they are not sufficiently informed by authorities. Second, the challenge of **insufficient procedures in place to examine potentially adverse impacts of digital infrastructure on human health**. Taken together, these uncertainties may lead to citizens' resistance against broadband rollout.

Challenges related to infrastructure and infrastructure development and rollout, were mentioned in several responses: Brandenburg highlights the **lack of cooperation between network operators**, when building broadband networks. Moreover, it states that the **pick-up thresholds**, which are particularly relevant parameters for eligibility, **lead to confusion**. Baden-Württemberg further mentions that private telecommunications companies are often not complying with the market consultation procedure because it is not mandatory. It also states that the **current minimum download speeds are much too low**.

The FTTH/FTTB technology is mentioned twice among the challenges: According to the Bodensee Hub, EU and Austrian goals are allowing only symmetrical broadband technologies such as fibre technology FTTH/FTTB in the future. Whereas the **principle of technology neutrality should be granted** so that, in the long term, the best-performing infrastructure or technology can be firmly specified and the switch from HFC/DOCSIS[116] networks is not delayed for a long time. In addition, Umbria considers the completion of FTTH connectivity throughout the territory to be a challenge.

Alentejo mentioned several other areas with room for improvement:

- legislative amendments could simplify the building of networks,
- coordinated efforts in construction of the networks could mitigate risks and reduce costs,
- regulation of prices and access to completed networks could increase competition in the market and optimise the profitability of investment,
- auctions to facilitate innovation in mobile broadband access,
- establishment of a European universal access standard.

In addition, Thessaly notes that the challenges faced by a modern and "smart" city require the constant improvement of its digital infrastructure so that it meets the needs of its inhabitants. Therefore, it considers the **speeding up of the 5G network and the adoption of IoT (Internet of Things) applications** as key to improve services to citizens. This Hub also suggested to **improve pricing policy for end users** and to speed-up the upgrade of infrastructure in terms of altering its quality.

Finally, Murcia provides a concrete suggestion for improvement: an **imposition of certain fixed and mobile coverage obligations on operators for certain sectors**, such as coverage of 100Mb in health sector and/or in schools etc.

[116] Data Over Cable Service Interface Specification (DOCSIS) is an international telecommunications standard that permits the addition of high-bandwidth data transfer to an existing cable television (CATV) system.

### 3.4 Public acceptance and infrastructure development

Each of the three parts of the second phase of the survey that led to this report contained two dedicated questions about the public acceptance of infrastructure projects and its importance for their planning, permitting and realisation:

1. **Is public acceptance an important factor in the planning and permitting process of (transport/green/digital) infrastructure projects in your region/city? Why (not)?**

2. **What challenges do you encounter in your region/city to obtain the public acceptance of these projects? Please mention the experiences and good practices in your region/city to address these challenges.**

Across the three parts – transport infrastructure, green infrastructure, and digital infrastructure – the replies underline the immense importance of public acceptance for infrastructure projects. Public acceptance encourages and accelerates the planning and permitting of infrastructure projects. Without it, projects can be rejected and ultimately even be abandoned. The following paragraphs summarise the findings about the importance of the public acceptance factor across the three survey parts and provide examples of good practices.

***Public acceptance as an important factor for the success of infrastructure projects***

It transpires from the Hubs' responses that public acceptance or public rejection of an infrastructure project can have different reasons as well as different consequences.

In general, public acceptance faces three main challenges, which can cause resistance among the population. First, a lack of trust in and understanding of high-tech infrastructures, such as 5G technology, when citizens fear radiation exposure that threatens their health. Second, the well-known "not-in-my-backyard" (NIMBY) phenomenon: geographical proximity of infrastructure projects and/or the special value of territories can cause citizens to oppose an infrastructure project, even if they do not question its technical relevance and its usefulness. Third, the construction phase of large infrastructure projects – when built close to or in an inhabited area – can entail nuisance for those affected. Finally, all three aspects can be compounded by the fact that citizens often do not receive sufficient and/or easily accessible and easy to understand information about the infrastructure project in question.

In addition, there are other, less tangible but more pervasive reasons for public opposition to infrastructure projects: they can imply a behaviour shift that triggers resistance, for instance when people do not like the idea of deploying transport infrastructure that gives priority to alternative mobility over private car use.

Public acceptance and civic participation in infrastructure planning is increasingly part of governance strategies and local and regional authorities are trying to improve participation with better access to information, a higher reader-friendliness of public documents and credible opportunities for co-decision. The aim is to facilitate public acceptance, which can benefit not only the planning and construction of an infrastructure project, but may even determine the success of its use, because it will be more likely that citizens will support a shift towards sustainable transport, if the corresponding infrastructure takes into account their needs and concerns.

## *I. Transport infrastructure and public acceptance*

Due to the above-mentioned impact it can have, obtaining public acceptance for transport infrastructure is particularly difficult. All German Hubs (Baden-Württemberg, Brandenburg, North-Rhine Westphalia) and the Bodensee Hub, for example, report that the change in mobility culture and individual behaviour, required for the transition to sustainable and smart modes of transport, faces constant opposition in car-dominated regions. This opposition is also reflected in low degrees of political will and the fact that cars continue to play a major role in all traffic planning, as Baden-Württemberg states. According to Friuli Venezia Giulia and Thessaly, transport planning is too often hampered by the NIMBY phenomenon. A transition towards sustainable transport is welcomed in the general interest, but often rejected when it is put into practice and collides with individual interests.

A majority of Hubs underline that fair and equal access to and benefit from public transport infrastructure is crucial for enhancing public acceptance. Moreover, public acceptance can provide decision-makers with additional legitimacy, as for example the Barcelona Provincial Council states. Several Hubs conclude that only if citizens are made aware of the benefits and advantages of such projects and if they can consider objectives such as a modern and secure transport network, train frequency, better accessibility etc., to be important, public acceptance can be achieved.[117] However, existing measures to increase public participation are often not reaching this goal:

- Brandenburg and Timiş state that the participation of citizens is often hindered by long procedures and non-user-friendly communication. Furthermore, according to Brandenburg, participation tends to be dominated by minority interest groups.
- The Community of Madrid, in this context, underlines the need for easy understandable information and credible participation mechanism: citizens should be able to present their concerns.

[117] Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen, Brandenburg, Murcia, Alentejo, North-Rhine Westphalia, Community of Valencia.

- Alentejo reports that, while regional parliament meetings are the adequate place to publicly discuss such issues, the problem is to persuade the public to attend and follow such meetings.
- Thessaly adds in this respect that digital means are crucial for citizens to fully benefit from infrastructure projects.
- The Hub further notes that also local businesses should be supported to carry out private sector green growth projects, such as the purchase of more sustainable car fleets, and digital transition actions. If these companies are part of the wider effort to make transport more sustainable, their involvement can promote public acceptance.
- In addition, Thessaly and Brandenburg emphasise the need to train critical workers tasked with implementing more sustainable and smarter projects and solutions: Only if these workers understand and embrace their goals and realise their full potential can they contribute to the acceptance of such infrastructure.
- A lack of information and trust is another factor hindering public acceptance, as several Hubs point out. Clear and credible information must be made available to citizens as early as possible.[118]
- According to Thessaly, the competent authorities should create and provide financial incentives to municipalities, who in turn can make these available to citizens. This could increase the acceptance of local infrastructure projects.
- Baden-Württemberg regrets that the planning of cycle lanes requires strong political support, because decision-makers are often overly sensitive with regard to car drivers' interests. Moreover, the financing of cycle lanes is often not clear, which further impedes their realisation.
- North-Rhine Westphalia finally emphasises the lack of a 'common position' between different political actors and parties, making the justification of (green) infrastructure measures even more difficult.

A majority of Hubs carries out some form of public consultation in order to create public acceptance for controversial projects. Moreover, there are civil-society initiatives underpinning governmental efforts.

| **Good practices examples** |
| --- |
| According to **Thessaly**, the Municipality of Trikkaia is putting citizens at the centre of planning processes. Experience shows they are often well-placed to offer new perspectives and solutions which cannot be provided by other stakeholders. |

[118] Bodensee Hub.

The **Barcelona Provincial Council** highlights the value of sustainable urban mobility plans as a good tool to manage public acceptance and disseminate information. As compared to other modes of consultation, the plans offer participation spaces for all stakeholders. This prevents a one-sided gathering of feedback and makes it possible to plan and develop strategies for ambitious actions, which take into account the concerns and needs of multiple stakeholders, while keeping the critical impact low.

As an example of civil-society initiatives, illustrating the raised social awareness with regard to the need to change the mobility model, the **Barcelona Provincial Council** mentions 'Revuelta Escolar'. The initiative spotlights the negative consequences and threats to health caused by excessive traffic and certain private transport modes.

**Brandenburg**, bordering with Poland and thus managing cross-border infrastructure projects, organises bilingual citizens' forums and online participation formats for citizens on both sides of the border. In general, the Hub underlines the usefulness of citizens assemblies, where clear and comprehensible explanations are given and can achieve a high level of acceptance.

**Umbria** explains that while the region is not obliged to ensure participation, it consults the individual stakeholders affected by infrastructure measures and assesses citizen's requests.

The **Community of Madrid** emphasises the need counter misinformation about e.g. alternative fuel supply infrastructure by publishing useful information and organising conferences and events about the issue.

**Emilia-Romagna** is carrying out the so-called PRIT process (Regional Local Public Transport Plan), which includes the consultation of regional transport stakeholders and involves citizens. As a concrete example, the Hub mentions the construction of the Bologna Motorway Passante, for which a public dialogue was launched, including the possibility for citizens to make proposals and be aware of project choices.

**Murcia** has set up an office for citizens ('Oficina de Atención al Ciudadano'), which is accompanies the works on the Alta Velocidad project in the city of Murcia, informing the residents and other affected stakeholders.

## *II. Green infrastructure and public acceptance*

The majority of Hubs highlight that public acceptance is an opportunity to improve infrastructure projects, design more integrated projects, and ensure that their implementation on the ground is sustainable.[119] Moreover, public acceptance can accelerate the approval of plans and projects, and improve the living conditions of citizens, in particular in urban areas.[120] However, green infrastructure projects face specific challenges to foster public acceptance, depending on the area and the socio-economic conditions in which they are implemented:

- On a general note, North-Rhine Westphalia regrets that obtaining public acceptance is no longer geared towards social consensus, but towards minority groups, which puts pressure on decision-makers. In the same context, the Community of Valencia states that it is imperative to find a balance between development needs and environmental protection.
- Vukovar-Srijem states that the broader public is not familiar with planning and licensing processes and this excludes a large share of the population from participation. Moreover, the Hub notes that citizens often do not look at investments in the sense of nature protection and are not aware of the concrete benefits. Timiş notes in this regard that a lack of information and education can be a cause for rejection.
- Brandenburg in this context raises the importance of sufficient transparency about the cost-effectiveness of projects.
- According to Baden-Württemberg, rural populations are not always sensitive to environmental concerns.
- Alentejo highlights the long and time consuming process of cooperating and engaging with all authorities involved in nature conservation activities. While public acceptance is important, the Hub is in favour of European standards for nature protection and conservation, to help overcome difficulties to obtain public acceptance.
- Similarly, Umbria claims that the main problems arise between authorities (and not with individual citizens), with different and sometimes contradictory priorities (e.g. river as a source of drinking water vs. river as an environmental protection area).
- Thessaly regrets that there is sometimes a general rejection of projects at the local level by some, but it has no scientific basis. The Hub mentions two specific projects, namely the construction of a municipal waste management plant in Volos and the combustion of fuel in the

[119] Community of Madrid, Thessaly, Vukovar-Srijem.

[120] Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen, Mazovia, Bodensee Hub.

cement industry AGET. To overcome this, the Hub states that local authorities should create a climate of trust and determination.

What is more, with regard to Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), which need to be carried out for infrastructure projects, Umbria raises challenges explicitly pertaining to EIA/SEA related measures: In an ideal scenario, SEA and EIA are carried out at the planning and project stage, respectively, and they contain well-defined measures and their possible alternatives already in the SEA. In reality, however, planning resources are limited and concrete planning only realises 'on the job', leading to a lack of alternative solutions in the SEA. As a result, lower levels of compliance with environmental standards and inefficiency due to double assessments, reduce public acceptance. Moreover, the decreasing time available to proper consultations limits the possibilities to ensure participation.

| **Good practice examples** |
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| According to **Alentejo,** in its region questionnaires inquiring the opinion of the public on planned and ongoing initiatives are regularly published. |
| In **Umbria**, the Department for Forestry, Mountains, Nature-Systems, Wildlife and Hunting, carries out awareness-raising campaigns and organises technical assistance as well as trainings for experts. The former are geared towards the general public (e.g. environment-compatible sports activities; management guides for agricultural activities promoting species conservation). This latter are offered by the region in the planning phase to large companies carrying out infrastructure projects (e.g. road or energy infrastructure). |
| **Mazovia**'s Regional Land Management Plan contains information about an ecological connectivity network in the region, including the Warsaw green belt. In addition to scientific studies (e.g. ecophysiographic study), the region carried out consultations in cities to better inform residents about potential green belt areas. |
| The Evaluation Department of **Valle d'Aosta** mentions sharing programming documents online, making them accessible for citizens and thus enable their participation. In general, many Hubs refer to the need to early and proactive information.[121] |

[121] Valle d'Aosta, Baden-Württemberg, Vukovar-Srijem, Brandenburg, Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen, Emilia-Romagna.

**Baden-Württemberg** also underlines the importance of early participation and the use of citizens' councils and dialogues. The region has created a dedicated online portal for citizen participation ('Bürgerbeteiligungsportal').

**Emilia-Romagna** cites as a concrete example the planning conference for the formation of the Provincial Territorial Cooperation Plan (PTCP) of the *Province of Modena*. The region thus organises conferences dedicated to the facilitation of planning. In the case of Modena, this covers the entire provincial sector planning, including planning activities for sectors as diverse as radio and television broadcasting, mining activities, and commercial settlements.

The **Barcelona Provincial Council** mentions that municipalities on whose ground such works take place, intermediate between the different stakeholders, by setting up coordination committees between the construction company, and undertakings affected by the works. The aim of this action is to inform about all relevant facts (dates, times, locations) and reduce their negative impact on other parties.

According to **Umbria**, the *Municipality of Perugia* has set up its own urban plan for sustainable mobility, has published it online and has opened a call for contributions.

### *III. Digital infrastructure and public acceptance*

Digitalisation and connectivity are chief objectives of the EU and its Member States to keep their economies competitive, ensure an equal participation of citizens and promote territorial cohesion. Nevertheless, the deployment of digital infrastructure like broadband, and in particular 5G, faces public opposition, which slows down authorisation procedures.

Some people fear radiation can cause health problems and that the presence of antennas near their homes could lead to a decrease in the value of buildings. Moreover, Umbria states landowners often oppose infrastructure projects that require excavations for fibre. In the absence of public acceptance, the installation of new mobile masts and the upgrading of existing ones, could be prevented from materialising[122]. In rural or less populated areas, residents seem more likely to approve of the construction of broadband networks, as Mazovia reports.

[122] Baden-Württemberg, Barcelona Provincial Council, Emilia-Romagna.

Interestingly, however, according to Umbria, the impact of public opposition to broadband projects only rarely prevents their realisation. This is because the current regulations favour the installation of 5G and fibre and overcome the possible opposition of citizens: municipalities only have the power to refuse authorisation to install digital infrastructure if the exposure limits laid down by law are actually exceeded.

Alentejo confirms this: public acceptance should not be a limiting factor for interconnectivity, as it is a key factor for unlocking full potential of regions, and considered a standard in the EU.

The Hubs refer to further challenges to digital infrastructure deployment:

- The fact that a network expansion by an operator always pre-requires an appropriate aggregation of demand, further challenges the deployment of broadband infrastructure, according to Baden-Württemberg. Only if a certain house connect rate (= number of end-user contracts) can be obtained, the refinancing of broadband infrastructure can be ensured and operators will invest. A lack of public acceptance and private interest in contracting broadband can thus prevent broadband deployment. As a consequence, households and businesses in affected areas face persistent connectivity problems.
- The Hub further notes that obtaining the necessary access to private property can also make broadband expansion more difficult. This is confirmed by the Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen, explaining that some landowners fear that any work, carried out on their land, could have negative and costly impacts for them and reduce their properties' value.
- According to Thessaly, unjustified delays of broadband infrastructure implementation may further reduce public acceptance. Ironically, as Murcia notes, these delays can also be due to public opposition.
- Valle d'Aosta states that, the regulations for and management of major projects unfortunately sometimes leads to planning errors with major impacts on the implementation schedule, which in turn can extend the construction phase and cause additional nuisances for citizens.
- Brandenburg and Baden-Württemberg both highlight the persistent opposition to potential radiation and to the expansion of 5G, for which they have not encountered any effective solution yet. The Bodensee Hub adds in this regard that there is a lack of 5G awareness-raising at the EU and German federal government level. The Hub further calls for a better and earlier involvement of local and regional authorities in 5G deployment, which would allow them to timely raise awareness at their level.
- Vukovar-Srijem states that existing procedures to examine the impact of digital infrastructure on human health are not sufficient to counter the worries and allegation of some citizens.

- The Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen in this regard emphasises the need to combat misinformation: citizens are sometimes afraid that even fibre optic infrastructure is emitting radiation.
- Alentejo raises again socio-economic factors in particular in sparsely populated regions, mountainous or peripheral regions and regions with higher average age, which may lower public acceptance because of a higher reluctance to change.

As already mentioned, there is no quick fix to deal with the resistance against 5G technology. Transparent communication and detailed reasoning, however, should be part of it, in order to put citizens in a position where they understand the technical and scientific reasons on which the rules and administrative choices are based.

Several Hubs report a number of good practices:

| **Good practice examples** |
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| **Catalonia** highlights the need to share the spirit and objectives of a project with local actors – once this is achieved, the Hub reports, it is much simpler to communicate about the project and obtain public acceptance. This is achieved by signing a National Pact for a Digital Society (PNSD). Moreover, in order to ensure that all operators are informed about the possibility to use the infrastructure, a Single Information Point (PIC) has been put in place. |
| **Thessaly** reports that the *Municipality of Trikkaia* has adopted an action plan as part of the city's digital transformation strategy, the Smart Trikkaia Project. The project encompasses, i.a., the Trikkaia Check App, open data portals, free Wi-Fi, smart lighting and a citizen helpline, all of which have strengthened the city's digital identity and the will of citizens to embrace new technologies. |
| The **Barcelona Provincial Council** points out as a good example '5G Barcelona', an open, global and neutral digital laboratory for the validation and adoption of 5G technologies and applications, which are tested in the real environment of the city. |
| **Baden-Württemberg** points to conflict resolution via intermediaries as a helpful instrument to address public concerns and to enable a factual exchange between authorities and operators on the one hand and citizens on the other. |
| **The Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen** emphasises the need to provide transparent and detailed information about all infrastructure projects: only if citizens can directly compare the existing alternatives, their construction and subsequent use, public acceptance can be achieved. |

According to **Emilia-Romagna** several municipalities in its territory organise participatory assemblies in order to integrate citizens in project planning.

**Mazovia** points to the helpfulness of local press articles, which can transparently provide residents with detailed and relevant information about infrastructure projects.

In **Murcia** the College of Telecommunications Engineers mediates in case of public or administrative opposition to infrastructure projects.

**Annex**

**Survey on 21st century rules for 21st century infrastructure**

Find the survey here.

**Statistics of the survey on 21st century rules for 21st century infrastructure**

Find the statistics here.

## Stakeholder list (1st consultation)

**Alentejo (PT)**

- ADRAL: Regional development agency of Alentejo

**Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen (IT)**

- Directorate-General, Autonomous Province of Bolzano – Bozen
- Section for Infrastructure, Autonomous Province of Bolzano – Bozen

**Autonomous Region of Valle d'Aosta (IT)**

- Department of Transport
- Telecommunications Infrastructure Office
- Directorate of Legislative Affairs and State Aid

**Baden-Württemberg (DE)**

- Departments of the provincial government
- Baden-Württemberg Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BWIHK)
- Baden-Württemberg's Day of Crafts:Handwerk International Baden-Württemberg
- Cooperative Association of Baden-Württemberg
- Verband kommunaler Unternehmen e.V. - Regional group Baden-Württemberg

**Barcelona Provincial Council (ES)**

- Coordination of corporate strategy and local coordination, Presidency of the Provincial Council
- NextDiba unit, Presidency of the Provincial Council
- Directorate for International Relations, Presidency of the Provincial Council
- Productive Tissue Service — Productive Sectors Subsection
- Technical Office for Local Mobility and Road Safety
- Technical Office for Climate Change and Sustainability
- Public Equipment and Spaces Service
- Housing Office

**Bodensee RegHub**

***Vorarlberg (AT)***

- Department Ib Transport Law, Office of the Provincial Government of Vorarlberg

- Department IV e Environmental and Nature Protection, Office of the Provincial Government of Vorarlberg
- Department VIa General Economic Affairs, Office of the Provincial Government of Vorarlberg
- Department VIb Economic Law, Office of the Provincial Government of Vorarlberg
- Department VIIb Road Construction, Office of the Provincial Government of Vorarlberg
- Department VIId Water Management, Office of the Provincial Government of Vorarlberg

***Liechtenstein (LI)***

- Office of Building and Infrastructure

**Brittany (FR)**

- Directorates for Transport, Environment, Digital, Maritime Affaires, European Affaires, and Economic Development

**Community of Madrid (ES)**

- Ministry of Education and Youth: Directorate-General for Infrastructure and Services
- Directorate-General for Roads, Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Infrastructure
- Directorate-General for Collective Transport Infrastructure, Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Infrastructure
- Social Housing Agency, Department of Housing and Local Administration
- Directorate-General for Housing, Department of Housing and Local Administration
- Directorate-General for Local Administration, Department of Housing and Local Administration
- Directorate-General for Sustainability and Climate Change, Regional Ministry of the Environment, Spatial Planning and Sustainability
- Directorate-General for Soil (Subdirectorate-General for Soil and Subdirectorate-General for Urban Consortia), Regional Ministry of the Environment, Spatial Planning and Sustainability
- Directorate-General for Circular Economy, Regional Ministry of the Environment, Spatial Planning and Sustainability
- Directorate-General for Agriculture, Livestock and Food, Regional Ministry of the Environment, Spatial Planning and Sustainability
- Directorate-General for Urban Planning, Regional Ministry of the Environment, Spatial Planning and Sustainability

**Community of Valencia (ES)**

- Regional Ministry of Territorial Policy, Public Works and Mobility

- Coordination of Participation in the Recovery Programme, Presidency
- Regional Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development, Climate Emergency and Ecological Transition
- EPSAR Legal Department

**Friuli Venezia Giulia (IT)**

- Service for International Relations
- Central Directorate for Infrastructure and Territory
- Central Finance Directorate
- Eastern Adriatic Sea Port Authority — Trieste
- EGTC GO/EZTS GO

**Dubrovnik-Neretva County (HR)**

- Administrative Department for EU Funds, Regional and International Cooperation, City of Dubrovnik
- Administrative Department for Construction and Project Management, City of Dubrovnik
- Administrative Department for Spatial Planning and Construction, Dubrovnik-Neretva County
- DUNAEA – Dubrovnik-Neretva County Regional Development Agency
- EU Projects Department, Municipality of Konavle
- Waste Management Agency Ltd.
- Dubrovnik-Neretva County Road Administration
- Vodovod Dubrovnik water utility company

**Emilia-Romagna (IT)**

- Pact for Work and Climate

**Eurocity Chaves-Verín (ES, PT)**

- Municipality of Verín
- Municpio de Chaves
- Eurocity Chaves-Verín

**Flanders (BE)**

- Agency for Domestic Administration

**Helsinki-Uusimaa (FI)**

- Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council
- Helsinki-EU Office
- Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (AFLRA)

**Kosice Self-governing Region (SK)**

- Department for projects and investments
- EGTC – Košice Self-governing Region
- Košice Technical University
- University of Veterinary Medicine and Pharmacy in Košice
- Pavol Jozef Šafárik University
- Datacomp s.r.o.
- City of Košice

**Mazovia (PL)**

- Mazowieckie Regional Planning Office
- Mazowieckie Regional Road Administration
- "Koleje Mazowieckie - KM" sp. z o.o. [Mazovian Railways]
- Independent Group of Public Health Care Facilities - Warsaw Children's Hospital in Dziekanów Leśny
- Mazowieckie Centre for the Treatment of Lung and Tubercular Diseases
- Mazowieckie Neuropsychiatry Centre in Zagórz
- Mazowieckie Specialist Hospital in Ostrołęka
- Department of Geodesy and Cartography
- Department of Social and Health Policy
- Department of Owner Supervision and Investments

**Murcia (ES)**

- Ministry of Public Works and Infrastructure

**Nivala-Haapajärvi Region (FI)**

- Haapajärvi province
- KuljetusPolar
- Nivalan Teollisuuskylä Oy

**Pinneberg County Council (DE)**

- District of Pinneberg, Department of Service, Law and Building
- Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Kiel, Elmshorn branch
- Projektgesellschaft Norderelbe (project management and support)

**Primorje-Gorski Kotar County (HR)**

- Institute for Physical Planning of Primorje
- Regional Development Agency
- Regional Energy Agency Kvarner

**Region Gävleborg (SE)**

- Infrastructure Coordinator, Regional Development, Region Gävleborg

**Istria (HR)**

- Regional Coordinator for European Funds and Programmes, Istria County
- Istria County Institute for Physical Planning public institution
- Administrative Department for Physical Planning and Construction, Istria County

**Thessaly (EL)**

- Directorate for Civil Engineering of Larissa Regional Unit, Thessaly Region
- Directorate for Technical Services of the Muncipality of Trikala
- General Hospital of Volos (legal entity of public law)
- Ephorate of Antiquities of Larissa
- Regional Health authority of Thessaly and Central Greece
- General Hospital of Trikala
- Ephorate of Antiquities of Trikala
- Special managing authority for the operational programme, Region of Thessaly
- Larissa Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Municipality of Kileler

**Timis County Council (RO)**

- Timis County Council, Project Implementation Departament

- Romanian Railway Company, Regional Branch Timisoara
- Traian Vuia International Airport Timisoara
- Fundatia Diaspora/Diaspora Foundation

**Umbria (IT)**

- Regional Director for Resources, Programming, Culture, Tourism
- Regional Information System, Digital Infrastructure Service
- Mobility Infrastructure and Local Public Transport Service
- Energy, Environment, Waste Service

**Vas County Council (HU)**

- Water Management Directorate of Western Transdanubia
- Volánbusz Zrt.
- Project Office, Vasivíz Zrt.

**Vukovar-Srijem County (HR)**

- Department for Communal Economy and Legal Affairs, Grad Otok
- Municipality Negoslavci
- Municipality Gunja
- Department for General Affairs, Municipality Ivankovo
- Department for Developmental Projects, Eko-sustav Ltd. Vukov
- City of Vinkovci
- Municipality of Tompojevci
- Vukovar-Srijem County Development Agency

**West Pomerania (PL)**

- Urząd Miasta Szczecin
- Urząd Miasta Koszalin
- Urząd Miasta Stargard
- Urząd Miasta Świnoujście
- Urząd Miasta Wałcz
- Department of Investment and Real Estate, Marshal's Office of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship
- Department of Infrastructure and Transport, Marshal's Office of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship
- Department of Culture, Science and National Heritage, Marshal's Office of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship

- Department for the Rural Development Programme, Marshal's Office of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship
- Department for the Implementation of Regional Operational Programme, Marshal's Office of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship

## Stakeholder list (2nd consultation)

### Alentejo (PT)

- CCDR Alentejo
- EDIA – Empresa de desenvolvimento e infra-estuturas do Alqueva, S.A
- CIMBAL
- DECSIS – Sistemas de informação S.A
- ESDIME
- FENACAM – Federação National das Caixas de Crédito Agrícola Mútuo
- Fundação Alentejo
- Marble Project, S.A
- MONTE – Desenvolvimento Alentejo Central
- NERE – Associação Empresarial do Alentejo Central
- SOMEFE – Sociedade de Metais e Fundição, LDA
- SOMINCOR
- Terras Dentro – Associação para o desenvolvimento integrado
- Universidade de Évora
- ACOS – Associação de Agricultores do Sul
- ADEGA Cooperativa de Redondo, CRL
- Amândio José Lobo, LDA
- ASSIMAGRA – Recursos Minerais de Portugal
- Município de Aljustrel
- AREANATEJO – Agência Regional de Energia e Ambiente do Norte Alentejano e Tejo
- Município de Évora

### Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen (IT)

- Office for Cable Cars and Air Transport, Department for Mobility
- Environmental Administrative Office, Provincial Agency for the Environment and Climate Protection
- Detection, Planning, Monitoring, Nature Division, Department for Landscape and Land Development
- Office for Telecommunications Infrastructure

### Baden-Württemberg (DE)

- Ministry of the Interior, for Digitalisation and Municipalities
- Baden-Württemberg Municipal Council

- Baden-Württemberg District Council
- Baden-Württemberg Nature Conservation Association (NABU)
- Baden-Württemberg Cooperative Association
- Rhine-Neckar CCI/Transport lead BWIHK (Chamber of commerce)

**Barcelona Provincial Council (ES)**

- Department of Innovation, Local Governments and Territorial Cohesion. Technology Services and Corporate Systems Services Directorate.
- Department of Climate Action. Environment Services Management Office: Climate Change and Sustainability Technical Office.
- Department of Infrastructures and Natural Areas. Roads and Mobility Services Management Office: Mobility and Local Road Safety Technical Office. Housing Services, Town Planning and Activities Management Office: Town Planning Office. Facilities, Urban Infrastructure and Architectural Heritage Services Management Office: Facilities and Public Areas Service and, Section of Territorial Information Systems of the Cartography and Local GIS Technical Office.
- Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Trade. Economic Promotion and Employment Services Management Office: Subsection of Productive Sectors of the Productive Fabric Service.

**Bodensee Hub (AT, DE)**

***Vorarlberg (DE)***

- Energy Institute Vorarlberg
- ÖBB-Infrastruktur AG Tyrol/Vorarlberg
- Office of the Provincial Government of Vorarlberg
- Department IVe — Environment and Climate Action
- Department VIa — General Economic Affairs, Transport Policy and Planning
- Department VIa — General Economic Affairs, Digital Sector
- Department VIb — Economic Law (responsible inter alia for EIA procedures)
- Department VIIa — Spatial Planning and Construction Law

***Bavaria (DE)***

- State Ministry of Housing, Construction and Transport

**Brandenburg (DE)**

- Department 3, County Oberlausitz-Spreewald

- Department for Economic Development/Digitalisation, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Labour and
- Energy
- Strategic Infrastructure, Frankfurt Oder Building Office
- Potsdam-Mittelmark District
- Frankfurt-Slubicer Cooperation Centre, City of Frankfurt (Oder)
- German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) Berlin-Brandenburg and Saxony
- IHK Ostbrandenburg

**Brittany (FR)**

- Regional Council of Brittany

**Catalonia (ES)**

- Government and Administration of Catalonia
- Ministry for the Vide-PResidency, digital policies and Territory
- Ministry for Climate Action, Food and Rural Agenda
- Sectorial Secretariat of Digital Policies
- Sectorial Secretariat of Territory and Mobility
- Sectorial Secretariat of Climate Action

**Community of Madrid (ES)**

- Isabel II Canal (CYII) (Water Infrastructures)
- Directorate-General for Collective Transport Infrastructure
- Directorate-General for Digital Policy
- Directorate-General for Judicial Infrastructure
- Ministery for Health and Public Health
- Directorate-General for Industry and Energy Promotion

**Community of Valencia (ES)**

- Directorate-General for the Progress of Digital Society
- European Funding Planning and Technical Support Service, Regional Ministry of Territorial Policy, Public Works and Mobility
- Directorate-General of Water
- Valencia City Council, Smart City Office
- Port of Alicante
- Port of Valencia

**Emilia-Romagna (IT)**

- Members of the Pact for Work and Climate
- Unions of Municipalities of the Emilia-Romagna Region
- ANCI of Emilia-Romagna
- Ravenna Port Authority
- ERF (Railway agency Emilia-Romagna)

**Friuli Venezia Giulia (IT)**

- Eastern Adriatic Sea Port System Authority
- Central Accounting Service, Autonomous Region of FVG
- Regional Directorate for Environmental Protection, Energy and Sustainable Development — Environmental Assessment Service

**Mazovia (PL)**

- Mazowieckie Railways
- Mazowieckie Regional Planning Office
- Department of Digitalisation, Geodesy and Cartography, Marshal's Office

**Murcia (ES)**

- Sectretariat-General of the Regional Ministry of Public Works and Infrastructures
- Telecommunications Service, Regional Ministry of Economy, Finance and Digital Administration
- Directorate-General for the Environment Regional Ministry of Water, Agriculture, Fisheries and the Environment

**North Rhine-Westphalia (DE)**

- Ministry of Economic Affairs
- Ministry of Transport
- North Rhine-Westphalia CCI
- Westdeutscher Handwerkskammertag (Chamber of crafts)
- North Rhine-Westphalia Association of Cities
- Association of Cities and Municipalities of North Rhine-Westphalia
- EU representative of the municipalities in North Rhine-Westphalia
- Smartlab GmbH, Aachen

**Thessaly (EL)**

- Municipal Water and Sewerage Company of Larissa
- Municipal Water and Sewerage Company of Tempi
- Programming, Organisation and ICT Unit, Municipality of Kileler
- Directorate for Technical Projects, Municipality of Tyrnavos
- Directorate for the Environment & Spatial Planning, Decentralised Administration of Thessaly-Central Greece
- Directorate for Technical Projects of the Regional Unit of Larissa, Contstruction Unit, Region of Thessaly
- Municipality of Argithea
- Association of Industries of Thessaly & Central Greece
- Central Greece Branch of the Greek Chamber for Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Gorestry, Fisheries and the Management of Mineral and Water Resources
- City of Trikkaia
- Aposteirosi SA
- Directorate for the Environment & Spatial Planning, Region of Thessaly
- Technical Projects of the Regional Units of Magnesia & Sporades, Region of Thessaly
- Independent Unit for Programming, Organisation and IT, Municipality of Palama

**Timis County Council (RO)**

- Timiș County Council

**Umbria (IT)**

- Technical Coordination of State aid, Commission for European Affairs, Conference of the Regions of Italy
- Service for Mobility Infrastructure and Local Public Transport, Region of Umbria
- Service for Environmental Sustainability, Environmental Assessments and Authorisations, Region of Umbria

- Service for Forestry, Mountains, Nature Systems, Wildlife and Hunting, Region of Umbria

- Service for Regional Information System and digital infrastructures, Region of Umbria
- Operational Unit for Technological and Energy Services, Municipality of Perugia
- Planning Office for Environment, Hygiene and Public Health, Municipality of Terni

**Autonomous Region of Valle d'Aosta (IT)**

- Transport and Sustainable Mobility Department, Autonomous Region of Valle d'Aosta
- Airport and Railways Direction, Transport and Sustainable Mobility Department, Autonomous Region of Valle d'Aosta;
- Cable way infrastructure Direction, Economic development and energy Department, Autonomous Region of Valle d'Aosta;
- Evaluations, Environmental Permits and Air Quality Direction, Environment Department, Autonomous Region of Valle d'Aosta;
- Telecommunications Infrastructure Office, Innovation and Digital Agenda Department, Autonomous Region Valle d'Aosta;
- SITMB (Italian Mont Blanc Tunnel Company);
- RAV S.p.A.(Valle d'Aosta motorway junction);
- INVA S.p.A. (ICT operator);
- Mont Avic Natural Park.

**Vukovar-Srijem County (HR)**

- Department for Communal Economy and Communal Infrastructure, Municipality of Ivankovo
- Department for Research, Development and International Cooperation, Vukovar-Srijem County Development Agency
- Croatian Chamber of Commerce - County Chamber Vukovar
- Senior Energy Efficiency Advisor, City of Vukovar
- Development Projects Department, Eko sustav Ltd. (incorporated by the Vukovar-Srijem County
- City of Županja
- Municipality of Drenovci
- Unified Administrative Department, Municipality Negoslavci
- Municipality of Tovarnik

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European Committee of the Regions

Created in 1994 following the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, the European Committee of the Regions is the EU's assembly of 329 regional and local representatives from all 27 Member States, representing over 447 million Europeans. Its mission is to involve regional and local authorities and the communities they represent in the EU's decision-making process and to inform them about EU policies. The European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council are obliged to consult the Committee in policy areas affecting regions and cities. It can appeal to the Court of Justice of the European Union if its rights are infringed or it believes that EU law infringes the subsidiarity principle or fails to respect regional or local powers.

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