The “LI RI CA” project

The “LI RI CA” project aims to improve the provision of cross-border public transport, not very satisfactory at present, in the French-Italian coastal area. More particularly, it concerns the local railway line from Marseille to Savona via Monaco, Menton, Ventimiglia and Imperia.

The Alps form a natural border which is unfavourable to the development of public transport between France and Italy. Nevertheless, the population density is very high on the coastal fringe and there are constant flows of border workers: almost 30,000 workers, including about 5,500 Italians, travel to Monaco every day, and more than 1,500 Italian workers travel to the Alpes-Maritimes department every day.

In addition, the cross-border service is not very good. The connections at the border, in Ventimiglia station, are unattractive, with connection times ranging from 5 to 60 minutes. The reasons for this poor transport interoperability include different equipment and electrical power supplies on each side of the border and a lack of coordination of timetables. There are also different standards for safety and signalling.

How will the “LI RI CA” project be able to change the situation?

The implementation of the area information system, accessible by Internet and scheduled to be opened to the public at the end of 2007, should encourage the use of public transport for cross-border journeys by facilitating searches for itineraries combining the different modes, rail and road.

The purpose of the studies is to give decision-makers, including politicians and competent operators (regions and railway operators), reliable information to assess the need to take action in this domain. But the response to these questions is political above all!

To counter the problems of interoperability of the railway systems and the equipment differences, the solution from a technical point of view would be engineering modification of the existing railway equipment on each side of the border. Such changes would demand substantial investments, and it is up to the politicians of the two regions to decide whether they are feasible.

A bus route between the French Riviera and Imperia Province

In response to the saturation of the road system in the coastal sector between Monaco, France and Italy, the French Riviera conurbation Community and Imperia Province, together with all the local authorities concerned, have launched a project to introduce a bus route linking San Remo, Ventimiglia, Menton, Roquebrune and Cap-Martin. The route will operate in both directions. Despite their closeness, the French Riviera and Imperia have never had direct and regular road services, each authority having developed its own public transport network, without complementarity. Moreover, the only integrated transport system, rail, does not serve all the population centres and is limited to the stations only. Many people thus have no alternative to the private car.

For an optimum response to this very high demand, the project plans a route that runs along the coastal strip, through the centres of the most dense urban areas. There will be frequent stops, including all the present transport stops, encouraging modularity (service to the main railway stations and connections to the existing urban networks). The target is to carry 350,000 passengers each year (almost 970 passengers per day). The route will be operated as an experiment for 30 months up to September 2008.

The MOT is publishing the sixth issue of its topical ‘Cahiers’ (The MOT Guides), which will cover cross-border passenger transport. This publication will soon be available on the Internet site www.espaces-transfrontaliers.eu.
The Alpine convention

The Alpine convention is a framework agreement on the protection of the Alps. Its objective is to safeguard the natural ecosystem of the Alps and promote sustainable development, while protecting the economic interests of the resident populations. It sets out the principles on which cross-border cooperation between the countries of the Alps must be based, while aiming to harmonize the policies of the signatories in order to achieve this.

Signed on 7 November 1991 and entered into force in March 1995, the convention includes France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Austria, Slovenia and, since 1994, Monaco. The European Union is a party to the convention on the basis of its competences in economic affairs and environmental protection. The territory covered by the convention encompasses some 191,000 sq km, 6,000 municipalities and 13 million inhabitants.

The Alpine convention defines common objectives for the signatory states, but is just a general framework. Its implementation depends on additional protocols, ten of which were drafted between 1994 and 2000: “conservation of nature and the countryside”, “spatial planning and sustainable development”, “tourism”, “mountain forests”, “energy”, “soil protection”, “transport”, “mountain farming”, “settlement of disputes” and the “Monaco protocol”.

These ten protocols have entered into application in five of the eight countries. In Switzerland, only the Monaco protocol has entered into application at the moment, six are in application in Monaco and none yet in Italy. For the European Union, entry into application concerns the Monaco protocol (since 1999) and the mountain farming, tourism, energy and soil protection protocols (since 6 October 2006).

Alpine convention and cross-border cooperation

• With regard to the “general obligations” of the states and the European Union, the convention stipulates that cross-border cooperation in the Alpine region will be intensified and extended in terms of both territory and the number of subjects covered (article 2).

• Other than this general principle, the protocol of greatest interest for cross-border cooperation is that on sustainable development. In it, the states undertake to eliminate the obstacles to international cooperation between local authorities and to promote the solution of joint problems through collaboration at the appropriate territorial level. In border areas this cooperation will be aimed more particularly at coordinating spatial planning, economic development and environmental requirements (article 4). This cooperation must nevertheless be undertaken within the existing institutional framework (article 7).

• This protocol also stipulates spatial planning and sustainable development plans and programmes, drawn up in a cross-border framework by or with the competent local authorities, in consultation with the neighbouring authorities. Their objective is to define the sustainable development and spatial planning guidelines for coherent and periodically-reviewed territorial units. Their drafting and implementation will be based on inventories and studies defining the characteristics of the territory under consideration (article 8).

• Finally, the states undertake to examine the possibilities of economic and financial measures for compensation between local authorities at the appropriate level and support for cross-border projects (article 12).

For further information: http://www.conventionalpine.org

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- Adoption of the Community strategic guidelines on cohesion, Inforegio release, 6 October
  “The Community strategic guidelines on cohesion (2007-2013) have been adopted following a decision of the Council.”

- Warsaw and Vilnius want to connect their electricity grids, AFP, 7 September
  “Lithuania and Poland are going to establish a joint company to build an energy bridge that will connect their electricity distribution grids. [...] This bridge will also integrate the Baltic countries into the European energy distribution grid.”

- A disaster on the Rhine to test cross-border cooperation, AFP, 18 September
  “A barge loaded with hydrocarbons colliding with a boat carrying 400 passengers on the Rhine: that was the disaster scenario of a trinational exercise that [took place] in the Three Borders region [...]. French (Alsace), Swiss (Bâle-ville canton) and German (Lörrach Landkreis) emergency and rescue services [participated] together in this exercise.”

- Geneva-France: a public transport emergency!, Le Progrès, 15 September
  “A survey emphasizes the inadequacy of public transport on the French side. ‘If people come by car, it’s because they have no choice.’ Almost 500,000 people now cross the Geneva borders every day, including 45% [...] from Haute-Savoie and 20% from the Pays de Gex.”

- Bonifacio - The ports, vectors of cross-border cohesion, Nice-Matin, 16 September
  “‘La Spezia, Livorno, Bastia, Bonifacio, Santa Teresa di Gallura, Golfo Aranci and Olbia are the ports of call in the log of a sea route that could be our territorial odyssey between 2007 and 2013.’ Meeting in the town hall, the elected representatives of these border ports put the final touches to a uniting draft agreement, [...] signed on 22 September in Olbia, last port of call on this North-South route.”