



ECA measures taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

The European Court of Auditors (ECA) has taken the necessary steps to be able to continue providing an effective public audit service in the EU, and to deliver timely audit reports, opinions and reviews during the COVID-19 pandemic, as far as this is possible in these challenging times. At the same time, we express our gratitude to all those who are working to save lives and fight the pandemic, in Luxembourg, in the EU and around the world. We also remain committed to supporting the Luxembourg government's policy on safeguarding public health. We are mitigating the effects of the ongoing health crisis on our staff and have taken precautions to minimise the risk to them and their families.

Press Release

Luxembourg, 21 April 2020

EU road network completion progressing slowly and maintenance costs a growing concern, warn Auditors

The core trans-European transport network (TEN-T) of fast roads is gaining ground and achieving positive results for travellers, such as shorter travel times and more motorway mileage, according to a new report by the European Court of Auditors (ECA). EU funding and the European Commission's actions have contributed positively to these results, but most central and eastern Member States still lag behind and only some 400 km of new TEN-T roads have been completed with EU support since 2014. In addition, seamless road travel along the network is hampered by incomplete cross-border sections and poorly coordinated parking and clean fuel infrastructure, while insufficient maintenance by Member States puts the network's condition at risk in the long run.

Roads account for the largest share of EU passenger and freight transport. By 2030, the Commission aims to complete almost 50 000 km of motorways and express roads covering the nine core TEN-T corridors and all major EU traffic routes. Since 2007, it has granted Member States around €78 billion to build new roads and revamp existing ones, including around €40 billion for those on the network.

The auditors assessed the progress made – and the Commission's role – in completing a fully functioning TEN-T core road network. They also checked Member States' contribution to road maintenance and visited Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Spain and Poland.

“Roads play a significant role in linking EU countries and regions, thus contributing to their economic activity, development and growth,” said Ladislav Balko, the ECA Member responsible for the report. “The EU core road network is making progress, but is not yet fully functional”.

The purpose of this press release is to convey the main messages of the European Court of Auditors' special report. The full report is available at eca.europa.eu.

ECA Press

12, rue Alcide De Gasperi - L-1615 Luxembourg

E: press@eca.europa.eu @EUAuditors eca.europa.eu

Around 3 100 km of motorways were built from 2007 to 2017 with EU support, which helped to make travel faster, safer and better. However, of some 2 000 km of new motorways planned in the 2014-2020 period, less than 400 km had been completed by the time of the audit – in late 2019. The auditors point to a gap between the level of core network development in western and central/eastern Member States.

The Commission has played an important strategic role in prioritising the completion of the most important traffic routes: it has introduced the core network and corridors in the EU regulations, placed conditions on funding and pushed Member States to prioritise the TEN-T network in their planning. Nevertheless, Member States set aside for the core network only a third of the available EU funding for 2014-2020, even though in most central/eastern Member States – major beneficiaries of EU structural funds – the network had suffered from low completion rates.

The Commission does not always monitor the entire core network and lacks intermediate milestones to accurately assess progress and make reliable forecasts as to whether it is likely to be completed by 2030. These monitoring weaknesses, as well as untimely and unreliable data from the Member States, undermine its ability to take timely corrective action if needed.

The auditors warn that national maintenance budgets are steadily decreasing, rather than increasing in line with the growing infrastructure and ageing crucial links. Even though this may have an impact on whether the network is fully functional by 2030, the Commission does not have tools to verify whether Member States have a solid system for ensuring proper road maintenance.

The auditors recommend that the Commission prioritise investment in the core road network, enhance monitoring arrangements, and strengthen its approach to ensure adequate maintenance of the growing network by Member States.

Notes to Editors

In 2013, when the TEN-T regulation was adopted, the objective was to finish the comprehensive road network to connect all EU regions by 2050, and the core network by 2030. In 2016, when the most recent data was compiled, the completion rates for the core TEN-T roads across the EU averaged 77 %. At the time of the audit, the rates for the four countries visited were 46 % in Bulgaria, around 75 % in Poland, around 78 % in Czech Republic and 100 % in Spain.

Of the routes examined for this audit, the biggest increase in length (190 %, from 200 km to 580 km) and time saving (8 %) between 2012 and 2019 were on the Tallinn-Vienna route (as compared to the Madrid–Warsaw, Bucharest–Paris and Burgas–Berlin routes). According to the OECD, Member States' average road maintenance spending fell by almost half between 2007 and 2017. Of the four countries visited, only in Spain is the network considered to be in a generally good state.

Special report 9/2020 “The EU core road network: shorter travel times but network not yet fully functional” is available on the ECA website (eca.europa.eu) in 23 EU languages. The ECA has previously published reports on road, rail, air, maritime and inland waterway transport. It has also dedicated an ECA Journal issue to transport and will shortly issue a report on EU-funded transport mega-infrastructures.

Press contact for this report:

Damijan Fišer – E: damijan.fiser@eca.europa.eu T: (+352) 4398 45 510 / M: (+352) 621 55 22 24