

Bottleneck: Austria

Project: Vienna-Bratislava

Name: Integrated River Engineering Project on the Danube to the East of Vienna

Danube Km: 1920 - 1872

Budget: Total expected costs of 170 million EUR, of which 40 million EUR comes from EU co-financing.

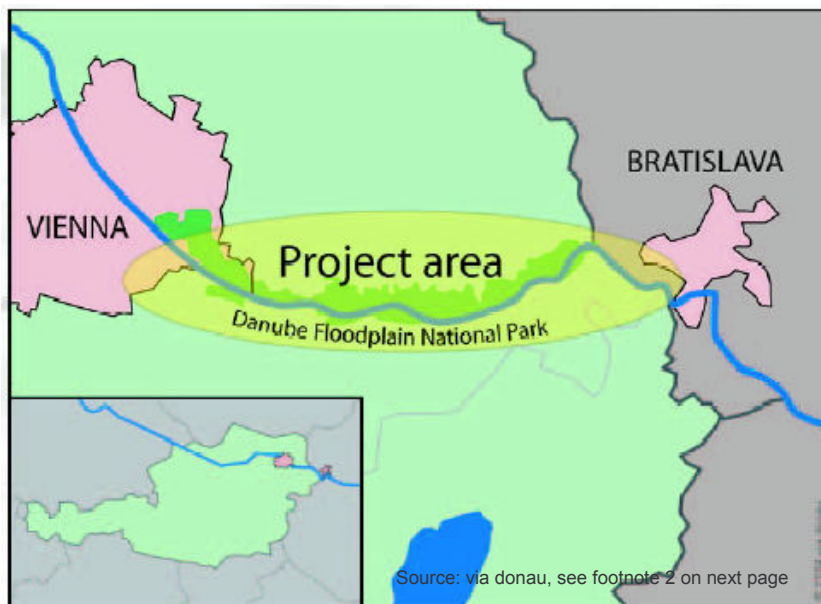
Final Beneficiary: Austrian Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology (bmvit)

Contractor: via donau (AT)

WWF Recommendations

WWF strongly recommends that no new depth requirements (to those of existing conventions) be introduced unless they are based on ecological assessment and prove that they do not have a negative impact on the ecosystem *across the entire* river basin. Greater riverbed depth means more aggressive intervention in the ecosystem and less room for ecological improvement.

In addition, the implementation of the existing depth recommendations in local projects has to be assessed in terms of ecological needs. In regards to the existing recommendations, their ecological impacts have hardly been discussed until now, and it is not clear whether they would meet the WFD objectives.



Project location

The project is located on the Danube section between the Freudeneu hydropower station next to Vienna and the Austrian-Slovakian border, amounting to 48 km in length.

Background

The TEN-T revised guidelines¹ designate this Danube section as one of the 30 priority projects of particular importance for the EU. Moreover, reference to this project was already included in Austria's General Transport Plan in 2002 as a key measure for promoting inland navigation.

¹ European Commission, DG for Energy and Transport. Memo on the Trans-European Network: The new priority projects and financial rules, updated 21 June 2005, http://europa.eu.int/comm/ten/transport/agency/doc/2005_07_20_memo_en.pdf

Project details

This project aims to modify the navigation channel from the present 2.2 m total depth to reach a 2.8 m total depth for low water periods (343 days per year). Planning guidelines include:

- Riverbed improvement (adaptive approach) to stop riverbed erosion by adding coarse gravel to the river basin.
- Different, tailor-made fairway depths depending on location to decrease the need for river regulation structures (e.g. groynes and guide dykes).
- Minimum fairway depth during regulated low-water periods is to be improved as far as possible by adapting the river basin, i.e. by dredging and extensively reintegrating the dredged material to deeper areas.
- Guide dykes

Implementation of these measures is to be carried out gradually by 2010.

Ecology

This project is within the boundaries of the Donau-Auen National Park, which is also a biosphere reserve, designated Natura 2000 site, and a Ramsar site.

A strong involvement of ecological scientists has led to the fact that ecological compensation measures be included as much as possible in order to ensure the sustainability of the National Park's landscape. This approach should be used as a positive example for other TEN-T projects. Such measures include riverbank restoration, waterway linkage, and sidearm re-connection.

Impact & Conflict

This project could lead to a new "depth wave" for the whole Danube. For the first time, a depth beyond the recommendations of the Danube Commission (2.5 m) shall be realized. Logically, other stretches will have to be developed without knowing the basin-wide impacts. According to an official project publication: "...the planned benefits [of this project] can only be fully realised if the bottlenecks in the neighbouring Danube countries can also be eliminated."²

Project status

The terms of reference of the tender have been issued; the decision will be in October. The project deadline is 2007.

Contact

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² Official project brochure by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology Ministry of Transport:
http://www.donau.bmvit.gv.at/uploads/tx_serpubl/Danube_Folder_en.pdf