

Navigation Projects: Hungary

Name: Studies on the development of navigation on the Hungarian Danube

River Km: 1433-1708 (275 rkm)
1708-1811 (103 rkm)

Budget: 8 million EUR (studies only) – for the stretch downstream Szob

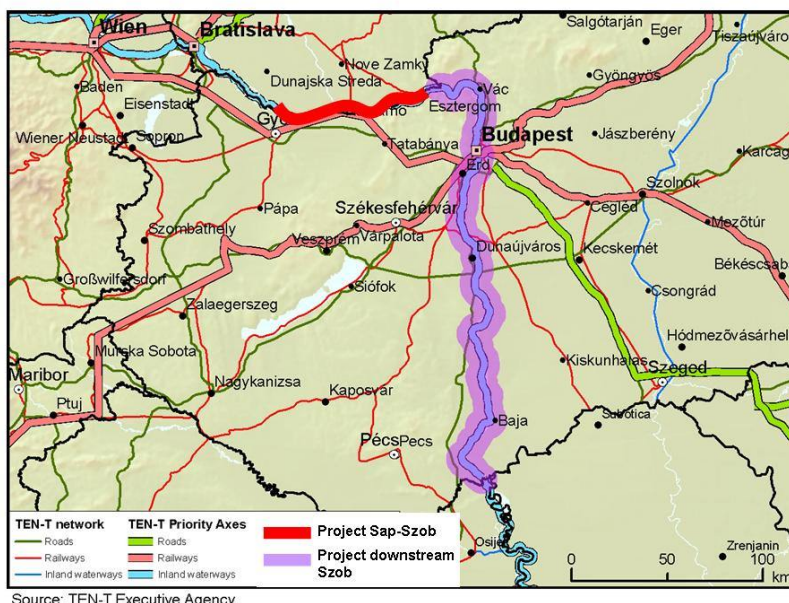
EU co-financing: 50% (4 million EUR) – for stretch downstream Szob

Beneficiary:
Hungarian Ministry of Transport, Telecommunication and Energy

Implementing body:
VITUKI - Environmental Protection and Water Management Research Institute.

WWF Position

- This project is based on findings of a previous VITUKI study, and WWF is concerned that it does not allow consideration of alternative solutions that may be better suited to the local environment.
- The SEA procedures for the stretch Sap-Szob and the stretch downstream Szob should be combined; impacts should be considered collectively.
- The project has a non-realistic time table, i.e. environmental studies should be elaborated in only a few months, not allowing enough time for quality reports.
- The projects (the published SEAs) still do not include economical and social surveys and measures about the potential impacts on the environment.



Project location

The Hungarian Danube navigation development has been divided into to projects: a) the stretch between Sap and Szob (highlighted in red on the map above), and b) the rest of the Danube downstream Szob to the country's southern border near the town of Mohács (highlighted in purple on the map).

Background

This project is part of Priority Project No. 18¹ and therefore designates these sections as one of particular importance for EU transport networks.

¹ http://tentea.ec.europa.eu/en/tent-t_projects/30_priority_projects/priority_project_18/priority_project_18.htm

Project details: downstream Szob

Currently, the fairway along this stretch does not meet UNECE VI B and C parameters² for approximately half of the year. However, the elimination of fords and bottlenecks is meant to limit this statistically for only 20-30 days a year as a maximum.

Eight million EUR have been budgeted (four million EU co-financing) to conduct investigations of the Danube on how to improve navigation. The first study completed by a consortium led by VITUKI, was finished in 2007. It elaborated alternatives to ensure a 2.7 m

² See Table 1 on page 343 at: http://untreaty.un.org/unts/144078_158780/9/5/2638.pdf

navigation depth for almost the whole year.

In May 2009, the Ministry of Transport opened a public tender to prepare, plan and pre-license for implementation of the navigation project. The tender envisions a period of less than 18 months. The tender call includes the study about the EU Water Framework Directive Article 4.7 investigation, and completion of a Strategic Environmental Assessment, a cost-effectiveness study, and a study of the ecological impacts on Natura 2000 and nature protection sites along the river stretch.

Project details: Sap-Szob

Preparations of the project along this common Hungarian-Slovakian river stretch between Sap and Szob has begun.

The Hungarian Ministry of Environment is responsible for the water management of this stretch. At the beginning of January 2010, the Ministry commissioned an SEA on the development of navigation along this stretch.

The SEA is based on the alternatives of the former VITUKI study³, including an additional alternative that considers the least amount of structural works, in turn aiming to have the least impact on the environment. This “least impact” alternative also considers implementation of non-structural measures to improve navigation, e.g. updated digital maps of the riverbed, improved water level forecasting, river information systems.

Ecology threatened

The entire Hungarian section of the Danube is Natura 2000 site (except in the proximity of the capital

Budapest). Unique side branch systems, oxbows, marshes and large floodplain forests enrich the natural value of this stretch. National parks and Ramsar sites also ensure protection of sensitive habitats.

Impact & conflict

Previous flood protection and river regulation interventions have caused riverbed deepening in the Hungarian stretch. Additional river engineering works may further aggravate this negative process. This could lead to a modified groundwater regime, accelerated aging and drying of the connected wetlands and lands, and loss of habitats and fish spawning sites.

Invaluable drinking water resources are pumped from bank-filtered wells for towns and cities – these resources are also at threat if groundwater levels are severely impacted. In the meantime, the navigations plans have no clear answers for these economic and social demands.

WWF is extremely concerned that the amount of time to complete the WFD 4.7 and SEA studies for the project downstream Szob is too short. Adequate time and funds need to be earmarked to complete a high quality and comprehensive study on possible works to be implemented in respect to river habitats and ecology.

WWF is also concerned that the project downstream Szob is based only on the former VITUKI study, not taking other alternatives into consideration that may have fewer impacts on the environment. WWF supports the consideration of a “least impact” alternative for the stretch downstream Szob as well.

WWF expects that the Hungarian government will consider viewpoints of all concerned stakeholders and will try to find alternatives that balance the requirements of navigation, nature conservation and socio-economic demands.

Contact

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Links

Hungarian Ministry of Transport, Telecommunication and Energy:
www.khem.gov.hu/en
(Unfortunately no information on the project is available on the ministry's website.)

VITUKI website:
http://www.vituki.hu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=74&Itemid=88

EU project website:
http://tentea.ec.europa.eu/en/ten-t_projects/ten-t_projects_by_country/hungary/2007-hu-18090-s.htm

WWF Hungary:
www.wwf.hu

Version: January 18, 2010

³ “Studies on the development of the navigation from Sap to the Southern border of Hungary”, Nr: 721/13/6779-01