

Environmental and Social Data Sheet

Overview

Project Name:	MODERNIZATION ELIN PELIN-KOSTENETS RAILWAY SECT
Project Number:	2019-0575
Country:	Bulgaria
Project Description:	<i>The Project "Modernization of the Sofia - Plovdiv railway line: railway section Elin Pelin - Kostenets" concerns the rehabilitation of railway infrastructure on the TEN-T core corridor. The implementation of the project will contribute to eliminate the current bottleneck on the corridor through Bulgaria and support the development of the Orient/East Med corridor on the territory of the country.</i>
EIA required:	yes
Project included in Carbon Footprint Exercise ¹ :	no

(details for projects included are provided in section: "EIB Carbon Footprint Exercise")

Environmental and Social Assessment

Environmental Assessment

The project is part of the General Transport Master Plan (2010), which was subject to a SEA in accordance with Directive 2001/42/EC. The SEA procedure was finalised on 12/03/2010 and adopted by Decision No 1-1/2010 issued by the Ministry of Environment and Water (MOEW). Furthermore, the project is part of the Operational programme "Transport and transport infrastructure" (OPTTI) for the period 2014-2020 of the Bulgarian Republic.

The project concerns approximately 50 km of double track railway line (renewal of approx. 14 km, construction of approx. 36 km of double track railway line) with a design speed of 160 km/h for passenger trains and 120 km/h for freight trains and dismantling and recultivation of approximately 26 km of existing railway line. In particular, the project includes:

- Construction of approximately 21 km of railway tunnel tubes
- Construction of bridges and viaducts in a total length of approximately 3 km
- Electrification

The project is part of the staged modernisation of the Sofia – Plovdiv railway line. It falls under Annex I of Directive 85/337/EEC as amended (applicable at the time).

The EIA procedure was initiated in 2009 for the section Elin Pelin – Septemvri, which includes section Elin Pelin – Kostenets with the notification for the investment proposal submitted to Ministry of Environment and Waters (MOEW). An EIA Report and an Appropriate Assessment study* (AA), an annex to the EIA, were required. The EIA Report and AA study were updated

*i.e. compatibility assessment verifying the project's compliance with the objective and purpose of protected areas within Natura 2000 under Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora and Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds

in 2014, to include an optimisation of one of the alternatives of the project. The EIA Report, with the Appropriate Assessment Study as an annex and including measures requested by the Competent Authority, was approved by the MOEW with Decision No 6-6/2014, dated 5.09.14.

The EIA Decision no.6-6/2014 contains mitigation measures for the different stages of the preparation of the project such as:

- for the design stage: to re-evaluate all bridges and where necessary propose mitigation measures to reduce the impact on river bed, to carry out an archaeological study, to elaborate a management plan for construction waste, to prepare an acoustic project to define exact parameters of noise walls;
- during the construction and operation: separate collection of waste, cleaning of sites for temporary storage of inert material, treatment of wastewater and maintaining the equipment in good working order to avoid air and noise pollution.

Design, construction and operation stage related requirements are addressed by the project Promoter as they are legally binding and the EIA Decision is part of the construction permit.

The project (section Elin Pelin – Kostenets) passes at the periphery of the Natura 2000 site SCI BG 0000304 Golak.

According to the Appropriate Assessment report, implementation of the selected alignment will not lead to loss of integrity, structure and function of the mentioned Natura 2000 site considering that it:

- affects only about 30 ha (which represents 0.27% of the area of the site);
- will result in the loss of 5.11 ha of habitat 91 M0 Pannonian – Balkanic turkey oak – sessile oak forests (less than 0.42% of the habitat area);
- will result in the loss of 0.14 ha of habitat Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco – Brometalia - *important orchid sites) – 0.02% of the habitat area;
- will not have significant impact on the conservation objectives of Natura 2000 site as the impact will be reduced by implementing adequate mitigation measures such as:
 - fencing with fine mesh along the railway in the area of the Natura 2000 sites,
 - passages and drains with dry trails to ensure migration of mammals,
 - appropriate access ways for the passages of wild animals.

Two Water Declarations were issued by the East Aegean Basin Directorate on 08.12.2016 and Danube River Basin Directorate on 13.12.2016 confirming that the project does not involve any modification to the physical characteristic of surface water or alteration to the level of bodies of groundwater. The project covers the following surface waters bodies:

- from Iskar river: BG1IS600R016, BG1IS600R015, BG1IS600R1416, BG1IS600R1015 and
- from Maritsa river BG3MA800R162, BG3MA900R201.

According to these declarations, the impact of the project is not expected to be significant and the project is consistent with environmental objectives stipulated in the River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) 2010-2015 and draft RBMP 2016-2021.

Project residual impacts include land take, permanent visual change of scenery and use of scarce resources.

The project is expected to enhance accessibility to railway services for people with reduced mobility, as it is delivered in accordance with the relevant European technical requirements.

Public Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement

The public, as well as the relevant institutions and municipalities, were consulted in all stages of the EIA procedure: the notification of investment proposal, the EIA Terms of Reference (ToR), equivalent to the scoping report, the review the EIA Report and the issuance of the EIA Decision.

The EIA Report with its annexes was subject to a public consultation held in July 2014 in the municipalities of Elin Pelin, Ihtiman and Kostenets. Furthermore, the consultation request was announced in two newspapers. During the public consultation, a public hearing was held. Some comments and opinions were expressed in the public discussion during the consultation period and they referred to: location of railway stops, execution of crossings and noise protection barriers in the areas close to the railway line. The National Railway Infrastructure Company (NRIC) answered to all comments received during the hearing. No written statements were received during the public consultation period.

The EIA Decision 6-6/2014 was published on MOEW website and subsequently appealed. The Supreme Administrative Court (SAC) issued decision № 5343//12.05.2015 and subsequently the SAC issued the final decision № 10667/14.10.2015. With this final SAC decision the EIA Decision №6-6/2014 from 05.09.2014 entered into force. The EIA Decision loses its legal action if the project implementation has not started within five years from the date of issuance. The EIA decision is valid until October 2020.

Total land acquisition will be around 30 ha. There have been two complaints related to land acquisition. They were filed against Order No. РД-02-15-52 / 01.06.2017г. of the Minister of Regional Development and Public Works. The order approved the Detailed Development Plan-Parcel Plan (DDP-PP), for Elin Pelin-Ihtiman section, for the lands of the villages of Vakarel, Paunovo, Buzyakovtsi, Verinsko and Zhivkovo in the municipality Ihtiman. The complaint is against the entry into force of the Detailed Development Plan in the area of the village of Vakarel. The court session of Supreme Administrative Court is scheduled on May 12, 2020. The Bank's Services will obtain the confirmation from the Promoter concerning the outcome of the court case prior to the application of EIB funds to this project.

No physical resettlement was needed.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Promoter completed the EIA procedure as required and obtained the necessary environmental approval. The project, with the prescribed mitigants, has no significant effects on any Natura 2000 sites.

The project contributes towards climate change mitigation as it supports modal shift to rail, which in turn helps to offset some of the negative environmental impacts stemming from the construction period of the project.

The project is therefore acceptable for EIB financing in environmental and social terms.