



European Investment Bank (EIB)

Luxembourg, 22 June 2021

Environmental and Social Completion Sheet (ESCS)

Overview

Project Name:	ROUTE E420 ROCROI-CHARLEVILLE MEZIERES RTE-T
Project Number:	20130626
Country:	France
Project Description:	Motorway development on the E420 corridor between Rocroi on the Belgian border and Charleville Mézières (RTE-T).

Summary of Environmental and Social Assessment at Completion

EIB notes the following Environmental and Social performance and key outcomes at Project Completion.

The project is located in the Champagne-Ardenne region, in the northeast of France and concerns the construction of 31 km of a 2x2 free toll motorway (A304) between Rocroi and Charleville-Mézières. The A304 is part of the European road E420 from Charleroi (Belgium) to Reims (France), completing a section of the planned TEN-T comprehensive network. The A304 motorway project is the last component of the “Y ardennais”, a motorway/expressway project part of a long-term strategy aiming at unlocking the Ardennes region. Construction works started in July 2011 and were finally completed in July 2018.

Studies investigating an improved road connection between the Belgian border and Charleville-Mézières (A34) started in 1992. This was prior to the requirements of the strategic environmental assessment (SEA) Directive 2001/42/EC. The project is a class of development that falls under Annex I of the EIA Directive 2011/92/EU. The obligation to conduct an EIA in France dates to Law No. 76-629 of 1976 on protection of nature (*Loi de Protection de la Nature*) and its implementing decree in 1977. The law is governed by the Environmental Code (Code de l'Environnement). Both, the Birds Directive 2009/147/EC and the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, are transposed into French law through the French Environmental Code.

An environmental impact assessment (EIA) approving the project was completed in 2005 in accordance with national and European legislation. Planning, building and environmental permissions were granted, allowing construction to start in 2011. However, the authorisation according to water regulation was being challenged legally, as the impact of the project on the aquatic areas and subsequent compensatory measures were regarded as insufficient. By decision of the Administrative Court of Châlons-en-Champagne of 11th February 2014, decree No. 2011-170 was annulled and a new authorization request procedure under the water law was initiated. The authorisation was obtained through the prefectural decree No. 2014-538 of 11th September 2014.

With respect to Natura 2000 sites, the project crosses the special protected area (SPA) of plateau Ardennais (FR2112013) and is close to the site of community interest (SCI) Rièzes du plateau de Rocroi (FR2100270). Therefore, the EIA was complemented by appropriate assessments (*étude d'incidence*) – in accordance with Article 6.3 of the Habitats Directive – on Natura 2000 sites also undertaken in 2005. The DUP (*déclaration d'utilité publique*) commission issued a favourable opinion in 2005, and following further project optimisations and studies the project was declared having an “*utilité publique*” in February 2007. The DUP



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was conditional upon obtaining derogation from protection of certain habitats and species in accordance with Article L.411-2 of the Environmental Code.

Complementary environmental studies on flora and fauna were completed between 2008 and 2010 to inform the dossier applying for derogation from protection of certain habitats and species. The dossier was completed in mid-2010 and approved by the Region and the competent authority – the national committee for the protection of nature (*comité national de la protection de la nature*) – between September and November 2010.

Potential adverse cumulative effects of the project include those on flora and fauna, land-use, water environment and landscape. The project incorporated environmental protection and mitigation measures in line with the EIA decision, appropriate assessments, water permit and other authorisations. The measures especially consider water and biodiversity. The main measures include, among others, the following:

Water

- Restoration of wetlands by plugging drains.
- Creation of ledges.
- Reconversion of ponds into marshes.
- Rewinding of watercourses.
- Reinforcement and restoration of riverine forests.
- Reconversion of poplar groves in alluvial zones in wet meadows.
- Erasure of thresholds to restore the ecological continuity of rivers.
- Planting of hedges to fight against erosion of agricultural soils.
- Recreation of flood extension fields in impacted valleys (This, Thin, Sormonne and Audry).

Protection of species:

- Creation of 43 compensatory ponds.
- Creation of 30 hibernacula.
- Installation of 4 nesting platforms for white stork.
- Installation of 100 nesting boxes for birds of prey affected by the project.
- Conservation management of habitats of the prairie avifauna and other species.
- Creation of 2 pike spawning grounds in the Meuse watershed.
- Construction of wildlife passages: 8 large passages, 72 small passages and other specific structures for amphibians and bats.

The monitoring of measures covers a period of 30 years. This has been ensured through the signing of environmental rural leases (for sites acquired by the State) and real environmental obligations (for contracted sites).

Concerning road safety, the Inspector General of Roads carried out several pre-commissioning safety audits, issuing a favorable opinion for the entry into service of the A304 motorway in July 2018.

Other relevant impacts of the project and mitigation measures:

- Archaeology: during the summer of 2014, a grave of exceptional nature was found in the area of the Belvall difusser, resulting in a corresponding network shifting.



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Summary opinion of Environmental and Social aspects at completion:

Based on the promoter's reports, EIB supports the opinion that the project has been implemented in line with EIB Environmental and Social Standards, applicable at the time of appraisal.