



**Road
transport**

Implementation timetable for priority infrastructure projects to be ready by the end of March

A thorough analysis and tight implementation timetable for priority infrastructure projects should be ready by the end of March. Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev also ordered the Coordination, Control and Implementation of Infrastructure Projects of National Significance Council to come up by that time with an assessment of the investment projects that are to start in 2007-2008.

At recent session of the Council the Prime Minister underlined that there is serious progress in scrutinizing priority infrastructure projects by the relevant line ministries. Such a report has not been drafted so far but it is vital if we want to take the most appropriate management decisions, Stanishev pointed out. By 31 March the Council will have to discuss proposals for amendments to the regulatory framework that will facilitate the investment process.

The Council discussed the report on priority road projects of national significance. Over EUR 2 bln from the Cohesion Fund of the EU are expected to be invested in transport infrastructure. The projects implementation will improve road capacity and will enable better interoperability with the Trans-European transport network. Five Pan-European Corridors cross our country and a modern infrastructure will only increase Bulgaria's competitiveness as a bridge between Europe, Asia and Africa. Good roads will make easier links between manufacturers, traders and end-consumers of goods and will boost tourism, internal and external trade. Thus new jobs will be opened and the economic development of the country will be taken forward, it was stressed at the meeting.

The schedule of the Ministry of Transport envisages the concession of Trakia, Maritza and Struma motorways. After a detailed financial analysis is carried out the Council for Coordination, Control and Implementation of Infrastructure Projects of National Significance will take a final decision and will put it forward for debate with the cabinet.

Airport infrastructure will also be modernized through a public-private partnership. The airports in the towns of Varna, Burgas, Russe, Plovdiv, Gorna Orayhovitsa and Turgovishte are also to be granted in concession.

The Ministry's programme envisages renovation with funds coming from the Cohesion Fund of railway lines between the towns of Vidin-Sofia, Sofia-Plovdiv, Sofia-Pernik, Sofia-Dragoman, etc. EUR 1 150 mln are expected to be invested in the implementation of these projects.

Other financing resources (the state budget, credits, etc.) will be employed for the modernization of railways Kanobot-Sindel, Russe-Varna, etc. The Ministry of Transport plans to allot EUR 44,3 mln for the implementation of the projects in 2007 budget. Bulgaria will receive around EUR 1 029 mnl from the Cohesion Fund for the reconstruction of road infrastructure.

Projects that are currently underway include: infrastructure projects Orizovo-Stara Zagora and Karnobat-Burgas, both of which are sections of Trakia highway; reconstruction and extension of Sofia airport; modernization of Burgas port; renovation of railway Plovdiv-Svilengrad, etc.

The Council for Coordination, Control and Implementation of Infrastructure Projects of National Significance was established on 27 December 2005. Its members include the ministers heading the respective ministries, namely of Economy and Energy, of Transport, of Environment and Water, of Finance, of Regional Development and Public Works, of Agriculture and Forestry and of Public Administration and Administrative Reform.



A total of 60 km motorways to be constructed and commissioned in 2006

Around 60-km-long stretches of motorways will be constructed and commissioned this year, announced Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev before the participants in a forum entitled Development of Transport Infrastructure in Bulgaria for 2006-2015 – Problems, Challenges, Strategic Planning. The forum was organized by the Bulgarian Industrial Association (BIA) and was attended by Regional Development Minister Assen Gagauzov, Minister of Transport Petar Mutafchiev, Economy and Energy Minister Rumen Ovcharov, Finance Minister Plamen Oresharski, PMs and business representatives.

The Prime Minister admitted that the 60 km motorways would not be enough. We all would like to see our country covered in motorways but we have to remain realistic, he said. Prime Minister Stanishev pointed out that the government will work for improving the road infrastructure because its poor condition raises the cost of production and services and is a hindrance for the economic development and competitiveness of Bulgaria. He further stressed that second and third-class roads should also be taken care of as they are of great social importance for the country.

Speaking before the participants in the discussion, Prime Minister underlined that government and business together should draft the priorities in the infrastructure and seek funding mechanisms during the 4-year term of office. A strong instrument towards the implementation of infrastructure projects in the next years will become Public-Private partnership. It has proved successful in the EU and will be indispensable for Bulgaria in achieving our priorities, the Premier added. Another potential resource is the European funds that Bulgaria can have the use of after 2007.

Mapa-Cengiz wins construction tender for Lyulin motorway

Turkish joint venture Mapa-Cengiz has been ranked first in a tender for the construction of Bulgaria's Lyulin motorway after it came up with the lowest bid, 137.4 mln euro, participants in the tender told Dnevnik.

According to unofficial information, five candidates have been shortlisted. They will have to be approved by the European Commission delegation in Sofia, after which the list will be sent for review to Brussels. No deadline has been set for the finalisation of the procedure.

The tender for the Lyulin motorway was called on June 16, and the deadline for submission of bids was October 11. It was later extended to October 26 in response to keen interest from potential contractors. A total of 74 companies bought tender papers. Tie-in Limak Eko tendered the lowest bid, 119 mln euro, followed by Mapa Cengiz with 137.4 mln euro. However, Limak Eko, together with a dozen other candidates, were subsequently disqualified for paperwork irregularities.

The Lyulin motorway is a 19 km section of Corridor IV that will provide a link between the Sofia Ring Road and the E-79 and E871 highways at Daskalovo junction near the town of Pernik. It will consist of 2 lanes in each direction with a central reserve and emergency hard shoulders. It will be constructed to a design speed of 100-110 km/h. The project will comprise the construction of significant number of road structures including: bridges, tunnels, overpasses, etc.

The project cost is estimated at 148.45 mln euro, of which the EU's ISPA program will grant 111.38 mln euro and the remaining 25% will come from the state budget.

Sofia ring-road financing in place

The financing for the design of the 30 km southern arc of the Sofia ring-road has been secured, said Veselin Georgiev, chief of the Roads Executive Agency. The conservative estimate for the cost of the design is 2 mln leva. The construction of the 33 km northern arc of the ring-road is part of the concession deal with a consortium of Portuguese and Bulgarian state-owned companies. The tie-in should complete the section by the end of this year but is likely to miss the launch target due to ongoing legal disputes.



Roads

Sofia-Nis motorway under consideration

Jump-starting the Sofia-Nis motorway project, the construction of a cross-border natural gas pipeline and improving the cargo truck capacity of the Kalotina checkpoint were discussed at a meeting by Bulgarian regional development minister Asen Gagauzov and the minister of capital investment of Serbia and Montenegro Velimir Ilic.

The project that can be completed quickest is the capacity upgrade of the border crossing because the necessary funding is already in place, said Gagauzov. The reconstruction of the checkpoint is part of the project for improving the cross-border movement of people, goods and services financed with 55 mln euro by the World Bank.

There is investor interest towards the construction of all sections of the Sofia-Nis motorway, said Ilic. The section of the motorway from Sofia to Bulgaria's border with Serbia is part of the concession awarded for the Trakia motorway.

Gagauzov said that one of the options that will be negotiated with the concessionaire - Portugal's MSF, Lena Engenharia e Construcões and Somague and Bulgarian state-owned Avtomagistrali and Technoexportstroi, is for the tie-in to build the Serbian section of the motorway as well. Ilic said Serbia will launch an international procedure to select a concessionaire for its section of the motorway.

Minister Mutafchiev and Minister Ilic agreed to accelerate joint projects

At their joint meeting Minister of Transport Petar Mutafchiev reconfirmed before Serbia's Minister for Capital Investment Velimir Ilic that Bulgaria prioritizes Pan-European Corridors 7 and 10. He defined them as an important element in the development of Pan-European transport infrastructure. Bulgaria is ready to cooperate closely with Serbia in the construction and development of road and rail infrastructure along Corridor 10, with a view to achieving good usage parameters.

Minister Mutafchiev acquainted his guest with the project for electrification and modernization of the Sofia-Nis railway. He proposed that a joint strategy for the modernization of Sofia-Nis stretch should be drafted, because this is the only part of Corridor 10 without a long-term development strategy. Velimir Ilic pledged to make efforts for the faster electrification of the railway on the Serbian side.

The two Ministers agreed also to set up a working group of Deputy Ministers, who will assist in accelerating the implementation of joint projects.



*Minister Mutafchiev and
Minister Ilic*

Bulgaria to receive EU grant of Eur 25 mln for cross-border cooperation

Bulgaria will get a EUR 25 mln grant under the PHARE Programme for cross-border cooperation with Greece and Turkey for 2005. The grant is designed to enable the development of the economy in border areas through the improvement of transport infrastructure, encouraging trade and economic cooperation, and environmental protection.

EUR 20 mln will be allocated for cross-border cooperation with Greece, while EUR 5 mln for cross-border cooperation with Turkey, according to the draft financing agreements between the government and the European Commission under the PHARE Programme for 2005.

Part of the grant will be used for assistance in the modernization of about 90 km of the international motorway from Dupnitsa to Kulata and another 29 km near Bulgaria's southern border.

Bulgaria's participation consists of co-funding under the projects of investment component. The funds for cross-border cooperation with Greece amount to EUR 4.050 mln, and with Turkey – to EUR 0.950 mln.



Railways



DRIVING RESTRICTIONS - 2006

TRAFFIC PROHIBITION

There is a prohibition on movement of all kind vehicles with total laden weight over 10 t on I-5, section Tchernootchene – Kardjali. The traffic is diverted along to following alternative roads:

- ♦ direction Haskovo – Kardjali: road I-5 – road III-505 – Manastir – road III-507 – Voyvodino – Most – Tchiflik – Kardjali;
- ♦ direction Assenovgrad – Kardjali: follow the route road III-58 – road I-5 – road III-505 – Manastir – road I-5 – road III-507 – Voyvodino – Most – Tchiflik – Kardjali;
- ♦ direction Mineralni Bani – Kardjali: follow the route road III-506 – III-806 – road I-5 – road III-505 – Manastir – road III-507 – Voyvodino – Most – Tchiflik – Kardjali.

SUMMER RESTRICTION

During the summer period there is a prohibition on movement of trucks with a total laden weight of over 20 t in the period from 12h00 to 19h00 when temperatures exceed 35°.

PROHIBITION FOR OVERSIZED AND OVERLOADED VEHICLES

There is a prohibition on movement of oversized and overloaded vehicles throughout the year in case of visibility under 50 m due to mist, heavy rain or snow, of black ice, during the hours of darkness and at peak times during the day except in cases of emergency or natural catastrophe.

ADDITIONAL TEMPORARY TRAFFIC RESTRICTIONS

1. Trakia motorway:
 - ♦ from km 79 to km 131 - on some sections additional speed limits will be in force in the period March – October.
2. International road I-1:
 - ♦ on the section between Daskalovo and Dupnitsa additional speed limits will be in force;
 - ♦ the section from km 61 to the km 103 is closed till July 2006. The traffic is diverted along to following alternative road: road II-11 and III-112 – Vidin – Archar – Brussartzi – Montana without route prolongation.
3. International road I-4:
 - ♦ on the section between Omurtag and Targovishte additional speed limits will be in force in the period April – October 2006.
4. International road I-6 Sliven - Burgas:
 - ♦ on some sections additional speed limits will be in force.
5. International road I-7:
 - ♦ the section from km 176 to km 201 (Varbishi pass) will be closed for the winter period;
 - ♦ on the section between Elhovo and the border with Turkey additional speed limits will be in force.

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For more information and contacts: Mr. Christo LOZENOV, Mrs. Antonia ATANASOVA, Trans-Info Centre, AEBTRI., BG-1680 Sofia, 6 Iskarski Prolom str.; Tel: +359/2/958-14-74, 958-10-56; Fax: +359/2/958-10-91, 958-12-59; E-mail: lozenov@aeetri.com; Web site: www.aeetri.com

Editor: Christo LOZENOV