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UPDATE IENE AND OTHER NEW EUROPEAN ACTIONS

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Abstract

The following contains general information about some important issues concerning habitat fragmentation due to linear infrastructure and measures taken to counteract this phenomenon.

COST 341

At the International Conference on Ecology and Transportation (ICOET) 2003, I presented an overview of COST 341. This European action, ordered by the European Union (EU), was initiated by the Infra Eco Network of Europe (IENE). The action concluded in November 2003 with a well-attended international conference in Brussels. At this conference, we appreciated it very much that several ICOET representatives attended. As the official chairman of the conference, I gave a piece of the jigsaw to Mary Gray to remind the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to continue with the subject and to use the information.

At the conference, the products of the COST 341 action were presented. These products include the *European Review*, the handbook, the national state-of-the-art-reports, and the database.

The Handbook of Cost 341 was translated to national versions for several countries. In each version of the handbook, specific, nationally oriented comments and questions were added. This was done in the Czech Republic, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland. In several of the 18 connected countries inside the action, the national working groups still exist as groups of well-informed people concerned about habitat fragmentation due to linear infrastructure.

Also very important is that the network of people at the international level is still vital. When there is a need for information, a second opinion, or advice, a COST 341 colleague is willing to give assistance. This is only possible because there is a network of capable and involved people.

The information gathered in COST 341 was the basis of several contributions at conferences concerning environmental issues in general or habitat fragmentation specifically. At the World Road Association (PIARC) 2003 World Congress in Durban, the results of COST 341 were presented as well. Habitat fragmentation now is included in the work of PIARC in Technical Committee (TC) 2.1, Sustainable development and road transport. I am responsible for the action mitigation of the environmental impact of road transport, one of several actions under this TC. This technical committee sent out a questionnaire to contacts all over the world, and we will hope to have enough feedback to produce some practical recommendations on how to handle fragmentation in our report to the next World Congress in Paris 2007.

At conferences in France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Poland this information was given to other people for use in other situations.

Some general developments with big impact in Europe

Previously, there were several EU directives concerning environmental issues around transport. Four of note include: the Habitat and Bird Directive, Soil Directive, Noise Directive, and Air Quality Directive. These directives must be implemented in the national legislation of each country that signed such a directive.

These EU directives have a big influence on policy and legal aspects concerning nature protection and environmental issues along roads and rail lines. For example, the Air Quality Directive, which is already implemented in Dutch legislation, was enforced in this year and caused reconstruction plans to be stopped. A Dutch high court decided that the expected pollution levels would be too high. That means that the reconstruction was postponed until the expected impact has been measurably decreased. This court decision gave an enormous push to the research and measures involving air pollution due to traffic.

Since 2004, there have been 10 new member nations added to the EU. The bilateral contacts intensified rapidly. There is an enormous increase of travel and cargo trade to and from these countries. And with this increasing amount of movement, there is a big need for new motorways and improvement of roads. This urgent need demands knowledge and for a new set of cooperation tools.

These new countries must fulfill the regulations for road-building activities ordered by the EU directives. That is an important reason for several bilateral contacts, projects, and programs to exchange knowledge and information. So at this moment (September 2005), there is a conference in Poland where the 10 new EU countries are discussing the possibilities and tools for environmental impact assessments and strategic environmental assessments.

Some developments in the Netherlands

In the new handbook (Leidraad aanvoorzieningen; see <http://www.rwsnatuurenlandschap.nl>), there is a lot of information about approaches, procedures, and ideas for defragmentation measures.

The Long-Term Defragmentation Program has been launched and has been accepted by Parliament. In this program three ministries (Agriculture, Nature Protection and Food; Transport, Public Works and Water Management; Spatial Planning and Housing) give their intentions, including work schemes and money to counteract fragmentation due to national infrastructure (motorways, canals, and rail). This program is to solve the problems in the ecological main structure, including the robust zones inside that main structure. The approach in this long-term program is area-oriented, integrated, and based on cooperation between involved parties in the region.

Biographical Sketch: Hans Bekker graduated from the Agricultural University of Wageningen as an engineer. He works at the Road and Hydraulic Engineering Institute (DWW), an inside advisory unit of the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management in the Netherlands. Bekker is a program leader working mainly with wildlife, roads, and traffic. He functions as a bridge between civil engineers and ecologists. He was chair of the European project COST 341: Habitat Fragmentation due to Transport Infrastructure. He is program leader for the Dutch Long-Term Defragmentation Program. He is a member of the steering committee of the International Conference on Ecology and Transportation (ICOET), where he represents the Infra Eco Network Europe (IENE).