



Brussels, 07/06/2019
Ares(2019) FL

Opinion

Title: Evaluation of major projects in transport financed by the ERDF and the cohesion fund (2000-2013)

Overall opinion: NEGATIVE

(A) Context

The EU invests in projects that aim to reduce regional disparities and promote economic, social and territorial cohesion. During the period 2007-2013, the EU funded 945 major projects to this end. Of those, 463 involved the transport sector. Projects whose costs are greater than EUR 50 million are called major projects. They require specific Commission approval and are subject to certain assessment procedures.

This evaluation examines the long-term effects of ten major transport sector projects, from 2000-2013. The sample is not representative. The purpose is to draw useful policy lessons, e.g. on the causal chain leading to those effects. A separate evaluation will do the same for major projects in the environmental domain.

(B) Main considerations

The Board considers that the report contains important shortcomings with respect to the following issues:

- (1) The evaluation does not show how the small sample of ten case studies adds value to other programme and project evaluations of the ERDF and cohesion fund.**
- (2) With a narrow focus on user costs, the report does not sufficiently link the transport projects to the objectives of the funding programmes.**
- (3) The report does not adequately explain its conclusion on the simplification of project assessment and selection procedures.**

Against this background, the Board gives a negative opinion. The Board considers that in its present form this report does not sufficiently respond to the mandate of the evaluation.

(C) Further considerations and adjustment requirements

(1) The report should not overstate the validity of findings based on these ten case studies. The report should be transparent about risks of e.g. selection bias of the case studies. Its selection criteria may have favoured more successful major transport projects. References to other studies or evaluations would help to validate the conclusions. The report should be more forthcoming about uncertainties. For example, it should acknowledge that as some of these projects were bundled with other initiatives, it may be difficult to isolate the contribution of the evaluated project to longer-term outcomes.

(2) The report should explain how the selected major projects contribute to cohesion policy objectives. This requires a more detailed explanation of the wider social and economic impacts, compared with ex ante expectations. It includes a discussion of the methodological limitations and the possible needs for future data collection.

(3) In the proposed future cohesion policy, there would no longer be a procedural distinction between transport projects of different sizes. The report should describe these changes more fully and explain how the evaluation's findings are relevant in this new policy context. It should also deepen the analysis of how the Commission already has taken some of these findings into account in the 2014-2020 cohesion policy. It should discuss further which findings remain relevant for the future and how the Commission has taken them into account in the proposals for post 2020.

(4) The report should assess how projects are selected for EU funding also from the point of view of efficiency. It should discuss its understanding of efficiency in this context and justify the choice of methodology (e.g. relevance of the tendering process). The analysis should go beyond the question of whether benefits exceeded costs for each project and also assess whether the selection process favoured those projects with the best cost to benefit ratio.

(5) The report should make more use of the input from stakeholders. Views of different stakeholder groups should be reflected throughout the report, and not just in the annex. Where relevant, the report should present stakeholder views by individual project.

(D) RSB scrutiny process

The Board advises the DG not to launch the interservice consultation before substantially revising the report.

The DG may resubmit to the Board a revised version of this report.

Full title	Ex-post evaluation of major projects in transport financed by the European regional development fund and the cohesion fund between 2000 and 2013.
Reference number	2018/REGIO/001
Date of RSB meeting	05.06.2019