

Strengthen and prioritise the Rhine waterway as a sustainable mode of transport and economic factor

In the vast majority of cases, there is widespread agreement that the realisation of transport infrastructure projects in Germany takes far too long. This is particularly true when compared to other EU countries with the same legal framework. To counteract this, in autumn 2022 the German government launched its "Act to Accelerate Approval Procedures in the Transport Sector", which aims to roughly halve the planning and approval time for transport projects. After long and controversial debates, this law has now also received the approval of the Bundesrat on 24 November 2023 and will therefore soon become legally binding.

Key component: This law assigns the status of "overriding public interest" to selected trunk road expansion projects (138 in total) and the railways, which means that they will have to be prioritised significantly by authorities and courts in future - a fundamentally positive development with regard to the development of the modes of transport addressed.

However, waterway projects are the only mode of transport not to be given this status in the current law - not even individual projects that stand out in terms of their importance. Only new regulations on the digitalisation of planning approval and authorisation procedures apply to waterways.

From the point of view of the organisations involved, the federal government has thus missed an opportunity with this law to put waterways on an equal footing with rail and trunk roads in terms of their importance - despite the recommendation to the contrary made by the majority of the federal states in May 2023. It is generally known and often emphasised that it is considered a climate-friendly mode of transport and is also needed to implement the energy transition. In the Rhineland and the neighbouring Netherlands in particular, the waterway or Rhine is also a very important economic factor. This applies in particular to the further strengthening of the European Rhine-Alpine corridor and the associated development of inland ports. More information on this can be found here: <https://t1p.de/29b0t>

For this reason, an urgent appeal is being made, especially to federal politicians, to give significant priority to projects that are of considerable importance for the Rhine and its status as Europe's most important waterway, both at national and European level:

- Discharge optimisation of the navigation channel on the Middle Rhine (BVWP 2030, W25)
- Discharge improvement and riverbed stabilisation on the Rhine between Duisburg and Stürzelberg (BVWP 2030, W27)
- Extension of the Wesel-Datteln Canal to Marl and replacement construction of the "large locks" (BVWP 2030, W23)

In order to further strengthen the system of waterways connected to the Rhine as well as the economy and population of the North Rhine-Westphalian Rhineland and the Euregio region, and not only to secure but also to expand the importance of the Rhine as Europe's most important waterway, appropriate resources must be made available for these important measures.

Specifically, we suggest prioritising two measures:

1. Bundling/concentration of existing human and financial resources for the above-mentioned projects, especially at the Federal Directorate-General for Waterways and Shipping,
2. Consistent implementation of the recommendations of the "Middle Rhine Acceleration Commission" of September 2023.

It is important not only from the point of view of the stakeholders united here, but also from an overall economic perspective, that these projects are realised or completed in a timely manner. The bottleneck on the Middle Rhine in particular is considered a bottleneck, especially during the increasingly frequent low water phases, which can significantly restrict inland navigation on the entire section of the Rhine between the Netherlands, the Lower Rhine and the Rhine-Neckar conurbation, as seen most recently in 2018 and 2022. In the current Federal Transport Infrastructure Plan 2030, the measure is labelled as an urgent need with bottleneck elimination and has been given priority among all the projects that have been submitted.

In comparison: the average cost-benefit ratio of all 22 waterway projects listed in the BVWP is only 6.8.

Subscribing institutions:

duisport - Trimodal logistics hub and Europe's largest hinterland hub

Duisburger Hafen AG (duisport) is the owner and operator of the Port of Duisburg, the leading logistics hub in Central Europe. The duisport Group offers a full range of infra- and superstructure services. In addition, the subsidiaries provide logistics services such as the development and optimisation of transport/logistics chains, rail freight transport, facility management, industrial goods packaging and contract logistics. www.duisport.de

HGK Group

HGK AG is the logistics company in the Stadtwerke Köln Group, which has developed into a pan-European group for integrated transport and logistics services. It is organised into five business divisions: Logistics & Intermodal, Shipping, Rail Operations, Infrastructure & Maintenance and Real Estate. Through its subsidiaries and associated companies, the HGK Group operates Germany's largest inland port network, one of the largest private freight railways, specialised logistics companies, terminals and its own rail network and workshops for rail freight transport.

www.hgk.de/

HGK Shipping

HGK Shipping GmbH is the largest inland shipping company in Europe. The fleet comprises around 350 ships, including particuliarers. The transport spectrum ranges from liquid chemical products and liquefied gases to dry goods and breakbulk.

www.hgk.de/shipping/

Neuss-Düsseldorf harbours

Neuss-Düsseldorfer Häfen GmbH & Co KG (NDH) was created in 2003 through the merger of the Düsseldorf harbour company with the port of Neuss. This created the third largest inland port in Germany, which today plays an important role in freight transport in the Rhineland logistics region and covers a wide range of options for handling goods. In addition to the Rhine as the largest waterway, NDH benefits from optimal connections to other transport markets in Germany and abroad thanks to its central transport location in Germany and Europe. This enables goods to be transported efficiently to the continent's most important seaports and economic centres.

www.nd-haefen.de/

Euregio Rhine-Waal

The Euregio Rhine-Waal is a special-purpose association under public law to which around 50 municipalities and regional authorities are affiliated. The main objective of the Euregio Rhine-Waal is to improve and intensify cross-border co-operation in business and society. There is great potential for strong economic and social development in the area covered by the Euregio Rhine-Waal, from Düsseldorf via Duisburg, the districts of Kleve and Wesel to the Dutch cities of Arnhem/Nijmegen, Ede/Wageningen and Apeldoorn. The Euregio Rhine-Waal brings partners together to launch joint initiatives and thus utilise synergy effects.

www.euregio.org

Logistics region Rhineland

Logistikregion Rheinland e.V. is an association of companies, associations and public institutions with the aim of further developing and strengthening the Rhineland as one of Europe's leading logistics regions. Logistikregion Rheinland e.V. is committed to ensuring that the people and companies in the region benefit from the opportunities offered by the growth sector of logistics through additional added value and jobs and acts as a mouthpiece for the interests of the logistics industry in the Rhineland.

www.logistikregion-rheinland.de

Rhineland metropolitan region

The Metropolregion Rheinland e.V. (MRR) brings together all the independent cities, districts, chambers of industry and commerce, chambers of skilled trades and the regional association in the Rhineland region of North Rhine-Westphalia. The region covers around 40% of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia and is home to around 8.7 million people. With a total of 35 members, the MRR represents the interests of the Rhineland externally and serves internally to improve networking between the stakeholders involved. Its work focuses on the topics of energy and transformation, transport and infrastructure as well as profiling and identification.

www.metropolregion-rheinland.de