

Proposal for guidelines to assess the environmental impact of railway infrastructure successfully introduced

Keywords

Environment

Infrastructure



The InfraGuidER EU FP7 coordinated action held its dissemination milestone event today in the shape of the Final Conference at the “Arts and Sciences Academy” in Brussels.

As the designated organisation in charge of the InfraGuidER consortium’s dissemination activity, UIC succeeded in bringing together a diverse range of participants from Europe and beyond (e.g. the European Commission, procurement directors, senior purchasers, maintenance process managers, R&D specialists, environmental advisors, etc.). The conference offered an opportunity to gain an interesting one-day insight into this European railway infrastructure EU FP7 coordinated action, presenting the achievements on railway network asset management from an environmental sustainability viewpoint.

For two years, the work coordinated by NITEL, the Italian university pool for Transport & Logistics, has involved exchanging views and know-how and implementing a solution tool-box ranging from solid transparent methodology for innovative eco-procurement processes, caveats and guidelines for the introduction/enhancement of environmental management schemes (based on ISO14000 series) for railway infrastructure managers, to material accounting and decision support expertise. Overall they represent environmental specifications for railway infrastructure, including a recommended set of indicators and some reference requirement values.

The InfraGuidER project, with the involvement of Central, North and Eastern European infrastructure managers, academia and the supply industry, has led to a mature ambitious proposal for improving ‘business as usual’ tendering processes by integrating it with new eco-procurement criteria. One of the main outcomes is that policy priorities should be placed in the following order: “Prevent and limit”, followed by “Management and control” and finally “Remediation”. This sequence can be assumed considering that the respective order of magnitude cost increases tenfold from the first to the last. The challenge remains to broadly adopt such policy whilst maintaining economic and social activity.

New criteria were designed in the proposed network materials procurement methodology, aiming at minimising material life cycle-related risks such as the negative impact of climate change, natural resources depletion and hazardous substances handling. Is it time to rethink policy and processes, phase-out selected materials, set up environmental management scheme reviews, use the best available technologies, maintain better collaborative links with the supply industry, promote R&D and compound solution patterns? Simple business changes could constitute low hanging fruits. The partners have created an up-to-date tool-box with technical and managerial recommendations which will be delivered in full and made publicly available at:

www.infraguider.eu by January 2011.

InfraGuidER partners also benefited along the way from some inspiring external contributors as

the new procurement scheme set up by the Dutch infrastructure manager ProRail – “CO2 performance ladder” – which is being implemented by tender practitioners, applying award advantages to virtuous suppliers and the Norwegian Infrastructure Manager’s (JBV) valuable business experience in procurement.

A dynamic and inclusive approach in tackling issues has enabled the InfraGuidER partners to successfully deliver a tool-box for railway infrastructure managers, supporting them in decision-making, and keeping the railway sector green, strong and competitive. The InfraGuidER project constitutes a stimulus for further European harmonisation in railway infrastructure material procurement and management, enhancing rail’s current environmental performance.

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