

MEASURES FOR PROTECTING ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH IN ROAD CONSTRUCTION

(Maßnahmen zum Schutz der Umwelt und der Gesundheit im Straßenbau)

Name of Supreme Audit Institution

Österreichischer Rechnungshof (Austrian Court of Audit)

Title of summary report on audit findings

Report; Bericht des Rechnungshofes Reihe Bund 2008/5; published in April 2008

Audit issues

Infrastructure, noise protection

Audit type

Combined audit

Description of the Audit

The aim of the audit was to find out the financial impacts of existing regulations on the high ranked road system and the ecological effectiveness.

The audit was conducted in October and November 2006.

Scope of audit

Costs and effectiveness of measures dealing with health and environmental issues in road constructing with a stress on noise and nature protection

Conflicts between environmental protection, protection of neighbouring human population, costs and speed of expansion of the road networks

The audit took five representative road projects as examples, representing an annual construction budget, covering roads under construction as well as roads already in service, which are located in regions with different ecological sensibility.

Audited units

Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology, ASFINAG (the enterprise responsible for constructing and maintenance of the high ranked road network in Austria)

Summary of the audit findings and evaluation of the audited activities

The portion of costs of measures for the protection of health and environment increased during the last 20 years significantly due to stricter regulations, increasing traffic volume and the extension of settlement areas. In the audited projects it was between 17 % and more than 40 %.

Projects concerning the high ranked road system have to undergo an environmental impact assessment to be able to evaluate possible impacts on health and environment.

The decision about the justifiable noise exposure was made on the corresponding regulations on federal level after balancing economic and health aspects. For new roads the recommended WHO standards were applied during the environmental impact assessment.

Measures for noise reduction like tunnels, subsurface roads or enclosures increase the costs significantly and make road construction hit the limits of economic possibilities. Standards should be developed to be able to set priorities and to decide, which relation of costs and benefits is still tolerable from a macro- and microeconomic point of view.

The construction enterprise ASFINAG built 340 km noise reduction walls along existing roads from 2000 until 2006. The investment was about 246 million EUR. Neither the ASFINAG nor the ministry were able to tell if the noise reduction targets were met. The need for noise reduction measures should be evaluated and the construction program should be adapted.

The statutory survey about the noise situation at high ranked roads was just started.

Costs to make up for negative impacts on the ecologic structure were about 10% of over all costs. Standards for very expensive ecologic compensatory measures should be developed.

Addressees of the summary report on audit findings

The report was forwarded to the Nationalrat (federal legislation) of Austria.

Results of the audit

A regulation including the state of the art of noise thresholds was initiated.
Work on a comprehensive strategic noise map was accelerated to meet EU deadlines.
Standards dealing with ecologic compensatory measures were elaborated.

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