

**XXIIInd WORLD ROAD CONGRESS  
DURBAN 2003**

**LATVIA - NATIONAL REPORT**

**STRATEGIC DIRECTION SESSION ST2**  
*Roads and quality of life*

**Mr. Olafs Kronlaks, Director General,  
Mr. Juris Tauriņš, Project Manager**

Latvian Road Administration  
3, Gogola Street, Riga, LV 1050, Latvia

# **Problems and Solutions for the Improvement of International Transport Corridor – Route Via Baltica (E67) in Latvia.**

## **Executive Summary**

Since the regain of independence of the Baltic States in the beginning of 90-ties the road transport corridor Via Baltica (Helsinki – Tallinn – Riga – Kaunas – Warsaw) has become the main transport artery in North-South direction from Finland through Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania to Poland. In the Conference of European Ministers of Transport in 1994 Via Baltica was defined as the part of European multi-modal transport Corridor 1.

The route ensures harmonic integration of the Latvian road network in the European road network, as well as, contributes to the development of tourism and service sectors. Since 1996 the route Via Baltica in the European road network is designated with international road index “E67”.

Considering the international importance of the Via Baltica delegated representatives of the involved countries set up a Monitoring Committee in order to ensure sustainable development of the route and co-ordinate the activities to be implemented. Under its leadership the First Via Baltica Investment Programme for 1996-2000 was worked out in 1995. The Programme has been successfully completed.

The implementation of the First Via Baltica Investment Programme has contributed to the implementation of new technologies, methods and road maintenance management in the route and the rest of the Latvian road network, and it also contributed to the establishment of modern road winter maintenance service, traffic safety improvement projects prepared by foreign consultants, preparation of a uniform tourist information system which served as a basis for a national tourism information sign system in Latvia, etc.

At present Via Baltica development projects are under way. Latvia as a candidate country of the European union receives support from the EU assistance funds, which play a major role in the bilateral financing of the Via Baltica Development Programme.

Development of Via Baltica route is a part of the activities to be undertaken in the road network in order to provide a planned development of efficient, environmentally friendly, balanced multi-modal transportation system which would meet the need of qualitative and quantitative transportation with specific safety, guarantees and acceptable costs, increase the choice opportunities in passenger and goods transport, contribute to regional development, as well as integration in the European transport system.

## Problems and Solutions for the Improvement of International Transport Corridor – Route Via Baltica (E67) in Latvia.

### What is Via Baltica

Since the regain of independence of the Baltic States in the beginning of 90-ties the road transport corridor Via Baltica (Helsinki – Tallinn – Riga – Kaunas – Warsaw) has become the main transport artery in North-South direction from Finland to the Western Europe crossing Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. In the Conference of the European Ministers of Transport in 1994 the route Via Baltica was defined as the part of the European multimodal transport corridor No. 1.



**Fig. 1. Northern Europe. European Corridor 1 Via Baltica**

Total length of the route is approximately 1000 km, out of which 202 km long road section crosses Latvia. The road section in Latvia mostly has a roadway with two lanes with speed limit of 90 km/h (50 km/h in urban areas). A short road section has separate roadways (2x2 lanes), though it does not meet the requirements of a motorway. Pavement condition comparing with the rest of the state road network is good, however, its homogeneity in terms of quality or geometric dimensions is not achieved.

Average annual daily traffic varies from 2 500 vehicles per day near the borders with Estonia and Lithuanian and up to 20 000 vehicles per day around the capital city Riga.



**Fig 2. Latvian state road network. Via Baltica route and access roads.**

Via Baltica as the North-South route together with West-East corridor lies in the base of the Latvian road network. Crossing point of both important routes lies in the vicinity of Riga and is characterised with the greatest traffic intensity and loading.

The route provides Latvia with an opportunity of harmonised integration of the Latvian road network in the European road network and contributes to the development of tourism and services. Since 1996 the route Via Baltica acquired the international road index “E67” at it was the first road in Latvia, which had such index in Latvia. Since 1996 the „E” road network in Latvia has been expanded considerably.

### **Via Baltica Supervision Committee**

A Via Baltica Supervision Committee was established basing on the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Ministers of Transport of Via Baltica countries and the European Commission in order to co-ordinate mutual activities in the development of Via Baltica route. It consists of representatives delegated by the involved countries and the European Commission. The government of Sweden provides the chairing of the Committee and the government of Finland implements its secretarial functions.



**Fig. 3. Structure of Via Baltica Supervision Committee**

Main tasks of the Supervision Committee are the following:

- co-ordination of mutual activities in the scope of the memorandum of Understanding;
- development of Via Baltica into an internationally recognised route;
- implementation of Via Baltica investment programmes;
- collection and distribution of traffic flow, traffic accidents, border crossings and other information for the evaluation of further investment needs.

In addition to the activities of Via Baltica Supervision Committee the representatives of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian road sectors in the scope of the Baltic Road Association regularly exchange the information on topical issues, discuss the arisen problems and propose solutions in relation to the development of Via Baltica route.

### **Via Baltica Investment Programmes**

In order to commence the harmonisation of Via Baltica route the first Via Baltica Investment Programme for the years 1996-2000 was worked out under the guidance of Via Baltica Supervision Committee in 1995. It reviewed problems to be solved immediately, defined liabilities undertaken by each country and activities to be implemented basing on the level of development of each country's road network, availability of financing, and other factors.

The main problems in Via Baltica route were the following:

- Complex and time consuming border crossing procedure;
- Insufficient pavement bearing capacity;
- Poor traffic safety;
- Poor condition of bridges and pavements;
- Lack of a united road user information system and poor road furniture;
- Poor winter maintenance inadequate to traffic needs and route importance;
- Lack of bypasses around large urban areas.

### **Results of the 1<sup>st</sup> Via Baltica Investment Programme for 1996-2000**

In the scope of Via Baltica Investment Programme 41.05 million EUR were spent for the improvement of the Latvian section of Via Baltica route in the period of 1996-2000 and the following most important projects were implemented :

- pavement rehabilitation or surface treatment on 145.87 km of roads, i.e. 71 % of the whole section;
- strengthening or renovation of 8 bridges;
- implementation of traffic safety programme in 2 towns;
- local traffic safety improvements in “black spots”;
- establishing of a modern winter maintenance service along the whole route.

Bridges were repaired extensively and in the period of 1997-2000 a bridge rehabilitation programme for the reconstruction of 8 bridges was implemented.

Due to insufficient financing in 90-ties activities were undertaken not to allow further deterioration of average road pavement condition. Improvement of road bearing capacity and road geometry are envisaged in the scope of the Second Via Baltica Investment Programme.

Topical issue at present is the existing traffic safety situation in the route. Traffic safety improvements have contributed to traffic safety situation though much has to be done in future.

With the assistance from the EU PHARE programme border crossing and customs stations were reconstructed and equipped, and uniform border crossing procedures were elaborated which helped to reduce considerably the time needed for border crossing.

In addition to that, though the traffic intensity has increased considerably in the route the number of killed and injured in accidents has reduced.

In route improvement great assistance was provided by the road administrations of Nordic countries, which provided consulting, financed feasibility studies, carried out seminars and implemented mutual projects. For example, Finnish Road Administration assisted in the implementation of a Road Weather Information system initially along the Via Baltica route and later on throughout Latvia. It ensures efficient road maintenance in winter, which in Latvia lasts from November to April.



### **Via Baltica 2<sup>nd</sup> Investment Programme for 2001-2006**

The most important priority of the Via Baltica 2<sup>nd</sup> Investment Programme in Latvia is to implement large-scale reconstruction works. Emphasis in this Programme is made on improvements in Via Baltica basic route and West-East corridor:

- activities in Via Baltica basic route – traffic safety improvement and road capacity increase measures in road sections in Riga region, as well as, improvement of road and bridge nearing capacity meeting the axle load of 11.5t defined by the EU; construction of Saulkrasti bypass in the length of 24 km;
- projects closely connected with the basic route – reconstruction of access road to the airport “Riga” and construction of a new crossing over the Daugava river in Riga;
- access roads of Via Baltica system: West-East corridor Liepaja/Ventspils – Riga – Jekabpils - Rezekne – Russian border (Terehova): traffic safety improvement and road capacity increase measures in some road sections on roads Riga – Ventspils/Liepaja (A9 and A10); reconstruction and new construction of the Latgale highway.





## **Financing**

Total amount of investments in Via Baltica basic route is envisaged to be 128 million EUR, which would include the reconstruction and construction of a number of road sections and bridges, traffic safety improvements, as well as, improvement of road bearing capacity according to the loads specified in the EU norms (96/53/EC).

It is envisaged to acquire 75% of the financing for these projects from the EU Pre-Accession funds ISPA. ISPA funds are envisaged for bilateral financing of construction projects or as technical assistance in the bilateral financing of feasibility studies. Other costs related to project feasibility studies, public hearing for construction, environmental impact assessments, land acquisition for road construction, detailed designs and project management are to be covered by the beneficiary country receiving ISPA funds.

170.79 million EUR are envisaged for the projects connected with the basic route (access road to the airport "Riga" and new crossing over the Daugava river in Riga).

In addition to that 57.50 million EUR are to be invested in improvements on Via Baltica access roads in West-East corridor.

Implementation of each specific project defined in the Programme will depend on the availability of financing. Via Baltica 2<sup>nd</sup> Investment Programme mostly will be financed from the EU ISPA funds, loans of international banks and state budget investments.



## **Future perspectives**

As mentioned above the EU ISPA bilateral funding for Latvia as the EU candidate country, as well as bilateral funding from Cohesion Fund after accession together with state budget investments are the most important source of financing. To ensure the availability of this financing good projects have to be prepared and tender documents have to meet the EU requirements.

Project and tender documents in Latvia are elaborated by private consulting companies and supervised by the Latvian Road Administration; specific project stages are closely monitored by the delegation of the European Commission).

All project preparation stages in total require at least 2 years if there are no problems in land acquisition, serious technical contradictions or other obstacles, for example negative environmental impact assessment. Considering this fact feasibility studies for several projects have been commenced in connection with the improvement and development of Via Baltica route. At the same time insufficient capacities and experience of local design companies in the preparation of complex projects may be seen, therefore the presence of foreign consulting companies may be expected in the preparation of projects which are to be implemented in the period of 2005-2007. Already at present companies widely known in Europe are actively co-operating with local sub-contractors in tenders for project feasibility studies. This may be a good opportunity for our engineers to increase their experience.

## **Conclusion**

Co-ordinated development of the Via Baltica route has not only contributed to the improvement of the road as the set of engineering structures and road furniture but also has contributed to the implementation of new technologies methods and road maintenance management in the route and in future also in the rest of the Latvian road network. Some examples might be the establishment of modern winter maintenance service, traffic safety improvement projects prepared by foreign consultants, preparation of uniform tourism information system lying in the base for the system of national tourism signs in Latvia, etc.

Continuous improvement and development of the route is an excellent result of successful international co-operation which has united all countries of the Baltic Sea region and which serves as a basis to successful solution of other road sector problems.

The direct beneficiaries of this co-operation are the road users who have evaluated positively qualitative improvements of the road and the saved travel time. It is also reflected by the increase of traffic safety and fast development of service and rest areas adjacent to the route thus influencing the flow of tourists not only to the area of the route but also to the adjacent regions.

Development of the route Via Baltica may serve as a good example to other countries how to develop regional and international projects in top level.