Findings Report
October 2015

Action WP6 Inv13:
Innovative financing for transport Schemes: a European reference resource
Sustainable transport for North-West Europe’s periphery

Sintropher is a five-year €23m transnational cooperation project with the aim of enhancing local and regional transport provision to, from and within five peripheral regions in North-West Europe.

INTERREG IVB

INTERREG IVB North-West Europe is a financial instrument of the European Union’s Cohesion Policy. It funds projects which support transnational cooperation.
# Table of contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 1 Background and objectives</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 2 Development of the European reference resource</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 3 Transnational relevance to Sintropher partners and wider audiences</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 4 Next steps</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 5 References and further information</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 6 What is Sintropher?</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

This Findings Report summarises the development of a European reference resource for innovative approaches to financing transport schemes (capital costs) with particular reference to light rail and tram-based schemes in cities and regions. The work was undertaken by University College London as part of their contribution to the Sintropher transport project funded by the EU’s North West Europe transnational co-operation Programme under INTERREG IVB.

Sintropher focuses in particular on light rail and tram-based schemes, but the financing approaches in the reference resource could be applicable to transport infrastructure schemes generally.

Part 1 provides the background and context to the work, and Part 2 outlines the development of the reference database, and its structure and coverage of topics.

Part 3 sets out the transnational relevance of the resource in relation to knowledge transfer within the Sintropher project partnership, and wider target audiences, and arrangements for open access. The main audiences are governmental authorities and transport agencies at city, regional, national and EU levels; and transport professionals and practitioners who may be involved in initiating and implementing new transport infrastructure links.

Part 4 outlines next steps regarding the hosting, ongoing development, and ongoing open access to the reference database.

Part 5 provides contact details, and Part 6 summarises the overall Sintropher project, of which this work is a part - the overall aims, objectives, partners and partner regions, and activities.
Part 1
Background and objectives

Background

This Findings Report is about one of the Investments undertaken for the Sintropher project funded under the INTERREG IVB North West Europe Programme. It summarises the development of a European reference resource for innovative approaches to financing transport schemes (capital costs) with particular reference to light rail and tram-based schemes in cities and regions.

The overall aim of the Sintropher project is to develop sustainable, cost-effective solutions to improve connectivity to, from and within poorly connected regions in North-West Europe - to use innovative transport links to connect peripheral regions of NWE with the core European transport network of high-speed trains, via effective interchange hubs.

There has been a particular focus on tram-train systems which allow local trams to run on to national rail networks, pioneered in Germany, firstly in Karlsruhe and developed in Kassel, which allow urban tram systems to extend over national rail tracks to serve extensive city regions. The project has also looked at other innovative forms of tram systems such as single-track tramways, as well as high-quality transport interchanges that link such systems to major national or transnational rail or air hubs.

The project began in late 2009, with fourteen partner agencies in five EU Member States, and lead partner University College London (UCL): Valenciennes (France); the Fylde Coast (UK); West Flanders (Belgium); North Hesse (Germany); and Arnhem-Nijmegen (Netherlands). Participants included public transport operators, local authorities, regional transport agencies, and universities.

They have worked together on a series of feasibility evaluations, pilot investments and demonstration projects, as well as comparative analyses of EU best practice. The total budget is more than €23m, with funding part-financed by the EU's INTERREG IVB Programme.

A €1.5m project extension in 2014, covers follow-on work to capitalise on results from the initial project, and added a fifth objective: to test technologies for low cost transport links in different territorial contexts, plus integrated territorial corridor plans that help these links unlock wider economic and regeneration benefits; and better recognise these in business cases. This included two new partners (total now 16) and two extra demonstration regions (total now 7) in West Flanders Brugge-Zeebrugge (Belgium) and Saar-Moselle (a cross-border region France-Germany).

Innovative financing for transport schemes - increasingly important

Results in the European demonstration regions, plus topics at Sintropher Conferences and Workshops (see references at end of report) indicate that new tram-based or tram-train proposals are usually technically feasible and can often offer a reasonably positive
investment case - especially if the case goes wider than conventional cost-benefit analysis (CBA) to include realisation of territorial objectives and benefits, such as economic growth and social opportunities. But implementation can be impeded by lack of available funding due to cuts in public expenditure following the European economic crisis of 2008 and subsequent recovery efforts by national governments. Regions that are weaker in population or economic terms have even more difficulty in justifying an investment case in terms of public expenditure, so innovative financing is of growing importance - and much can be learned from approaches in different European countries.

Innovative approaches

Several presentations and masterclasses were held at two Sintropher Conferences - “Using Innovative Transport Technologies to Stimulate Regional Development” in London 2011, and “Supporting Growth through Regional Connectivity” in Brussels 2014 (references at end of this report). Both included issues of financing regional transport in challenging times. According to Sintropher’s 2014 Conference contributor Alexander Jan, transport issues are perceived by many business leaders as the main barrier to growth, with around 65 per cent of business leaders indicating that they are not satisfied with how funding is secured for infrastructure projects.

The UK is an example, with its fall in GDP in the financial crisis being one of the most dramatic over the last 20 years, and many other economies in North West Europe saw similar falls. Regions outside the core UK economic regions such as the south-east region experienced a sharper fall. Given that public expenditure is falling accordingly, the challenge is to secure other sources of investment for transport infrastructure - especially for the high capital costs of larger transport schemes such as a new/extended tram or tram-train systems.

In the UK context, there are several potential methods of funding available in the regions to help fund infrastructure (Figure 1). These could be potentially applicable (or adaptable) to other European countries.

Funding “cocktails

The Sintropher Conferences also highlighted a need to be more imaginative about ‘funding cocktails’: a creative mix of funding to take a project forward. But even this will generally favour cities/regions with stronger economic performance, rather than weaker areas. Regions might also look at less ambitious, incrementally-developed projects rather than large schemes. A third point was to take a more coordinated and comprehensive approach, as with the French experience of tram development, where a new tram scheme is supported by related measures such as increasing the cost of car parking and traffic restrictions in urban areas, and urban regeneration or urban development initiatives.

Sintropher: a European reference resource

Against this background, the additional work in Sintropher had two objectives:

- to develop a European database (reference resource) of innovative financing models, and exemplar cases of where these models have been successfully applied in the real world, to help construct new transport links (in the context of Sintropher, relevant to tram-based systems; but also relevant to any type of transport link)
• to promote wide access to this by target audiences, through a web-based resource linked into an appropriate European transport network or platform e.g. ELTIS, POLIS, and EPOMM

Figure 1
Transport schemes in the UK - potential financing mechanisms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanism</th>
<th>Political risk</th>
<th>Attractiveness to private sector partners</th>
<th>Economic cycle risk</th>
<th>Track record of success (credit worthy)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workplace charge/Congestion charging</td>
<td>High High</td>
<td>Low? Medium</td>
<td>Possibly</td>
<td>No Limited to London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farebox (user pays)</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Possibly</td>
<td>Very mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payroll tax</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bed tax/Roof tax/Sales tax</td>
<td>Unclear?</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, but…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developer contributions</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium-low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local bonds</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Yes and no!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Recycling” assets/Local asset backed vehicles</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business rate supplement/Community Infrastructure Levy</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Not quite yet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax Increment Finance/ADZs/RIFs</td>
<td>Low-medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Possibly</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: A. Jan; presentation at Sintropher Conference 2014 “Supporting Growth through Regional Connectivity”.
Part 2
Development of the European reference resource

Methodology

The reference resource was developed in stages: (1) specification (2) design (3) software development (4) data input (5) testing and finalisation (6) live operation.

Stage 1

Specification consisted of developing a typology of approaches to innovative financing, as a working framework; and then specification of a series of briefing papers (including city/region case examples) to cover the various categories of financing.

The typology is shown on Figure 2, and was developed by examining relevant literature (desk exercise) and discussion with experts from the project partners and some external experts. Project partners were able to provide information on the transport financing regimes in their own countries, and how this related to the types of approaches on the typology. Reference was made to typologies developed by external experts, for example a UK-specific classification presented at the Sintropher Conference in 2014 (Alexander Jan, Arup Consulting - Figure 1) and also a wider classification used by UITP (International Association for Public Transport) which covered both capital financing and operational/revenue financing.

Figure 2
Sintropher’s typology of financing approaches
Stage 2

Design: the briefing papers cover each category (the white boxes on Figure 2) - one paper per category - and content covers:

- context/status of the financing approach
- the mechanism
- advantages
- disadvantages
- track record of implementation
- European case study where implemented/ being implemented
- overall comment/assessment of potential
- future prospects
- transnational relevance
- further information

They are designed to be short and succinct, for busy transport professionals and managers working in government authorities, transport agencies, and consultancies (Figure 3).

Figure 3
Example Sinropher briefing paper
Stage 3

Software development: the reference resource is designed to be web-based and can be easily uploaded on to the Sintropher website for access by any user, by simply going to the home page (news feature or similar) and then navigating to a dedicated section which will include the briefing papers as PDF documents. The website will be operational until at least 2020, beyond the formal end of Sintropher in 2015.

Software development was also influenced by discussions with potential European transport networks/platforms, about potentially hosting the reference resource on their website (to realise the objective to link into an appropriate existing European network or transport platform, in order to enhance dissemination and user access). The simple PDF basis was easily adaptable to such websites, combined with a suitable dedicated web page and feature/tab on the home page, also linked to the website’s keyword search facility if present. Very positive discussions were held with three major networks - ELTIS, POLIS, and UITP.

ELTIS facilitates the exchange of information, knowledge and experiences in the field of sustainable urban mobility in Europe. It is aimed at individuals working in transport as well as in related disciplines, including urban and regional development, health, energy and environmental sciences. Created more than ten years ago, ELTIS is now Europe's main observatory on urban mobility. It is financed by the European Union under the Intelligent Energy - Europe (IEE) programme.

POLIS is a network of European cities and regions (membership currently 70 organisations). Since 1989, European local and regional authorities have been working together within POLIS to promote sustainable mobility through the deployment of innovative transport solutions. Its aim is to improve local transport through integrated strategies that address the economic, social and environmental dimensions of transport. To this end, POLIS supports the exchange of experiences and the transfer of knowledge between European local and regional authorities. It also facilitates dialogue between local and regional authorities and other actors in the sector such as industry, research centres and universities, and NGOs. In POLIS, decision makers are provided with the necessary information and tools for making sustainable mobility a reality. Within the Political Group of Polis, they also formulate recommendations to the European institutions.

UITP (International Association of Public Transport) is internationally recognised for its work in advancing the development of sustainable urban mobility. UITP has a long history, and is now a worldwide network to bring together all public transport stakeholders and all sustainable transport modes. It promotes innovation and encourages new ways of thinking; provides a platform for sharing insights into the latest mobility trends and hot topics; looks to the future by anticipating mobility needs and inspiring pioneering solutions; and acts as a global centre of knowledge on the sustainable mobility of today and tomorrow; and gathers information, best practices and statistics related to sustainable mobility worldwide.

All three were interested to collaborate with the Sintropher initiative, and the choice of host was difficult given that all three networks have a good reputation in the world of transport, and offer wide access by users. POLIS was chosen to host the European reference resource, based on practical matters - it had a combination of suitable website architecture, open access to users, and ability to act within the timescale of Sintropher which is due to formally finish in October 2015 (a big factor was that Sintropher also developed a European
reference resource on innovative transport/tram technologies - which also needed to be hosted on the same platform (Sintropher Findings Report for Investment 1)

Figure 4
European reference resource hosted by POLIS network
Even though a choice had to be made, we are pleased to say that ongoing working links are being maintained with all three networks. UITP will receive some of the briefing papers and case examples (with the agreement of POLIS) in order to adapt these to its developing initiative for a transport finance toolbox, which resides on the UITP website.

Stage 4

Data input: the briefing papers were produced by UCL using desk-based research and in-house expertise, supplemented by information from project partners and external experts. For the city/region case examples, direct interview with the relevant authorities would have been desirable, but this was not possible due to a demanding timescale and limited resources.

Stage 5

In the testing and finalisation stage, the draft briefing papers were circulated to expert project partners for comment and revised as necessary (comments were generally favourable with little revision needed).

Stage 6

The reference resource is going “live” with a feature and access on the Sintropher website, plus a link to the main material being hosted on the POLIS website (Figure 4). A memorandum between UCL (on behalf of Sintropher) and POLIS sets out the operational arrangements, including appropriate acknowledgments to the Sintropher project, NWE Programme and ERDF. It includes provision for future UCL staff and/or POLIS associates, to add new briefing papers or update the existing ones (with appropriate reference to the author, and quality control).

Issues arising and how resolved

The main matters to address were:

- development of a useful typology of innovative approaches to financing transport infrastructure capital costs. As outlined earlier, this was developed by examining relevant literature (desk exercise) and discussion with experts from the project partners and externally

- selecting good city/region case studies for the various categories of financing approaches - achieved by UCL in-house expertise with advice from project partners and external experts.
• ensuring, in the discussions with potential European networks/platforms, open access to the material by users in accordance with the requirements of the NWE Programme and ERDF funding. Not a problem - users simply go to the home page of POLIS and navigate to the Sintropher page (or use the POLIS search tool to find the financing topic).

• ensuring the reference resource has a life after Sintropher formally ends in October 2015 - the POLIS website has an ongoing life, and the memorandum with POLIS includes provision to add new briefing papers or update the existing ones, by future UCL staff and/or POLIS associates (with appropriate reference to the author, and quality control).
Part 3
Transnational relevance to Sintropher partners and wider audiences

The reference resource will be utilised both within Sintropher by various project partners, and it also has a much wider transnational relevance to other cities and regions which may be seeking to implement new or extended tram-based links to enhance regional connectivity.

Transnational relevance: Sintropher partners

The reference resource will be used by Sintropher partners to follow up their work on technical and economic feasibility assessments for new or extended innovative tram-based systems in their region. Partners’ results show that their preferred option is usually technically feasible and can often offer a positive economic investment case (including conventional CBA greater than 1) - especially if the case is widened by going beyond narrow CBA to include achievement of territorial objectives and benefits, such as economic growth and addressing social disadvantage. But the follow-up implementation of these results (detailed design, construction, testing, and operation of new or extended links) requires significant capital funding:

- Saar-Moselle: the Sintropher feasibility studies identified viable options for extending the region’s existing tram-train route to cover (1) a new link Saarbrucken-Forbach (estimated capital cost €132.7m - €170.4m) (2) a service connecting Alt-Saarbrucken and the ZF factory, an automobile subcontractor which has almost 10,000 German and French employees (3) extension by creating a small regional loop from Forbach - Völklingen estimated capital cost €143.8m (4) a large regional loop Forbach -Bêning - Freyming-Merlebach, - Creutzwald - Überherrn - Wadgassen - Völklingen - Sarreguemines, estimated capital cost €292.7m. But a key challenge is the limited budgets of the French authorities and German Land of Saarland. The approaches in the reference resource could help.

- Flanders, Brugge-Zeebrugge corridor: De Lijn’s feasibility studies indicate the best option is a new dedicated tram line rather than utilising the existing rail line (eg tram-train). However the estimated capital cost of €100m is an issue, even if the commissioning authorities (Flanders Government, City of Bruges) can contribute some funding. The major budget constraints of the Flanders Government mean that even existing planned transport schemes are being delayed or reviewed. A third source of potential financing is needed. Linked to this, De Lijn’s feasibility assessment is now looking at the wider benefits of the scheme, for example tourism in Bruges, and increased rail freight capacity on the existing rail link to the Port of Zeebrugge by transferring passenger traffic.

- West Flanders, Kustram extension from the coast inland to Veurne: the same challenge is faced by this proposal. De Lijn’s technical and economic feasibility studies resulted in a preferred tram route option and submission of a dossier to the Flanders Government. The investment case is positive, but the estimated capital cost of €37m is a challenge.
Fylde Coast, South Fylde Line: the Sintropher-funded corridor studies examined options to connect the existing Blackpool Tramway on to the SFL, linking to the regional/national rail station hub at Preston by either tram-rail or tram-train. These have resulted in a recommended strategy of a short-term upgrade of the existing SFL heavy rail route (estimated cost £54m equivalent €76m) and medium-term extension of the existing Blackpool Tramway to Lytham, by linking this to the SFL enabling segregated tram or tram-train (estimated cost £166m - £255m depending on option, equivalent €232m - €357m). Although the CBA gives a benefit-cost ratio of almost 2 for the preferred options (higher if eligible wider economic benefits are included in the CBA) the issue of financing the capital cost has to be addressed - even though action for the SFL is one of the priorities in the regional transport programme for Lancashire, and the sub-regional Fylde Master Plan for transport.

Transnational relevance: Europe-wide

Availability of funding is an issue faced by many cities and regions across the North West Europe Programme area and indeed more widely across Europe. Traditionally, in most countries tram-based links have been financed by public funding from national or regional government authorities, sourced from either taxation or borrowing or a combination. (In regimes where there is a national or regional transport infrastructure authority, net operating revenues may also assist).

But as with Sintropher partners, implementation of such schemes is facing a lack of available funding due to cuts in public expenditure following the European economic crisis of 2008, and subsequent efforts to recover, by national (and/or regional/city) governments. So innovative financing is of growing importance, and much can be learned from approaches in different European countries.

The financing approaches and city/region case examples on the reference resource are context-specific and reflect:

- the geographical context: the physical scale of the scheme and scale of capital cost. Obviously a major scheme with high capital cost of, say, €50m + may be beyond the resources of a single city or regional authority, and require a national contribution in a “cocktail” approach. The investment case will usually be stronger in a major dense metropolitan area than smaller regions with lower population and (possibly) lower or weaker economic activity.

- the organisational context: which level of government and/or relevant transport authority or agency is the primary initiator of the scheme - national, regional, or city - will influence the financing opportunities and options available.

- the legal context: the nature and extent of the powers and responsibilities of the initiating authority, and the processes/procedures, to actually pursue any of the financing approaches.

For example the v érsement transport in France (Nantes case example) currently does not have an equivalent in, say, Belgium or the Netherlands. The community infrastructure levy in the UK (London case example) depends on powers available to UK local authorities through the UK development planning system, powers which do not appear to be currently available to local authorities in, say, Germany or Ireland.
But even though the various approaches and case examples are context-specific, their transnational relevance is strong:

- the approaches offer a stimulus and possibilities for wider thinking by cities and regions in other European countries, about how to assemble capital financing for transport schemes,

- in all countries, the reality of capital finance for transport infrastructure means that the “cocktail” approach is often the most practical way forward - and the approach of mixed public-private sector finance is an increasingly pragmatic basis

- some or all of the various approaches might be potentially adaptable within the particular organisational and governance regime of another country, using comparable powers or processes

- the approaches offer possibilities for lobbying by city and regional authorities, in order to secure from national government the powers and competences to utilise new approaches (as has happened in the UK - for example local authorities have in recent years acquired powers to implement tax increment financing (TIF) although subject to safeguards over risk and borrowing; similarly, they have powers to enact a community infrastructure levy (CIL) on developments in their area, subject to local consultations and independent examination of viability and fairness for private developers.

The reference resource should be seen from this perspective, as a means to promote knowledge transfer and learning across different NWE countries and regions.
Part 4
Next steps

This covers three dimensions: use of the reference resource by Sintropher project partners; use by wider target audiences; and ongoing availability and development of the resource through time.

Use of the reference resource by Sintropher project partners

The reference resource will be disseminated to all partners, to assist with their challenges of assembling capital financing for their proposals for new or extended tram-based links (for see Part 3 of this report). This will include uploading the material on to the Sintropher website.

Dissemination to wider target audiences

The resource will have open access by any user in accordance with NWE Programme requirements and ERDF Regulations. Particular target audiences are governmental authorities and transport agencies at city, regional, national and EU levels; and transport professionals and practitioners who may be involved in the initiation and implementation of new transport links. Access will be by two routes: the Sintropher project website (which has a fixed life after Sintropher ends) and the POLIS website (ongoing life).

Additionally in agreement with POLIS, selected case examples will be made available to the UITP, who will adapt them to its evolving transport finance toolbox - with appropriate acknowledgements to Sintropher, the NWE Programme, and ERDF.

Dissemination and utilisation will be promoted by a feature on the Sintropher website home page, and a feature on the POLIS website. Plus possible news items in other communication channels such mainstream transport journals.

Ongoing availability and development of the resource in time

As mentioned previously, the material will be available on the POLIS website on an ongoing basis. The memorandum between UCL and POLIS includes provision for future UCL staff and/or POLIS associates, to add new briefing papers or update the existing ones (with appropriate reference to the author, and quality control).
Part 5
References and further information

References


Detailed findings – main Report

The European reference resource can be accessed on the following:

Sintropher project website http://www.sintropher.eu/publications

POLIS website http://www.polisnetwork.eu/sintropher or http://www.polisnetwork.eu/res/resources
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Responsibility for the report

Acknowledgements are due to UCL staff who worked on this initiative and have now moved to other jobs: Charles King (Communications Manager, Sintropher project, UCL) who led the work; and Imogen Thompson and Giacomo Vecia (MSc students acting as research assistants, UCL) who produced the content of the briefing papers and case examples.

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Part 6
What is Sintropher?

The Sintropher transport project (Sustainable Integrated Transport Options for Peripheral European Regions) is funded by the EU’s North West Europe transnational cooperation programme under INTERREG IVB.

The overall project aim is to develop sustainable, cost-effective solutions to improve connectivity to, from and within poorly connected regions in North-West Europe. There are four objectives:

- promote possible cost-effective technology-based solutions
- assess the appraisal procedures used by different counties for investment in regional tram systems and improve the development process for a positive business case
- promote high-quality, effective interchange between regional tram systems and regional rail and air hubs
- promote and market the benefits of regional tram-based systems to users and stakeholders

There has been a particular focus on tram-train systems which allow local trams to run on to national rail networks, pioneered in Germany, firstly in Karlsruhe and developed in Kassel, which allow urban tram systems to extend over national rail tracks to serve extensive city regions. The project has also looked at other innovative forms of tram systems such as single-track tramways as well as high-quality transport interchanges that link such systems to major national or transnational rail or air hubs.

The project began in late 2009, with fourteen partner agencies in five EU Member States, and lead partner University College London (UCL): Valenciennes (France); the Fylde Coast (UK); West Flanders (Belgium); North Hesse (Germany); and Arnhem-Nijmegen (Netherlands). Participants include public transport operators, local authorities, regional transport agencies, and universities.

They have worked together on a series of feasibility evaluations, pilot investments and demonstration projects, as well as comparative analyses of EU best practice. The total budget is more than €23m, with funding part-financed by the EU's INTERREG IVB Programme.

A €1.5m project extension in 2014, covers follow-on work to capitalise on results from the initial project, and added a fifth objective:

- to test technologies for low cost transport links in different territorial contexts, plus integrated territorial corridor plans that help these links unlock wider economic and regeneration benefits; and better recognise these in business cases (this also covered innovative fainting to fund investment cases in such schemes)
This includes two new partners (total now 16) and two extra demonstration regions (total now 7) in West Flanders Brugge-Zeebrugge (Belgium) and Saar-Moselle (a cross-border region France-Germany).

The project officially ends in European funding terms in October 2015 and work will continue by partners beyond this, to capitalise on results and generate impacts in terms of influencing transport and territorial development policies and investment programmes in their regions, and respective national approaches to appraising and deciding investment in such links.

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