

Name of Exercise: Extension of motorway in Nitra city

Location: Nitra – Chrenova

Participation Exercise under which Article? Article 6

Purpose of Participation Exercise:

Call for suggestions, objections and comments to the proposed extension of motorway No. 1/65 from Nitra city to Zlate Moravce.

Background:

Public involvement in the planned activity was not included in the original background documents. Slovak road management was acting as the investor and Dopravoprojekt as the project design agency. This project is part of a complex project CESTA (motorway) 1/65 Nitra – Caradice. This case study describes the connection of an existing northern city bypass with a planned highway from Nitra to Zlate Moravce. The planned highway is an important part of connection of Nitra region with Banska Bystrica region and Kosice region. The potential impacts of construction of the extension and the high level crossings in the district of Nitra city might be negative to the local environment.

Participation Techniques Used:

General information about the construction appeared in the local newspaper and a public meeting was organised to invite public opinion. Information about the meeting was mounted on an information board in the entrance hall of the municipality. This clearly made a “call for comments”. The Public were also entitled to submit comments for up to 2 months following the announcements of the projects plans.

Study III/98 sets the direction of the highway in accordance with the urban plan of Nitra city using northern bypass but it does not set the route for the connection with the planned south-east Nitra city bypass. Information dissemination and public involvement was undertaken on the basis of personal initiatives, enthusiasm and overtime work of Dr. Cyril Ivan, chairman of council of Nitra city district Chrenova. He prepared a petition against the origin proposal.

About one month after the study was elaborated, the public was informed about the plans. Members of council of Nitra city district had to look for and collect documentation. The first stage was the opinion of members of Nitra city district council which was sent to the Office of the Main Architect on 29 April 1998. Since the public was not involved in the original process, the petition was sent to the Ministry of the Environment. The petition expressed disagreement with the technical study and the proposal. Despite public negotiations, a positive outcome in relation to the affected inhabitants was not reached. On 20 May 1998, they wrote:

“Because adequate information about the public affected by the construction of highway 1/65 was not provided in time and in relevant dimensions, the State Administration Office of Nitra city should not execute the construction decision in the area. The proposal would lead to demolition of houses, roads and greenery. The project design agency did not follow the law and correct procedure and the agency elaborated the project without involving the public. According to law number 127, the project design agency had to communicate with the affected public. We were very interested in the instructions to speed up the approval process with a shortened time scale with the intention of avoiding the law on public participation and to avoid the regulations of state administration office of Nitra city on environment protection.”

The public was afraid that the demolition of this part of the city as proposed in the plans would lead to great devastation of the environment. High levels of noise, negative environmental impact and undesirable psychological impact would be combined with awful aesthetic effects on inhabitants living close to the noise barrier. A high level highway junction would optically and physically divide the inner part of the city from this area. The public asked that construction should not go ahead according to the origin proposal and that existing motorways should be used as a route to the highway around Nitra city. They also suggested preparing a proposal for a south-southeast highway bypass. The public's solution was supported by the city council and by the state administration office of Nitra city.

Who participated?

Authors of the project proposal, potential investors and members of the public within the affected area (a marginal part of Nitra) participated at the public meeting. The public meeting and announcement about the proposal was made on 28 May 1998. At the meeting representatives of Nitra district city council, the city and Nitra office of the state administration and other interested parties participated. The petition was signed by 900 inhabitants from the affected district. The public was involved in the decision making process on the basis of strong disagreement with planned activity.

Stage(s) at which public participated in the process:

The city district commission believed it was appropriate that the general public be involved in the decision making process. Therefore, the public participated in the early stages of the project's preparation, the project proposal, and in the phases of the project development.

At the general public meeting and during the 2 month period after the project plans were announced to the public, the public were entitled to react to the proposals. The public did not agree with the project idea and project intentions.

The project was elaborated into the technical study when the public started to be involved. As a consequence of several months effort by local inhabitants and members of the Nitra city district council, the amendment was added to the study which moved the high level junction 800 metres out of the city centre. It also stressed the complexity of the solution and involved connection with planned south highway bypass. The public's initiative led to mutual agreement of all involved participants in relation to connection with southern bypass of motorway 1/51.

What information was made available?

Project idea and project documentation were available and provided if needed to the public. Information was provided to the public on the basis of the initiative of the chairman of Nitra city district council. The information board was available at Nitra city council. Public meetings of Nitra city district council were used to collect opinions, comments and objections of inhabitants.

What was the outcome of the public participation exercise?

The result of public objections, comments and disagreement with the project proposal was research of alternative solutions of construction of "Extension of motorway in Nitra city direction to Zlate Moravce city". A more complex solution was authorised.

Comments of participants in the process:

The original solution did not meet support of the public and inhabitants of the affected area mainly because 8 family houses should have to be demolished.

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REC view on participation exercise:

The case seems to have met the main requirements of public participation in specific decision-making concerning notification, opportunity to comment, and information. The public appears to have had an opportunity to influence the decision-making in the present case. The fact that revisions to the proposal were in process due in large part to the objections of some members of the public indicates that the public's comments were seriously taken into account. There appears to have been adequate information available, although it is not clear whether all the relevant information was made available at an early stage.

Significant omissions from requirements of Article 6:

None, based on the information given. It is interesting to note, however, that the initiation of the public participation is termed as a matter that the local authorities thought appropriate, rather than that it was required by law.