

D1 Motorway Turany – Hubová (Slovakia): Overview of Basic Arguments

- The worst of available variants is again pursued at any cost!
- Decision-makers are trapped in a repeated vicious circle: although there are more suitable variants, they aggressively have been insisting – already for seven years – on a controversial decision in the alleged effort of speeding up the construction.
- The public is misled that the nature conservationists are those who propose a new variant. However, exactly the opposite is true: conservationists consistently promote the original variant recommended by the Ministry of Environment following a regular EIA procedure.
- It is obvious that the Slovak authorities are those who push a non-standard variant lacking any reasonable supporting evidence and any valid EIA. Regardless of the consequences, the so-called preparatory works damaging rare biotopes (mires, ravine forests, riparian habitats etc.) were carried out hastily during the Prime Minister Robert Fico's first term in 2009 and 2010.
- The media campaign funded by the EU and Slovak Government advertising the valley (surface) variant is disreputable due to both the unauthorised use of public funds and its extent indicating that something not warranted by a standard discussion is promoted by improper means.
- The approach is in conflict with the promise of Commissioner Janez Potočnik made at the meeting with the NGOs in January 2012 at the Ministry of Environment that the European Commission will require also an unbiased assessment of the tunnel variant.
- Opinions that the issue is first of all the problem of Slovakia are unacceptable. Such attitudes ignore the fact that the coherent European ecological network is primarily the Community's interest and that Natura 2000 concerns primarily European, not only national natural heritage.
- What is referred to as the additional voluntary assessment of impacts on the Natura 2000 sites, prepared by the team of RNDr. Petr Roth, PhD. (July – October 2012), is not an appropriate assessment in the sense of the Habitat Directive. A number of experts criticised the concrete errors and shortcomings in this assessment (underestimated impacts on the Rojkov Fen, on ravine forests at the base of the Mt. Kopa, on the key habitats of Eurasian Otter, Huchen etc.), but the European Commission disregards the critique.
- The assessment by Dr. Roth et al. is not independent. It is financed by the National Motorway Company, a state enterprise politically and economically strongly interested in pursuing the valley variant. This poses an obvious material conflict of interests.
- The statement that the valley variant will have no significant negative impacts on the integrity of Natura 2000 sites is ill-founded and easily refutable (see the Rojkov Fen).
- From the long-term data it becomes clear that the majority of proposed mitigation measures is unrealistic, superficial and not serviceable, as serviceability itself was not assessed. These measures thus may work just as another "confidence trick" with the public and/or European funds. There is the risk that the European taxpayers would inadvertently support an overpriced and absurd devastation of nature.

- Suggestions that the valley variant must be implemented as soon as possible and considerations of any other variant will delay the whole D1 motorway completion are deceptive and blackmail local authorities and citizens. Advocates of such approach do not admit that i) the more critical anterior section of the D1 motorway Lietavská Lúčka – Dubná Skala is even more delayed, ii) the originally recommended variant with the Korbeľka tunnel could have been implemented a long time ago, and iii) the construction times for the tunnel vs valley variant still remain comparable and potentially the same, as the valley variant deserves new EIA, new land-use permit and new building permit.
- The fact that nature conservation is not the only argument against the pushed valley variant is passed by. Particularly the geohazards (Kraľovany and Rojkov landslides), threats to landscape (unique structure and appearance of the Upper Váh River valley), its perception, opportunities for long-term sustainable multiple use, environmental hygiene, road traffic safety (three-month unavailability of direct sunlight, high risk of icing and associated accidents) and similar risks are ignored or underestimated.
- Both Slovak and European authorities turn a blind eye to the fact that the tunnel variants are much shorter and according to relevant studies also much cheaper than valley variant (505 – 611 vs 700 – 820 million €). Moreover, the southern tunnel variant offers the strategic opportunity for multi-modal transport corridor integrating the motorway and high-speed railway.
- Based on independent economic comparisons, construction of the valley variant in the persisting critical economic situation turns into a serious waste of both Slovak and EU public finances both in the short-term and long-term (elevated fuel consumption, operation cost of vehicles, time cost of passengers etc.).
- Primarily the two key ministries and the Government as a whole are responsible for the present unfortunate situation. The Ministry of Transport is blameworthy as it pushes forward the valley variant at any cost against citizens (forced expropriations), against nature and landscape. The Ministry of Environment abandoned both its duty to defend natural or environmental values and its final statement in the regular EIA, which recommended the tunnel variant. Any pertinent questions are ignored.
- The valley variant is far more destructive, more expensive, longer and equally time-consuming. The Ministry of Transport has still time, tools and opportunities to choose the better variant.

Summary

The conclusion that the valley variant of the D1 motorway, section Turany – Hubová is ecologically or environmentally tolerable is untenable. Equally untenable is to ask the Slovak and European taxpayers to contribute to an obviously worse variant of the motorway, which may seriously damage nature, landscape and human health, being simultaneously more expensive and more dangerous than the officially recommended variant.