

## Executive Summary

The ex-ante evaluation for the Sectoral Operational Programme Transport (SOPT) 2007-2013 has been carried out in the period August – November 2006. The basis for the evaluation has been an appraisal of the in April 2006 submitted version of the SOPT to the European Commission in Brussels as well as studies of underlying documentation and relevant information to the SOPT as well as interviews with the main stakeholders in Romania, e.g. the Managing Authority and implementing agencies.

The ex-ante evaluation of the SOPT can be considered as a fundamental part of an important process, which has as main objective to improve the quality of the SOPT in the sense of maximising compliance with EU and national policy guidelines and at the same time increasing its effectiveness and efficiency in achieving the formulated programme goals.

In this process two official debriefing sessions have been organised in which the Evaluation and Coordination Unit (ECU) of the Ministry of Public Finance, representatives of the Managing Authority and the ex-ante evaluator participated to discuss progress of the ex-ante evaluation. The ex-ante evaluator has also organised meetings with representatives from the European Commission, in charge of the Sectoral and Regional Operational Programmes, e.g. DG Regio to discuss preliminary findings and exchange views. However, the ex-ante evaluator would like to stress that the evaluation has been carried out strict independently without any interference from the European Commission, the Managing Authority or the ECU of the Ministry of Public Finance in Romania.

The SOPT provides a relatively comprehensive overview of the needs related with the development of the transport sector in Romania. These needs have been translated into a strategy at the level of the Operational Programme as there still is no General Master Plan for the Transport Sector with definition of global objectives; specific objectives; list of priority axes and key areas of intervention. There is a certain logical coherence in this process. It goes without saying, however, that with a more reliable database, development of policy would be much easier and programme and project interventions would be more focused and targeted to implement this policy.

The overall conclusion must be that the Sectoral Operational Programme Transport is of high quality and certainly complies with the Community Strategic Guidelines for Cohesion Policy and the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs and the overall European transport policy as defined in the document "European Transport Policy for 2010, Time to Decide" and "Keep Europe Moving". The SOPT is also derived from the Romanian National Strategic Reference Framework and is as such in congruence with Romanian policy.

The present state of the transport infrastructure and services, which may be qualified as of poor quality and not responding to the present needs, is a major obstacle to social cohesion and the economic development; e.g. it impedes competitiveness, movement of goods and labour, business settlements, investment, etc. The upgrading of the transport system is considered urgent and

requiring huge investments, but financial constraints require prioritisation based of the earlier sound diagnosis of the transport sector, clear objectives and an integrated strategy to achieve them.

The SOPT envisages to contribute to the development of a more efficient, flexible and safe transport system, which will have a positive impact on the reduction of social and economic disparities between Romania and the EU member states.

The SOPT therefore formulates as its global objective to promote a transport system in Romania, which will facilitate safe, fast and efficient movement of persons and goods with appropriate level of service at European standards, nationally, Europe-wide and between and within Romanian regions.

There is a certain balance between the various priority axes defined and the derives key intervention areas.

However, some issues do need very close attention in the implementation of the SOPT. The institutional capacity of the Managing Authority and the implementing agencies is still not sufficient to guarantee a successful implementation of the entire SOPT according to the planned timeframe. Experience from the implementation of the ISPA programmes has shown that the issue of lack of implementing capacity should not be underestimated. It is very important to address this issue as soon as possible.

Another issue is related with the concept of sustainability. The SOPT proposes an ambitious programme for implementation of a wide range of transport infrastructure projects in Romania. Large investments are foreseen; about five billion euro in a seven-year period. Construction of new transport infrastructure implies that adequate sums should be safeguarded for routine and regular maintenance. Therefore, it is important to establish proper mechanisms to guarantee sufficient funds for the purpose of maintenance works of transport infrastructure projects.

The Managing Authority is invited to give some thoughts on the further integration of the project implementation units for the projects financed out of the Cohesion Fund and the European Regional Development Fund within the ordinary state administration in order to avoid the building of a "state within a state".

Public consultation in all stages of programme preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation is very important and will definitely contribute to a more successful programme.

In summary, the following recommendations are made:

*Planning of transport infrastructure and transport planning*

As there still is no overall transport policy and consequently no systematic prioritisation of transport infrastructure projects, the experiences in the development of the Transport Master Plan, which is presently carried out, should be used to install a sound transport planning system in Romania and the elaboration of a good transport database to justify interventions in investments in transport infrastructure. The implementation of the SOPT would benefit from these experiences in such a way and adjustments would than easily be justified.

*Setting-up a system of data collection and data processing*

As there still is no reliable base of transport data and the collection of reliable transport data is an important tool for adjusting transport policy and focusing and directing investments in transport infrastructure, mechanisms should be developed to collect relevant data from transport operators, by surveys and by studies. Capacity should be developed to process these data for use by policy makers. The implementation of the SOPT would highly benefit from this.

*Towards integration of transport planning systems*

Integration of transport planning systems should be strived for. Presently there is no co-ordination and synergy between the three entities responsible for the Romanian road network (SOPT, ROP, EAFRD). Formal and informal mechanisms should be established to co-ordinate planning of investments in road infrastructure between the three entities responsible for it.

*Financing of maintenance of transport infrastructure*

Investments in new transport infrastructure implies that budgets should be guaranteed for proper maintenance of this infrastructure. Therefore, yearly budget allocations for maintenance and rehabilitation purposes should be made.

*Development of institutional capacity*

Institutional capacity is a serious concern for the successful implementation of the SOPT. The SOPT programme is ambitious and intends to spend a considerable amount of money in a short period of time putting a lot of pressure on the programme implementation unit. Development of institutional capacity is, therefore, a very urgent and serious issue. At the short term, a more detailed study should be carried out by the Romanian authorities to identify what capacity they need for the successful implementation of the SOPT and to quantify the needs for staffing dealing with the programme implementation. Also, a training plan should be designed for staff involved in the management and implementation of the SOPT.

*Making use of public consultation*

Public consultation in all stages of programme preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation is very important and will definitely contribute to a more successful programme. Public consultation should be further institutionalized in the Romanian transport planning process.

*Use the experience of the SOPT to strengthen institutional structures*

The process of development and later implementation of the SOPT should be used to strengthen the structural planning process of the Managing Authority and the Implementing Agencies.