

## **Era-net Transport Conference 2014**

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Era-net Transport (ENT) celebrated its annual conference on the 15th April 2014 in Paris. This accompanying event to the 5<sup>th</sup> TRA Conference had three main goals:

1. to disseminate the outreach of ENT research and innovation initiatives and results
2. to present tools and experiences that will support the further building of the European Research Area (ERA)
3. to create an open space for discussion on future transnational funding initiatives.



The event was addressed to national and regional programme funding institutions, members of the European Platform on Transport Research (EPTR), larger national research institutions, relevant policy-makers, other ERA-networks and the European Commission. Due to many parallel competing sessions, the number of participants finally attending was less than preliminarily expected from registrations. This however allowed more targeted and in depth discussions.

The conference comprised two main parts. The morning session was structured in several presentations: the introduction of the ENT network, the activities carried out inside the initiative and the presentation of the transnational collaborations and their results. The afternoon session went along two workshops where experiences and preliminary research results were shared and discussed with the audience.



## 10 YEARS OF Era-net TRANSPORT

**William Bird**, Programme officer at European Commission kicked-off the presentations of the morning session. He defined sustainable mobility and its dimension at social, environmental and economic levels. He also described the challenges that Europe faces in transport and the contributions of the ERA-NET instrument in general and of Era-net Transport in particular: “Era-net Transport is more than a funding mechanism”, Mr Bird emphasized.

**Peter Wilbers**, coordinator of ENT and senior programme consultant at Rijkswaterstaat (RWS), gave a general overview of the activities and achievements of ENT in its decade of existence and presented potential scenarios for the future of the ENT network, after expiration of the financial support of the EC at the beginning of 2016.

Afterwards, **Christian Drakulic** from Austrian Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology (BMVI) presented the ambassador task in ENT. Six ambassadors are acting as “faces” of ENT to the “outerworld” and have the following tasks: to attract new partners by establishing contacts pro-actively, to be a ‘sensor’ for collaboration opportunities, to link programme owners and programme managers closely to the ENT network and to give support to other tasks carried out in ENT and its network when needed.

Although still under development, **Patricia Haniger** from Austriatech introduced the ENT platform to the audience. This web-based cooperation support tool aims at mapping comprehensive data on national and regional research programmes, calls and funding schemes, enabling both programme owners and programme managers to recognise common topics, joint call opportunities and favourable time windows. The objective of this electronic platform is to stimulate and ease regional and national cooperation on transport research programmes.

After the coffee break, concluding the first part of the event, three practical experiences of transnational cooperation were presented:

- the results of Electromobility+, an initiative to boost the roll out of electro-mobility in Europe by stimulating R&D aimed at the next generations (horizon 2025) of electric vehicles



Era-net Transport Conference 2014 - morning session



Era-net Transport Conference 2014 - afternoon session



- the results of the first Flagship call Future Travelling, launched by ENT in spring 2013. The results of the evaluation of the submitted proposals were published on the ENT website at the time of the ENT conference: <http://transport-era.net/ambass/future-travelling>)
- the development of the small and medium-size funding initiatives was depicted, their potential topics and interested countries and regions and scheduled Action Groups. This last presentation served as an introduction to a subsequent workshop in the afternoon session.

The afternoon session left the floor open for the presentation and discussion of two different topics: the preliminary results of Stepping Stones and the potential deployment of the European Structural Investment Funds for transport R&I in various Member States, partners in Era-Net Transport.

Stepping Stones is a small- and medium-sized transnational research and innovation funding initiative launched inside Era-net Transport in 2012. The goal of this call for tender was to understand both successful and unsuccessful (policy) mobility management measures and their underlying mechanisms, including social & psychological factors. Three projects have been funded under this call. Though the final results of the three projects will still be presented in Krakow on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> September, some initial and preliminary conclusions and recommendations were already outlined. For more information see the presentations by **Marien Baker** from **Rijkswaterstaat (RWS)** and **Jantine Zwinkels** from **Royal Hansconing DHV**.

The second workshop was introduced by two ENT members: **Yasen Markov** from the **Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications in Bulgaria** and **Cristina Ugarte** from the **Basque Innovation Agency**. Yasen Markov presented the activities carried out in Era-net Transport regarding the initiative to support an enlarged utilization of ESIF for the purpose of transport R&I. Two pilot countries have been identified for this task: Bulgaria & Czech Republic. The first task outcomes are a snapshot of the Bulgarian transport R&I funding landscape along with a set of recommendations for enhanced participation of MTITC (the BG partner in ENT III) in the tns cooperation in the domain.

Cristina Ugarte presented the experience of the Basque Country region using Structural funds to participate in the ERA-NET initiatives. She presented pros and cons of the new ERA-NET Co-fund initiative, stressing how this new initiative can directly affect the future participation of regions that use European Regional Development Funds (ERDF). The new ERA-NET Co-fund is in its essence quite similar to the ERA-NET Plus scheme, This means that regions participating in this initiative will have to participate with regional funding programmes that are not co-funded by ESIF in order to avoid double funding.

Both presentations led over to a discussion directly related to the future of Era-net Transport that was more extensively discussed in a later invited session organized by ENT partner Austriatech.



## DOES THE WORLD STILL NEED ERA-NET TRANSPORT?

As part of the official Programme of the 2014 Transport Research Alliance Conference TRA2014 and directly after the Era-net Conference, AustriaTech organized a session on the future of Era-net Transport.

Attended by 30-40 conference visitors, the session facilitated by AustriaTech's Managing Director **Martin Russ** was kicked-off with a presentation by Era-net Coordinator **Peter Wilbers**. Participants from the European Commission (**Bill Bird**, DG R&D), research organisations or institutions (**Muriel Attané**, EARTO and **Barbara Lenz**, DLR) as well as national and regional programme owners and managers (**Walter Wasner**, Austrian Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology and **Cristina Ugarte**, the Basque Innovation Agency) had a lively debate on the following questions:

- Has there been any progress towards shaping a European Research Area in Transport and what was the contribution of Era-net Transport?
- What is the positioning of Era-net Transport and how can it be institutionalized beyond its current form as a co-financed European project?
- What are the benefits of Era-net Transport and is there a role for a platform in the future?



“Does the world still need Era-net Transport?” invited session at TRA

In his presentation “*Does the world still need Era-net Transport? Creating a sustainable future for ENT*”, **Peter Wilbers** acknowledged the success of Era-net Transport over the 10 years since 2004 and reported on the experiences of the currently running CSA. Peter also pointed to some difficulties such as the low rate of active participation and differences in country levels which make it difficult to agree on actions. He pointed out different scenarios, including a No-ENT-World in which there is no interest in sustaining Era-net Transport. However, citing the results of a future workshop held in Vienna in March 2014, Peter also touched on a number of reasons for continuing Era-net Transport after spring 2016 when the financial support of the EC to the ENT network will expire:

- Flexible operation, independently from EC policy and technology platforms
- Demand-driven transport and innovation instead of research-supply-driven
- Learning
  - Transnational coordination
  - Scientific partnership
- Visibility
  - Need for transnational dissemination of research results



The form of such continuation ranges from a loose network of programme owners and managers to the use of new EC funding instruments such as Co-Funds or Synchronised Call Initiatives.

In the following debate a discussion emerged between representatives of the research community, who generally criticized Era-net Transport for its low visibility, weak alignment and networking with other platforms and communities and a generally too generic focus, and current Era-net Transport programme owners who pointed to the fact that Era-net Transport is not only about transnational funding but also about the coordination of research programmes or the integration of SMEs. It was agreed that it is in principle good to have rather independent instruments aside from e.g. the European Technology Platforms. At the same time there is a need to define focused topics. If Era-net Transport is about achieving breakthrough research, an exchange between programme owners and managers is a first step; but research running independently from the needs of technology platforms and industry should not be the way to go.

The discussion ended pointing to an unclear future: Even though a dedicated core group of Era-net Transport project partners views clear benefits in an exchange the financing of Era-net Transport beyond the duration of the EC co-financed project is still unclear yet...

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