



Joining forces for road research

“*ERA-NET ROAD provides us with a real opportunity to establish close and productive links between researchers and programme managers from road administrations across Europe, enabling the partners to benefit from more effective sharing of knowledge*”

Freight and passenger transport numbers are set to rise across the continent, placing ever-greater demands on the road network. However, research relating to the management and operation of Europe's roads is almost exclusively carried out at national level.

ERA-NET ROAD – Coordination and implementation of national road research programmes in Europe – plans to change this situation. By promoting structured and strategic joint working between 11 National Road Agencies (NRAs), this project will lay the foundations for developing transnational research programmes that will benefit Europe as a whole.

Europe's economy and society simply could not function without its road network. People have got used to driving where they want when they want, and roads still take more freight than any other mode of transport. Traffic volumes will continue to grow, placing further burdens on the road network and creating a detrimental impact on Europe's environment and citizens as the result of problems such as increased pollution and congestion.

Effective management and operation of the road network can ease some of these problems – but getting things right everywhere is a mammoth task. The annual cost of managing Europe's road network stands at about €150 billion. Despite being interlinked and crossing borders, Europe's roads are managed by country-bound NRAs. These agencies have responsibility for issues such as traffic safety and management, road maintenance and new road construction.

In terms of developing a research agenda for Europe's road network, there is currently very little interaction between NRAs. Each has its own structure, and research agendas tend to be guided by domestic priorities.

The ROAD ahead

ERA-NET ROAD seeks to start the process of coordinating national research programmes among its 11 member NRAs. It wants to see a mutual opening-up of national research programmes and to create an environment where transnational road research programmes can be devised and will flourish.

To achieve these goals, project partners have set themselves a number of objectives which include:

- encouraging the exchange of information and best practice between NRAs;
- identifying and analysing potentially complementary research themes;
- carrying out joint activities after identifying current research projects and programmes run by the NRAs that could be clustered together;
- developing strategies and programmes for transnational research activities, with common funding and calls for proposals;
- finding ways to ensure that the different structures, rules and administrative procedures within the NRAs do not hinder transnational co-operation; and
- disseminating results to programme managers, research strategists and end-users across Europe.



Coordination Action ERA-NET ROAD



Full title:

ERA-NET ROAD - Coordination and implementation of Road Research in Europe

Research field:

Road research

Co-ordinator:

United Kingdom: Highways Agency

Partners:

- United Kingdom: Highways Agency
- The Netherlands: Directorate-General of Public Works and Water Management
- Finland: Finnish Road Administration
- Sweden: Swedish Road Administration
- Germany: Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Housing
- Norway: Public Roads Administration
- Switzerland: Office Federal des Routes
- Austria: Federal Ministry of Transport, Innovation and Technology
- Poland: General Directorate of National Roads and Motorways
- Slovenia: Directorate of the Republic of Slovenia for Roads
- Czech Republic: Road and Motorway Directorate of the Czech Republic

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“ I am really looking forward to working with my counterparts in the other participating organisations, and creating a network which will benefit the wider European Research Area, not just over the next three years, but into the future ”

Bringing the NRAs together in this way will certainly pack a financial punch – together they have a combined annual research budget of €156 million. In the spirit of helping to form a coherent European Research Area (ERA), the project partners have also made a commitment to help other NRAs develop research strategies and programmes that can contribute to European-level activities.

Europe-wide benefits

Improving the integration of Europe's road research efforts and capacities will certainly support the building of the ERA. The project will improve the coordination of national research programmes at European level, which should encourage the formulation of more transnational research programmes. ERA-NET ROAD's partners also aim to generate “a culture of long-term collaborative thinking and create ambitions for common visions and long-term goals”. This should, in turn, lead to the creation of transnational research strategies.

Dissemination of the project's achievements, via the internet and seminars, will create what the partners call an “internal market” in road research, providing free movement of knowledge, researchers and technology. The coordinating of activities will also avoid duplication of effort at the national level, which will create savings for already hard-pressed research budgets. ERA-NET ROAD should improve the quality of national and regional research through sharing information and identifying examples of best practice. And co-operation and joint working will give NRAs the chance to standardise some of their research practices. ERA-NET ROAD's impact should last well beyond its three-year lifespan because it will lay down the procedures and practices that can be used time and again to devise and run transnational research programmes.