



European Committee  
of the Regions



# Press Release

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## Missing small-scale transport infrastructure hinders EU's border regions potential

Missing railway links as a challenge for cohesion and growth in border regions was the focus of a joint conference by the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) "**Eurodistrict Pamina**". The conference took place on 11 April in Brussels and gathered representatives from the European Parliament and EGTCs from Germany, the Netherlands, Czech Republic, Austria, Hungary and France urging to reinforce financing to small-scale transport infrastructure projects in border regions.

Peripheral border regions are often not the top priority for national or European infrastructure investment. Only last year, the European Commission identified 176 missing cross-border rail connections in the EU, of which 48 are in urgent need of improvement and 19 are assessed as positive by local actors. These small projects, that need relatively little co-financing, can help Europe's border regions to improve the lives of its citizens through a better connection with the neighbouring region and the rest of Europe, increased access to public services and the cross-border labour market as well as greater potential for economic development.

*"Often it is just a few kilometres of transport infrastructure that hinders border communities from fulfilling their full potential. EU funds like, the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) and cohesion policy, are helping but we need to increase take-up. We therefore must maintain strong financing for cohesion policy, and particularly for European Territorial Cooperation. If we want Europe to grow together, local and regional authorities are best placed to develop these small projects which make a real difference, showing the added value of the EU for every citizen"*, said CoR President **Karl-Heinz Lambertz**.

**Rémi Bertrand**, president of the Pamina Eurodistrict EGTC (France-Germany), said: *"The missing Karlsruhe-Rastatt-Haguenau-Saarbrücken link is a good example of the importance of missing links at both local and European level: four European corridors pass by in close proximity to each other and filling the gap of a few kilometres between Rastatt and Haguenau could link these corridors and create an important back-up route. At the same time, it would give the entire cross-border area an economic boost: people in the border area would have better access to the cross-border labour market as well as to healthcare and local suppliers. The 140 businesses along the route could transport their goods by rail instead of by road and thereby make a major contribution to protecting the environment."*

In 2016 the CoR's **COTER Commission** and the European Parliament's **TRAN Committee** initiated their missing links initiative with a joint meeting between the two bodies. As a result of the common push in 2019 the European Commission issued a first successful call for proposal under the CEF which invested €140 million in 13 cross-border transport projects. A second call for proposals of projects co-funded through CEF is open until 24 April 2019 to support small-scale projects on the more peripheral 'comprehensive' network of the TEN-T with €65 million. However, the missing links initiative must not stop here as many missing links are not yet part of the TEN-T and therefore not eligible in CEF. Closing this financing gap was one of the main topics at the conference held at the CoR.

**Michael Cramer**, Member of the European Parliament, added: *"We have a choice: prioritise major projects worth billions of euros – which may perhaps be finished in 30 years' time. Or instead undertake small, more cost-effective gap filling projects that help boost convergence in Europe more quickly and in a tangible way. I am particularly pleased, however, that the Greens' calls for a rethink of investment policy at EU level have been listened to, and that this has begun to be implemented in practice. In a first round since 2017, the European Commission is providing EUR 140 million as an initial step to fund small targeted measures to close cross-border gaps. This should be only the beginning."*

Further CEF calls are expected for 2019 and 2020 which the CoR sees as a good opportunity to address the financing need of small, cross-border projects to improve territorial cohesion, regional accessibility and economic development in border regions. The CoR further calls for a revision of the regulatory framework for the TEN-T Regulation to make sure that closing missing-links is one of the top priorities for financing of the transport network.

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### The European Committee of the Regions

The European Committee of the Regions is the EU's assembly of regional and local representatives from all 28 Member States. Created in 1994 following the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, its mission is to involve regional and local authorities in the EU's decision-making process and to inform them about EU policies. The European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission consult the Committee in policy areas affecting regions and cities. To sit on the European Committee of the Regions, all of its 350 members and 350 alternates must either hold an electoral mandate or be politically accountable to an elected assembly in their home regions and cities. [Click here](#) for more details on your national delegation.

### Pamina Eurodistrict

The core task of the Pamina Eurodistrict European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) is to facilitate and intensify Franco-German cross-border cooperation in its three sub-areas: Southern Palatinat (PA), Upper Middle Rhine (MI) and Northern Alsace (NA). This has been ongoing for 30 years, promoting balanced and sustainable development in the region and facilitating daily life for all inhabitants regardless of their circumstances. With this in mind, it aims to be a platform for pooling competences, i.e. to be a facilitator for the development of territorial cohesion, without however claiming to replace the existing competent authorities. The Pamina Eurodistrict develops cross-border activities, devises programmes and projects, and applies for funding. Its members are drawn from 19 local and regional authorities.

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