

Southeast Asia is facing rapid and extensive infrastructure development in the coming years. The Asian Development Bank has secured 50 billion USD for the improvement of road networks and high-speed railway development. While there is an inevitable need for transport network improvement in the region to overcome current difficulties, at the same time this also poses a serious threat to wildlife. A highly important conflict area is in the mountainous Tenasserim Region in Myanmar and Thailand, where the planned Dawei road and railway project will cross the most intact forest areas in the Greater Mekong Region. New species are still being found in these unexplored forests and they sustain the largest populations of tiger and elephant in Southeast Asia. In autumn, 2014, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) invited Infra Eco Network Europe (IENE) to assist in finding environmentally friendly solutions to problems that will result from road and railway development in this area. In February 2015 a three-person team from IENE spent two weeks in Myanmar and Thailand meeting with relevant authorities and conducting fieldwork along the proposed route.

The IENE team participated in four meetings in the region: 1) the highly international “Green Energy, Green Growth” conference in Naw Pyi Taw, 2) a transboundary civil society seminar in Kanchanaburi, 3) a green infrastructure policy seminar, and 4) a technical workshop in Bangkok, Thailand. IENE talks attracted more than 230 participants, including ministerial decision-makers (e.g., general directors) in both countries. As a result the IENE team received invitations from both Myanmar and Thailand to come again to help develop solutions that will minimize the negative environmental impacts of transportation infrastructure.

Due to safety reasons, the fieldtrip schedule had to be modified several times, which finally resulted in the cancellation of a planned visit to the Dawei region in Myanmar, thus allowing more time for working on the Thai side of the impacted area. After several days of fieldwork, practical suggestions were made about the proposed road routes that would go west through Kanchanaburi to the Myanmar border. Mitigation solutions for keeping wild elephants away from roads were proposed after consulting local experts from the Salak Phra Wildlife Sanctuary who have been experimenting with using ditches and electric fences to keep elephants away from highways.

From the experience gained during the trip, seven general recommendations were made for the countries in the Greater Mekong Region.

1. The legal structure for green infrastructure should be established and strengthened.
2. Multi-disciplinary cooperation among different professionals should be established.
3. Strategic planning should precede any major development projects.
4. Tendering and contracting should include mitigation measures.
5. Conservation supervision during construction should be required.
6. Monitoring before, during and after construction should be required and monitoring results should be used for improving the performance of mitigation measures.
7. Civil society should be more involved in the planning phase of linear infrastructure projects.

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