
The Infra Eco Declaration

Declaration of the Conference 'Habitat Fragmentation, Infrastructure and the role of Ecological Engineering'
organised by the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management of The Netherlands, Directorate-General for Public Works and Water Management, Road and Hydraulic Engineering Division, Delft, The Netherlands
Maastricht, 18-20 September 1995

At the International Conference Habitat Fragmentation and Infrastructure held in Maastricht on 18 - 20 September 1995 135 participants from more than 25 countries discussed the effects of habitat fragmentation caused by infrastructure. They reviewed the methods to prevent or counteract the impacts on nature and landscape by mitigating and compensating measures. More and more attention has been paid to the causes of the decreasing biodiversity. Due to increased human activities most of the present landscapes are no longer suitable for the long-term survival of (fauna) species. Among the most important causes are undoubtedly habitat loss and fragmentation. Large parts of Europe have already been strongly fragmented and large parts of Europe with valuable and vulnerable ecosystems are threatened to become fragmented. Consequently it is important that policy makers become aware of the possibilities to prevent, mitigate or compensate the negative impacts on ecosystems, caused by infrastructure works. Our societies should become more aware of the importance of natural values and must devote funds to save these values. Summarizing all the Conference contributions we come to the following conclusions and requests.

1. The participants conclude that:

- 1.1 The European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy should function as a guiding principle for the integration of transport and nature policies. For the implementation of the Strategy sufficient means should become available.
- 1.2 The European ecological network that is going to be developed should be compared with the planned infrastructural network to find the (potential) intersections. These may conflict. So, in the planning, design and building processes full integration must take place of environmental considerations on the one hand and transport policies and infrastructure developments on the other.
- 1.3 A strategy must be developed for minimizing the impacts of roads on the European ecological network in all countries of Europe by avoiding intervention. If this is not possible, mitigation measures should be considered, such as fauna tunnels, ecoducts, anti-noise barriers and traffic and transport measures. Compensating measures should be carried out if mitigation itself would be inadequate.
- 1.4 The proposed Infra Eco Network Europe (IENE) consisting of policy-makers, planners, implementors and researchers who work in the field of habitat fragmentation and infrastructure can help to coordinate and stimulate cooperation between member states of Europe.

- 1.5 Special attention should be given to the characteristics of each country. In the densely populated areas action is needed to reduce the effects of existing road systems and in more natural, relatively undisturbed areas it is obvious that more attention should be given to the impacts of planned infrastructure systems.
- 1.6 There is a need for more cooperation on a global level. Beside an Infra Eco Network Europe initiatives should be taken to form a network on a global scale.

2. The participants request:

The European Union and the Council of Europe:

- 2.1 To support the initiative to establish the proposed Infra Eco Network Europe.
- 2.2 To support the principle that before any major infrastructure work is planned a Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment (SEIA) should take place to include and evaluate all possible alternatives. This should also apply to the European Transport Network.

National and regional governments and local authorities:

- 2.3 To bring about that in all infrastructure projects costs for mitigating and compensating measures should be allocated within the total project costs. Enough funds should be made available for this.
- 2.4 To promote and enable good working relations with organisations and networks working in the field of nature conservation, ecological engineering and civil engineering.

The Dutch Government:

- 2.5 To present the results of the Conference Habitat Fragmentation and Infrastructure to the European Ministers of Transport as well as to the European Ministers of Environment.
- 2.6 To present this declaration at the Environmental Ministers Conference which will be held in Sofia in October 1995.

The impact of the Infra Eco Declaration until now

The recommendations formulated in the Infra Eco Declaration, which have been adopted by the participants of the Conference Habitat Fragmentation and Infrastructure, have resulted in the following concrete actions.

The Infra Eco Declaration was presented at the Pan-European Environmental Ministers Conference in Sofia in October 1995.

The Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy was adopted during the Pan-European Environmental Ministers Conference in Sofia in October 1995. One of the objectives of this strategy is to develop a Pan-European Ecological Network. The Strategy mentions for 1996-2016 the following priority action for the transport sector: "to integrate biological and landscape diversity consideration into transport policy and infrastructural development, avoiding areas of high value as much as possible, prevent or mitigate negative effects of infrastructural works and transport activities on landscapes and ecosystems".

A further result of the recommendations stated in the Infra Eco Declaration is the establishment of the Infra Eco Network Europe (IENE). IENE is an open European platform for cooperation and exchange of knowledge and experience in the field of habitat fragmentation caused by linear transportation infrastructure.

The first meeting of IENE was held in October 1996 in Romania and the second in Sweden in March 1997. The third meeting will take place in Russia in September 1997. The EC DG VII (Transport) and DG XI (Environment) have shown their interest in the activities of IENE. An application for financing IENE for the next four years has been made to the EU COST programme.

The Infra Eco Declaration has proven to be a valuable tool to promote interest and commitment in the field of finding solutions to ameliorate the effects of habitat fragmentation caused by infrastructure and traffic.