



## **Transport Research Knowledge Center**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Transport Research Knowledge Centre (TRKC) is a project of the European Commission's Directorate General for Energy and Transport (DG TREN) and is funded under FP6. The primary aim of TRKC is to disseminate and promote the results of transport research activities at European and national level. It also illustrates how transport research programmes and projects help to develop guidelines and innovative tools to support European transport policy for sustainable mobility.

**KEYWORDS: TRKC, transport research, projects, programmes**

## **1. Introduction**

The TRKC is a Specific Support Action under the 6th Framework Programme and succeeds the Extra (1999-2001) and EXTR@Web (2002-2006) projects. It kicked off in early 2008 and public activities on the TRKC website are currently being relaunched. The Transport Research Knowledge Centre (TRKC) project (2007-2010) is an EU (DG-TREN) supported co-ordinated action under the Sixth Framework Programme for Research and Development (FP6). It is designed to raise awareness of the outputs of transport research at European, national and international levels and to provide analyses on how these can be utilised to stimulate innovation in transport and to shape European transport policy for sustainable mobility. To this end the TRKC collects, structures and analyses transport research results from across the European Research Area and disseminates the gained knowledge through the dedicated TRKC web portal. It is co-ordinated by GOPA-Cartermill (Belgium). Other consortium members are IABG (Germany), Egis Mobilité (France), the University of Rome – DITS (Italy), the University of Leeds – ITS (UK) and CDV – Transport Research Centre (Czech Republic).

## **2. The aim of TRKC**

The project attempts to collect, structure, analyse and disseminate transport research results, covering not only EU supported but also nationally financed research in the ERA (European Research Area). TRKC disseminates research information primarily via the website [www.transport-research.info](http://www.transport-research.info), which comprises a searchable database of transport research programmes, projects, results, analyses, events and links. It also features a user helpdesk and an e-newsletter. In addition, the project provides thematic analysis papers and policy brochures, which are available on the TRKC website for download.

The overarching goal of the TRKC is to disseminate and promote the results of transport research conducted in the Framework Programmes and more widely in the European Research Area.

To achieve this goal, the TRKC's three key objectives are:

- to enhance and maintain the web-based TRKC, providing structured and timely access to both detailed and summary information on European, national and international transport research activities and their results,

- to provide focused aggregated analysis of transport research results against a thematic structure and emerging policy priorities,
- to stimulate innovation in transport by accelerating the application of research results through extended networking among the main stakeholders.

The Transport Research Knowledge Centre is setting up a broad Support Network of interested transport research stakeholders from all over Europe who would like to contribute to the success of the Transport Research Knowledge Centre.

### 3. Database of transport research programmes and projects

TRKC is a free service aimed at ensuring that results of publicly funded research projects are properly disseminated and that end users (researchers, academia, industry, administrations and policy makers, transport and infrastructure operators, the media, etc) have access to a comprehensive source of relevant and up-to-date information on transport research. The major part of the TRKC website comprises a database of transport research programmes and projects. The data for these is collected in Programme Forms and Project Forms. For this reason a project is defined as a research action or series of actions which produces results and (normally) has a final report. It may be publicly or privately funded, or self-funded by the organisation carrying out the work. It may be undertaken by a single entity or a consortium. A large project (such as certain European projects in FP6 and FP7) may contain several sub-projects. TRKC only considers projects whose results are in the public domain (or mostly in the public domain). Clearly there is no value in including projects whose results are confidential. A programme is then described as a group of projects that are funded (or partly funded) under a common structure. Examples of programmes are FP5, FP6 and FP7 of the European Commission, national research programmes funded by ministries or government agencies, or internal programmes of research institutes. Large programmes may have several sub-programmes. Ad-hoc projects which are funded by the same institution but not as part of a formal programme (e.g. the Ministry of Transport in a given country) are referred by TRKC as “informal programmes”. Note that a programme itself does not generate results although it can collate and disseminate the results of its constituent projects.

### 4. Focus of transport research projects and programmes

TRKC focuses on EU programmes and projects, national programmes and projects in Europe (EU Member States, Candidate Countries and also Associated Countries such as Switzerland, Norway and Iceland). Given the limited resources (as the project's focus is on EU research), coverage at national level is selective. The key focus are the projects which are able to fill research gaps identified at European level, as well as major national and international initiatives of European interest. Note that national initiatives which also receive partial funding under EU programmes should not be included, as this is included under the EU data collection which is being conducted by the TRKC core partners. Transport research projects and programmes should focus primarily on socio-economic research which addresses policy goals such as efficiency, economic aspects, the environment, safety, security, user aspects, accessibility or equity. Technological projects are a secondary focus (as results are often more specialised, situation-specific and hence less transferable to other contexts and sometimes confidential). Projects such as feasibility studies (e.g. for a new road or other transport infrastructure) should not be included as this is not strictly research. Also, projects whose results are entirely or mostly confidential should not be included. All programme and project forms are completed in English. TRKC is an English language service only, due to the fact that almost all EU projects are carried out in that language, and also because the scope and budget of the project do not permit the creation of a multilingual portal. Final reports are however uploaded in whichever language(s) they are written and links may be to websites in different languages. The project form includes fields for results and policy implications. If the project is ongoing and there are no results yet, these sections can be left blank and added once the project is finished.

We can find following categories among the Project Profiles:

- short profiles, which comprise basic information only, such as the project acronym and name (including English translation where the original name is in another language), the programme to which it belongs, and at least one valid means of contact (usually an email, but postal address and telephone/fax details are also included where readily available, and project website if there is one), as well as thematic labelling,
- standard profiles without results, which comprise, in addition to the above, the project dates and descriptions of the background, objectives and methodology and a list of project partners and their countries,

- full profiles with results and technical and/or policy implications sections completed, which are accompanied by the project's final report where this is available and public.

## 5. Clients' and stakeholders' needs

TRKC aims to provide a service to the research community, policy makers, industry and other stakeholders and it is therefore paramount that the project's outputs are both used and are seen as useful. Apart from the usual stakeholders, contractors and clients, this project will seek support from several groups of stakeholders including Transport research programme managers, Transport research project coordinators, TRKC Support Network of stakeholders and Focus Group(s).

In regard to the immediate client, DGTREN, the complexity of the project requires a different and more far reaching level of institutional support than most other projects. Within DGTREN, TRKC has been under the responsibility of Unit G3 until end 2008, and has then been moved to D2 as of 1 January 2009. However, specific project requirements stretch far beyond the sphere of influence of Unit G3 or D2 within DGTREN, and partly even into other Directorates-General (e.g. collection and validation of FP6 project data and analysis, IT support for website updates, etc.).

The project serves an extremely large and heterogeneous group of clients and end users with distinctly different requirements. These requirements are based on a variety of contractual agreements and on largely differing expectations. Consequently, the means and tools to fulfil these expectations and requirements, the relations to these groups as well as the means and criteria to assess their satisfaction should be separately controlled.

For that reason, the clients have been broken down into four major groups:

- the contractual client, DGTREN,
- the internal clients comprising the consortium's partners and their subcontractors,
- other contributors to the project, including the Support Network and Focus Group members, members of the pilot cases, and persons involved in European or national programmes or projects who provide inputs such as project/programme information (e.g. via the Reporting Scheme) or validation,
- the anonymous end users to gain from the project's outputs.

A matrix stating the expectations and the criteria to assess the satisfaction of each client group has been developed

subsequent to the user requirement survey, the acceptance of the draft dissemination strategy and the availability of results of the first workshops in the pilot areas (in the end of 2007). This matrix is part of the Dissemination Strategy. The satisfaction of all client groups is systematically assessed and evaluated as part of the evaluation exercise.

DGTREN is a key stakeholder. Apart from the institutionalised communication, the project manager meets regularly upon need with the task manager of the project to discuss daily management issues, project progress, outputs in draft or final form, and any other item of relevance for the project. During such meetings, reflections on the satisfaction of the client are also gathered, although in an ad hoc and informal way.

A key criterion for the satisfaction of DGTREN is the acceptance of all contractually requested deliverables, including the formal reports, which reflect on achievements and problems of the past six months and provide an outlook on the forthcoming reporting period. The provision of feedback on deliverables and other outputs is a key responsibility of DGTREN. As many deliverables, which are closely interlinked and which are impacting on further progress of other activities, DGTREN is required to respond on these in a very timely, accurate and committing manner, not to hinder further project progress.

Input is strongly encouraged from persons responsible for programmes or projects, on a voluntary basis. Such input is considered to be in their own interests, as TRKC is effectively providing a free channel for them to promote and disseminate information on their activities to a wide audience. Input mostly comprises the provision of project and programme information using the Reporting Scheme, but may also include updates or corrections to information, submission of links or information on events, etc. In addition, persons responsible for national programmes may be requested to validate related outputs. Again, this delegated validation is entirely voluntary, but in the interests of the programme coordinators in order to ensure that the information disseminated is fair and correct.

## 6. Support network

The TRKC Support Network is a platform for exchanging information and providing strategic advice, experiences and new ideas – across national borders – to improve the dissemination of transport research results via the TRKC website. By joining the Support Network, you show your commitment to enhancing awareness of successful transport research, shaping European transport policy and developing innovative tools to support sustainable mobility. As a Support Network member you may be asked – always in accordance with your particular background, knowledge, expertise and provenance – to give advice on TRKC's strategic and awareness-raising

activities, to facilitate access to transport research information (at European, international, member state and institutional levels), to support, wherever possible, the TRKC consortium in the collection of data, for instance by providing access to your own transport research activity databases, to advise the TRKC consortium on prioritising and selecting projects for analysis where desired, to advise on particular user needs and provide feedback, to facilitate and multiply the TRKC's dissemination and awareness-raising activities, for instance by promoting the TRKC through newsletters, national events etc. or to peer-review thematic publications.

In this way, you will be able to actively influence TRKC activities, enjoy early access to data and information, link with your own information bases for the mutual benefit, promote your own research results and best practice projects through the TRKC, and establish a link to your own website from the TRKC site. A list of TRKC Support Network members will be highlighted on the TRKC website. Membership is open to individuals, institutions or organisations that are committed to provide a tangible contribution to the Transport Research Knowledge Centre and its goals. The TRKC particularly encourages representatives from the various transport stakeholder communities to join the Support Network:

- European Commission,
- Member states' ministries and programme management bodies,
- Industry and professional associations,
- Research institutes and Universities,
- Networks of Excellence and Thematic Platforms,
- Transport research initiatives or projects,
- Transport research organisations,
- International organisations,
- Media.

The Support Network operates as a virtual assembly, mainly through email. An internet based discussion forum might be installed at a later stage. In addition, the TRKC might invite individuals to specific workshop-type Focus Group meetings for clearly defined subjects. Please fill out and send the application form with as many details as possible so that others can gain inspiration. If you have any questions regarding the Transport Research Knowledge Centre or the process of joining the Support Network, please do not hesitate to contact us.

## 7. International & national programme & project profiles

The scope of the national and international research programmes and projects are those which are of European relevance and interest but are not funded by EU

institutions, and, where appropriate, key national projects outside Europe. The scope of national data collection is the ERA countries (the 27 EU Member States, plus associated EEA countries and candidate countries for EU accession). Four countries: France, Germany, Italy and the Czech Republic, are covered by core project partners. For most other countries (particularly smaller countries where national transport research activity is more modest), input comes from the TRKC Support Network, which consists of national FP7 Programme Committee members, representatives of national research programmes, etc.

At the project level, project co-ordinators themselves are encouraged to submit their project and result information. It is in the interests of both programme and project co-ordinators that their action is properly disseminated through the TRKC. Also, the best way of ensuring that information is correct and up-to-date is if it comes directly from a responsible person within the programme or project in question. A limited pool of resources has however been allowed for subcontracting and geographic subcontractors have therefore been selected for a limited number of countries, where there is a significant number of projects and programmes and hence a greater potential for updating and collection of new material. The subcontractors are given targets in terms of quantity of forms provided (programmes and projects) as well as the quality of the information provided. These are set and agreed individually with each subcontractor depending on the national situation. Note that target projects are agreed with the TRKC project in advance and that projects should not be selected just because they are easy to get information for.

## 8. User feedback surveys

There was a conclusion achieved that only questionnaires on the web shall be used, as they already were used in the past: either short pop-up surveys or an email sent to e-bulletin subscribers containing a link to a website with a more comprehensive questionnaire. Both these methods also elicited low response rates (37, 43 and 82 responses for each of the three online questionnaires conducted by EXTR@Web and 88 responses for the TRKC web questionnaire in 2007).

It would appear that better quality results would be gained by contacting a smaller sample of persons who use the TRKC at least occasionally and either conducting a semi-directive telephone survey or perhaps organising a seminar at a major conference or event whereby the TRKC and its outputs are explained and the site demonstrated in front of a small audience, followed by a question and discussion session.

Pop-up questionnaire surveys on the website can help us to understand how many visitors to the website are looking for something in particular (i.e. the core users which are the target of the TRKC) and how many are “just surfing” or visiting out of curiosity. Previous pop-ups have elicited very low response rates (the last one in the EXTR@Web project had 54 responses, which were split almost evenly between people looking for specific information and those who were not). A further pop-up is planned during 2009 and it is recommended that this question (“Why are you visiting this site?”) be included in it. The geographical spread of visitors shows a reasonable balance, with increased numbers from the New Member States, although efforts are required to increase awareness in these countries further in order to achieve a greater European balance and greater interest in pan-European transport research activities in Central and Eastern Europe. The TRKC’s Dissemination Strategy for New Member States should help achieve this.

A further pop-up survey is planned towards the end of the TRKC projects, although this will be very brief (3 or 4 questions) in order to encourage a reasonable response rate. It is also recommended that feedback be collected on an ad-hoc basis and recommendations/suggestions centralised and assessed. Such a basis could include:

- Discussions with Support Network members and informally with colleagues involved in transport research,
- Promoting the use of the helpdesk email to receive comments on the website and the public deliverables (e.g. inclusion of a message in brochures and thematic research summaries to invite comments by email).

## **9. Website content (availability of programme, project and result information on the TRKC website)**

The TRKC website has evolved substantially since the beginning of the TRKC contract in February 2008. In particular, the site was re-launched in May 2008 with a new look, enhanced search capabilities and increased content, in particular the addition of information from the internal project database spreadsheet.

With the addition of eight new Programme Profile forms between February and June 2008, the number of Programme Profiles available on the TRKC has risen from 253 at the end of the EXTR@Web project to 261 at present.

The number of full profiles with results has risen from 316 at the start of the project to 619 in July 2007 and the number of project profiles without results has risen from 158 to 520 during this period. A key addition has been the 4 629 short profiles added since October 2007.

The great majority of short profiles (88% of them) relate to national projects, due to the considerable work in project listing carried out in the EXTR@Web project. On the other hand, 68% of project profiles and result summaries are for EU projects. The breakdown of result summaries for EU projects is 265 for FP4 (produced by EXTRA and EXTR@Web), 139 for FP5 (produced by EXTR@Web and TRKC), 8 for FP6 (produced by TRKC) and 11 for other EU projects (produced by EXTR@Web and TRKC). The number of FP6 result summaries available online will increase rapidly in the near future as this is the current priority focus of the project.

## **10. Web traffic statistics for the TRKC website**

The number of visits to the site has increased overall and is at a creditable level. However it is not known how this compares with other comparable sites such as CORDIS/ICT Results. It should be borne in mind that simply the number of hits cannot be taken as a reliable indicator of the real use of the site: as with most websites, the average length of a visit is short (1-2 minutes). Although peaks in visits occur after the sending of an e-newsletter, it could be assumed that the majority of these extra visits are “just surfing”, i.e. following the link from the news bulletin to see what is on offer. Average time spent on the site varies from 2.5 to 4.5 minutes and 45% of visitors only view one page. On the other hand, over 40% of the visitors visit more than three pages, which suggests that this visitor segment is fully exploiting the information and search tools available on the TRKC.

## **Bibliography**

- [1] [www.transport-research.info](http://www.transport-research.info)