



BEST



Dear Reader,



BEST will formally come to an end this spring. The objective of BEST has been to identify, by creating a network of experts and national representatives, the potential of benchmarking as a tool to sup-

port and improve policy making in transport at EU and national levels. As a result of three years of intense work, a comprehensive network has been established which has brought together transport policy makers and other stakeholders to learn and exchange knowledge and experience about benchmarking in both transport and non-transport sectors.

The BEST network has reviewed the state of the art of benchmarking and raised awareness of benchmarking as a tool for improvement and knowledge sharing. We have also taken the very first step towards the innovative concept of benchmarking transport policy. And, importantly, BEST has communicated key recommendations from experts and national policy makers to the European Commission.

This – the final – newsletter brings you highlights of the BEST process. We also bring you some findings of the three BOB benchmarking pilots. One significant result of BOB is the fruitful exchange of experience that has taken place between the benchmarking partners, and the cooperation between authorities and industry. The testimony in this newsletter from one of the BOB railway pilot participants, Hilary Howatt of Strathclyde Passenger Transport in Scotland, illustrates quite clearly some of the challenges and benefits that international benchmarking involves.

A presentation of a railway benchmarking exercise - "RailBench" - which was carried out by Trenitalia, received much positive attention during the final BEST conference. On behalf of our readers, I am very pleased that Margherita Vaglio of Trenitalia has contributed an article about the Railbench experience.

I take this opportunity to thank all of you who have taken part in the BEST network for your continued support.

Yours,

Nils Fearnley, Editor
Institute of Transport Economics, Oslo

Benchmarking European Sustainable Transport

THE FINAL BEST CONFERENCE

The final BEST conference took place in Brussels on 12-13th March 2003. The conference consolidated the findings of the BEST project and presented the results of its sister project, BOB. Some 90 delegates participated in the conference, representing transport ministries from seven EU Member States and nine Accession Countries, in addition to stakeholders and experts working in the fields of sustainable transport and/or benchmarking.



Group work at the conference



The conference opened with keynote speaker Professor John Oakland of Leeds Business School, who gave a refresher of the main steps of the benchmarking process. The BEST team then gave an overview of activities and achievements of the network. Some central contributors to previous BEST conferences were also invited to present updates of their benchmarking work. The BOB team presented the three pilot projects, which illustrated the living experience of taking part in a practical benchmarking exercise. Additional presentations and panel discussions addressed the role of benchmarking in European transport policy making and the potential for a continuation of the BEST network. Panellists included representatives of Ministries of Transport, international transport associations and industry, all of whom provided interesting and thoughtful views.

It was felt by many conference delegates that the European Commission could play an

important role by facilitating a framework to keep the network together and by promoting the application of benchmarking, not necessarily financially, but through political or 'moral' support, by providing information, and by bringing people together.

In response, one representative of the European Commission who attended the conference remarked (on her own behalf) that:

- according to the presentations made during the conference, the benchmarking exercises that appeared to be the most successful were those that were precisely focused and that involved the actual stakeholders themselves, and that some such successes were achieved with extremely limited resources;
- benchmarking as an input to policy making is different from benchmarking of policies, which is a more complex process and was only one of the topics addressed within the framework of the BEST project at the 5th BEST Conference;
- reports from BEST and BOB that are available for dissemination can be submitted to the EXTRA website europa.eu.int/comm/transport/extra/home.html;
- the Cordis website (www.cordis.lu) also provides opportunities for further networking and dissemination of information/results from 5FP projects.

HOW CAN BENCHMARKING HELP FULFIL WHITE PAPER OBJECTIVES?

The European Commission launched the BEST and BOB projects three years ago. Now that the projects are coming to an end, we wondered how the Commission has appreciated the past three years of active work in the field of transport benchmarking. Further to the feedback from the project officer, we asked one of her colleagues, Claude Rossignol*, who has not been directly involved in the project, to let us know what he personally thought of these projects after having participated in the final conference of BEST.

MR ROSSIGNOL, PLEASE TELL US ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH THE BEST PROCESS.

I discovered BEST through BOB. As a recently-joined national expert at the Commission services, I can only comment on what I have seen of the projects by visiting the website and listening to reactions of the participants, for several of whom the events appear to have been profitable.

IN WHAT WAY HAS BEST CONTRIBUTED TO THE COMMISSION'S WORK?

Benchmarking is a tool, related to the well known "quality processes". Like every tool, it

can solve problems, but not all problems. BEST has provided a somewhat better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of benchmarking and on the conditions that have to be fulfilled if we want to take the best out of it.

IN RETROSPECT, WHAT COULD WE HAVE DONE BETTER?

In relation to BOB, as this is what I know a little better, I think the focus should have been more on concrete results and less on descriptions of the processes. DG TREN may initiate new benchmarking projects in the future but a clear prerequisite will be that they offer tangible results such as "if you do a and b then you will obtain c and d." In that way best practice can be disseminated, while paying of course due regard to the fact that even what has worked well in certain circumstances may have to be 'customised' in another context.

HOW WILL THE COMMISSION MAKE USE OF THE BEST/BOB EXPERIENCE, RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS?

With regard to BOB, DG TREN is reviewing the final reports and has made several comments

Claude Rossignol



on the draft reports in order to ensure more practical results. Once the final recommendations have been received, a decision can be made. To my knowledge, no follow up actions are planned in the Framework Programme, at least currently.

FROM THE COMMISSION'S POINT OF VIEW, WHAT ROLE WILL BENCHMARKING PLAY IN DEVELOPING TRANSPORT POLICY IN THE FUTURE?

Obviously the Commission's immediate concern is that the objectives stated in the White Paper are met. The White Paper proposed 60 or so measures in order to meet the major challenges in the European transport sector. A study is due to examine possible approaches to the mid-term evaluation of how the objectives are being met. In case relevant benchmarking results from the research projects are available at that time, they will be examined by the consortium in charge of the study. [●]

* Claude Rossignol's answers to our questions only reflect his own views and in no way commit the European Commission. Claude Rossignol works in Unit B.1 of DG TREN.
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THE BEST PROCESS FROM THE BEGINNING

In May 2000 the European Commission launched the thematic network BEST – Benchmarking European Sustainable Transport. The main objective of BEST was to bring together European transport policy makers and other stakeholders to learn about benchmarking and to assess its application as a practical tool to improve the performance and sustainability of European transport.

The network has been based on a series of six conferences over three years. Each conference addressed a different theme relating to transport benchmarking:

1. The state of the art of benchmarking in all sectors (October 2000)
2. The state of the art of benchmarking in the transport sector (January 2001)
3. Indicators and benchmarking in the transport sector (June 2001)

4. Putting benchmarking methodology into practice (October 2001)
5. Benchmarking transport policy (June 2002)
6. The final conference - results and recommendations (March 2003)

On the basis of the conference presentations and discussions, the network has produced specific recommendations on the development of benchmarking as a practical tool to assist the European Commission, Member States and Accession Countries in effectively implementing sustainable transport policies in Europe.

The first two conferences provided an introduction to benchmarking and its application in the transport sector. A broad range of projects was presented to illustrate the principles of benchmarking, the key success factors and main challenges for implementa-

tion, and the positive results of its application. The third conference focused more specifically on the role of indicators in the benchmarking process, including the definition and use of indicators. The fourth conference aimed to increase understanding of benchmarking by examining in more detail the different steps of the benchmarking methodology and its practical application. The fifth conference addressed the concept of policy benchmarking in the transport sector. The final conference consolidated the principal findings of the whole project.

Conference programmes, presentations and recommendations to the Commission are available on the BEST website:

www.besttransport.org [●]

BOB – BENCHMARKING OF BENCHMARKING

Updates of the three BOB pilots have been provided in all BEST newsletters. Here we present some of the conclusions of the three benchmarking pilots. If you would like further information about the BOB pilots, please contact the pilot leaders (contact details are provided at the end of each section).

ROAD SAFETY PILOT

The objective of the Road Safety pilot was to assess how far benchmarking could be used to improve policy at national and European level aiming at a higher road safety performance of professional road transport in particular and consequently the sustainability of road transport as a whole.

The following countries participated in the Road Safety pilot:

- Austria
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- France
- Germany
- Ireland
- Netherlands
- Poland
- Spain
- Sweden
- United Kingdom

One overall conclusion of the pilot was that although road safety can be benchmarked on a high aggregation level, the explanation of differences (“worse” or “better”) has to be found on a lower aggregation level. Therefore, care must be taken when assessing whether a road safety policy is “good” or “bad” just by monitoring (by means of benchmarking of) the number of, for instance, road traffic casualties. To solve this problem, strings of benchmarks have to be defined.

It is therefore not sensible to monitor road safety purely on the basis of road safety statistics. It is also not advisable to conclude that a certain policy is “good” or “bad” just on the basis of these statistical benchmarks.

Some of the main conclusions of the road safety pilot are that:

- It is not possible to obtain knowledge (and proper actions) without proper measurement. EU definitions on road casualties and a standardised statistical measurement system are strongly required.

- The higher the proportion of preventive elements in the road safety policy, the better the road safety statistics are.
- Preventive elements in road safety policies seem to be under-represented. A further decrease of road casualties requires additional attention to the preventive elements in road safety policies.

Pilot leader: Aad van den Engel, NEA. Email: aen@nea.nl

AIRPORT ACCESSIBILITY PILOT

The overall objective of the pilot was to assess the potential of benchmarking to improve airport accessibility. In particular, the results of the pilot should support the identification of effective policy measures for ensuring sustainable airport accessibility.



Airport bus in Copenhagen

Topics benchmarked were the sustainability of land access to airports, focusing on airport access by public transport, cycling and car sharing.

The benchmarking exercise showed that airport authorities have limited control of issues relating to landside accessibility and need better control over this important issue. The exercise identified a number of good practices in airport accessibility, for example: mobility management at Amsterdam Airport, air-rail intermodality at Copenhagen Airport, and the Transport Forum at Manchester Airport. The results of the pilot indicate a clear role for benchmarking to develop and implement airport accessibility policy. Among the conclusions drawn from the work are that:

- It is important that the European Commission defines a clear EU policy on airport accessibility.
- It could be useful to establish Europe-wide Airport Transport Forums, using as a model the Forums that have been successfully implemented in the UK and France to coordinate airport accessibility strategy.
- Airports would benefit from a European framework in which they could compare their performance with others, and in which they could learn from others and exchange good practices.

Pilot leaders: JanJaap de Vlieger, Erasmus University. Email: devlieger@few.eur.nl. Peran van Reeve, Erasmus University. Email: vanreeve@few.eur.nl

The following organisations participated in the Airport Accessibility pilot:

- ACI Europe
- Aeropuertos Espanoles y Navegación Aérea
- BAA Heathrow
- Bologna Airport
- Brussels International Airport Company
- City of Warsaw
- Copenhagen Airport
- Dublin Airport
- German Airport Association
- German Federal Ministry of Transportation
- International Air Transport Association
- Lyon-Saint Exupéry Airport
- Manchester Airport
- Milan Airport
- Netherlands Ministry of Transport
- Paris Airports
- Polish Airports State Enterprise
- Schiphol Group
- Syndicat Mixte de Transports en Commun de l'agglomération toulousiane
- Tritel NV, Transport, Infrastructure and Telematics
- Vale of Glamorgan Council
- Vienna Airport

RAILWAY PILOT

The objective of the railway pilot was to assess how far benchmarking could be used to improve the implementation of key objectives to increase the effectiveness of passenger railway services. The pilot exercise examined the institutional framework, policy objectives, and performance indicators used by the participating countries. The exercise revealed a variety of differing situations. This rendered some of the proposed comparisons difficult and of limited value. The railway pilot reached a number of conclusions, including:

- The basic principles of benchmarking are the same when applied in any topic or sector.
- Most of the organisational changes identified in European railways are a result of several European directives.
- Since nearly all participants are only in the early stage of institutional changes, the

lessons learned were limited at this stage. However the continuing interest in the various aspects of this process is substantial.

- Passenger growth is closely related to the development of national and local economy, population etc. Hence the direct influence of operators on growth is limited.
- Punctuality is regarded as quality indicator number one, both by passengers and the authorities. Most railways run on-going programmes for improvement in this area.
- Factors contributing to the high level of punctuality in Japan are higher technical standards on rolling stock and infrastructure, and better discipline from staff and passengers. Japanese punctuality levels would not be realistic in Europe.
- One of the success factors of improving punctuality in Finland was the involvement of every staff member in the improvement process.

The following organisations participated in the Railway Pilot:

- *Danish State Railways and Ministry of Transport*
- *Dutch Railways and Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management*
- *Finnish Railways (VR) and Helsinki Metropolitan Area Authority*
- *Hungarian Railways (MAV) and Ministry of Transport*
- *Norwegian Railways (NSB)*
- *and Ministry of Transport and Communications*
- *Polish Railways (PKP) and Ministry of Transport*
- *ScotRail and Strathclyde Passenger Transport*
- *Banverket (Sweden)*
- *German Ministry of Transport*
- *Kyushu Railways (Japan)*
- *ÖBB (Austria)*
- *SBB (Switzerland)*

Pilot leader: Pieter Hilferink, NEA. Email: phi@nea.nl [●]

TAKING BOB'S TEMPERATURE: DIAGNOSIS - GROWING PAINS!

STRATHCLYDE PASSENGER TRANSPORT'S EXPERIENCE OF THE BOB PILOT PROJECT

In the mid 1990s, SPT, as the regional passenger transport planning body for west central Scotland, had to jointly deliver acceptable and appropriate conditions of contract for its first rail franchise, for a seven year period, between SPT's political authority, the UK government, and a train operator. The process of building a public/private partnership in a regulated commercial market was entirely new in the UK rail industry and therefore to regional (political) passenger transport authorities charged with delivering a social railway.

It was not a breeze. It takes doggedness and sheer devotion to build the vision of a quality rail network and train services fit for purpose. SPT is currently engaged in Franchise II, working with new partners and industry structures – Scottish Ministers, the Scottish Executive, Strategic Rail Authority, Network Rail and a number of pre-qualifier TOCs (Train Operating Companies). The rail and political world have moved on since 1997 but the need to work together has inescapably not! There are fresh growing pains.

For SPT, the BOB rail pilot characterised, in microcosm, the current turmoil of the world of rail in Europe: antagonism between states' rail objectives and the public/private railway structures; the separation of infrastructure and of train operations; the "growing pains" of transition from public to private ownership; mistrust between national railways and the direction of EU policies; doubts on the part of regional transport providers (in Britain, still in their emergent stage) about participation in the project; the continuing grasp of trade unions on working practices. There was a sense of sitting on a diagnostic fence – of a willingness to watch the game, but not to kick the ball about.

SPT experienced BOB's limitations – for example, the unwillingness of rail operators to collectively engage with regional rail authorities in discussion directly on benchmarking performance criteria. But to be frank, the project was entering a brave new world of uncharted territories where diagnostic techniques could not be agreed overnight, and business relations were only beginning to form. It is also fair to add that at local level, the bilateral working relation with "our" partner in the project, ScotRail, was



Hilary Howatt

good, and perhaps contributed to some of the problem-solving in the wider project. But our overall lesson was never to underestimate the preliminary manoeuvres of a pan European project when the ingredients are a public/private economic and political mix, compounded by a wide disparity of sectoral approach and experience across Member States! SPT learnt much from being part of the wide circle of European rail interests, and would welcome being part of future diagnostic trials.

Thanks BOB! [●]

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"A LEARNING PLATFORM"

Francis Cheung of the Dutch Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management has been one of the most active delegates throughout the BEST process. Mr Cheung nicely summed up his feelings: "Having been involved in this network for two and a half years, I must see myself as a part of the BEST family". His enthusiasm and commitment are two important factors that have contributed to the success of the BEST conferences and BOB pilot projects. We met Mr Cheung after the final BEST conference.

WE HAVE VERY MUCH APPRECIATED YOUR COMMITMENT AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO BEST AND BOB. BUT WHAT IS IT ABOUT THE PROJECTS THAT MAKES YOU SO ENTHUSIASTIC?

Benchmarking is a powerful instrument. The opportunity to use data and information to serve policy making enables improvement of services to the community. When you use the

data, you work with others to learn about good practices and about what the indicators tell you, and that enables you to improve. Benchmarking is decision making with a scientific foundation.

BUT DOESN'T BENCHMARKING HAVE ANY LIMITATIONS?

Absolutely. A benchmarking process involves several important challenges and requirements that are not easily solved or met. Firstly, it is difficult to obtain comparable data. Secondly, it is a challenge to build up sufficient interest among the stakeholders - from top management to fellow workers on the work floor. Thirdly, the success of benchmarking depends crucially on the skills, flair and knowledge of the people who are going to interpret the results. Finally, it takes courage to put oneself on display as "the less successful" and then to introduce the necessary measures for improvements.

Francis Cheung



HOW WOULD YOU SUM UP THE BOB AND BEST PROJECTS?

The projects have been a learning platform. We have learnt about the techniques and their possible applications. It is also a network of like-minded people. As part of this network, I know how and where I can get the information that I need.

THIS IS THE END OF BOB AND BEST. IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN NEXT?

We should proceed with additional research and new pilot projects, ideally with funding and support from the European Commission. We thank Mr Cheung for his commitment and support to the network and his contributions to the success of the projects. [●]

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RAILBENCH

The experience of FS-Trenitalia in the RailBench project that ran from end 1999 to 2001, was brought to the Final BEST Conference to stimulate discussion about the conditions for successful benchmarking. The project came from the initiative of the strategy managers of FS and two major European railways, who were interested in using benchmarking, on a confidential basis, to identify good practices and support decision-making in reorganising company processes. Viewing company behaviours through the reflection from other practices stimulated new ways of performing.

Each participating railway proposed a topic of their interest, agreeing to work on the others for reciprocal benefit. The result was a complex benchmarking process involving three international workgroups at functional/divisional level, an expert coordination group and a steering group. The topics chosen involved:

- **rolling stock maintenance**, proposed by Trenitalia, mainly to increase reliability and availability of regional trains,
- **telecoms**, to identify ways of increasing value and business development of existing assets in the railways,



Margherita Vaglio

The RailBench was supported by benchmarking experts of the Railway Strategy and Technology Centre at Imperial College in London, who did an excellent job in facilitation and in analysing the data collected to identify good practice, strengths, weaknesses and possible early wins.

As often occurs in new benchmarking projects, the RailBench went through alternate moments, showing that commitment to and ownership of the project by functional managers are essential to its success. Meanwhile companies underwent organisational changes and cost-cutting schemes, creating delays and hindering participation to meetings and site visits. Ultimately, those members who were most committed gained the most.

Though data was often not fully comparable,

- **sales and distribution channels** in passenger services, to reduce costs, review grip on market segments and stimulate revenue generation.

the RailBench brought an understanding that if one went beyond one's description of reality in measuring results, valuable insights emerged when real cross-cultural conversations took place, not only between functional managers from different countries, facing similar issues, but also within the companies, between different divisions. RailBench opened the scope of their thinking, creating cross-fertilisation and real benefits to those who picked up practical innovative solutions for rapid implementation. This actually occurred when one of our regional managers came back from a site visit, and adapted into practice a reorganisation of the daily current maintenance cycle for regional trains, fitting minor repairs into time-slots between peak hours, rather than doing the whole bulk of daily maintenance at the end of the day. This produced higher train availability registering an early win. Similarly, costs and use of transparent anti-graffiti film was discussed as a side-issue and now Trenitalia applies it not only to interiors, but also exteriors of regional trains, with the partial contribution of the Regions. Today info-exchange endures well after the RailBench project. [●]

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FAREWELL NOTE FROM THE BEST PROJECT COORDINATORS

The end of the BEST project has come after three years of stimulating, productive and hard work. When we think back to the beginning of the project and the first BEST conference, and compare those early days to the project's current achievements, we can see how much the project has developed and flourished. One of the most important achievements of the BEST project has been the creation of a dynamic and broad-based network which has fostered learning and in-depth discussion about the use of benchmarking in the

transport sector. For the BEST team, the most valued – and enjoyable – aspects of the project have been working with you, learning from your varied experiences, and exchanging ideas with you about the range of topics addressed by BEST. The BEST project has been a “co-production” of all those who have participated in the network. The success of BEST has been due to our joint efforts, and we thank you for your contributions and support.

Although the BEST project is coming to an

end, we hope that we will continue our cooperation in order to support the improvement of transport in Europe with the ultimate aim of achieving a transport system that is truly sustainable from an environmental, social and economic viewpoint.

We wish you all the “best” for the future. [●]

YVES, NIKKI, LUCY, BEATRIZ AND ROBERT,
OGM, BEST PROJECT COORDINATOR



WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The BEST project will be finalised at the end of April 2003. The European Commission is currently using benchmarking as input to transport policy through various activities and networks, in addition to BEST and BOB. Many views about what should happen after BEST were expressed at the final BEST conference. Several BEST network members (ministries, operators, researchers etc) have expressed an interest

in participating in a continuation of the network. If you are interested in participating in a follow-up, please send an e-mail to best@ogm.be. We also welcome all ideas and suggestions for future transport benchmarking network activities (at EU, national and local levels).

The BEST website will continue for another year. If you would like to publish your views or

an article on the BEST website or provide information about your benchmarking activities, then please send an email to best@ogm.be.

The Cordis website (<http://www.cordis.lu/>) also provides opportunities for further networking and dissemination of information/results from 5FP projects (e.g. news service, eTIP electronic technological implementation plans, on-line fora etc.). [●]

BEST is a Thematic Network under the European Commission's Fifth Framework Programme for Research, Technological development and Demonstration, Competitive and Sustainable Growth Programme, Key Action 2 'Sustainable Mobility and Intermodality', coordinated by the Directorate-General for Transport and Energy (DG TREN).

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THE BEST STEERING COMMITTEE

The Steering Committee acts as an independent panel of transport and benchmarking experts, who advise the project consortium on the scientific content and overall progress of the project. The BEST team extends a special thank you to the members of the Steering Committee for their support.

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