

PRESS RELEASE

31 May 2018

Report to the Walloon Parliament

Planning and management of the Walloon Region's investments in its inland waterway network



In Wallonia, more than 40 million tons of goods are transported annually on a network consisting of 450 km of inland waterways. A properly managed network shall contribute to the modal shift of freight transport from road to less polluting waterways; it shall also foster economic activity and job creation as well as a better management of flood risks.

Safeguarding navigability, planning investments and maintaining waterways require first and foremost to have a good knowledge of the navigable waterway network and sufficient human and budgetary resources available to conduct all the work to be done.

The Directorate-General for Mobility and Hydraulic Ways of the Walloon Region has tools for assessing the state of the water engineering structures and electromechanical appliances, but their practical implementation is neither complete nor fully operational (lacking controls, deficient recording of the data resulting from the controls and non-compliance with the maintenance plans).

Both financial and human resources do not ensure the full application and respect of the preventive maintenance plans which must limit urgent repairs and unplanned traffic stopping.

In 2008, the Walloon Region had drawn up a priority dredging plan aimed at the restoration of a sufficient navigation capacity on the entire network. Yet, owing to budgetary restrictions, the dredging process occurred at a slower pace than was originally intended.

The Court of Audit recommends achieving at least the dredging objective laid down in the priority plan and dredging to the level of the "old beds and banks" of the most problematic waterways so as to avoid having to dredge again in a very near future the areas that silt up the most rapidly.

In order to compensate for the lack of financial means to ensure the maintenance and the investments in the waterway infrastructure, the regional authorities have been seeking and setting up various financing mechanisms. In this context, the Court of Audit recommends that the multiannual planning of investments and extraordinary maintenance be considered as a fully-fledged activity, which implies a pre-established procedure, ad hoc resources, a regular monitoring, an ex-post evaluation and a greater strategic coordination with Sofico, the Walloon company for the additional financing of infrastructure.

In order to prevent the recurrence of situations which have generated substantial additional delays – with sometimes extra charges exceeding 50% of the initial offer, the Court of Audit finally recommends that extensive preliminary studies of the projects be carried out before starting work and that human, budgetary and technical needs be better anticipated.

Information for the press

The Court of Audit exerts an external control on the financial operations of the Federal State, the Communities, the Regions and the provinces. It contributes to improving public governance by transmitting to the parliamentary assemblies, to the managers and to the audited services any useful and reliable information resulting from a contradictory examination. As a collateral body of the Parliament, the Court performs its missions independently of the authorities it controls.

The report “Planning and management of the Walloon Region’s investments in its inland waterway network” was sent to the Walloon Parliament. The report, the summary and the press release are available (in Dutch and French) on the Court’s website (www.courtofaudit.be).