

Developing an International Interface for Innovation

A Profile of the European Conference of Transport Research Institutes

GEORGE GIANNOPOULOS AND JEAN-PIERRE MÉDEVIELLE

Giannopoulos is Head, Hellenic Institute of Transport, and Professor, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, and is Immediate Past Chair of the European Conference of Transport Research Institutes (ECTRI). Médevielle is Deputy General Director of INRETS (French National Institute for Transport and Safety Research), founder and Immediate Past Secretary-General of ECTRI, and a member of the TRB International Activities Committee and the International Trade and Transport Committee.

Jean-Pierre Médevielle, ECTRI's original Secretary-General, and ECTRI President Guy Bourgeois, both of INRETS, the French National Institute for Transport and Safety Research, participate in the International Research Roundtable during the 2007 TRB Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C.

January 2006 marked a major milestone for the Transportation Research Board (TRB) and the European Conference of Transport Research Institutes (ECTRI). The two organizations signed a memorandum of understanding to develop research partnerships extending across geographic borders. The document sets forth a 10-point action plan to foster information and technical exchanges, the professional development of young researchers, and collaboration and coordination of research efforts between the two organizations (see box, page 5).

Shaping the Mission

ECTRI was created in April 2003 as an international nonprofit association governed under French law. A key influence was the Lisbon Strategy, an initiative of the European Council, which consists of the Euro-

pean Union heads of state and government and the president of the European Commission. Drafted in 2000, the agenda set a goal of making Europe a cutting-edge knowledge society and called for the establishment of an international interfaced European Research and Innovation Area.¹ ECTRI is pursuing this initiative in surface transportation research.

ECTRI members include 20 national transport research institutes, technical universities, and national research platforms in 17 countries from the European Union, the Acceding Countries awaiting full membership in the European Commission, and the Western Balkan nations (see box, page 6). All together, member organizations employ more than 5,000 researchers and research staff working with a variety of transportation stakeholders.

¹ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/00100-r1.en0.htm.



ECTRI Working Group 4 meets to consider initiatives involving “soft research infrastructures”—such as libraries, databases, data sets, communication networks, and discussion forums—in the international exchange and transfer of knowledge on transport topics.



Pursuing the Mission

ECTRI's mission is to

- ◆ Facilitate the integration of transport research activities within the European Union;
- ◆ Foster cooperation with international counterparts;
- ◆ Provide independent, science- and technology-based advice to European Union institutions or state members on policy issues, on request;
- ◆ Promote and coordinate the technology transfer of European transportation expertise; and
- ◆ Provide a platform of exchange for the establishment and development of additional research networks.

The mission is being carried out through six strategic efforts:

- ◆ Identifying common priorities and programs of work and fostering opportunities for researchers' professional development and mobility—that is, the opportunity to move between nations and institutions;
- ◆ Promoting high-quality, coordinated, and focused transportation research in Europe, through cooperation, networking, promotion, and support of excellence in transportation research;
- ◆ Offering independent advice on research to European funding agencies, the European Commission, member states, regional councils, and

A June 2006 workshop on research management issues, conducted by ECTRI's NET-TRACK program, which works to “network transport research resources, competencies, and knowledge within the new boundaries of the European Research Area,” was attended by 22 organizational executives from 12 countries, in Budapest, Hungary.



Action Plan for Cooperation Between ECTRI and TRB

1. Arrange a scanning tour of leading research institutes in Europe for U.S. research managers and a similar tour in the United States for European research managers.

2. Encourage participation by TRB-selected researchers in the Young Researchers Seminar organized by ECTRI, the Forum of European Road Safety Institutes, and the Forum of European Highway Research Laboratories.

3. Publish an informative article on ECTRI in *TR News* and an article on TRB activities in the ECTRI newsletter.

4. Encourage the active participation of ECTRI members in TRB committees.

5. Encourage the active participation of ECTRI in TRB Annual Meetings, through session presentations and an exhibit booth.

6. Regularly exchange information about

strategic documents in transport research and about key research events in the United States and Europe.

7. Strengthen U.S. participation in COST (European Cooperation in Scientific and Technological Research) projects through the exchange of information about COST activities.

8. Build up possibilities for cooperation between U.S. and European research bodies through the European Union Framework Programmes and the corresponding U.S. research programs—such as the National Science Foundation and the TRB Cooperative Research Programs.

9. Include a special session on Europe or a keynote speaker from Europe in TRB Annual Meeting programs.

10. Create a joint committee or working group on the topic of future transport research needs.



The 10-point memorandum of understanding between ECTRI and TRB is displayed by signers Giannopoulos (*center*), then President of ECTRI, and TRB Executive Director Robert E. Skinner, Jr., in January 2006. Médevielle (*left*), then Secretary-General of ECTRI, and Michael D. Meyer (*not pictured*), then Vice Chair of the TRB Executive Committee, played key roles in developing the historic agreement.

European and national official agencies—such as safety agencies; ECTRI has established and strives to maintain permanent links and liaisons with the three European Union Directorates General that have jurisdiction over transportation issues—Research, Transport and Energy, and Information Society and Media;

◆ Promoting and coordinating high-quality training opportunities and technology transfer throughout Europe in the field of transportation—especially for young researchers, but also to enable researchers to increase their professional mobility;

◆ Encouraging an open and free exchange of information, as well as the dissemination of research results, at the national and international levels through state-of-the-art reports and through organiz-

ing other appropriate events and activities; and

◆ Creating a cooperative research network in Europe, in coordination with the European Union, and with selected organizations in the United States, Japan, and other countries, such as Korea, China, India, and Australia.

Goals and Accomplishments

Operating on a three-year cycle under a Joint Programme of Activities, ECTRI relies on the efforts of working groups, task forces, and nonexclusive research project groups. The groups address content- or process-oriented activities adapted to the Joint Programme and to any major development or breakthrough in surface transport research at the European or international level.



Médevielle and then-President of ECTRI, George Giannopoulos, Hellenic Institute of Transport, prepare to greet visitors at the organization's exhibit booth at the 2006 TRB Annual Meeting.

In cooperation with transportation stakeholders from academia, industry, public agencies, and other areas, ECTRI is developing a new electronic scientific journal for European transportation researchers, encompassing a multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary,

and systematic approach to transportation science. The journal will be launched soon. Papers will receive a high-level peer review appropriate to a scientific journal such as the *Transportation Research Record: Journal of the Transportation Research Board*.

Among ECTRI's early accomplishments is the establishment and implementation of a Young Researchers Seminar every year and a half, in conjunction with two other transportation organizations—the Forum of European Road Safety Institutes and the Forum of European Highway Research Laboratories. The seminar already has provided a venue for approximately 50 young researchers to present their research and to build collegial relationships and exchanges.

Supporting Policy

In addition, during the past three years, ECTRI has supported the European Union's policies and is working toward the creation of the European Research Area, which will engage in the following activities:

- ◆ Networking Europe's centers of excellence and creating virtual centers through new interactive communication tools;
- ◆ Developing a common approach to financing large-scale research activities—examining both the needs and the means—and building closer relations between the various organizations working to

ECTRI Members

AVV: Adviesdienst Verkeer en Vervoer (Transport Research Centre), Netherlands

CDV: Centrum Dopravního Výzkumu, Czech Republic

CEDEX: Centro de Estudios y Experimentación de Obras Publica, Spain

DLR: Deutsches Zentrum für Luft und Raumfahrt (German Aerospace Center), Germany

DTF: Danmarks TransportForskning (Danish Transport Research Institute)

FHG-FVV: Fraunhofer-Verbund Verkehr (Fraunhofer Transport and Traffic Alliance), Germany

HIT: Hellenic Institute of Transport, Greece

INRETS: Institut National de Recherche sur les Transports et leur Sécurité, France

ITS: Instytut Transportu Samochodowego and CNTK: Centrum Naukowo-Techniczne Kolejnictwa, Poland

KTI: Közlekedéstudományi Intézet (Institute for Transport Sciences), Hungary

POLITO: Politecnico di Torino, Department of

Hydraulics, Transports, and Civil Infrastructures, Italy

TNO: Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research

TØI: Transportøkonomisk Institutt, Norway

TRL: Transport Research Laboratory Limited, United Kingdom

TTEF: Transport and Traffic Engineering Faculty, University of Belgrade, Serbia and Montenegro

UPM: Universidad Politecnica de Madrid, Spain

VG TU-TMI: Vilniaus Gedimino Technikos Universitetas—Transporto Mokslo Institutas, Lithuania

VTI: Statens Väg-och Transportforskningsinstitut (Swedish National Road and Research Institute), Sweden

VTT: Valtion Teknillinen Tutkimuskeskus, Finland

VÚD: Výskumný Ústav Dopravný (Transport Research Institute), Slovak Republic



Participants at the May 2007 Young Researchers Seminar in Brno, Czech Republic, considered such topics as transportation economics and travel behavior, intelligent transportation systems, sustainability and the environment, safety, and road engineering.

achieve scientific and technological cooperation in Europe;

- ◆ Improving the instruments and resources that encourage investment in research and innovation, such as indirect aid in compliance with the European Commission rules on state aid, as well as patents and risk capital;

- ◆ Establishing a common system of scientific and technical reference for the implementation of policies;

- ◆ Encouraging more abundant and more mobile human resources, to achieve such goals as

- Greater mobility of researchers from nation to nation;

- The introduction of a European focus to scientific careers;

- Increased prominence and opportunities for women in research; and

- Stimulating the interest of young people in research and careers in science;

- ◆ Enhancing the cohesiveness of European research through best practices in knowledge transfer at the regional and local levels and through promoting the role that regions can play in European research efforts;

- ◆ Bringing together the scientific communities, companies, and researchers of Western and Eastern Europe;

- ◆ Improving Europe's attractiveness to researchers from other continents; and

- ◆ Promoting common social and ethical values in scientific and technological matters.

Other activities under way include the development of cooperative programs for research to guide scientific databases, libraries, and communication

networks; a strategic agenda for urban mobility; and research management. ECTRI has kept its members informed about requests for proposals from the European Union and other international projects and has provided assistance and advice as needed.

ECTRI has submitted comments to the European Union and other organizations on the frameworks for research and development programs and on draft policy documents. The organization's representatives participate in all of the major European transportation-related technology platforms, including rail, road and automotive, logistics, and the e-Safety Forum and Intelligent Car Initiative. ECTRI is assisting transportation research projects in the Eastern and Western Balkan nations.

Long-Range Vision

ECTRI's long-range vision is to create a virtual transport research institute for Europe with an international interface, combining the strengths and potentials of all its members and using members' expertise and infrastructure. In effect, the vision is for a 21st century, supply-side research institute harnessing the synergies, the coordinated activities, and the involvement of research managers, senior scientists, and young scientists in the member organizations in the pursuit of innovation and research in transportation.

The ECTRI endeavor is proceeding step by step, bringing together a large part of the European scientific community in transport research, seeking excellence and relevance at the international level, and taking an open-minded and pragmatic approach to a new paradigm of competition and cooperation. The international interface that ECTRI provides is essential for each step forward.