

DOSSIER

THE UPDATE OF THE « CETMO-INFRA : ROUTES » DATABASE

Faithful to its work programme, CETMO has recently completed a new update of the CETMO-INFRA: ROUTES database. The CETMO-INFRA database – of which the section ROUTES forms part of and also includes railways, ports and airports – is one of the pillars of analysis that CETMO has undertaken in the development of the network infrastructure of transport in the Western Mediterranean and the identification of priorities in the region.

The first version of the CETMO-INFRA: ROUTES database – which only included information concerning the corridor France / the Iberian Peninsula / Morocco – was disseminated in 1990. Since then, CETMO has presented an update of the information every two years, progressively introducing diverse improvements, such as the incorporation of information concerning Italy, Algeria and Tunisia starting from the reference year 1996 or the elaboration of maps with the support of GIS programmes starting from 1998.

This dossier aims to share some of the conclusions obtained starting from the last update carried out of said database.

The structure of the CETMO-INFRA: ROUTES database

The CETMO-INFRA: ROUTES database is compiled of first level road networks (i.e. those which support the demand of the majority of long distance transport) of the seven countries in the Western Mediterranean – Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia -. Amongst the compiled characteristics one can differentiate between the variables that describe the physical network (fundamentally the start and finish of each section, its length, number of carriageways and speed of reference) and those that provide information on the use of the infrastructure (daily average traffic and the percentage of heavy goods vehicles) and the existence of toll.

Information available in publications

The principal resource of CETMO to carry out the update of said database continues to be information of a public nature which is at the disposal of transport ministers of each country or of national organisations that are under their guardianship.

Firstly, CETMO always turns to the published information. The availability of this information depends on the will as well as the diffusion capacity of each country. For example, Spain edits every year a map that identifies the average daily traffic on the road network of the State, the percentage of heavy goods vehicles and the average journey speed. In contrast France publishes the traffic in the national road network and motorways every five years, although no information concerning the heavy goods traffic is specified. Unfortunately no similar publications exist in other countries of the Western Mediterranean.

Furthermore, the publication period of information is usually also variable, depending on the country and the data of which it consist. For example, whilst the information concerning the cost of the tolls is officially published at the beginning of each year, the information regarding the daily traffic is not usually available until almost a year after the end of the year referred to. For this reason it is necessary on occasion to compile information from various years and resort to estimates that – most or least reliable – allow to join together all the information for the same year of reference, all with the idea of having a comparative global vision when analysing.

Tacking down sources

In practice, the resource to publications usually appears to be insufficient – in particular when referring to traffic data – and it is essential to turn to the unit responsible for the production of the information.

Therefore the first issue raised is to find – within every national administration – the source of information for the required data. In this task it is useful to have a certain amount of previous knowledge of the competences in each country of their distinct organisations, as there does not always exist a standard administrative structure at an interstate level, nor an equivalence between the data that is required and the organisation that produces it in each country.

Secondly, it is also fundamental to identify and obtain – within each organisation – an adequate speaker, not only to complete the information but also to eliminate any confusion when requesting data and to gather technical explanations to facilitate its subsequent harmonisation.

The collaboration of the national Co-ordinators

Fortunately, the functional essence itself of CETMO and its accumulated experience allows the Center to rely on a number of Co-ordinators and contacts in each country with who CETMO collaborates regularly and that allow or provide with the access of said sources of information.

Glossary differences

Another relevant question to raise regarding the compilation of data concerning the road networks is the difference in definitions adopted by each country. Some of the data commonly used could cause confusion if details of how the information was obtained is not known or what is the terminology used by each country. With this in mind, on occasion certain differences that the same data implies can be explained according to the source responsible for its compilation.

For example, there are countries like Italy that use distinct definitions for the daily average traffic (practical and theoretical) whose values significantly differ between them as they come from different processes of the same original data (the second takes into account the kilometres covered by the vehicle, unlike the first). Other concepts with distinct interpretations according to the country are, for example, the definition of heavy goods vehicles (in Italy it is evaluated by the height of the front of the vehicle, where as in France it is evaluated by the total height and weight and in Spain depending exclusively on the weight) or the classification of the distinct categories of vehicles that are identified when paying tolls.

In this matter, CETMO without doubt benefits from the backbone work carried out by other international organisations. This is the case, for example, of the census carried out every five years by the European Economic Commission for Europe of the United Nations concerning the principal links in Europe with international traffic (Network E). This census provides information regarding the characteristics of the routes and traffic following a standard scheme for the processing as well as the presentation in all of the countries.

Information of the concessions of toll roads

Although the national public organisations provide the bulk of the information required by CETMO to update their databases, emphasise should be made to the quality of the data that normally provide the concessions of toll roads, with great presence in various countries of the region.

Internet

Finally, emphasise should be made to the growing contribution of the Internet as a tool for searching and updating data. The Internet not only eliminates the intermediaries in the dissemination of information, but also brings the north and south coasts of the Mediterranean considerably closer with regards to the easiness of accessing information and open access to new sources of information which by other means would be difficult to achieve. Internet also introduces other positive aspects to the process to searching, such as the permanent availability of network information, certain homogeneity with regards to the logical structure of the access to information or the minimalization of linguistic barriers.

Another practical advantage of the Internet with respect to the traditional sources is the digital nature of the information. In this sense, it particularly makes it easy to work with digital maps obtained for the network, as it not only eases the manipulation but also allows a greater grade of precision due to the zoom system.