



9 September 2009

Via Baltica photo update

New imminent damage to Knyszyn Forest Natura 2000 site.

We urge the European Commission to accelerate its legal action: Via Baltica construction plans are progressing to damage the Knyszyn Primeval Forest EU-protected Natura 2000 site. The Commission should accelerate its legal action on the Katarynka-Przewalanka section immediately by sending Poland the reasoned opinion and calling on Poland to halt the road works unless the European nature directives requirements are fulfilled.

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Via Baltica was approved over a year ago. This report recommends that the Via Baltica should be routed to the west via Lomza, NOT via Białystok (along road no. 8/S-8). However, the Polish Government has still not taken any official step to change the route and start planning the expressway along “new” route. Moreover, damaging road projects along the “old” (road no. 8/S-8) route are still advancing and about to start within the boundaries of EU-protected Knyszyn Primeval Forest.

Construction works are still continuing on the Białystok-Katrynka section of road no. 8 entering the Knyszyn Forest Natura 2000 site, including a huge road junction “Sochonie” to connect “Via Baltica” with Wasilkow Bypass (a section of the planned new international expressroad “Via Carpatia”).

The most worrying news is that the upgrade of the next, 12 km-long, section of road no. 8 - the Katrynka-Przewalanka - involving cutting the Knyszyn Forest Natura 2000 site and damaging the habitat types from Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive¹ and affecting at least 15 bird species listed in the Annex I of the Birds Directive as well as mammals listed in annex II of the Habitats Directive (inc. wolf, lynx, European bison) – is about to start.

The environmental consent for this project may be granted during the next few weeks. The Road Agency (investor) applied for the “immediate implementation status” for this consent which means the forest cutting may start as soon as the consent is granted without the possibility to suspend it by any legal appeals in Poland. It also means that it will not be possible to implement any potential compensation measures to ensure the site integrity before damage starts.

¹ Including the priority habitat types: 91D0, 91E0.

The new documentation for this road project is still in breach of the European nature Directives and does not properly address the EC's concerns expressed in the Letter of Formal Notice sent to Poland in March 2009. For example, the EIA report does not include an adequate assessment of alternative solutions and presents misleading information about the numbers of car accidents giving the impression that the problem is increasing (whereas in fact the trend is decreasing) in support of its arguments that there is an overriding public interest on health and safety grounds. NGOs believe there are no reliable arguments for proceeding with this investment on the basis of Article. 6.4 of the Habitats Directive.

Other road projects affecting the Knyszyn Forest Natura 2000 site are progressing at the same time: Wasilków Bypass and Sokółka Bypass along the road S-19 ("Via Carpatia"). The lack of assessment of cumulative impacts of these projects in combination on the Knyszyn Forest is a clear breach of Article 6.3 of the Habitats Directive.

Road no. 8 upgrade works on Białystok-Katrynka section.

Pictures taken on 18 August 2009.



Białystok-Katrynka section of road no. 8 - under upgrading. Picture taken outside the Natura 2000 site.



Białystok-Katrynka section of road no. 8 - under upgrading. Picture taken on the boundary of the Natura 2000 site.



Białystok-Katrynka section of road no. 8 - under upgrading. Picture taken inside the Natura 2000 site.



Białystok-Katrynka section of road no. 8 - under upgrading. Picture taken inside the Natura 2000 site.



Białystok-Katrynka section of road no. 8 - under upgrading. Picture taken inside the Natura 2000 site.



Białystok-Katrynka section of road no. 8 - under upgrading. Picture taken inside the Natura 2000 site, showing the "Sochonie" road junction.



Białystok-Katrynka section of road no. 8 - under upgrading. Picture taken inside the Natura 2000 site, showing construction of the "Sochonie" road junction.



Białystok-Katrynka section of road no. 8 - under upgrading. Picture taken inside of the Natura 2000 site, showing construction of the "Sochonie" road junction construction and the planned connection with Wasilkow Bypass.



Białystok-Katrynka section of road no. 8 - under upgrading. Picture taken inside the Natura 2000 site.



Białystok-Katrynka section of road no. 8 - under upgrading. Picture taken inside the Natura 2000 site.



Białystok-Katrynka section of road no. 8 - under upgrading. Picture taken inside the Natura 2000 site.



Białystok-Katrynka section of road no. 8 - under upgrading. Picture taken inside the Natura 2000 site.

Road no. 8 on Katrynka – Przewalanka, 12 km-long section through the Knyszyn Forest Natura 2000 site – planned for upgrade.
Pictures taken on 18 August 2009.



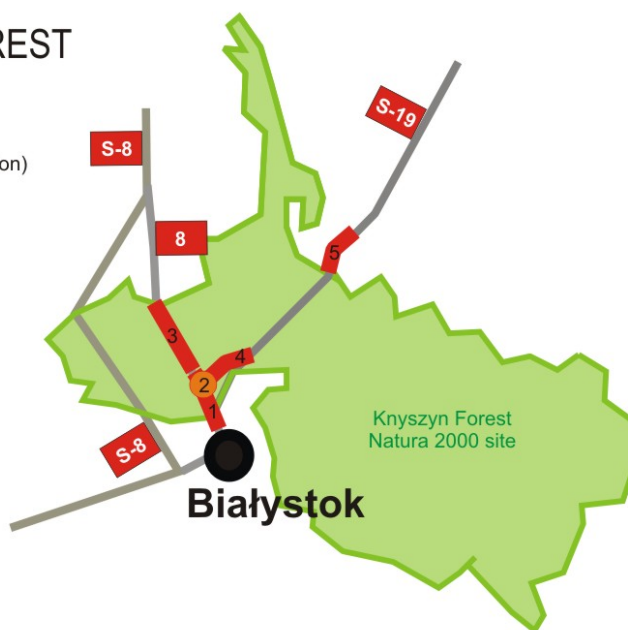
Katrynka – Przewalanka section of road no. 8 – planned for upgrade. Picture taken inside the Natura 2000 site.



Katrynka – Przewalanka section of road no. 8 – planned for upgrade. Picture taken inside the Natura 2000 site.

ROAD PROJECTS (planned and implemented) AFFECTING KNYSZYN FOREST NATURA 2000 SITE

1. Białystok - Katryńka Upgrade (under construction)
2. "Sochonie" road junction (under construction)
3. Katryńka - Przewalanka Upgrade (planned)
4. Wasilków Bypass (halted)
5. Sokółka Bypass (planned)



For further information

Małgorzata Górską, OTOP – the Polish Society for the Protection of Birds (BirdLife Partner in Poland), malgorzata.gorska@otop.org.pl, tel. + 48 605 072 963.

Marta Majka Wiśniewska, CEE Bankwatch Network/Polish Green Network, mwisniewska@bankwatch.org, +48 602 888 143.