

The Winter Olympic Games and transportation - problems and requirements of the IOC's guidelines

by Heike Aghte, ITE board

1) The contribution of traffic to climate change

What the Winter Olympic Games will look like in 20 years time is unclear. All the scientific predictions suggest that winter sports are threatened because global warming will result in the widespread loss of snow cover. It is therefore in the IOC's vital interests to slow down further warming of the earth as effectively as possible and indeed, to stop it.

The Olympic Games are not merely the victims of, but also contributors to global warming, because they produce large quantities of CO₂ through the additional air and road traffic - both types of which are among the largest emitters of greenhouse gases worldwide. The question that has to be asked is how much longer can and to what extent should global events in general take place? Whatever the answer, the effects of such events must be compensated for.

It is vital that there is a substantial reduction in the air travel caused by the Olympic Games. Additionally, road traffic can no longer be the main means of transport for the Games. Road traffic's share in the total mobility of the Games has to be reduced to a maximum of 20 percent.

There are numerous means of doing this. However, at the moment it is exactly the opposite that is taking place, not least through the demands on the road infrastructure, which is always followed by an increase of traffic, in the regions bidding for the candidacy of the Winter Olympics. Climate change is just being ignored - even in the Alpine regions, where there is clear evidence that such change is taking place twice as quickly as on global average.

2) Specific conditions in mountainous areas

a) The dispersion of pollutants

The Winter Olympic venues for the Alpine disciplines are naturally in mountainous areas, where traffic noise and exhaust emissions from road transport are particularly intensive: air pollutants which are emitted accumulate here, often hanging in the air for days. They are merely carried back and forth on the gentle Talein-Talaus winds, as hardly any aeration occurs in the steep and narrow mountain valleys. There is often an inversion layer above the valleys, especially in the winter months. This acts as a lid on the valley and therefore increases the concentration of the pollutants.

Specific mechanisms also contribute to the spread of noise. Whereas traffic noise is often rapidly absorbed by small and large irregularities in the landscape, buildings etc, it can spread unhindered through U or V-shaped valleys and is often even more pronounced along the slopes (the amphitheater effect).

b) Limited space

The Alps are the world's most intensely-developed mountains. There have been conflicts of use in the narrow valleys for a long time. These valleys are no longer able to bear any further intervention or infrastructure, and it is not possible to build on the steep and unstable slopes

as this deprives farmers of agricultural land or involves building in dangerous areas (slopes at risk of avalanches).

This limited space, which forces everything to be grouped closely together, also means that building sites are already more contentious here than in the lowlands, because over the years they have affected a large number of people in the surrounding regions through the dirt and noise.

These are problems in both the Olympic candidacy regions of Garmisch-Partenkirchen/Königsee and Annecy.

Such burdens affect the fundamental quality of life of the people who live in the mountain regions, and result in them being at a greater risk of illness and danger due to less-effective protection from the weakened forests above their homes.¹ This has been scientifically researched and well documented. And these are also the concerns of the Alpine Convention (S.U.). It is therefore the responsibility of the candidate areas, as well as the IOC, to take this into consideration.

The criteria of the IOC and its reports lack an adequate differentiation between cities and mountain areas. (e.g., the meteorology and interpretation of the ecological conditions)²

3) Excessive expansion of road infrastructure

The IOC categorically assumes that roads which have the capacity necessary for the Winter Olympics are beneficial for the regions where the Games will take place. The proposed additional transport infrastructure is seen as an important criteria for the applications³- regardless of whether the regions themselves will be thereby damaged or not.

a) The example of South Bavaria - a lack of policy and questionable legal procedures

The entry in the IOC report that the German candidate region wants to invest 80% of the sum allocated to the transport sector in roads, passes without criticism.⁴ 500 million Euros are set aside solely for the connecting route between Garmisch-Partenkirchen and Munich. This will include four tunnels (two in Garmisch-Partenkirchen itself and two between the motorway and the small town of Farchant). Three of the four tunnels would not be built were it not for the Olympic bid. This can be clearly seen in the Federal Transport Infrastructure Plan (BMVWP) showing the legal basis for the German road building project⁵. It is also borne out in the 2009 traffic report from the German Federal Government. Should South Bavaria be successful in its bid and these projects then undertaken, it might even be necessary to seek legal advice.

In any event, after such a development, the Loisachtal would be merely a transit area. Removing the parts prone to bottlenecks would make the route about 100 km shorter than the existing main route (via Kufstein) and thereby attractive for rapid transalpine traffic. The increase in road traffic of up to 40% would be a medium-term effect, but the consequent deterioration of the quality of life for the population of Loisachtal would be permanent. Both events (an increase in the environmental degradation and a new transit route), would have the same result: the contravention of the Alpine Convention (see below).

¹ www.alpnap.org; www.monitraf.org; www.alpconv.org

² www.alpnap.org; www.monitraf.org; www.alpconv.org

³ IOC, report p.18: "For the evaluation: two sub-criteria, one of them: planned and additional general transport infrastructure"

⁴ Report, p. 18

⁵ <http://dipbt.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/17/004/1700444.pdf>

b) The Alpine Convention (“Convention for the Protection of the Alps”)⁶

The Alpine Convention is a binding international legal agreement as defined by the Vienna Convention, with the eight Alpine countries and the EU as co-signatories. The Convention defines the obligation of the transport sector to ensure "pressures and dangers posed by intra-alpine and transalpine traffic be reduced to a level which is not harmful to humans, animals, plants and their habitats, including by transferring more (...) to rail (...)" (Article 1, transport protocol).

Specialized protocols contain several clear, legally-binding requirements. The question is whether these are observed in the current bids for hosting the Winter Olympics. Points of conflict concerning the Bavarian Olympic bid are:

- the B2 as a new transit route (see above > forbidden by Art. 11 Transport Protocol).
- the new tunnel projects lack alternative tests and EIA (> required according to article 8.1 and 11 transport protocol, Article 10 Regional Planning Protocol)
- There has been no pre-consultation with Austria (> required according to article 8.2 transport protocol).
- Only 20% of the traffic between Garmisch-Partenkirchen and Munich will be public transport (giving priority to public transport, according to Article 13 of the required transport protocol).

Should Bavaria be successful in its bid and the proposed road construction plans put in place, it may be necessary to check for potential breaches of contract.

4) Temporary infrastructures – not a suitable concept

The IOC is always very approving of temporary constructions⁷. This includes parking for thousands of cars and buses near the sports facilities, outsourced Park & Ride sites, extra access roads for utilities, etc. But whether the structures are temporary or permanent, there is always the problem of long-term damage to the landscape of the mountain areas. Thousands of cars parked on agricultural land compacts the soil and has an adverse effect on the vegetation, meaning that rainwater can no longer drain away - resulting in meadows often becoming flooded and unusable for agriculture. In the restricted valley floors, there are few other alternative areas - and so the livelihood of farmers is adversely affected.

Furthermore, construction work, tree felling, the filling in of meadows and moors and so on, is also carried out for temporary structures as well. None of this can be reversed. Temporary structures are therefore not the solution in areas of natural beauty or on agricultural land. However, they are perfectly suited as sham solutions and for encouraging irresponsible construction plans.

This is true not only for the European Alps, but for all mountainous and rural areas.

5) Mobility management

In view of the number of people that will need to be transported both before and during the Olympic games - according to the IOC report, there will be 100,000 accredited people and also a further 100,000 visitors on peak days⁸ - the high proportion of cars in the transportation total is unacceptable. (For the venues in Bavaria, it is anticipated that 50 to

⁶ http://www.alpconv.org/theconvention/index_de

⁷ 2018 Candidature Acceptance Procedure; Technical Manual on Transport

⁸ report, page 16

60% of people will be traveling by car, with considerably more doing so for the journey to Garmisch-Partenkirchen)

The IOC must ensure for the future that there is a reduction in the use of cars. This also applies to their own "Olympic family". However, the current IOC rules continue to favor vehicle fleet management and are fixed on the car as the means of mobility management..

Some examples of this:

- Even the wording of the manual on transport is interesting as it equates infrastructure with road infrastructure as a matter of course, and sees "non-road-based transport modes"⁹ as a separate issue. References to fleet operations mean - in their eyes naturally - only the passenger car fleet¹⁰, and so it continues.

- The demands of the extensive "Olympic family" (including its advisers and sponsors) who will be traveling exclusively in cars using their own vehicles and chauffeurs, parking areas and own entrances, with unlimited mileage and often at all times¹¹ is seen by many people as excessive. This is likely to generate disproportionate traffic, and furthermore, it contradicts the Olympic ideals of promoting discipline and athletic ethos. And even assuming that in the year 2018, the vehicle fleet will emit far less noise and pollution than current models, the imposition on the local population would be far too high.

- The demand for exclusive "Olympic lanes" for the "Olympic family" - the athletes, sponsors, consultants, etc, for at least 15 hours per day¹²

- At the same time there are strict management plans which even go as far as a ban on driving for the local population¹³.

- There is no mention in the technical manual of a preference for transferring traffic (including Olympic traffic) to trains/trams etc, which are less at risk of congestion problems, or an equalization of the program of events to reduce timetable stress, nor of traffic reduction (allocating a kilometer-budget for the "Olympic family" vehicles). We see this both as a missed approach and an undermining of the statements testifying to the IOC's environmental commitment.

6) Supply concepts

Measures to systematically promote the regional economy are standard modern transportation concepts. The IOC Manual for trademark protection has to follow it's own principles. Regulations such as those for so-called "clean areas" and to "protect the brand-name sponsors, " are examples where until now, regional utilities have been at least hindered or even excluded.

⁹ technical manual on transport, Introduction, p.26, et al

¹⁰ technical manual on transport, Introduction, p.26

¹¹ Technical Manual on transport, p. 28 / 29

¹² Technical Manual on Transport, p. 61

¹³ "would require very strong transport management measures, including the implementation of general traffic restrictions to cope with Games traffic." Report p. 47

This is within the power of the IOC: requirements for the transport sector

- The IOC shall express its commitment to the Alpine Convention and its trade protocols, and act accordingly. The limited environmental capacity of mountainous areas (limited space, unstable slopes, the susceptibility of the ground to soil compaction, the particular propagation conditions there of noise and air pollutants) must be taken into full consideration.
- The selection criteria for the Olympic Winter Games shall be revised so that no additional construction or expansion of road infrastructure solely for the purpose of the Olympic Games is sanctioned.
- The IOC shall make the award of the hosting of the Olympic Games dependent on the successful candidate region's agreement to respect the emission levels allowed under the Clean Air Ordinance and the Noise Abatement Regulations before, during and after the Games.
- The IOC shall make the award of the hosting of the Olympic Games dependent on the successful candidate region's agreement, especially in mountain areas, to a particular effort being made to reduce road traffic and for a shift to more sustainable transport modes.
- The IOC shall commit itself to a carbon-neutral games: the choice of the successful candidate region is dependent on it being able to prove it has an exemplary regional climate policy already in place, with ambitious targets for the reduction of carbon dioxide (CO₂). In the short-term, while the games are taking place, the high emissions are offset by appropriate measures within the affected region. The games themselves must provide a good impetus for long-term, climate-friendly mobility options.
- Helicopter flights shall be restricted to rescue flights, limited monitoring by the police, and aerial photography for television broadcasts.
- The IOC shall make it a condition that a minimum of 70% of all journeys in connection with the Olympic games are by ecological transportation. (The only exception to this is rescue traffic)
- The IOC and the entire "Olympic family" shall reduce their own vehicle fleet available during the games to a third of the current number.
- The IOC shall endorse the aim of supply journeys for the Games covering short distances only. Regional products must be given full approval, and regional producers will be involved in the catering etc.