INTRODUCTION

TGV Med is part of the TGV Network of high speed rail lines linking major cities in France. It opened in 2001.

The project includes new stations at Valence, Avignon and Aix-en-Provence, six station refurbishments and increasing the speed standard on the Paris-Lyon line to 300km/hr. It is also associated with the Euroméditerranée regeneration project in Marseille.

BACKGROUND

The main objective of the project was to provide a high speed rail link in the south of France, linking to the wider high speed network of routes through the country and across Europe. More specifically, the objective of reducing journey times between Marseille and Paris to three hours was, for the national rail operator SNCF, part of a wider strategy of gaining market share from air travel.

SNCF discussed the project at an early stage with regional politicians, who were generally supportive as it was seen as a catalyst for economic revival in the region. However, when details leaked out into the public domain, widespread public opposition began. Although planning approval was finally given, as usual for French infrastructure projects through the déclaration d’utilité publique (DUP) mechanism, this was preceded by two unique mechanisms introduced by the government to resolve conflicts and develop a consensus around the route.

The Querrien Mission created a degree of agreement around a selected route, but did not consider protest groups’ calls to use existing railway corridors and pendular technology, and did not fully resolve the conflict. Protestors were critical of SNCF’s power to judge its own proposal and a College of Experts was established, with members nominated by government, SNCF and protest groups. The College used independent experts to conduct an evaluation of SNCF’s proposals, directed by a committee of all stakeholders.

Some groups, including the government’s environment ministry, remained opposed on the basis of environmental and risk issues. The route crossed designated ecological zones and 138km of floodplains, and passed near to a nuclear site. These concerns were reiterated in the official public survey report to government.
The extent of the protest movement helped to trigger several pieces of new legislation affecting the decision-making procedure for major transport projects.

**CHARACTERISTICS**

The cost was estimated at EUR 4.51bn in 1994 (2003 prices) but fell when part of the route was cut, and the final project cost was only EUR 4.36bn in 2003 (USD 6.61bn at 2010 prices)\(^1\). However, the cost of station construction was 26% above the estimate.

SNCF was both client and project manager, contracting separately with a large number of companies for the construction of the line. In contrast to its customary integrated hierarchical structure, and in response to the strength of opposition, it established a project manager in the local area at an early stage. When construction started, the local team had grown to 500 people.

In 1997, the organisational structure of the French rail network changed to reflect changes in European law. A new body, Réseau Ferré de France (RFF), assumed responsibility for rail infrastructure and construction of new lines, while SNCF remained the main service operator and owner of stations. Although no longer officially the main client, SNCF remained project manager for the line on behalf of RFF. Station construction was more problematic, with responsibility shared between SNCF, RFF and the local authorities, and a stakeholders group was convened to resolve disagreements.

**TIMELINE ISSUES**

The task of developing a consensus around the project and the detailed route caused substantial delays. In 1991, an opening in 1998 was envisaged, but when the project was finally approved in 1994, the opening date had slipped to 2000. A further 18 month delay was then caused by budgetary constraints imposed on SNCF.

**FUNDING**

The project was funded mainly by SNCF by recourse to a loan, with the debt transferred to RFF on its formation. A national government subsidy of 10% guaranteed SNCF a profitable rate of return of 8%. Small subsidies were provided by local authorities, for station buildings, and the European Union. Passenger numbers (4.5m in 2004) were initially lower than predicted due to the unfavourable economic climate.

\(^1\) Costs have been converted to USD at 2010 prices, using historic inflation rates and current exchange rates, to allow comparison between projects.