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Down to Earth

Good Practice

**Reactivation of the Ermstalbahn in the
Neckar-Alb Region**

1 GP

As explained above, each PP must complete the template below with potential GPs (3 or 4, at least, one template per GP) identified in its region.

[Regional Association Neckar-Alb Germany]

1. General information

Author(s)	Annika Hiller
Project acronym	DOWN TO EARTH
Policy Instrument	Regional Plan Neckar-Alb
PI public authority	Regional Association Neckar-Alb
Version	1.0
Date	2024/03/25
GP Code ¹	PP05 RVNA

2. GP basic information

Number and Title of the GP	Reactivation of the Ermstalbahn in the Neckar-Alb Region
Body responsible for the implementation	Erms-Neckar-Bahn AG (ENAG) RSBNA Erms-Neckar-Bahn Schieneninfrastruktur GmbH Pfählerstraße 17 72574 Bad Urach https://erms-neckar-bahn.de
Thematic objective of the GP (multiple choice if needed)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Year 1. Environmental risks related with depopulation and aging population in rural areas. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Year 2. All-type of access barriers to young farmers in depopulated rural areas. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Year 3. Policy instruments to foster the role of farmers and land managers in fighting climate change and environmental risks.

¹ Please, fill in the GP code following the next instructions: GP-PARTNER CODE-ACRONYM- GP number (i.e.: GP-LP01-AGADER-01).
PPs CODE and ACRONYMS: LP01-PP02 AGADER-FJDV / PP03 MoC / PP04 NMA / PP05 RVNA / PP06 UPatras / PP08 BSC.

Geographical scope of the GP	<input type="checkbox"/> National <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Regional <input type="checkbox"/> Local
Location of the GP	Erm Valley (Metzingen via Dettingen to Bad Urach), County of Reutlingen, Neckar-Alb Region, southwest Germany.

3. GP detailed description

Summary of the GP	The reactivated Ermstalbahn was electrified and expanded for accessibility and to improve livability, contributing to both climate action and demographic stability.
Detailed information on the GP	<p>The reactivation and electrification of the Ermstalbahn promotes carbon-neutral transport, significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions compared to traditional motorized vehicles, contributing to climate change mitigation. By connecting urban and rural areas, the railway improves accessibility for various demographic groups. This helps to make the rural Swabian Alb more attractive to live in, creates employment and counters depopulation by ensuring these part of the Neckar-Alb region remains viable and well-connected. As a result, the Erms valley thrives economically and boosts tourism and avoiding the abandonment of these areas. The project is a model for sustainable regional development driven by a citizens' initiative, that pushed for its reactivation it in 1999. The primary obstacle was the co-financing required from the state, district, and local authorities. From 2019 to 2022, the line was expanded and electrified as part of the Neckar-Alb regional light rail system.</p> <p>By ensuring that key transportation infrastructure is robust and future-proof, the region is better equipped to handle extreme weather events, such as heatwaves, storms, or flooding, which can disrupt transportation networks. A resilient rail network helps maintain connectivity and mobility even under adverse conditions.</p> <p>The Ermstalbahn reduces the need for additional road expansions and parking spaces, which typically require clearing natural habitats. By taking pressure off the region's road infrastructure, the railway supports more sustainable land use.</p>
Resources needed	<p>Citizen initiative: "Pro Ermstalbahn"</p> <p>Planning: Regional Association policies; Special purpose association Regional-Stadtbahn Neckar-Alb</p> <p>Financially and operationally supported by municipalities in the Erms Valley, Reutlingen district and Federal State</p> <p>ENAG annual costs (2013-2017): 200,500 EUR</p> <p>Expansion and electrification (2017-2023): 31.5 million EUR</p>
Actors involved	<p><u>Actors involved:</u></p> <p>Erms-Neckar-Bahn AG (ENAG) emerged from Ermstal-Verkehrsgesellschaft mbH in 1992 through a reorganisation and maintains the Erms Valley railway line from Metzingen to Bad Urach.</p> <p>Special purpose association Regional-Stadtbahn Neckar-Alb: A cooperation including the Regional Association Neckar-Alb, the three counties of Tübingen, Reutlingen and Zollernalb, the city of Reutlingen and the city of Tübingen Regional-Stadtbahn Neckar-Alb.</p>

	<p>Its tasks are planning, organisation, project funding, and integration of the Ermstalbahn into the network of the Neckar-Alb Regional Light Rail.</p> <p>County of Reutlingen: supported and funded passenger transport.</p> <p>Municipalities of Metzingen, Dettingen and Bad Urach supported reactivation processes in terms of the increasingly pressing traffic problems in the valley.</p> <p>Federal State of Baden-Württemberg funded the electrification and expansion of the Ermstalbahn as part of the project Neckar-Alb Regional Light Rail (RSB).</p> <p><u>Beneficiaries of the Initiative:</u></p> <p>Local communities and Municipalities (County of Reutlingen)</p> <p>Local economy (commuting workers, interconnection to urban commercial and industrial areas)</p> <p>Local tourism (increase of overnight stays, services and gastronomy, more daytime visitors)</p>
Timescale	<p>27.12.1873 Inauguration of the Erms Valley Railway</p> <p>28.05.1976 Cessation of passenger transport</p> <p>1984 Initiative "Pro Ermstalbahn" is formed, from then Railway enthusiasts organised special trains and special trips.</p> <p>05.07.1988 Foundation of the Ermstal-Verkehrsgesellschaft mbH (EVG)</p> <p>01.01.1994 Railway infrastructure is sold to EVG</p> <p>22 August 1995 EVG is renamed Erms-Neckar-Bahn AG (ENAG)</p> <p>24.05.1998 Tourist services on Sundays and public holidays are resumed</p> <p>31.07.1999 Opening journey</p> <p>01.08.1999 Resumption of regular rail passenger services with Regio shuttles (VT 650), Inauguration of three new stops (Dettingen-Lehen, -Freibad and -Gsaidt)</p> <p>01.05.2001 Through-connection of trains on Saturdays, Sundays, and public holidays every 2 hours to and from Reutlingen</p> <p>04.03.2004 Bad Urach Ermstal hospital stop is opened, Line speed increased to 80 km/h</p> <p>2013 Agreement for the Follow-up financing of the Ermstal</p> <p>2017- 2022 expansion and electrification as part of the realisation of the Neckar-Alb regional light rail system</p> <p>10.12.2022 Electrification was completed in December 2022, with the first electric train travelling through the Erms Valley on 10 December 2022.</p> <p>2023 Through-connection from Bad Urach via Tübingen with the Ammertalbahn (another reactivated railway in the Neckar-Alb region) to Herrenberg.</p> <p>2023 Cooperation with the Zweckverband Regional-Stadtbahn Neckar-Alb (Regional Light Rail Network Neckar-Alb)</p>

4. Evidence of success and transferability

Evidence of success

Rescued from closure, the Ermstalbahn project not only contributes to reducing emissions and addressing access to rural areas but also enhances the ability of the Erms Valley and surrounding municipalities to adapt to and thrive in the face of environmental challenges posed by climate change. It offers hourly direct connections and faster travel than by car to urban areas like Reutlingen. Public traffic handles nearly 70% of valley traffic. From 2001 a 65% increase in passengers was achieved. The citizens' initiative "Pro Ermstalbahn" involved significant community participation and collaboration with local authorities, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for the project's success.

Regional impact

The Neckar-Alb Regional Association supported political initiatives to preserve railway lines and took action in several reactivations of railway lines, as a dense network of transport routes is aimed for in terms of regional planning. With the reactivation of the Ermstalbahn, the idea of a regional light rail system was born in the 1980s. As a result, the Neckar-Alb regional urban railway association was founded and is being implemented at regional level.

For decades, rural railway lines were deemed obsolete. However, recent initiatives challenged this perception, recognizing railways' potential to address pressing issues like climate change, pollution, and rural traffic congestion. In the Neckar-Alb Region, efforts to access and develop rural areas have gained momentum since the late 1980s, driven by bottom-up calls for reactivation.

The revival of the Ermstalbahn exemplifies this shift. Through the engagement of a citizen's initiative, this railway line has been revitalized to serve not only as a mode of transportation but also as a catalyst for rural development. Settlements along the Ermstalbahn have experienced increased connectivity and economic opportunities, with the railway playing a central role in shaping local growth.

Furthermore, the reactivation of the Ermstalbahn has significantly impacted tourism development in the Swabian Alb. With the now operational railway, the UNESCO-certified Swabian Alb Biosphere Reserve can offer a gentle and environmentally friendly way to explore the region to visitors.

With the running Ermstalbahn, the UNESCO certified Swabian Alb Biosphere Reserve has a sustainable transport concept thanks to the Erms Valley railway and a further reactivation of the Swabian Alb railway, which makes sustainable and gentle tourism possible.

Looking ahead, ambitious plans for Bad Urach's railway station aim to transform it into a mobility hub, creating a focal point for various transportation modes, including buses and road rail services. This integrated approach not only enhances connectivity within the town but also strengthens its position as a gateway to the wider region.

In summary, the reactivation of railway lines in rural areas represents a paradigm shift in transportation policy. By leveraging railways as tools for sustainable development, communities in the Neckar-Alb Region are tackling climate change, promoting local accessibility, and fostering tourism while redefining the role of railways in rural landscapes.

Potential for transferability (Overview)

Depopulated areas often struggle with accessibility barriers, especially in tourism and attracting younger demographics via public transport. The Ermstalbahn's revitalization and enhanced connectivity offer a replicable model for addressing these challenges and provides carbon-neutral transport. Improves access to rural areas by connecting Bad Urach with the broader Neckar-Alb regional light rail system. New stops in Dettingen and Bad Urach enhance access to key services and facilities, like schools and healthcare, which are crucial for making rural areas more livable. Prioritizing railways can improve access and appeal across demographics, reducing the risk of depopulation. The Ermstalbahn's success underscores the benefits of investing in rail infrastructure to foster sustainable regional development. It offers a framework for other regions to combat environmental degradation and depopulation.

By promoting the shift to railways as a scalable solution, other rural regions can adopt similar initiatives to reduce their carbon footprint and improve rural connectivity, thereby preventing depopulation.

High-quality infrastructure, particularly in public transportation, plays a key role in retaining populations in rural areas. It makes rural life more convenient and connected to urban economic centres, preventing outmigration and ensuring long-term demographic stability.

By showing how disused or underutilized railways can be revitalized and made sustainable, it offers a blueprint for other regions to follow, reducing car reliance and boosting environmental resilience elsewhere.

Rate of potential transferability

Rate this potential on a scale of 1-5, where 1 means low potential for transferability and 5 means high potential for transferability

1 2 3 4 5

5. GP methodological viability

Study visit: theoretical session

In your opinion, how likely will it be to have a theoretical session about the GP? (1 – very unlikely | 5 – very likely)

1 2 3 4 5

Add a short explanation of your rating [Max. 500 characters]

We have included it in our agenda for the Study Visit Neckar-Alb.

Study visit: practical session

In your opinion, how likely will it be to visit the experience? (1 – extremely unlikely | 5 – extremely likely)

1 2 3 4 5

Add a short explanation of your rating [Max. 500 characters]

We have included it in our agenda for the Study Visit Neckar-Alb.

6. GP pictures

GP pictures

If possible, provide pictures of the initiative