

A (concise) historical outline

1989-1991

Local Administrators and citizens of the Susa Valley learn from the newspapers that memorandums of understanding and other agreements have been signed by the Major of Torino, the President of the Piedmont Region ... together with the Italian Railways, the Minister of Transport, the Major of Lyon ... concerning a High Speed Railway line (TAV, i.e. “Treno ad Alta Velocità”) running across their valley, doubling the existing one and ending with a 54 km tunnel connecting Susa to Saint Jean de Maurienne.

The rumours of that time report of a fast passenger line similar to the French TGV. Only some years later it has been admitted that the new line will be operated prevalently with goods trains, even if still today the TGV-like image is preserved in the public communication.

1989-1991

First public meetings in the valley. Establishment of a committee (named “Habitat”) to provide the municipalities and their coordinating body (“Comunità Montana” of the lower Susa Valley) with technical consultancy. Experts from several disciplines join the Habitat committee and scientifically document the environmental consequences of the new infrastructure and its economical effectiveness.

1991 up to today

All Town Councils start to deliberate against the TAV project. The official deliberations are repeated and reinforced on occasion of new events. Gradually, also several Municipalities external to the Susa Valley associate themselves through similar deliberations (the North and West “belts” of Torino). In the meanwhile the Municipalities, the “Comunità Montana” and its consultants ask again and again to see the project and to discuss it. Several sets of meetings are organized, never exceeding the Regional level (until to the last weeks). The project went on independently and no convincing answers to the valley’s concerns arrived.

The growing participation of the people to the protest against the TAV project

March 2nd, 1996

First demonstration march in S. Ambrogio: about 3,500 people

May 31st, 2003

Demonstration march from Borgone to Bussoleno: about 20,000 people

June 5th, 2005

Protest march from Susa to Venaus: about 30,000 people

November 16th, 2006

General strike in the lower Susa Valley. Protest march from Bussoleno to Susa: almost 80,000 people

The project went on independently. The national press and the main television networks constantly minimized these events.

2003

The “preliminary project” of the line in the Susa Valley is finally presented. It includes a significant section enclosed in tunnels, to meet some requests of the Piedmont Region. But this solution raises new critical issues.

However, the new “Legge Obiettivo”, passed by the present Italian Government, allows to start realization basing on an Environmental Impact Assessment done with reference to the preliminary project. Only a few weeks are accorded to the local Administrations to propose observations on the preliminary project as well as on the related Environmental Impact Assessment

All Municipalities, including those of the North and West Torino belts, and both Comunità Montane (lower and upper Susa Valley), identify together a set of seven critical issues, which deserve the highest attention prior to any start of the the activities related to the realization of the new infrastructure.

New meetings at the Regional and Province levels are called, all rather inconclusive.

The seven critical issues raised by the Local Administrations as regard to the preliminary project

- 1) The scheme of operations of the new infrastructure is not declared, but it looks as though the town of Torino will not be served by it. An important connection between the new line and the road-rail distribution hub of Orbassano (which otherwise should be dismissed) is missing
- 2) A strong hydro-geological instability may be originated, basing on the experience done with the tragic flood of the year 2000
- 3) There are unsolved problems regarding the electric line and station needed to power the new railway
- 4) A strong acoustic environmental impact is expected in all open-air sections. This impact is non traditional, in that it consists of a sequence of very noisy and frequent events (more than 400 over day and night, with an intermittence rate of 3-4 min) and therefore cannot be ruled by the current regulations (which take advantage of time averaged noise level). Moreover, elevated settlements cannot be protected by the usual sound barriers.

- 5) No alleviation to the huge disturbance caused by the railway yards and by the lorries transporting the extracted or required materials during the next 15-20 years is proposed, probably because of the impossibility to propose one. At the same time, no acceptable solutions to set down the materials extracted from the tunnels (about 7 millions of cubic meters) are offered. Furthermore, the well known presence of asbestos inside the mountains to be crossed by the tunnels in the lower Susa Valley raises the issue of a possible dispersion of dangerous substances. A similar problem occurs with the 54 km base tunnel, which crosses uranium veins.
- 6) The new tunnels will cause problems to the water supply, due to the interference with the sources and the interruptions of the underground layers.
- 7) The foreseen mechanism of indemnity for the people whose homes will become uninhabitable or completely lose their market values is absolutely inadequate and cannot even be compared to that adopted in the neighbouring France.

2005

Regardless of the 7 critical issues raised by the Municipalities, LTF (Lyon Turin Ferroviaire) communicates to the Municipalities its will to start a set of geo-technical drillings aimed to assess the quality of the rocks in view of the start of the excavation activities.

Additionally, LTF intends also start the “exploratory drift” at Venaus, a 6.3 m diameter by 11 km length tunnel anticipating the realization of the service tube of the final infrastructure. The contracts for all these works are already awarded.

The people of the Susa Valley mobilize and organize “garrisons” on the places destined to the geo-technical drillings and to the exploratory drift in Venaus.

At last, the National Government sets up a technical committee (“Commissione Rivalta”), including all subjects and also the consultants of the Comunità Montana, with the charge to analyze the seven critical issues. Only a two-month time is accorded to discuss all questions on the table.

The Commissione Rivalta discusses first the issue of the dangerous substances, the asbestos in particular. It turns out that neither the exploratory drift of Venaus, nor most proposed drillings are adequate to assess the danger. Only 3 drillings out of the 27 requested by LTF could serve this scope, even if largely insufficient to map the territory. This conclusion is reached after three meetings.

Before the Commissione Rivalta can proceed to consider the other critical issues, the Italian Government requires the immediate start of the three drillings and also of the exploratory drift in Venaus (openly, to officially communicate the start of the activities to the EU). The Municipalities refuse their consensus since all other issues are still to be discussed. The Government suspends the Commissione Rivalta for some weeks.

On October 31st nearly 1,000 policemen occupy the territories destined to the three drillings, resisted one whole day by more than 500 people. At present the zone is still under military occupation: people must show documents to enter their own homes. The Comunità Montana withdraws its consultants from the Commissione Rivalta.

In the following days it turns out that only one site out of the three is suitable for drilling. The technical significance of the whole operation (implying a consistent military presence on the territory) is still hard to understand.

The lower Susa Valley declares a general strike. On November 16th about 80,000 people march from Bussoleno to Susa (8 km) to peacefully protest.

The Government and LTF do not desist. In the last days letters have been sent to the owners of the estates in Venaus, announcing their occupations and the start of the works of the “exploratory drift” on November 30th, 2005.

The people of the Susa Valley is fully aware of the deception implied by the use of the wording “exploratory drift” and of the fact that this is the actual start of the base tunnel excavation.