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Stalled ring road project "loses Catalonia 645 million euros"

The B-40 ring road, which was to have opened in 1996, will run from Abrera to la Roca del Vallès

MICHAEL BUNN

Miquel Valls, the president of the Barcelona Chamber of Commerce, claimed yesterday that the economy of Catalonia has lost out on earnings totalling 645 million euros since 1996, the year when the new B-40 road was due to have been opened.

Valls said that this loss of earnings had taken place because the project to build the city's fourth ring road, between Abrera and la Roca del Vallès, had not yet been completed. The report entitled *The orbital B-40 highway* which has been drawn up by the Chamber of Commerce, claims that if the highway had been completed, this would have represented a significant reduction in travel times and road accidents, as well as a marked increase in competitiveness.

The study has established that the B-40 highway will serve three different purposes: it will exist as the city's fourth ring road, bypassing the metropolitan area and connecting



The president of the Barcelona Chamber of Commerce Miquel Valls (right) and Catalan minister of trade Pere Esteve. / EFE

Abrera and la Roca del Vallès, it will offer an alternative to the N-11 main road between Abrera and Sils, and it will provide a perimetral axis route from la Bisbal del Penedès as far as Sils.

Construction of the fourth ring road would also help create 10,000 new jobs and, if used as an alternative to the N-11, it is estimated that it will create a further 20,000 to

30,000 jobs.

Valls said that this building project is "essential and high-priority", and that he did not consider the alternative project to replace the B-40 with rail infrastructure as being at all viable. Protest groups against the building of the B-40 claim however that a rail network would in fact be an ideal solution.

Forecasts by the Chamber of

Commerce suggest that the macro-economic revenue derived from this project within 30 years will be three times the cost of the ring road.

The project is currently in the draft stage (specifically the Abrera-Terrassa section), while a new study is being carried out on the Terrassa-Granollers/St Celoni section, replacing the previous report that was drafted in 1995.

Royes stresses the "vital future role" of the Zona Franca consortium

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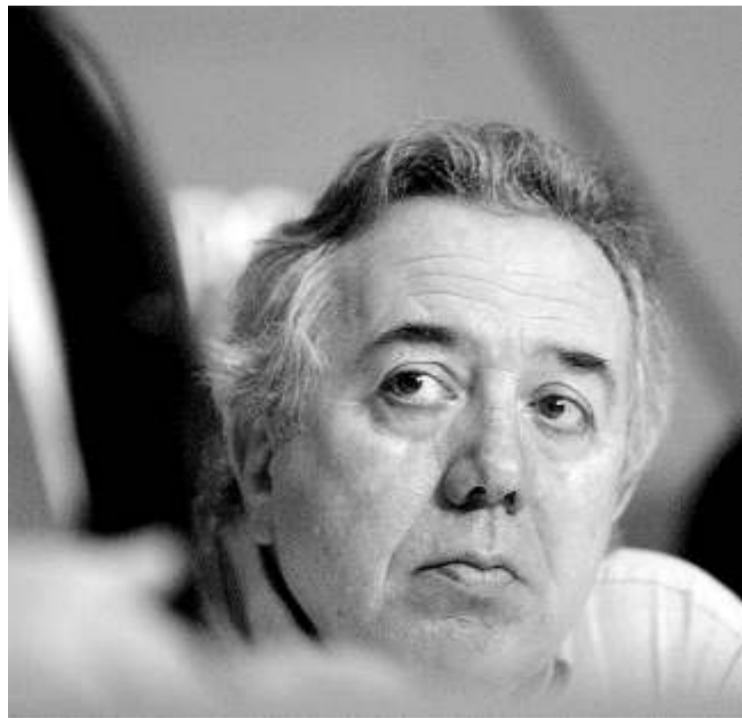
Speaking at a meeting held yesterday morning, Manel Royes, the new state delegate government for the Zona Franca consortium, has stressed the "key role" which he believes this organisation will play in the development of public policy with respect to industrial land as well as to the evolution of the Catalan economy.

Royes said that "only the consortium is capable of offering technological installation and industrial land" to boost the Catalan economy especially now that "we have entered an age of delocation." He also added that "for the first time, all the institutions operating in Catalonia share the same orientation and philosophy".

Speaking on his coming respon-

sibilities as the head of the consortium, Royes mentioned projects such as the Levante inter-university campus, the 22@ project in the Poblenou district of Barcelona which is part of Forum 2004 and the future of the old military barracks located in the Sant Andreu district. Meanwhile, his predecessor Enrique Lacalle admitted that the last eight years in which he has held the ministerial post had been "exciting," and he took the opportunity to give a brief summary of the achievements and activities of the consortium during that time. He mentioned events that had taken place such as Barcelona Meeting Point, as well as the over 95,000 square metres of office space which have been built in the Zona Franca Logistical Park.

Lacalle went on to mention the



Manel Royes, state delegate for the Zona Franca consortium. / GABRIEL MASSANA

fact that during the time in which he has headed the organisation, profits have risen by 434.19%, and assets have climbed by 57.85%. However,

Lacalle modestly added that he was convinced that Royes would succeed in "improving on these results in the coming years".

LEISURE

Bars to set up association

Catalonia's 15,000 music bars, pubs and discotheques have taken the first step towards forming an organisation the Catalan Association of Businesspeople for Quality in Leisure (known as the ECO) - that will enable them to establish quality systems and to improve the public image of the sector. Dionisio Lara, the president of the Spanish ECO, said that owing to the fact that neighbours tended to associate these bars and clubs with drugs, fights and general disturbance, "our profession has been demonised, and we want to give it back the dignity that it deserves". A study will be carried out in July in order to determine the quality criteria that should be applied and to enable the organisation to draw up a much-needed quality framework. In Catalonia, these establishments provide a service to over two million people every week, and generate some 2.4 billion euros every year.

LOCAL COUNCILS

Housing plan approved

The city council of Tarragona has voted in favour of the Terres Cavades development plan. This plan, which covers an area 100 hectares in size south of the city, will involve the construction of 4,500 homes, one thousand of which will be protected housing. The revised plan was passed yesterday during a full council session, after having been submitted as an urgent matter for the council. All votes in favour of the plan came from the ruling CiU/PP coalition, while the ERC spokesman, Xavier Almagro, criticised the project by saying that the design of the estate was "unsuitable" and that it was far too densely laid-out. Almagro also complained of "real estate mobbing", in the form of pressure being brought by the landowners, adding that this pressure had been "legal but not ethical".

INDUSTRY

Factory fire at Pinyana

Four teams of firemen were fighting yesterday morning to put out a fire at a factory that manufactured refrigeration units in Pinyana de Torreferrera (Segrià). The fire broke out on Sunday evening, completely destroying the factory and leaving 150 workers unemployed. The town council held an urgent meeting yesterday to discuss measures to help these employees. Meanwhile, other cooperatives in the municipality have offered their services to the members of the agricultural firm. After visiting the site of the fire, local mayor Sergi Burgués announced that he will be meeting representatives of the agricultural company, as well as the departments of industry and agriculture of the Catalan government, in order to see "what should be done about the company and its employees".