

The Hochsonnberg Project

Commencement of ecological compensatory measures. Construction works of lifts and cable cars don't start yet.

The Hochsonnberg Project is one of Salzburg's most important lift projects. By expanding the Schmittten ski area, the attractiveness of the Zell am See-Kaprun winter sports region will be further enhanced, which in turn will benefit the entire region. Piesendorf will be connected to the Schmitttenhöhe ski area by the construction of 4 lifts and associated pistes. The total cost for the whole project is estimated to amount to approximately €90 million.

Planned lifts and pistes

In order to achieve this extension of the ski area, 3 chairlifts, one 10-seater monocable gondola lift, 4 pistes, and a multifunctional ski track are envisaged, along with snowmaking facilities with a reservoir. Overall, the ski area will be increased by 23 hectares. The bottom station in Piesendorf will house a ski centre with bistro, ski school office and sports shop, and will offer parking for approximately 700 cars and about 20 buses.

Numerous benefits for tourism, economy, and traffic

The Hochsonnberg Project will create additional piste areas at high altitude, an aspect that due to their snow sureness is becoming ever more important. From a tourist's perspective, the Hochsonnberg Project is indispensable if the Zell am See-Kaprun region is to retain its position as a highly attractive winter sports destination. Meanwhile, the neighbouring districts of Piesendorf and Niedernsill will increase in value as regards tourism. Local economy will receive an important impulse thanks to the high investment involved, and in future traffic will be better distributed between Piesendorf-West, Kaprun and Schüttdorf. A deconcentration of traffic will lead to improved safety for all road users.

Official process not yet complete

Plans for the project initially began as long as 10 years ago. In 2010 documents were submitted for environmental impact assessment and in 2011, the Salzburg State Government gave its approval. After several appeals and official dealings, these were then rejected in April 2018 by the Court of Federal Administration. Thereupon the Nature Conservation Union, the Alpine Club, and a citizens' initiative "Save the Hochsonnberg" filed an extraordinary appeal. In August 2018 the Court of Federal Administration for the appeal refused the suspensory effect whereby the positive decision of the Salzburg state government remained legally valid. The final decision about the extraordinary appeal remains open. It is hoped that a decision will be received by the Schmitttenhöhebahn within a year. If the outcome is positive, construction of the initial lifts can begin. It is envisaged that the project will entail a total construction time of at least 5 years.

Commencement of ecological compensatory measures

In the meantime, until the outcome of the extraordinary appeal is known, in October 2018 initial work on ecological compensatory measures will commence. Whilst it is not possible to begin construction of the lifts, important forestry work can be undertaken. As a first step, an area of 50 hectares of spruce forest will be cleared and suitably prepared to serve as a valuable habitat for grouse. This work in itself will take over a year.