



Ocean Plan Viewer

for Microsoft Project plans exported as XML

User manual · Version 5.5e · Desktop client for Windows, Linux and Raspberry Pi OS

1 · What this is

Ocean Plan Viewer opens a Microsoft Project plan that has been exported as MSPDI XML, and shows it three ways: as a Gantt chart, as a task list and as a resource list.

It never writes to the plan. There is no editing, no rescheduling and no saving of plans; the viewer cannot alter a plan even by accident. A plan you publish is the plan your readers see. The only files it ever writes are a PNG image of the chart, when you ask for one, and a diagnostic text file described in section 12.

It is not a planner and does not try to be. If you need to change a plan, you need Microsoft Project; if you need to *read* one, this is enough, and the people reading it need no licence of their own.

Nothing is remembered between sessions

No recent-files list, no last folder, no window size, no column widths. The only thing kept is the last web address you loaded from, and only until you close the program. The viewer keeps no settings of its own, so there is no settings file to find and none to clean up.

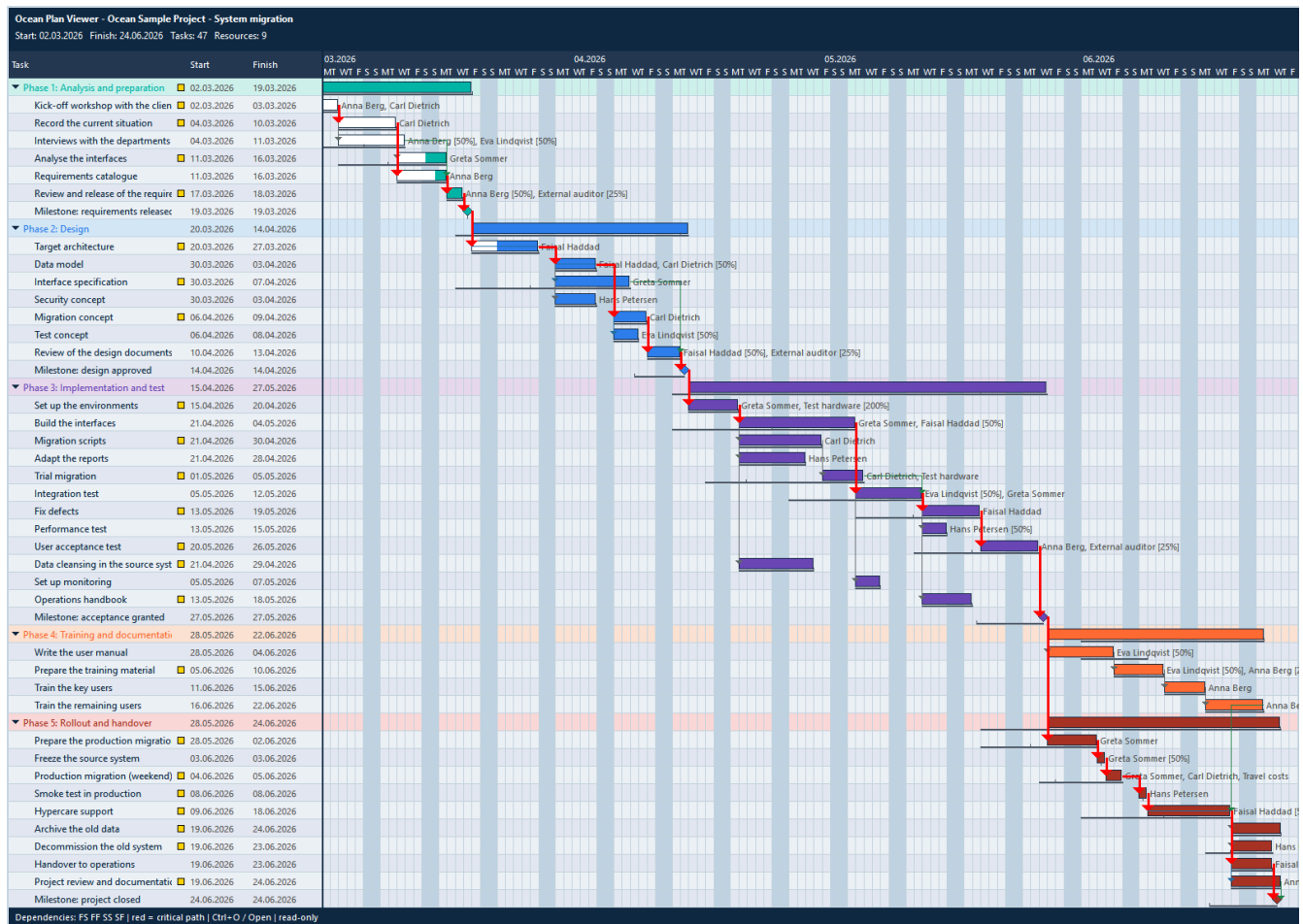
Getting started

1. Unzip the archive anywhere you like — a folder, a memory stick, a network drive. There is no installer and no administrator rights are needed.
2. Run the program. On Windows it is a single .exe; nothing else in the folder is required to start it.
3. Open the plan included in the archive, `Ocean_Sample_Project.xml`, to see the whole viewer working before you point it at your own plan.

Windows may say the publisher is unknown

The program is not code-signed, so Windows shows a warning the first time you run it. Choose *More info* and then *Run anyway*. We would rather tell you this than have you assume something is wrong.

2 · Opening a plan



The sample plan supplied with the viewer, fully expanded: 47 tasks in five phases. The names beside the bars are the assigned resources.

Five ways to open a plan. They all do the same thing.

From a file

The **Open** button, **Ctrl+O**, or drag the file onto the window. The file dialog offers XML (*.xml) and All files.

Dragging takes **one** file: if you drop several, the first opens and the rest are ignored. A file that is not .xml gives "Only MS-Project XML files are supported."

From a network share

There is no separate command — type or paste a UNC path such as \\server\share\plan.xml into the file dialog. On Linux and Raspberry Pi OS the share is mounted by the operating system first and is then an ordinary path.

From a web address

Ctrl+U opens a box for an address, pre-filled with the last one you used in this session. Both http and https work. While it fetches, the status bar reads Loading <url> ...

Unlike a web browser, the desktop viewer is not restricted to servers that permit cross-origin reads, so it can open a plan from an intranet server that a browser would refuse. If it cannot: "The address could not be read. Check the address, and that the server is reachable."

By dropping a plan on the program icon

Drop a plan on the viewer's icon and it starts with that plan open. The same happens if the viewer is set as the program for that kind of file and you open one. Both work because the system hands the viewer the path, which is also what the next section uses.

From a command line, or a link that runs one

Start the viewer with a plan already open by naming it:

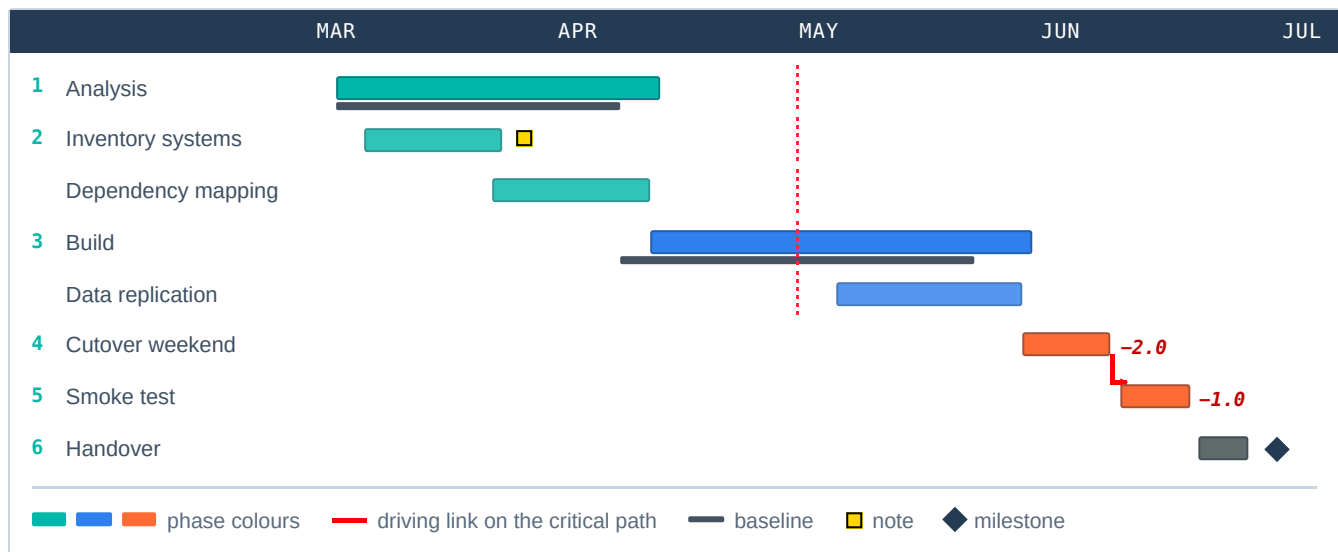
```
ocean-viewer C:\Plans\migration.xml
ocean-viewer \\server\plans\migration.xml
ocean-viewer https://intranet/plans/migration.xml
```

Quote the value if it contains spaces. The switch /o may be put before the plan and means the same thing; it is the older form and still works everywhere. This is also how a link elsewhere — in Microsoft Teams, in an email, on an intranet page — can open the viewer on one particular plan: the link hands the plan to the operating system, which starts the viewer with that command line.

One plan at a time

Name several plans and the first is opened and the rest ignored, which is also what happens when several files are dropped on the window. Anything the viewer is given that it cannot read fails the same way a missing file does, with the reason in the status bar.

3 · The Gantt chart



1 summary task 2 note marker 3 phase band 4 negative slack 5 driving link, in red 6 milestone. The dashed vertical line is today.

Reading the chart

One row per visible task. **Bars are coloured by phase** — the top-level phase summary bar each task belongs to — so a plan reads as bands of colour. There are ten phase colours and the cycle repeats from the eleventh phase onwards.

Critical tasks are not red

A task bar keeps its phase colour whether the task is critical or not — otherwise the phase, which is what you most need to see, would be lost exactly where the plan is tightest. The red in the chart marks **links**, never bars.

Criticality is visible in two other places: the **Critical** column on the Tasks tab, and the **Critical** filter button on the toolbar.

What red links between tasks actually mean

Every dependency is drawn in the colour of its type, and then each *driving* link is drawn again on top in red, thicker and with a larger arrowhead. A task's driving link is the one predecessor that actually determines when it can start — so the red chain of links is the critical path as a route through the plan. If one of the tasks on that critical path is delayed, the project as a whole will be delayed too.

Link type	Colour	Meaning
FS	grey	Finish → Start, the common case
FF	green	Finish → Finish
SS	blue	Start → Start
SF	orange	Start → Finish
—	red, thick	drawn over the above: this link drives its successor

Two things that look like inconsistencies and are not: a link between two critical tasks that is *not* the driving one keeps its type colour, and a task has at most one driving link.

Baselines, notes and today

- A **thin dark bar beneath** a task bar is its baseline — the dates the plan was approved with. Where the two differ, the slip is visible without arithmetic. Many exports contain no baseline at all, and the viewer says so.
- A **yellow square** in its own narrow column marks a task that carries a note. Open the task's details to read it in full.
- **Today** is a dashed red vertical line with the word Today at the top of the timeline. It appears only while today falls inside the part of the timeline you are looking at — scroll away from today and the line goes too. If you cannot see it, the plan probably still covers today and you have scrolled past it.

Moving around

Mouse wheel	Scrolls vertically, three rows a notch
Shift + wheel	Zooms the timeline about the mouse pointer
+ / -, zoom buttons	Zoom the timeline in and out
Fit	Scales the visible task bars to fill the view
Today button	Centres the timeline on today
Drag the divider	Changes the width of the task columns, between 260 and 650 pixels
Triangle	Collapses or expands one summary branch
Hover a row	Shows a summary box after a moment (section 5)
Double-click a row	Opens the full task details (section 5)

4 · The Tasks and Resources tabs

Tasks — ten columns

ID · Outline · Task · Start · Finish · Duration · % · Slack (d) · Critical · Resources

Slack (d) can be negative, and that is information

Microsoft Project writes a negative total slack for a task whose constraints cannot all be met, and such a task is normally flagged critical as well. A negative figure means **the schedule does not fit** — not that the data is wrong. The viewer shows the number rather than rounding it to zero, because a schedule conflict reported as "no float" tells the reader a plan is sound when it is not.

Resources — six columns

Name · Type · Initials · Email · Max. Units · Tasks

Type is work or material. Tasks lists the tasks the resource is assigned to.

How the tabs relate to the chart

- The **Critical filter** applies to the chart and to the Tasks list.
- **Folding does not apply to the lists** — they always show every task, collapsed branches included.
- **Switching tabs keeps your place.** The task at the top of the chart is the task selected in the list, and the other way round.

5 · Task details

The summary box on hover

Rest the pointer on a task in the chart and a box appears after about half a second: the task name, the ID and the dates, duration and percentage complete, whichever of `critical`, `milestone` and `summary` apply, the resources, the predecessors and successors by ID and link type, and the first line of the note where there is one. It follows the pointer, and goes as soon as you move off the task or press a mouse button. The Gantt tab only: the two list tabs have no such box.

The details window

Double-click a task — a bar or its row on the **Gantt** tab, or a row on the **Tasks** tab. The Resources tab has no such gesture, since a resource is not a task. The window is modal — the main window waits until you close it — and its title is Task details - ID <n>, with the task name as the first thing inside it.

Then: ID, UID and outline level; Start and Finish; Duration and Complete; **Baseline**, with *slipped by n day(s)* or *ahead by n day(s)* where it differs from the plan, or exactly **Baseline**: - when the task has none; **Flags**; Resources with their units as a percentage; the note in full; and two lists, **Predecessors** and **Successors**, each giving ID, task name and link type.

The **Flags** line is left out altogether for a task that is not a summary, not a milestone and not critical.

Task details - ID 16

Review of the design documents

ID: 16 UID: 16 Outline level: 2
Start: 10.04.2026 Finish: 13.04.2026
Duration: 16.0h Complete: 0%
Baseline: 10.04.2026 - 13.04.2026
Flags: critical

Resources:
Faisal Haddad (50%)
External auditor (25%)

Note from the plan
-

Predecessors (click to go there)

ID	Task	Type
14	Migration concept	FS
12	Interface specification	FF

Successors (click to go there)

ID	Task	Type
17	Milestone: design approved	FS

Go to predecessor
Go to successor
Close

Task 16 of the sample plan, opened from the Tasks tab: two predecessors with different link types, one successor, two resources at partial units.

Walking the dependency chain

Click an entry in either list and the window refills with that task, while the chart behind scrolls to it. The two buttons *Go to predecessor* and *Go to successor* do the same for the selected entry, and take the first entry if you have selected nothing. You can walk a chain in either direction without closing the window.

Jumping to a hidden task changes the main window

If the task you jump to is hidden — inside a collapsed branch, or excluded by the Critical filter — the viewer **reveals** it: the branch unfolds and the filter switches off, so the jump always lands somewhere you can see. You may therefore find the Critical filter off when you had left it on. A dependency can also point at a **phase**, since MS Project allows a link on a summary task, and a phase you jump to **opens** — so a branch you folded on purpose can come back expanded too.

List clicks are ignored for a moment after the window opens and after each jump, so a fast double-click navigates once, not twice.

6 · Finding a task

Type into the search field on the toolbar — the fifth control from the left — and press **Enter** or **F3**. It matches on task name or ID, and **F3** repeats the search for the next match. The Find-next icon flashes and the status bar reports the result; there is no dialog either way.

While the cursor is in the search field, the navigation keys do nothing

Arrow keys, **Page Up**, **Home** and the rest are suppressed so that typing a task name does not scroll the chart underneath you. Click the chart, or press **Enter**, to get them back.

7 · Saving the chart as an image

The **Export** button writes the **whole chart** — every visible row across the full span of the plan's own dates, not the part you can see in the window. Collapsing branches changes the height of the image; it does not change the period covered.

A save dialog appears with the project's name offered as the file name. The extension is **appended, not replaced**: a name typed as `plan.jpg` is saved as `plan.jpg.png`. The file is always a PNG.

What it tells you afterwards

Outcome	What you see
Saved	The Export icon flashes and the status bar reads <code>Gantt chart saved as <file></code>
Cut off	A dialog: <i>"The chart is larger than the maximum image size and was cut off. Collapse branches or zoom out for the whole chart."</i> This replaces the success message, so a clipped export does not name its file
Could not write	<i>"The image could not be written to <file>. Check that the folder exists and has room."</i>
Too large to create	<i>"The image could not be created; the chart is too large."</i> Nothing is written at all
Nothing loaded	<i>"Open a plan before exporting the chart."</i>
Wrong tab	<i>"The export draws the Gantt chart; switch to the Gantt tab first."</i>

The limits are **30,000 pixels a side** and **120 million pixels of area**; where the area is the constraint, the height is trimmed. A very large plan at a fine zoom can reach them — collapse branches or zoom out and export again.

In the demo version the export is refused: *"The image export is available in the full version."*

8 · What the viewer tells you about a plan

The status bar along the bottom always says what happened to the last plan you opened.

READY | Open or drag an MS Project XML file

OK | loaded | 47 tasks | 9 resources | 46 dependencies | 3 message(s) | loaded in 0.12 s

WARNING | loaded | 122 tasks | 5 resources | 110 dependencies | 2 warning(s) | 6 message(s) | loaded in 0.31 s

FAILED | 2 error(s) | previous project is still displayed | loaded in 0.08 s

Hovering the status bar shows a tooltip. On Linux and Raspberry Pi OS it gives the file name, the counts, and a stage-by-stage breakdown of the loading time; look there when a large plan feels slow. Windows shows only the first line of a tooltip, so there the hover gives the file name alone.

A failed load leaves the previous plan on screen

That is why the fourth line above says so. Without that clause, FAILED beside a chart full of bars would be a puzzle — the bars belong to the plan you opened before.

The message button

At the right of the footer. The caption reads View warnings (n) when at least one warning exists, and View messages (n) when everything is informational. Expect it on every plan: there are always at least two messages, one about baselines and one about the critical path. It is absent only before the first plan is opened, and after a rejected file, where the viewer opens the message window by itself.

The three severities

Severity	Meaning, and examples
ERROR	The plan did not load. The file is not XML, or its root is not a Project; a task or resource has a duplicate UID; a task date is missing or invalid; the project's own dates are contradictory. Where the file is structurally fine but its dates are not, the viewer says so: <i>"The file is structurally valid; these errors come from the plan's own date fields. The source plan in MS Project most likely needs correcting."</i>
WARNING	It loaded, but something was dropped or guessed. A duration that could not be read; a link of an unknown type, treated as Finish → Start; a link naming a predecessor that is not in the plan, which is therefore not drawn; a note too long, shortened; assignments naming a resource that does not exist; a date more than a year outside the declared project dates, named task by task.
INFO	Nothing is wrong. Empty placeholder rows skipped; a project finish date derived because the plan did not give one; how many tasks carry notes or baselines; the critical-path summary; tasks falling outside the declared project dates, with the timeline extended to cover them.

The message window shows up to 200 lines, then ... and N further message(s) not shown.

Two messages that are not faults

"This export contains no baseline data, so no baseline bars are drawn." — the plan was exported without baselines. Nothing is wrong with the viewer or the file.

"Task N ... starts <date>, N year(s) before the declared project start. The chart spans N year(s) as a result; check the date in the source plan." — almost always a typo in the plan itself, and the reason a chart occasionally looks absurdly wide.

9 · The demo version

The demo shows the **first 50 tasks** of a plan. Everything else works normally: the chart, both lists, the details window, search, the messages.

A demo build always identifies itself, in three ways that do not depend on the plan:

- a DEMO VERSION watermark low on the chart,
- | DEMO in the footer, and
- the image export refused.

Two more appear only when a plan actually had to be cut: a banner above the message list reading *"This build shows 50 of <n> tasks. The full version has no such limit."*, and the same count in the footer as | DEMO: 50 of <n> tasks.

The **Resources tab is not limited**. Resources are not tasks, and a resource assigned only to tasks beyond the cap still appears.

The plan included in the archive is 47 tasks, so it opens complete in the demo. What the full version adds is plans of any size and the image export.

10 · Keyboard

Ctrl+O	Open a plan from a file	+ / -	Zoom in and out
Ctrl+U	Open from a web address	Arrows	Scroll, or move the list selection
F3	Find the next match	PgUp / PgDn	Scroll one page
Enter	Find next, in the search field	Home / End	Jump to the start or the end
F5	Fit the chart; on a list tab, refresh it	Ctrl+D	Write a diagnostic dump (section 12)

11 · Toolbar

Left to right. The buttons carry no text — hover one for its tooltip.

#	Icon	Button	Tooltip
1		Open	Open MS Project XML
2		Zoom out	Zoom out
3		Zoom in	Zoom in
4		Fit	Zoom the visible task bars into the Gantt view
—	field	<i>search field</i>	Find a task by name or ID; Enter or F3 finds the next match
5		Find next	Find the next matching task
6		Today	Centre the timeline on today
7		Critical	Show only critical tasks, or all tasks again
8		Collapse	Collapse all summary tasks
9		Expand	Expand all summary tasks
10		Export	Save the Gantt chart as an image file
11		Help	Show the help window
12		About	About this viewer

Critical is a toggle and stays pressed while the filter is on.

Three buttons flash to report an outcome — Find next, Today and Export. The icon dims for a moment and the status bar carries the message. That is how the viewer says *that worked*, or *there was nothing to find*, without putting a dialog in your way:

 normal  dimmed for a moment

The Export button reports on more than exporting: the diagnostic dump of section 12 also flashes it.

12 · Help, About, and the diagnostic dump

Help and About

Both open a modal window that scrolls with the mouse wheel. There is no scrollbar to drag, but a small marker at the right edge appears whenever there is more to read than fits.

About carries the version and the attribution for the icon set, with the address where its licence terms can be read. The address is plain text and is not clickable — copy it into a browser.

The diagnostic dump

`Ctrl+D` or `Ctrl+Shift+D` writes a text file listing everything the viewer read from the plan: the project, the counts, one line per task, one per resource and one per message. **You need it only if you are asked for one**, and then this is how to produce it.

The file offered is named after the project inside the plan rather than the file, so it may not match the plan's file name. Three outcomes: nothing loaded, written, or could not be written — each in a dialog titled `Model dump`.

If something looks wrong

- **The chart is far wider than the plan.** Check the message list — a task with a mistyped year stretches the timeline, and the viewer names the task.
- **No baseline bars.** The export probably contains no baseline data; a message says so explicitly.
- **A dependency is missing.** If a link names a predecessor that is not in the plan it cannot be drawn, and that is reported as a warning.
- **The Critical filter turned itself off.** Jumping to a hidden task from the details window switches it off deliberately — see section 5.
- **Today's line is not visible.** You have scrolled the timeline away from today. Press the Today button.
- **A plan will not open at all.** The status bar gives the count of errors and the message list gives each one. Most often the plan is not an MSPDI XML export, or its own date fields are inconsistent and need correcting in Microsoft Project.

The file must be UTF-8

The viewer reads UTF-8, which is what current versions of Microsoft Project write. A plan saved in another encoding may show damaged accented characters or fail to open. If that happens, re-export the plan.

13 · Third-party notice — toolbar icons

The toolbar icons were produced with an icon-drawing program written by the authors named below. Their licence requires its copyright notice and permission notice to be included with anything that reproduces the icons, so both are given here in full and unaltered. Nothing in this section applies to Ocean Plan Viewer itself.

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