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Public consultation on the report of the High Level Group on the extension of the main trans-European transport axes to the neighbouring countries and regions

We wish to pay tribute to the work that has been carried out in the High Level Group (HLG) chaired by Ms Loyola de Palacio. As member of the HLG, Norway is very satisfied with the outcome of this process.

Our comments on the report from the HLG are limited to the questions related to the main transport axes and the proposals for implementation and coordination of the recommended actions. As a general remark to the other questions, we support the report's recommendation to further examine and analyze feasibility and usefulness of the proposed measures.

The main transport axes highlighted in the High Level Group report

Motorways of the Seas

Norway is pleased with the fact that the report reflects the important link to the Barents Sea (as part of the Motorway of the Sea to the Western Europe), and that the ports of Narvik and Oslo are proposed as Motorway of the Sea ports.

We wish to emphasise the importance of the Motorway of the Sea between the North Sea/Baltic Sea and the Barents region. This is, and will to an increasing extent, become a major transport axis as economic activity in this area is expected to accelerate in the years to come.

The Barents area is extremely rich in many natural resources such as petroleum, minerals, forests and fish and holds important industries that need efficient transport routes to Central Europe and other markets. The importance of the mentioned sea route will only increase, in

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pace with the oil and gas developments in the High North.

Although the report recommends that the Motorway of the Seas should link the sea area of the Barents, the Motorway of the Sea of Western Europe is only extended to the Norwegian Sea. We therefore recommend that the Motorway of the Sea towards Norway is extended to the Barents Sea and to Northwest Russia, so that the map reflects the recommendations of the report.

Northern Axis

In the report from the HLG, the Northern axis connects the northern EU with Norway on the one hand and with Belarus and Russia and beyond on the other. A connection to the Barents region linking Norway through Sweden and Finland with Russia is also foreseen.

Norway will give priority to major investments in both rail and road on the multimodal connection related to the Nordic Triangle (TEN priority axis no 12). These investments are foreseen in the Norwegian National Transport Plan for the ten year period 2006-2015, and will be followed up in the annual state budgets.

From a Norwegian point of view, the development of a multimodal connection St.Petersburg – Vartius – Tornio – Haparanda – Narvik is a particularly interesting proposal in the report. The corridor is important in a global context, with an existing continuous rail connection from the Atlantic port of Narvik through the Nordic countries and eastwards into Russia. A main challenge for industrial activity in the Barents region is the costs of transporting goods to the markets. The transport corridor will improve transportation standards to and from this region substantially.

The above mentioned transport corridor has the potential to promote commercial interactions between the east and the west, and facilitate global trade by connecting Europe, North America, Central Asia and China through less congested areas. The corridor is also interesting as a major east-west axis for freight transport within the Barents region, covering North-West Russia and northern parts of Norway, Finland and Sweden.

The development of the transport corridor and the necessary improvements of the port of Narvik are strongly supported by the Norwegian government.

The implementation and coordination of recommended actions

The making of efficient, safe and secure international transport corridors is dependent upon international cooperation and agreements.

Norway believes international agreements are necessary to ensure the implementation and coordination of the proposed actions from the High Level Group. It is a major challenge to coordinate actions across borders, and make sure that priorities and investment plans along international transport corridors are coordinated with neighbouring countries. We believe that a relevant place to start is to make use of the agreements and memoranda of understandings that already exist today.

The Barents Euro-Arctic Pan-European Transport Area (BEATA) is one of four Pan-European Transport Areas (PETRAs). The BEATA cooperation has been well functioning since the beginning. BEATA could thus be an arena for further cooperation and development of transport axis among the countries involved.

We look forward to participate in further co-operation on the follow-up of the report, including the proposed mid-term review in 2008.

Yours sincerely,

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