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**Public consultation on how to connect better the major Trans-European transport axes to the neighbouring countries and regions**

Reference is made to the High Level Group and to the public consultation on extension of the major Trans-European axes to the neighbouring countries and regions.

Since March 1999, the TEN-T guidelines have been included in the EEA-agreement. The Norwegian part of TEN-T consists of infrastructure of national importance and with connections to international networks. Thus, Norway has an interest in a further development of the network, also taking into account that a major part of Norwegian transports are carried out by using this network.

Furthermore Norway has taken part in the Pan-European Transport Corridors and Areas cooperation, through the Barents Euro-Arctic Transport Area (BEATA). It is important to continue the BEATA cooperation, as is also stated in the common letter from the Ministries responsible for transport in Sweden, Finland and Norway (copy enclosed).

New transport corridors can be a tool for regional development as well as generating economic benefits to the market players. Therefore, there is a need to develop new transport corridors and axis in areas where the capacity is not stretched to the limit and ideally where transport to a major extent can be done by sea or rail. In this connection, we find it appropriate to point out the importance of developing the transport connections in the Northern part of Europe. In addition to the TEN-T connections between the European Union and Norway and to the BEATA, we particular call attention to two ongoing projects - with very good synergies - of major importance both for several EU member states and neighbouring countries and regions:

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### *The Northern Maritime Corridor (NMC)*

The Northern Maritime Corridor (NMC) is an Interreg IIIB project covering the Northern Periphery and North Sea areas with associated partners in Northwest Russia. 20 regions in 9 countries participate in the project. The project promotes and develops short sea shipping between the European Union and neighbouring countries and regions, considering also the environmental and safety aspects. The NMC project provides an arena for networking between key actors in promoting sea based and intermodal transportation, like shipping companies, forwarders, transporters, ports, major industries and relevant governmental bodies.

The Northern Maritime Corridor constitutes an axis that fits very well into the envisaged axes that connect the European Union with neighbouring countries. The NMC project has suggested this corridor to eventually become the "Motorway of the Northern Seas", fitting into the European Union's concept of motorways of the sea.

### *The Northern East West Freight Corridor (N.E.W.)*

The Northern East West Freight Corridor (N.E.W.) is introduced as an east-west intermodal transport route connecting the North American East Coast and Central Asia via the Atlantic Ocean, intermodal ports in Northern Europe and Asia. An important criterion for the development of the route is that the N.E.W. corridor already has a continuous railway from the Atlantic port of Narvik through the Nordic countries to Russia, Kazakhstan and China.

The N.E.W. corridor has obtained political and commercial interest, and several partners have committed resources to the development of the corridor. It is an intention to prepare conditions for permanent commercial operation subsequent to a demonstration run. A demonstration run is planned in 2005 where operational viability shall be tested and a single entity (company) for the N.E.W. corridor will be organized.

The region within and close to the European Union directly affected by the corridor is sparsely populated, but with vast natural resources such as oil, gas, minerals, forests and fisheries. The region's industry is however located far away from their main eastern and western markets. All major transport routes are routed via the European continent, independent on the final destination of the cargo. The N.E.W. corridor is a transport concept which will benefit these regions by establishing westbound sailing and eastbound railway transport.

Strong focus on environment/congestion and security are examples where the N.E.W. corridor can contribute. The main ideas of the N.E.W. corridor are to stimulate growth in European outlying areas outside central Europe as well as to establish a global east-west alternative and supplement to relieve pressure from current routes in a freight market where cargo is growing faster than present solutions can accommodate.

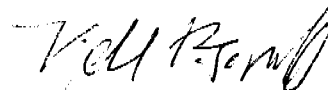
The N.E.W. corridor will be operating through less congested ports and areas than most alternative routes.

*Suggestion*

The above described projects have in common that they aim to improve the transport connections between the EU and its neighbours in an efficient, safe and secure way. Furthermore, they focus on utilizing rail and sea transport, including the concept "motorway of the sea". Based on this, Norway suggests that the projects should be considered within The Wider Europe concept.

Yours sincerely

  
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