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Response from the European Forum of Northern Sweden, to the EC Communication (COM 2009/279): “A sustainable future for transport: Towards an integrated, technology-led and user friendly system”

The European Forum of Northern Sweden welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation of the EC Communication (COM 2009/279) on a sustainable future for transport. The standpoints and opinions in this response is the result of a continuous process between political representatives for the regions and local authorities in northern Sweden.

The European Forum of Northern Sweden (EFNS)

The European Forum of Northern Sweden (EFNS) is a network of politicians from the four northernmost counties in Sweden, representing almost 900 000 citizens and half the geographical area of Sweden. A group of 12 rapporteurs manages the regular work of EFNS.

The Transport Infrastructure Context of Northern Sweden

Reliable, accessible and comprehensive infrastructure is a critical success factor for northern Sweden as well as for the rest of Europe. In order to achieve common goals for growth, employment, competitiveness and sustainability as agreed in the Lisbon and Gothenburg agendas, competitive and sustainable transport solutions are an absolute necessity. The implication is that a continuous development of the railways and ports should have the highest priority. For northern Sweden, also roads and regional airports are important for public transports as well as for cargo.

Even though a large part of the industry in northern Sweden are based on natural resources there is a strong growth in tourism, the service sector, research and other knowledge intensive businesses. Efficient public transports and options for commuting are essential for supporting the growth potential in new businesses and facilitating skills supply in the knowledge-based sector.

Large areas in northern Sweden are sparsely populated, but there are significant urban areas along the coast line of the Gulf of Bothnia. Most of the Swedish paper and pulp industry is located in northern Sweden, as well as processing of metals, wooden-products, and chemical industry. A critical success factor for the mining industry as well as for the wood industry is the presence of well functional freight transports systems. The current infrastructure is insufficient for the industrial need, in both northern Sweden and Finland. The railways have not enough volume and weight capacity. Several new railway lines need to be built in order to satisfy the need of the industry as well as for commuting and tourism.

The EFNS response to the issues raised in the communication:

5.1. Infrastructure: maintenance, development and integration of modal networks.

What can the EU do to promote the integration of modal networks as well as their maintenance and upgrade? What should be the priorities for investment? Which measures would allow a better exploitation of the networks and a balanced use of the different modes?

- EFNS believes it is important that the EU give the member states incentives for long-term investments in environmental friendly infrastructure, such as railways and sea transports. This demand for a much better co-ordination of infrastructure planning between regional and national level and the common European level.
- EFNS stress the need for prioritizing the most environmental friendly modes of freight transport, i.e. railways and sea transports. A green corridor needs to be established from northern Sweden and Finland (the Bothnian Corridor) for the provision of goods and raw materials (e.g. minerals, woods and paper) to the rest of Europe, in accordance with the EC (COM(2007) 608).
- EFNS proposes that TEN-T should stimulate the implementation of ERTMS in order to increase capacity on current railways, through a special instrument within TEN-T or included in the conceptual pillar of a core network.
- EFNS considers optimizing capacity on current railway infrastructure to be of uttermost importance. On many lines, lack of double tracks makes it difficult to combine different types of train transports. If resources should be spent on high-speed tracks, it is important that this be done with the perspective of releasing capacity also for freight transports.

5.2. Funding: finding the resources for sustainable transport

What can the EU do to ensure that prices in transport correctly reflect costs to society? What actions should be considered for implementing the 'polluter-pays' and 'user-pays' principles in transport? What should be done with the revenues thus obtained?

- EFNS believes it is important that environmental friendly modes of transport are not only competitive, but also preferable by citizens and industry. For obtaining this, a societal intervention in the pricing and/or funding of transport systems is necessary. Revenues from pollution tax or similar should be used for financing environmental friendly infrastructure, such as railways.
- EFNS has the opinion that infrastructure should be a commitment for the society, neutral to competition, for facilitating industrial growth, employment and social cohesion.
- EFNS consider it would be positive if common agreements or recommendation on how EIB financing resources should be utilised in each member states. This is especially important for large projects with long-term economic and environmental benefits.
- EFNS favours improvement of co-ordination between different financial instruments. It is also important that the criteria for the possible use of structural funds for transport systems be clarified in the structural funds directives.

5.3. Technology: how to accelerate the transition to a low-carbon society and lead global innovation

Many technologies are being developed or are already available to improve the environmental performance of transport, increase safety and reduce congestion and dependence on oil. What can the EU do to accelerate the development and deployment of these new technologies?

- EFNS propose that the EU should stimulate the implementation of ERTMS in order to increase capacity on current railways, through a special instrument within TEN-T or included in the conceptual pillar of a core network.
- EFNS suggests that special measures should be considered in TEN-T, for the converting of train engines to ERTMS.
- EFNS suggest that the EU should further stimulate R&D on the second generation bio-fuels and establishment of production capacity of these fuels.

5.4. The legislative framework: further promoting market opening and fostering competition.

What can the EU do to further improve working conditions, health, safety and security standards in transport and the rights of passengers? In which sectors should market opening be pushed forward and how? What measures of a regulatory nature should be considered to reduce the transport sector's environmental impact?

- EFNS believes it is important that pollution and CO₂-emissions from road transports be reduced, and that this is not hampered by less control of the open market.
- EFNS support the need for administrative simplification aiming at reducing unnecessary burdens on transport companies.
- EFNS proposes that the viability of short sea shipping and ferry lines in the Baltic Sea, be secured, possibly by regulatory measures that allows for support of this environmental friendly mode of transport, or by instruments such as Marco Polo or Motorways-of-the-Sea.

5.5. Behaviour: educate, inform and involve.

Sustainability of transport also depends on sound planning and on a change in transport habits. Are there measures that can be taken at EU level to improve accessibility and modify transport needs and behaviour?

- EFNS welcomes the proposal of greater public involvement in transport planning.
- EFNS stresses the need for better co-ordination between the regional, national and EU-levels in the planning and investments and transport systems and infrastructure.
- EFNS would like to draw the EC attention to the fact that there are several good practices in the form of ERDF projects in northern Sweden successful in changing behaviour and improve accessibility of public transports and commuting.

5.6. Governance: effective and coordinated action.

Effective action requires coordination between different levels of government: what can the EU do to facilitate this process and avoid inconsistent approaches? Many of the challenges for transport will be in the urban environment: are there specific measures the EU could take to help local authorities?

- EFNS agrees on the need for co-ordination of technical standards and administrative rules to ensure interoperability.
- EFNS realize the challenge of urban transports, considering expected continued accelerated urbanisation. However, we do not think that this should be a prime concern for the EC, but the principle of subsidiarity should be applied. As for environmental impact the cost of urbanisation, is an external cost that could be internalised by e.g. local congestion taxes.

5.7. The external dimension: the need for Europe to speak with one voice.

The transport sector is increasingly becoming more international. Which actions in the transport sector can help to foster relations with our neighbouring countries and encourage sustainable growth there? What measures can help the EU industry and transport operators to thrive in the international context? How can the Union better contribute to sustainable global governance?

- EFNS remarks the need for a smooth and efficient co-ordination of the realization of the Northern Axis with improved railway infrastructure between Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. The Northern axis is also important for environmental friendly freight transports to and from Asia.
- EFNS points out that ports important for export/import to the rest of the world also are located outside the EU area. Especially Norwegian ports, such as Oslo, Trondheim, Bodö, Mo i Rana and Narvik, with its hinterland connections by roads and railways are of very great importance for the whole of northern Europe. This should be considered in TEN-T.
- EFNS proposes a better co-ordination between EU and the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). This would facilitate design, planning and evaluation of the comprehensive TEN-T network at international as well as European and national levels. Besides less administration, a benefit from this would be that the TEN-T network would be more transparent and visible to the citizens (as is the case with the E-classification).
- EFNS stresses the importance of the Baltic Sea Strategy as a tool for coordination of infrastructure planning and investments in northern Europe.

The political rapporteurs of the European Forum of Northern Sweden have adopted this response:

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Main rapporteur for infrastructure

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