NSPA Position Paper on the revision of the TEN-T regulation

The Northern Sparsely Populated Areas network, NSPA, represents the interests of the four northernmost regions of Sweden (Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland Härjedalen and Västernorrland), the seven eastern and northernmost of Finland (Central Ostrobothnia, Kainuu, Lapland, North Karelia, Northern Ostrobothnia, Pohjois-Savo and South Savo), as well as the two northernmost regions of Norway (Nordland, Troms & Finnmark).

Regarding the revision of the TEN-T regulation, the Northern Sparsely Populated Areas (NSPA) wish to make the following comments.

General comments

The NSPA underlines that the revised TEN-T regulation should continue to have a major focus on a "traditional" infrastructure development concept, all while strengthening the concept of infrastructure quality and boosting digitalisation and innovation. These three focus areas are of equal importance to achieve the objective of a sustainable, integrated, and efficient European transport system. A revised TEN-T should aim to develop a high-performance rail passenger network within the EU as well as between the EU and neighbouring and other third countries.

The NSPA supports:

- Introduction of minor adjustments to the network design to further strengthen accessibility for all regions, especially taking into account the challenges faced in regions with long distances to the larger markets, as well as enhancing cross-border mobility.
- Broadened criteria for urban nodes to include important nodes in the NSPA area given their strategic roles for the trans-European transport network in a wider geographical area around the nodes, both in terms of passenger and freight traffic, as well as in a system perspective.
- Extension of the requirements from the core to the comprehensive network to increase performance, sustainability and user benefits for all transport modes.
- Strengthening of transport nodes including multi-modal terminals and their network integration, to facilitate both first and last mile connections.
- Strengthened coherence in the alignment of core network and rail freight corridors.
- Adjustment of the criteria regarding socio-economic estimates for entire routes, including border-crossing routes to third countries, taking into account the transport flows within the EU as well as between the EU and neighbouring and other third countries.
- Stronger instruments, including better follow-up and reporting on the member states commitments, to ensure and accelerate the timely completion of core and comprehensive network projects.
- Strengthening the role of the European coordinators and a reinforcement of the corridor approach - including the stronger connection with rail freight corridors.

Prioritising the decarbonisation objectives

The NSPA welcomes the EU's new growth strategy, the European Green Deal, which aims to ensure that climate aspects permeate all EU policies in the future towards a climate- neutral Europe by 2050. To reach the objective of a 90% reduction of CO2 emissions by 2050, the European transport

sector faces major challenges and advanced biofuels play an important role in the green transition. Also, a fully developed European transport network, enabling access to renewable energy sources, natural resources and sustainable products is vital for the EU's internal market to function and to adapt to a circular economy. A sustainable, integrated, and efficient European transport system is therefore crucial for achieving the green and digital transition.

Advanced biofuels are sustainable and should be included as a low-emission fuel. All relevant EU legislation should take into account the overall climate impact of a fuel. This is based on a life-cycle assessment, covering all parts, such as raw material extraction, production, and transport, and not just the emissions generated when the fuel is used.

The NSPA supports:

- Ensured continuous coverage of alternative fuel infrastructure for both the core and comprehensive networks and for all transport modes within the whole of the EU, especially taking into account the challenges faced in regions with long distances to the larger markets.
- Strengthening of the synergies between transport infrastructure and the different energy sectors in the context of the strategy for smart sector integration for a future integrated European energy system. Electrification of the transport sector, focusing on railway, aviation and first and last mile for heavy freight transport and the use of decarbonised and non-polluting gases and fuels, such as hydrogen and advanced biofuels, are essential in achieving a green transition.
- Deployment of high-power charging facilities and new flexible bunkering infrastructures to provide large quantities of sustainable alternative fuels for both the aviation sector and different shipping segments in ports and alongside European rivers.
- Introduction of binding requirements for recharging and refuelling infrastructure for zero and low emission vehicles and vessels for all transport modes, including on TEN-T infrastructure in sparsely populated areas. This includes in particular sufficient fast charging capabilities and hydrogen refuelling stations along motorways and equivalent both for light and heavy- duty vehicles.
- Adjustment of the criteria regarding socio-economic estimates to better value the climate-related objectives.
- Enhancement of the infrastructural basis for rail freight services and high-performance passenger rail as sustainable modes.

Enhancing the digital dimension of the TEN-T

The NSPA underlines that digital technologies are a critical enabler for attaining the sustainability goals of the Green deal, in transport as well as in many other sectors. It is important to further boost the role of TEN-T policy as an enabler and testbed for new technological developments. To enable a faster digitalization of the transport sector throughout the TEN-T system, a model should be built in that provides economic benefits to those who choose to take the lead in technology development by participating in, developing, pilot projects or investing in new technologies.

The NSPA supports:

- Advancement of the framework for the digital dimension of TEN-T infrastructure within and between all transport modes (e.g. European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS); to ensure readiness for future developments and strengthen the TEN-T as an enabler of innovative, sustainable, inclusive and efficient transport and mobility solutions.
- Digitalisation to pave the way for new transport and mobility solutions, along with altering user needs and behaviour.
- An adjustment of the 5G corridors according to the routes of the core network corridors in order to develop a smart and digitalised transport network.

Improved resilience of the TEN-T infrastructure

Needs of investment in the trans-European transport network, TEN-T, are high while ordinary budgets are limited, with a further challenge due to the economic consequences of the covid-19 crisis. At the same time, transport remains crucial for the EU's internal market to function, as has been clearly demonstrated during the current public health crisis, where closed borders have created severely delayed delivery times. With the cancelled air traffic, the NSPA area is particularly affected as the railway and road networks are not as developed and well maintained as they are in large parts of the rest of Europe.

The NSPA supports:

- A fully developed TEN-T with appropriate cross-border connections to neighbouring countries and third countries to facilitate the exchange of goods between the EU and those countries with positive effects for the EU economy and consumers.