

**Transport policy and
international goods shipments
in the Nordic countries**

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Transport Analysis

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Summary

The Nordic countries in general, and Finland, Sweden, and Norway in particular, have similar fundamental transport needs for their foreign trade. These countries all produce raw materials in the north for export markets on the continent and in the rest of the world. Denmark differs slightly from the other Nordic countries insofar as most of its international shipments consist of transit traffic. At the same time, trade between these countries is relatively extensive. These transport needs have led the Nordic countries to become dependent on one another's infrastructure to manage their imports and exports efficiently.

All these countries have long coastlines and common to all is the fact that many of their shipments travel by sea. Denmark is a seafaring nation by tradition, with a leading worldwide shipping line in Maersk, while Finland, Sweden, and Norway have numerous exports that are suited for shipment by sea. Because of specialization and geographical circumstances, these countries also use one another's ports for imports and exports. For example, Finland has no port capable of accommodating large ocean-going vessels, so such vessels are unloaded in, for example, Gothenburg, with the goods then being transported on to Finland (the process is reversed for exports). Norway also receives many of its goods via the port of Gothenburg. The port of Gothenburg is consequently not just of Swedish national concern, but also of interest to Finland and Norway.

Denmark serves as the transit hub of the Nordic transport system, and changes in Denmark's international infrastructure will have major ramifications for Sweden and Norway in particular. This is obvious in connection with the planned Fehmarn Belt Fixed Link, which is expected to have a positive impact on Swedish and Norwegian exports by road and rail. However, if Norway and Sweden are to realize the full potential of this link, improvement in, most significantly, the track infrastructure between Norway and Sweden will be needed, an issue addressed in the Scandinavian 8 Million City project.

The fact that Norway is not part of the EU has the greatest impact on shipments by road in connection with customs clearance. Norway is otherwise well integrated with the EU, and participates in a number of cooperative arrangements, with TEN-T probably being the most important in terms of improving conditions for international shipping.

None of these countries has any designated central function that administers international shipments regardless of mode of transport. In Finland an administrative group within the Ministry of Communications handles shipments across the Russian border. Sweden and Norway have a departmental cooperative arrangement at the official level. These two countries have also established a cooperative arrangement at the general-director level to deal with rail shipments across their common border. This is especially important for Norway, as many rail shipments having their origins and destinations in Norway pass through Sweden. The existence of these cooperative arrangements is only natural, as they involve two countries that share long national borders.

The transport authorities in the Nordic countries resemble one another in terms of their areas of responsibility. However, like Finland, Sweden has consolidated its agencies for various types of transport to create a single, all-encompassing national transport administration.

One major organizational difference between these countries concerns the number of human resources available to transport authorities, and how those resources are divided between government offices and transport authorities. One reason for this is that the responsibility for operating and maintaining road infrastructure differs between the Nordic countries. In Denmark, in the wake of a major highway reform, this responsibility is essentially municipal. In Finland it is borne by the Finnish Transport Agency and handled within a regional organization via the Development, Transport and Environment Centres (NTM Centres). The regional road systems in Sweden and Norway are managed at the regional level, but under the same agency as the national road system.

The long-term planning of infrastructure development in each country differs as well. Coherent long-term financial and physical planning is undertaken in Sweden and Norway. There is regular long-term planning in Finland, but the financial planning is done based on a shorter time horizon. Denmark does not have the same type of long-term planning as do the other Nordic countries, and long-term investments in infrastructure are decided on through broad political accords.

The division of responsibility for infrastructure planning between the departmental level and the transportation authority level in the Nordic countries mainly reflects which level primarily addresses international shipment issues. In Denmark, where the Ministry of Transport has relatively more human resources, the responsibility for managing international shipments also rests chiefly there. In Finland the responsibility for regional international goods transport projects rests with the regional NTM Centres, while central issues are handled by the Ministry of Transport and Communication. In Sweden this work is handled mainly by the Swedish Transport Administration nationally, or by the relevant Regional Transport Administration, depending on the nature of the cooperative arrangement in question. However, more strategic issues are handled centrally by the Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communications transport unit. In Norway too this work is handled either by the Norwegian Public Roads Administration (on the national level), the Public Road Administration regions at regional level, or by the Norwegian National Rail Administration.

Other cooperative arrangements for international goods shipment are essentially regional, although often with regional representation from the national agencies. More overarching cooperative arrangements exist within the framework of the EU, such as the TransEuropean Transport Networks (TEN-T) and the associated financial framework under the Connecting Europe Facility Regulation (CEF), as well as the related “motorways of the sea” and “rail freight corridors”. Regional cooperative arrangements are also financed in part with EU funds.

TEN-T covers the inter- and intra-Nordic links considered most important from a European infrastructure perspective. The TEN-T network and the measures undertaken by the Nordic countries to develop it thus function partly as a joint plan for Nordic infrastructure development. Complementary overarching projects such as rail freight corridors (e.g., the Scandinavian–Mediterranean Rail Freight Corridor, ScanMed RFC) ensure that the administrative work is coordinated between the countries.

The most northern part of the Nordic region is not currently included in the TENT-T Scandinavian–Mediterranean Rail Freight Corridor. However, northern Finland, Norway, and Sweden form an area characterized by heavy international shipping and represents the only area where a joint international infrastructure plan (i.e., the Joint Barents Transport Plan) has been formulated. However, the plan currently has no joint financing, but rather is based on the national priorities of the countries involved. Even without joint financing, the plan provides an excellent foundation for coordinating international infrastructure, which is valuable, as the

different planning methods applied by the Nordic countries can make such coordination difficult.

In addition to cooperative infrastructure development efforts, there are two examples of jointly owned and administered infrastructures, i.e., the Öresund and the Svinesund bridges. Both bridges are wholly or partly administered by state-owned companies and financed with user fees. Another example of joint ownership is Swedish–Danish air traffic control, where a joint corporation is responsible for controlling air traffic on flight routes in Swedish–Danish air space.

Cooperative arrangements generally arise when there is a need for coordination. The configuration of cooperative arrangements varies, but some type of EU financing is a common denominator. The consultancy study conducted in connection with this memorandum report found that transport buyers encounter the greatest problems with international shipments by rail, particularly in the areas of operation and maintenance.¹ At the same time, this memorandum report also notes that there are few cooperative arrangements in this area. An exception is the rail freight corridors that exemplify a cooperative arrangement that takes a holistic approach to both new and existing infrastructure. This is something that the consultancy study indicates is sought after by the business world.

¹ WSP (2014)



Transport Analysis is a Swedish agency for transport policy analysis. We analyse and evaluate proposed and implemented measures within the sphere of transport policy. We are also responsible for official statistics in the transport and communication sectors. Transport Analysis was established in April 2010 with its head office in Stockholm and a branch office in Östersund.

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