

## Northern Sparsely Populated Areas' (NSPA) position on the future EU budget for transport

*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 regions of Finland (Central Ostrobothnia, Kainuu, Lapland, North Karelia, Northern Ostrobothnia, Pohjois-Savo and South Savo), as well as the three northernmost regions of Norway (Nordland, Troms, Finnmark).*

[The NSPA](#) would like to highlight the following messages regarding the focus for EU's future transport infrastructure investments.

### Preserving a Unified Approach to European Transport Funding

The NSPA urges the European Commission to reconsider its plans to redirect a significant portion of transport funding toward National Single Plans. While national plans are important, they risk sidelining cross-border and interregional projects that are crucial for enhancing connectivity and addressing shared challenges in sparsely populated and remote regions like the NSPA.

A robust and integrated European transport network requires centralised coordination and dedicated funding to prioritise projects of European added value — especially those that bridge gaps, remove bottlenecks, and strengthen east-west and north-south corridors. By maintaining a strong European transport instrument, the EU can ensure long-term investment in infrastructure that promotes cohesion, competitiveness, and resilience across the continent, rather than fragmenting efforts into nationally focused agendas.

### Ensuring Fair and Inclusive Access to EU Funding Instruments

The NSPA welcomes the continued support of EU instruments like the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Horizon Europe, and Interreg. These tools are vital for fostering sustainable regional development, supporting innovation, and addressing disparities.

*To fully leverage these opportunities, we stress the importance of:*

- Improved cross-border coordination to align local infrastructure projects with EU priorities.
- Enhanced capacity-building initiatives for regional and local stakeholders to design and manage high-impact projects.
- Expanded eligibility for Arctic regions to access funding mechanisms tailored to remote and sparsely populated areas.
- Investments in infrastructure projects that enhance Europe's security while improving connectivity and economic vitality in border regions

### Prioritising East-West Connectivity and Strategic Resilience

The NSPA strongly supports the European transport policy, particularly the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) and its Core and Comprehensive Network Corridors, as essential to Europe's strategic resilience. Strengthening east-west connectivity across the Nordic-Arctic region is critical for

addressing geopolitical tensions, supporting supply chain sovereignty, and integrating Sweden and Finland's NATO membership into broader European security objectives.

We urge the European Commission to robustly fund the successor to the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) to ensure timely completion of the TEN-T network, including a comprehensive TEN-T network, with special attention to the NSPA's challenges and opportunities.

*This should include:*

- Investments to eliminate bottlenecks and establish missing links, particularly in cross-border and east-west corridors.
- Tailored support for multimodal transport solutions, including rail, shipping, inland waterway transport, and air transport, to overcome the region's geographic challenges.
- Broader eligibility criteria for airport infrastructure investments, recognizing the importance of air connectivity for remote communities and industries.
- Security of supply and military mobility, based on dual use for military needs in crisis and civilian and societal use for peoples and goods otherwise.
- Recognizing the importance of green investments. This includes also the sea transport of critical minerals, such as Lithium, for securing the self-sufficiency of the EU; developing electric air transport; Similarly, improving the throughput capacity of ports to enable the intermediate storage and movement of offshore wind farm structures requires new investments in ports on the Bothnian Bay.

## **Leveraging NSPA Contributions to Europe's Green and Digital Transitions**

The NSPA is central to achieving the EU's climate and digital ambitions, hosting critical resources for emerging technologies and renewable energy production. However, realising this potential requires targeted investments in infrastructure to link regional production to European and global markets efficiently. Findings from the recent OECD report, *Building Resilience to Global Transitions in the EU Northern Sparsely Populated Areas*, highlight the urgent need for improved connectivity and capacity-building in these regions.

*Key OECD recommendations include:*

- Upgraded east-west transport infrastructure, including roads, railways, and air routes, to enhance access to markets and improve economic integration.
- Development of a comprehensive air transport strategy for the NSPA, ensuring strategic investment in regional airports and routes.
- Increased focus on digital infrastructure, such as broadband and smart grids, to support innovation and integrate renewable energy sources effectively.
- The potential for investment in renewable energy, such as wind power. High research, development and innovation (RDI) intensity is an opportunity to boost Europe's competitiveness and create opportunities to exploit areas as the whole energy value chain in energy production, storage (such as hydrogen and battery technology) and energy downstream.

*Adopted at the Steering Committee Meeting in Brussels 18 February 2025*

NSPA Steering Committee:

**Jonas Andersson**, Jämtland Härjedalen, Sweden; *CHAIR*

**Isak Utsi**, Norrbotten, Sweden

**Rickard Carstedt**, Västerbotten, Sweden

**Jonny Lundin**, Västernorrland, Sweden

**Svein Magnar Øien Eggesvik**, Nordland, Norway

**Benjamin Nordgård Furuly**, Troms, Norway

**Jouni Ponnikas**, Kainuu, Finland

**Jyrki Kaiponen**, Central Ostrobothnia, Finland

**Satu Vehreävesa**, Pohjois-Savo, Finland

**Merja Olenius**, South Savo, Finland

Contacts:

**Mikael Janson**, North Sweden European Office: [mikael.janson@northsweden.eu](mailto:mikael.janson@northsweden.eu)

**Nils Kristian Sørheim Nilsen**, North Norway European Office: [nils@northnorway.org](mailto:nils@northnorway.org)

**Kari Aalto**, East and North Finland EU Office: [kari.aalto@eastnorth.fi](mailto:kari.aalto@eastnorth.fi)