

Via Baltica Nordica Development Zone

leaflet 1/2004



Photo: Markku Wiik

Via Baltica Nordica supports TEN status for the Swedish part of the E12 road

The Swedish part of the Via Baltica Nordica zone, the E12Alliance/ Blue Highway region, stretches for more than 400 km from the Baltic Sea Bay up to the high mountains at the Norwegian border. Population is mainly concentrated to the Baltic coast. Some parts are facing depopulation, others have a growing population. So we have a vast region with long distances between a number of small towns interacting with a larger city, Umeå. To reach a level of sustainable development *accessibility* is one of the strategic issues to be addressed. This means solving problems connected to transportation of people and goods.

Via Baltica Nordica is approaching this challenge within the Accessibility to Railway Traffic theme. Our region has two positive factors related to this theme. One important factor is the ongoing development of the Botniabanan railway along the Baltic coast up to Umeå. Secondly we have the Tvärbanan railway from Umeå to Storuman connecting coast and inland. Nowadays it is unfortunately used only for goods transportation. Investments on the Tvärbanan will be needed to cut travel time and to open up a sustainable commuting alternative for people. But these are long-term investments and we will still be heavily dependant on the roads, especially the E12 road.

The E12Alliance was formed to approach several of the challenges we are facing. One of the original objectives was to form cooperation with Via Finlandia and Via Baltica. This has happened in the Via Baltica Nordica. Two other objectives are related to the connections to our neighbouring countries: the ferry connection between Vasa and Holmsund and the tunnel under Umkaret in Norway. The Norwegians are now building a tunnel starting in April 2004, but the ferry is constantly under a threat of being closed down due to low profitability. Due to various hindrances, like closure of roads due to heavy snow in winter, transportation firms build up their routes based on other alternatives. This not only results in longer transportation distances and higher costs

but has also a negative effect on the use of the ferry. Hence, we have to continue our efforts to maintain this ferry connection.

As we see it, all of these problems are linked to the fact that the E12 road is not seen as an entity with Trans-European Network (TEN) status for the whole road. The E12 road is an important link, stretching from Helsinki in the southeast to Mo i Rana and the Atlantic Ocean in the northwest. Furthermore, the connection by the E67 road through the Baltic countries and Poland to the Mittelmark region outside Berlin is a fantastic vision for the future. All this you can see on European maps showing important links and zones for development, except the Swedish part of the E12 road. The importance of completing this circuit and, in doing so empowering the Via Baltica Nordica Development Zone, seems obvious to everyone.

Here we face a common challenge. In September 2003 the Via Baltica Nordica Monitoring Committee made a decision in Hemavan, Sweden, to put forward this issue to relevant parties. This is an important decision, which shows that the Via Baltica Nordica project is truly supporting regions facing future regional challenges. We have high expectations for the future: the level of accessibility for the whole zone will reach new heights, so that we can in coming years look back with pride and say that the processes we were involved in really supported the realisation of the Via Baltica Nordica Development Zone as a sustainable development zone in Europe.

Lilly Bäcklund
Chairman of the executive board of the municipality of Lycksele
Chairman of the regional steering group of E12Alliance-Via Baltica Nordica project



Photo: xxx



“We must take tourism seriously!”

What is tourism? There are several definitions, but, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation, **tourism** is defined as “people’s activities when they travel to and are visiting places outside their daily living area for a shorter period than one year, for pleasure, business or other purposes”. In Sweden the tourism industry is defined as “all companies that act as goods and service suppliers to consumers of tourism”. These two definitions imply that tourism is something rather complex, at the same time concerning travelling, people’s consumption and suppliers to this consumption.

International tourism is the world’s largest export earner and an important factor in the balance of payments as well as in the gross national product of many nations. Tourism has become one of the world’s most important sources of employment. It stimulates enormous investment in infrastructure, which helps to improve the living conditions for local people as well as accessibility for tourists. It provides governments with substantial tax revenues. Most new tourism jobs and businesses are created in developing countries, helping to equalise economic opportunities and assisting rural residents to find other alternatives than moving to overcrowded cities.

From our point of view, tourism as an industry contributes to our possibilities to continue living in Europe’s northernmost periphery. That is why we must take tourism seriously! And we do; within Via Baltica Nordica project tourism is one of the three themes.

The strength in the Via Baltica Nordica project is that we are able to relate our actions with all other partners’ actions. We can compare and learn from each other. We can inspire and be inspired to use new methods.

Now in the middle of the project period we have a big challenge ahead of us. We have to find out if there is a way to continue the good co-operation within Via Baltica Nordica Development Zone also after this project. It will be very exiting to meet all the partners on more equal terms after the enlargement. Then we will all have access to the same EU programmes.

*Johanna Palmlöf,
Regional Project Secretary, E12 Alliance, Sweden
Chairman of the Via Baltica Nordica Tourism Theme
Group*



Via Uma database: accurate and sustainable data with easy access

The Swedish partnership E12 Alliance has focused on the tourism theme in the Via Baltica Nordica project. The other two themes, Accessibility to Railway Traffic and Landscape Planning/ Geographical Information Systems (GIS), are both of major importance when it comes to developing tourism. They regard increased accessibility and developed planning methods/GIS as strategic tools in order to develop destinations. These tools will be supplemented by actions that will strengthen hospitality for both the visitors in the region as well as the entrepreneurs and also improve the purchaseability.

- Building our common database *Via Uma* is one good example of this. It is a geographical information system where tourism data will be connected to general municipal planning. The purpose is to make it possible to share data between different sectors of the society and also to make data available for several purposes including tourism offices, Internet and mobile solutions, says Johanna Palmlöf.

In *Via Uma* it is important to ensure that data is accurate and sustainable. This means that a lot of effort has to be put into organising and securing the input process. The aim is to provide easy access to high quality data concerning different destinations and highlighting products for tourists as well as for all participants active in the industry, in the municipalities and in the region.

E12 Alliance has also planned to use the *Via Uma* database in the other pilot project called *Innovative Information Environments*. Here specially designed information boards equipped with interactive screens are planned to be placed at resting areas along the E12, the Blue Highway. These boards will give travellers updated and accurate information on accommodations, restaurants, service stations and activities.

Additional information:
Johanna Palmlöf, johanna.palmlof@epost.lycksele.se

Photo: Johanna Inkänen



Sweden Photo: xxxx



Via Finlandia Photo: xxxx



Via Karelia Photo: xxxx



Tallinn Photo: xxxx



Bauska Photo: xxxx

Via Karelia Information and Marketing System

Via Karelia is a tourist route running for over a 1000 km in eastern Finland from Gulf of Finland to Lapland. The marketing of Via Karelia will be based completely on an electric information system, which is developed and constructed with the help of the Via Baltica Nordica project.

The system is built like an inverted pyramid. On the top is an Internet portal which acts like the cover of a magazine and “sells” the content to the client surfing in the Internet. This will in turn tempt them to click deeper into the system. At the same level an active map shows where you are travelling along Via Karelia. The deeper you are in the system, the larger the scale on the map and the more detailed your information.

The heart of the system is a marketing database. This is not just a collection of information but information collected, stored and classified on many different levels. The database information is linked to the Internet portal by a general map whilst a detailed map also shows the location of the services the Internet user is currently viewing. The Internet user can also browse for services by location and type. Hence, the entrepreneur can always be located by his geographical position, e.g. South-Karelia or North-Karelia and his character, e.g. hotel, hostel or camping site.

The surface and the bottom of the system form a tube with information running in both directions connecting supply with demand. The last link between the client and the tourist enterprise is a booking system. Via Karelia information system is, therefore, developing into a wholly integrated selling system.

An extra service mostly for small businesses is a built-in Extranet, which contains an electric advertising office. Part of the system includes basic materials like newspaper ads, business cards and direct marketing letters. Entrepreneurs can gain access to this material with a password and by paying a small amount to the Via Karelia association.

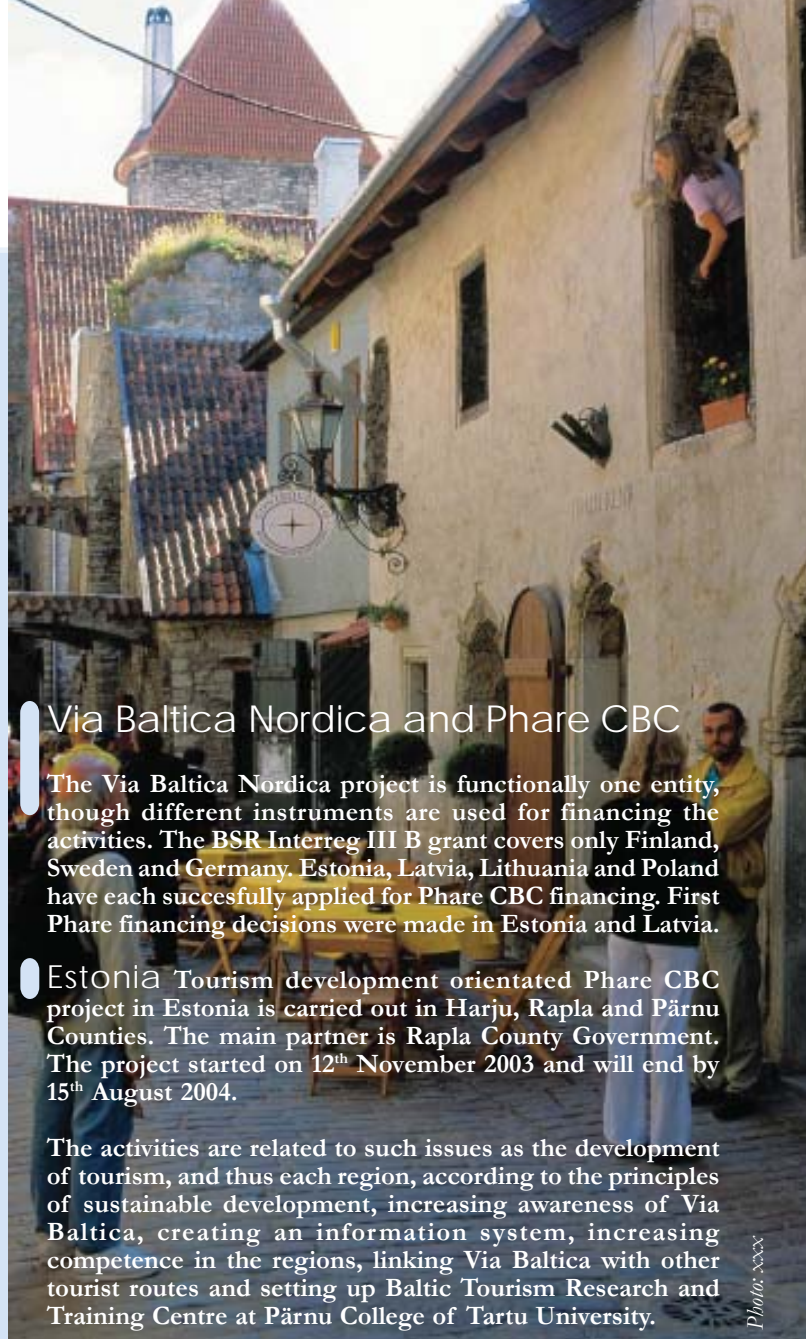
Additional information: Juha Rantala, via.karelia@kolumbus.fi

Mobile solutions for Via Finlandia

Via Finlandia made an investigation in the state of mobile solutions and their usability on the Via Finlandia travel route. Information was gathered and processed from the chosen pilot area so that it was possible for the traveler to use his or her mobile phone to get maps and information on places worth visiting or seeing. Results of the investigation were promising although a lot of work will still have to be done. Special attention should be paid to data collection and its use: common tools, methods and processes should be agreed on. In addition, a common server solution should be found for the whole route and the service should be made available to as many different types of mobile equipment as possible.

- Now we have a clear idea about the necessary scope, which we will have to cover, if we want to use expensive mobile information systems. As the technology becomes more common, travelers will use the new technology as they search for information on destinations. We will have to keep up with the development. Mobile information systems, their development and implementation in reality should also be used internationally, says project coordinator Mika Niskanen from Via Finlandia.

Additional information:
Mika Niskanen, mika.niskanen@pirkanmaa.fi



Via Baltica Nordica and Phare CBC

The Via Baltica Nordica project is functionally one entity, though different instruments are used for financing the activities. The BSR Interreg III B grant covers only Finland, Sweden and Germany. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland have each successfully applied for Phare CBC financing. First Phare financing decisions were made in Estonia and Latvia.

Estonia Tourism development orientated Phare CBC project in Estonia is carried out in Harju, Rapla and Pärnu Counties. The main partner is Rapla County Government. The project started on 12th November 2003 and will end by 15th August 2004.

The activities are related to such issues as the development of tourism, and thus each region, according to the principles of sustainable development, increasing awareness of Via Baltica, creating an information system, increasing competence in the regions, linking Via Baltica with other tourist routes and setting up Baltic Tourism Research and Training Centre at Pärnu College of Tartu University.

- One of the main activities of the project is providing information and marketing of the Via Baltica tourism route. Co-operation within the Via Baltica Nordica Umbrella and continuation of co-operation in the whole Baltic Sea Region is also essential, says Tavo Kikas from Rapla County Government.

More information: Tavo Kikas, Rapla County Government (tavo@raplamv.ee)

Latvia The Phare CBC project of the city of Bauska was approved in August 2003 and will last for one year. The main aim of the Latvian project is also sustainable tourism development. Though the focus of the pilot is in Bauska, the project activities cover the whole Latvian part of Via Baltica Nordica. Networking with other Via Baltica Nordica partners gives new opportunities and experiences.

Project activities include surveys on tourist flows and services, marketing material production and participation in national and international tourism fairs. Signing system of Bauska city centre is implemented as a local pilot. In addition the goal is to establish an international Via Baltica road association in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The main target groups of the project are tourists, tour operators, travel agencies, entrepreneurs, local and regional authorities and citizens.

More information: Inese Turkupole, Tourism Information Centre of Bauska District (tourinfo@bauska.lv)

The first version of the Via Baltica Nordica Internet homepages was launched in February 2004 at the address www.viabalticanordica.com. Eventually the homepages will act as a portal to the whole Via Baltica Nordica Development Zone. The homepages include information about the project as such, marketing material and links to the project partners and other related organisations. With a password it is possible to use documents and downloads, like detailed budget figures, for the project's internal use.



Photo: Jonas Axelsson

Via Baltica Nordica Forum in Hemavan

The second international Via Baltica Nordica Forum took place on 26th and 27th of September in Hemavan, Sweden. Forums are essential for exchanging experiences between the project partners. Local and regional activities get added value from the true transnational dimension. The excellently organised Forum gathered nearly 80 participants from seven countries in the warm Via Baltica Nordica spirit.

Tourism development was the special theme of the second Forum in the mountains in Northern Sweden. Connections with the Northern Dimension were also mentioned in several speeches. As the focus of the European Union moves northwards, the substance of the Northern Dimension has to be focused and strengthened. The Via Baltica Nordica project has been mentioned in the European Commission's draft for the Northern Dimension Action Plan as an example of how regions are implementing the NDAP.

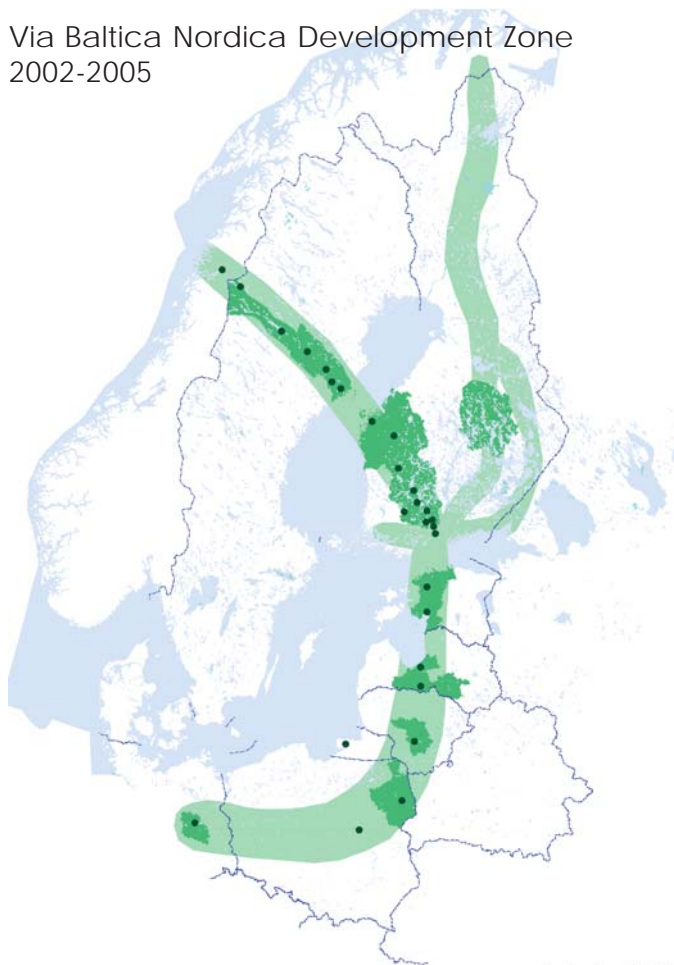
Via Baltica Nordica and Baltic Sea Region co-operation discussed in Brussels

Experiences and expectations on the Baltic Sea Region co-operation, especially related to Interreg programmes are discussed at the information seminar "Via Baltica Nordica – Regions implementing the Visions at the Baltic Sea Region" in Brussels on 19th February. Seminar is organised in co-operation by Via Baltica Nordica partners and South Finland EU office. The seminar takes place at the Permanent Representation of Finland to the European Union in Brussels.

Key themes of the seminar are regional development, transnational co-operation at the Baltic Sea Region including Russia and EU enlargement. Via Baltica Nordica project and its experiences and expectations are used as a concrete case. Presentations and comments are given e.g. by European Commission, European Parliament, Via Baltica Nordica secretariat, and the New EU member state partners. The seminar is opened by Mr Jari Koskinen, Chairman of the Regional Assembly of Häme, and Member of the Finnish Parliament.

The fourth Via Baltica Nordica Steering Group meeting is held back-to-back with the info seminar in Brussels on 20th February.

Via Baltica Nordica Development Zone 2002-2005



Background map © MigBSR

Regional Council of Häme

Niittykatu 5
FIN-13100 Hämeenlinna
Fax +358 (0)3 647 4026
www.viabalticanordica.com

Via Baltica Nordica Development Zone Project

Matti Lipsanen
Project Manager
Tel. +358 (0)3 6474 054
Mob +358 (0)50 5060 697
matti.lipsanen@hame.fi



Johanna Inkinen
Project Coordinator
Tel. +358 (0)3 6474 069
Mob +358 (0)50 550 2170
johanna.inkinen@hame.fi

