

Meeting of the Finnish-Norwegian Joint Working Group on the Arctic Railway – 4th Meeting

Date November 27th, 2018
Time 09:30 am – 12:30 pm
Location Government Banquet Hall, Eteläesplanadi 6, Helsinki

Participants

Lindström Sabina	Director-General, Ministry of Transport and Communications
Vihavainen-Pitkänen Marjukka	Senior Adviser, Ministry of Transport and Communications
Rinkineva Ville	Intern, Ministry of Transport and Communications
Rimpiläinen Anni Suvanto Tuomo	Senior Adviser, Transport Agency Transportation System Specialist, Transport Agency
Ylinampa Jaakko	Director-General, Lapland Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment
Jokelainen Timo	Director, Lapland Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment
Lohi Timo	Development Manager, Region of Northern Lapland Municipality
Paltto Heikki Kvalheim Eirik	I Vice President, Sámi Parliament Senior Adviser, Ministry of Transportation and Communications
Alvheim Sturla	Senior Adviser, Norwegian Railway Directorate
Selmer Eirik	Senior Advisor, Finnmark County Municipality
Gjølme Torhild	Head of the Agricultural Department, County Governor of Finnmark
Fjellheim Hege	Deputy Director General, Sámi Parliament in Norway
Alho-Tousignant Päivi Hupli Anne	Interpreter Interpreter

Minutes of the meeting on 27th November 2018

Representatives from the Finnish and Norwegian ministries and agencies responsible for transport matters of the states, and the representatives of indigenous Sámi people met in Helsinki on the 27th of November 2018 to review the situation of the assignment given to the Finnish-Norwegian Joint Working Group on the Arctic Railway.

The working group's assignment is to continue the study on an Arctic railway line (Rovaniemi-Kirkenes routing) and examine the prerequisites of such a project as well as prepare a suggestion for the project's future steps. The basis of this work is the former study on the Arctic rail line, published on 9th March 2018.

This meeting was the fourth meeting of the joint working group, the first one was held in Helsinki on 30th May 2018, the second one in Rovaniemi on 28th August 2018 and the third on 6th November 2018 in Helsinki. The Finnish Ministry of Transport and Communications convened and chaired the meeting.

1. Opening of the meeting

The meeting was opened by Chair, Mrs. Sabina Lindström.

2. Welcome-introductions

In her opening speech, the Chair stated that the main objective of the meeting is to discuss the draft final report of this steering group. She also notified that it is to be decided later whether the steering group sees a need for the last scheduled meeting to be held or whether the report can be finalised through email correspondence.

3. Approval of Agenda

The agenda of the meeting was approved.

4. Comments on the reports of the subgroups

4.1. Financing –subgroup

It was noted that the final reports of this subgroup have been distributed to the steering group. It was stated that some of the findings of both the financial structuring study and the study regarding tourism potential have been taken into the steering group's draft report and that the financing study will be annexed to the final report of the steering group in its entirety.

The Chair stated that the report will be translated into Finnish as soon as possible.

4.2. Permissions and Planning –subgroup

It was stated that the draft version of the report has been distributed to the group. No substantial amendments will be made, but some linguistic revision and other finalising will still take place. The final report will be published in the publication series of the Finnish Transport Agency. The finalising should be ready within a week after which the report will be translated into Finnish by the FTA.

The report has been written in co-operation with the Finnish and Norwegian agencies. It was stated that the national planning processes at first look rather different to each other, but in fact have very much similarities, especially in the future when Finland will also have its own 12-year National Transport Plan similar to the one Norway already employs. Of utmost importance is, that any further planning be closely linked between the two countries and that one cannot go ahead of the other.

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It was further enhanced, that because Norway has an ongoing National Transport Plan, this project, if pursued, must fit into place with the Norwegian Transport Plan revision schedule and prerequisites. The current revision will be concluded at the end of 2019 and it is likely that this project will not be mature enough to be included in this revision, possibly not even in the next one. In relation to this it was stated that the Finnish 12-year plan is likely to be established during 2019 and come into force in 2020. At current it seems unlikely that the Arctic Railway would be included in this first 12-year plan.

4.3. Impacts on Nature and Indigenous Peoples –subgroup

The report has been drafted both by Finnish and Norwegian officials. At the moment the drafts are being put together and phrasing finalised. The subgroup will still shortly comment on the work and the report will be final before 6th December.

Findings of the report are mainly comparative. It was stated that the legislation in Finland and Norway concerning nature and indigenous peoples is pretty similar, but that some differences exist. The main concern is to be aware of both international conventions and national legislation that take into account indigenous peoples. Regarding this, some discussion arose about the need and correct time for the Akwé: Kon -procedure. It was stated that in Finland it is not statutory and has mainly been used regarding forestry. Some of the group members stated that it might be good to have a statement on the mentioned procedure included in the report. It was further noted that the Akwé: Kon was considered during the regional planning process, but it was found out to be too expensive in regards to the benefits.

The Sámi parliament opposes the inclusion of the Arctic Railway in the regional land use plan of Northern Lapland. It was stated that proper impact assessments regarding the Sámi people and the environment have not been carried out and only after these impact assessments have been carried out can the railway be considered to be included in the land use plan. The Sámi parliament states that the effect on Sámi culture has not yet been assessed nor has the outcome of a zero option been duly assessed. Furthermore, the right of the indigenous people to land and water is an issue that has to be ensured. It was claimed that even without further studies it can be seen that the project would have severe negative impacts on the Sámi livelihood as well as their right to practice their culture and language.

It was brought to the group's knowledge that because of the land use planning monopoly of the regional council, the ministry nor this steering group can take a stand on the regional land use planning process. However, this process will be followed closely. It was agreed that it must be emphasised in the final report that this steering group's work is completely separate to the ongoing process of the Northern Lapland Regional Land Use Plan. It was further noted, that it is a normal procedure to include provisions for railways in regional plans and carry out preliminary studies concerning them. The correct place for thorough impact assessments is at a later stage of an infrastructure project. The steering group's assignment is only to identify circumstances, not go into detail.

There was some discussion on the zero-option and it's proper assessment. It was stated that in the time given no separate study would be carried out but some further details can be added in the final report regarding the zero-option.

5. The report of the steering group

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5.1. Overview and comments

Mr. Ville Rinkineva briefly presented the contents of the draft report after which the floor was opened for discussion. It was noted that so far the text is very Finland-oriented and some additions from the Norwegian point of view are needed in order to distribute an evenly balanced report. It was admitted that there has been very little time to familiarise with the draft report and that the Finnish translation is by no means complete.

The draft report was then addressed and commented chapter by chapter. It was agreed that the Norwegian representatives will produce some draft texts to be added regarding the Norwegian point of view. Some of the Finnish-focused texts were agreed to be removed from the actual report and be annexed to it instead. The chapter concerning the Sámi people was seen to be too brief. The Sámi representatives were asked to provide draft text to be added to this chapter. The chapter regarding the subgroup addressing impacts on nature and indigenous peoples will be amended once the subgroup's final report is distributed. Some minor technical amendments were also noted.

5.2. Conclusions and recommendations of the group

The group will not in the report take a stand on whether one should continue the planning of the Arctic railway into the next phase or not. It was stated that the actual findings of this exercise have been addressed in the conclusions. The objective of this study was to find out stakeholders and to get knowledge of what to take into account in possible further planning and this has been achieved.

There was thorough discussion on how to conclude the report. It was agreed that the Finnish Ministry of Transport and Communications would draft a text on conclusions and recommendations for the group to comment, taking into account the various opinions and points brought up in the discussion.

6. Following meetings and actions to be taken

The final report along with the reports of the three subgroups will be published as soon as possible. The Finnish Ministry of Transport and Communications is responsible for the publishing and will have an internal discussion on the schedule, bearing in mind that the term of the steering group ends on the 14th of December. A joint press release by the two ministries will be distributed along with the publishing of the report. All material will be published on the ministries' websites.

The final report will be translated into Finnish, North Sámi and Skolt Sámi. The subgroups' reports will be translated into Finnish. The Finnish Ministry of Transport and Communications is responsible for the translations.

It was agreed that correspondence will continue by email and the need for a last meeting will be assessed on basis of the discussion that rises from the further drafting and finalising of the report.

7. Any other business

Chair Lindström thanked the member's of the steering group for the good co-operation and their activity. She stated that this has been a challenging and interesting exercise and that it has involved a lot of learning. Work regarding the issue will continue.

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8. Close of the meeting

The meeting was closed by the Chair at 11.37.

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