

Northern Netherlands: Gateway between Western and Northern Europe

The Northern Netherlands region is located right in the middle between two major metropolitan areas: Randstad in the West and Bremen-Hamburg in the East. A faster and more reliable railway connection between these regions and the Urban Nodes such as Groningen and Leeuwarden would strengthen the TEN-T network and benefit many regions in different ways.

The strong link between our region and other regions in the Netherlands, Northern Germany, Scandinavia and the rest of Europe could be reinforced through this railway connection. Not only would this benefit connectivity in North West Europe: it would contribute to the modal shift and many others of the EU's most important goals.

Finding solutions together for Europe's biggest challenge

Improved railway connections between Amsterdam and Groningen would be combined with major developments in Northern Germany and Scandinavia: through the CEF Flagship project Wunderline between Groningen and Bremen and the Fehmarnbelt Fixed Link between Hamburg and Copenhagen, the TEN-T link between Western Europe and Northern Europe will experience a major upgrade, alongside the connection Emmen-Rheine-Hannover/Berlin.

The benefits of these connections will reach far beyond shorter travel times. European ambitions such as Smarter Europe, Greener Europe, Connected Europe, Social Europe and Europe closer to its citizens will become reality both inside and outside our region. How?



Economic Growth

On a European level, the Northern Netherlands is in the very middle between two of Europe's big metropolitan areas: Randstad and Hamburg. A better cross-border connection with fast and reliable railway links to Amsterdam and Hamburg helps to open up the potentials of the region as a gateway between the Netherlands and Northern Germany. In 2019 the Netherlands was Northern Germany's most important source of imports in the EU. The Northern Netherlands is embedded between the multi-port gateway regions of the Rhine-Scheldt-Delta and the Jade-Weser-Elbe-Delta. A better railway connection to Germany provides better access between the Northern Netherlands, including the ports of Harlingen, Delfzijl en Eemshaven, and the ports of Bremen/Bremerhaven, Hamburg and Wilhelmshaven.

For both Denmark and Norway, the Netherlands is one the top 3 trade partners and almost 10% of Swedish goods imports come from the Netherlands. Better connectivity towards Scandinavia by rail is essential and the Northern Netherlands can serve as a bridge between the Netherlands, Northern Germany and Scandinavia. The potential is shown by the frequent shuttle Rotterdam-Coevorden-Malmö.

Sustainability

Short-haul flights between Amsterdam and Bremen carried about 470 passengers per day (pre-Covid). A shift to rail would lead to a reduction of CO₂ emissions of over 85% - from 34,800 to 5,200 tons of CO₂/day. Flights between Copenhagen and Amsterdam carried over 3,000 passengers per day (pre-Covid). A good night train connection between the two cities could help travelers to cut their CO₂ emissions by almost 85% - from 156 kg to 24 kg of CO₂/trip.

Innovation

Better railway connections between the Northern Netherlands and Northern Germany will improve connectivity between innovative regions. The Northern Netherlands was the first European region to be granted the status of Hydrogen Valley. The Netherlands and Germany have recently intensified cooperation, launching a cross-border hydrogen project to investigate the potential of green hydrogen business models (HY3) in the border region. An improved railway connection can provide a further boost for the uptake of hydrogen in Europe, supported by a transnational hydrogen infrastructure.

Resilience

A better railway link closes the existing gap in the TEN-T network between Amsterdam – Northern Netherlands – Hamburg and bypasses the crowded railway node of Hanover. An improved railway connection in the Northern Netherlands could severely improve the resilience of the cross-border railway connection between the northern parts of the Netherlands and Germany, especially as an alternative route to the Oldenzaal – Bad Bentheim border crossing. In addition, by being integrated into the TEN-T network, the new railway link can significantly improve and shorten the connection to the Scandinavian countries.

Connectivity

Better railway connections between the Randstad, Northern Netherlands and Northern Germany could reduce travel times to just over 3.5 hours between Amsterdam and Bremen and would serve the travel needs between the Northern Netherlands and Northern Germany at the same time. This is particularly relevant for commuters who live in Germany and work in the Netherlands, and exemplified by more than 100 running cross-border INTERREG projects between the Netherlands and Germany. Fast and reliable railway links to Amsterdam and Hamburg help to open up the potentials of the Northern Netherlands as a gateway between the Netherlands and Northern Germany.

How to make this happen

With 2021 as the European Year of Rail and the ongoing roll-out of the European Commission Strategy for Smart and Sustainable Mobility, now is the right time to fulfill the potential of the railway link. Steps towards this goal would be a better inclusion of the Northern Netherlands in the TEN-T network. By investing in a better connection between Amsterdam, Groningen, Hamburg and Scandinavia, a big step towards the modal shift can be made. In order to ensure excellent international and interregional connectivity, investment in the following railway links are crucial: the Lelylijn between Amsterdam and Leeuwarden/Groningen, the acceleration of the existing railway connection between the Randstad and Northern Netherlands, and the Nedersaksenlijn between Groningen and Enschede via Emmen.

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