

The Northern Netherlands:

Fit for the European Green Deal



The Northern Netherlands are more than just a supporter of the European Green Deal. Not only do we share the ambitions of the European Commission to become the first climate neutral continent: we are taking a leading role in finding ways to make this happen. The status of first Hydrogen Valley in Europe is an important recognition and boost for us to continue these efforts, but our strategy goes beyond the transition towards renewable sources of energy.

We believe that the very key to shaping a climate neutral free continent lies in the synergy between policy areas such as energy, mobility, agriculture, and circular economy.

Clean energy: First European Hydrogen Valley

The Northern Netherlands is a sustainable energy region, a front runner in Europe, where we use our core strengths for the energy transition; namely the production and use of hydrogen and hydrothermal energy. The energy sector is the second largest economic sector of the region, both in terms of energy from renewables and jobs, but also in terms of innovation and knowledge.

Since the discovery of natural gas in the Northern Netherlands it became the main energy producer of the country, home to the energy-intensive industry and became highly dependent on the socio-economic prospects of this industry. Globally and at the European level, our region has the duty to drastically reduce CO₂ emissions and at national level the decision has been made to halt gas extraction by 2022.

To this end energy transition in the Northern Netherlands has to accelerate by using clean alternatives and we as a region have to make a sharp turn. Therefore the region is committed to providing a collaborative contribution by using the Just Transition Fund to enhance the economic development and transition of the entire Northern Netherlands. As Just Transition Region, we aim for sustainable growth by involving citizens in our efforts and by investing in our planet. A just transition with benefits and opportunities for everyone.

We collaborate with businesses and knowledge institutions to make the energy transition work. Therefore, a suitable energy infrastructure is essential in order to best transport and store energy from renewable sources.

That is why we welcome and support the European ambitions of the Hydrogen Strategy and the Fit-for-55- package. The Northern Netherlands is actively building on the green industry of the future and green hydrogen has a vital role to play in this transition, both as energy carrier and as feedstock. Our region is home to the first Hydrogen Valley of Europe, and we aim to develop a fully functioning hydrogen economy, encompassing the entire value chain



Projects focus on sectoral integration, namely production of green Hydrogen as feedstock for the industry, storage, transport, and the distribution of Hydrogen needed for the energy demand of the industry as well as mobility. Plans are already in place for expanding our Valley, and becoming a Cross-border Hydrogen Valley with our eastern, German neighbor region. A newly developed Hydrogen Investment Plan supports our ambitions and aims to make the Northern Netherlands the green hydrogen supplier of North Western Europe by 2030. Hydrogen Valleys are instrumental in Europe's Hydrogen ambitions as they are investing in all stages of the hydrogen value chain, position themselves as testbeds for green development projects, and they put in place the right conditions for new skills and more jobs. With regards to skills of our future economy and hydrogen ecosystem our Greenwise campus is developing with 33 European partners a Hydrogen curriculum.

We are also the hydrothermal energy region of the Netherlands. By building small scale heat networks, a district heating system, to heat our houses, and ensuring the transition from natural gas to cleaner alternatives. Citizens are involved in all our endeavors, and we are assisting citizens in energy saving measures, for instance in helping them strengthen the energy proficiency of buildings. To that end we are proud that we are working on climate adaptation as the municipality of Groningen is part of the European Mission for 100 Climate Neutral and Smart Cities and the province of Drenthe is part of the Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change together with 250 other European Region's.

Our strength in Europe is illustrated by our leading role in the European Hydrogen Valleys Partnership, a collaboration between over 60 regions in Europe with the aim of developing hydrogen regions and link them to each other. To ensure the green transition of our region and Europe we need financial support at European level for the scale-up of green hydrogen and hydrothermal energy, as well as additional supporting instruments to close the initial investment and regulatory gap.

Cross-border connectivity: synergy between transport, energy and digitalization



Hydrogen produced in the North Sea region will be transported to other regions in the Netherlands as well as other EU Member States and can serve as an alternative fuel to support the TEN-T Network. Therefore, we strongly support the European ambitions on the roll-out of Infrastructure for Alternative Fuels as set out in the new AFIR. It is of crucial importance that the infrastructure is available to stimulate the uptake of green hydrogen.

Through our ambitious plans to improve the connectivity between our regions and regions such as the Randstad, Northern Germany and Scandinavia, we aim to stimulate innovation, cross-border cooperation, resilience of the TEN-T network and sustainability. This would not only strengthen the TEN-T network, but also contribute to the goals of both European cohesion policy and the European Green Deal. It is crucial that the urban nodes in our region – Groningen, Leeuwarden and Emmen – are integrated into the TEN-T network in order to contribute to a smart and sustainable network.

We believe innovation is the key to a sustainable Europe: our region introduced intelligent transport systems and is the first in Europe to test a self-driving passenger train. A successful test with a hydrogen train was conducted in 2020. We are developing smart urban mobility solutions and zero emission urban logistic projects.

The Northern Netherlands have been active for a considerable time in the domain of 5G through, among others, 5Groningen/5G Fieldlab and 5G Fieldlab Drenthe. Here, innovations are tested and applied to the transport & mobility sector, and to agriculture, most notably through speeding up the market uptake of 5G solutions.

Circular Economy: closing the loops

The Northern Netherlands has the ambition to become the circular frontrunner of the Netherlands and Europe by 2030 and want to be an active stakeholder in fostering a true European Circular Economy and contribute to the implementation of the European Circular Economy Action Plan. The transition from a circular economy will put less pressure on our material and resource use, and will make optimal use of materials and products, so that we can expedite closing the loop.



The circular economy in our region enhances our Northern economy. Our circular core-competences will attract investments and foster the development of more circular enterprises. Therefore, the Northern Netherlands integrates the circular economy in its innovation policy. In our region businesses collaborate with knowledge institutions and public bodies, to foster our circular knowledge and activities.

We distinguish ourselves by this so called “triple helix” collaboration between businesses, knowledge institutions and local and regional authorities. An example of this is the Association Circular Friesland, set up by local SMEs and involving knowledge institutes and governments, empowering the transition bottom-up, working together and inspiring others to take circular steps too.

Our expertise lies in circular plastics, water, circular building, and circular procurement and we serve as example region in these areas of expertise through several iconic projects. We transform towards a circular economy with both our SME's and our industry. With respect to the latter we are changing the nature of chemistry and have the ambition of becoming the first chemical cluster in Europe with a net zero impact, and minimum environmental impact by using renewable energy and feedstock.

Part of this endeavor is also the recycling of plastics in the Northern Netherlands, 'Greenwise Circular Plastics in Emmen'. This is an initiative to develop our region into the main circular plastics cluster of Europe, a Circular Hub using our expertise on polymer synthesis and production as well as thermal, mechanical and chemical recycling – a unique energy efficient innovation in Europe- all in order to contribute to closing the plastics cycle in not only our region but Europe as a whole.

At the same time we strongly believe that this can only be done with a strong societal pillar embedded in our work, encompassing different fields of knowledge on for instance business administration, logistics, and regulatory aspects.

Furthermore, to foster a circular transition we use and develop water technology as enabler for the transition to a circular economy, at WaterCampus Leeuwarden, European center of excellence for sustainable water technology we are creating an unique environment for the development of profitable and sustainable state of the art water treatment technology. With regards to building, in our region, we are enhancing circular construction, using locally grown bio-based materials, such as flax, hemp and bulrush. All of the actors are involved and supported; farmers, processing companies and construction companies.

Our education programs raise awareness and provide skilled human capital for the construction sector, and finally our public authorities facilitate in terms of legislation and procurement. Moreover raw material flows from strong chains such as agriculture, chemistry and also waste are used for 'biobased' products and activities, which is beneficial to the environment and offers opportunities for entrepreneurs. We are creating impact by focusing on the raw material flows, this is the basis for our collaboration within the region and this makes us unique.

Nature Inclusive Agriculture: sustainability and productivity

The Northern Netherlands is a region that is strongly characterized by agriculture: more than two thirds of our lands are used for agriculture. It contributes to the livelihood and identity of our region, and to food supply at European and global levels. As the Farm-to-Fork strategy envisages, an increasing number of farmers in our region are making the transition to organic farming. We believe that in each region throughout the EU, farmers know what is best for the lands where they produce.



In our region, nature inclusive agriculture is an excellent way to combine sustainable use of land and resources with high levels of production. With the Regional Deal for Nature Inclusive Agriculture, we aim for an agricultural model with the support of local communities which contributes to restoring biodiversity, which is economically viable and circular.

At our Dairy Campus, the largest test farm in the world, with over 14 acres of land and 550 cows, science and practice go hand in hand to stimulate innovation. Through ambitious projects such as Fascinating we are working towards the protein transition.

Call to Action

In our region, prosperity, health, and sustainability are the foundation for a successful social and green economy. We aim for sustainable growth by involving citizens in our efforts and by taking care of our planet. We are a just transition region offering broad prosperity and opportunities to our inhabitants. With our effort and knowledge on energy transition, circular economy, sustainable mobility, and nature inclusive agriculture, the Northern Netherlands is contributing to a greener Europe, making us an absolute partner to build together a modern, resource efficient, and competitive European economy.

The Northern Netherlands stands ready to share its knowledge and expertise on the aforementioned topics and we aim to work together with other regions, the European institutions, knowledge institutions, the private sector and other stakeholders towards our common goals. If you are interested in ways of collaborating on these topics together, do not hesitate to get in touch with us. We can only make the European Green Deal happen if we work together, all across Europe!

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