

Newly formed body seeks to enhance the gateway function of the Baltic Sea Region

Towards the pan-Baltic state



Photo: Femern A/S

Nine countries, twenty one public and business partners, almost 5.5 mln euro budget and a dedication to make a difference. These are the start-up credentials of TransBaltic project, the new initiative wholly devoted to the progress of the Baltic Sea Region transport.

TransBaltic is an organization forged by regional authorities in cooperation with local academic and business partners. The goal it sets itself is to advocate the harmonized economic growth of all Baltic Sea states by helping to better integrate the pan-Baltic transport system and improving the region's overall accessibility. The official kick-off meeting was held on 15-16 September in Malmö – the heart of the project's main driving force, the Swedish region Skåne. It automatically launched the first of a series of work periods, all of which are to take 3 years to complete.

The project partnership structure has been likened to a triple-helix, with core regional partners, backing institutions and various associated support organizations acting as three

foundations on which the whole enterprise depends. Especially significant for the successful implementation of the plan are contacts with business institutions, because, more than anything else, TransBaltic hopes to create a climate conducive to transport-related investments.

The hows and whys

The new organization's ambitions are summarized perfectly in its motto: "Towards an integrated transport system in the Baltic Sea Region". The TransBaltic agenda is based on the fundamental premise that harmonized progress of the whole region is hindered first and foremost by the lack of an integrated and coherent transport system. It is the segmentation that stands in the way of true regional synergy. Not only legal regulations and

procedures need to be made more compatible, but also the very quality of the logistic infrastructure varies from country to country. These discrepancies must first be eliminated before there can be any talk of regional transport integration.

Furthermore, the partners in the project recognized the need to adapt to rapidly changing conditions in the global market – the ever-growing importance of emerging economic powerhouses such as China, India and Russia, and the growth in trade exchange volumes it entails. The EU at large, and the Baltic Region in particular, will have to take the necessary steps in order to be ready to handle the increasing traffic in Trans-European Transport Networks.

The ideas expressed by TransBaltic seem to fit in well with the European Commission's resolution to strengthen and facilitate multimodal

of mind

transport. Among the numerous partnerships considered crucial for TransBaltic to succeed is, for instance, Northern Dimension Transport and Logistics Partnership – a high profile cooperation scheme between EU, Norway, Iceland and Russia. It is also only logical to take advantage of the fact that the Baltic Sea Strategy is included among priority long-term development plans for the EU.

Cooperation is the key

TransBaltic is neither the only regional initiative of this kind, nor do its perpetrators aim at making it the dominant one. On the contrary, they seek to work as closely as possible with all kinds of other pan-Baltic bodies, such as Baltic SeaStates Subregional Cooperation or Baltic Sea Commission. The idea is for the new project to act more as an umbrella organization, offering a joint framework for coordinating and focusing the endeavours of various autonomous institutions. Equally important is reaching the wide consensus that ongoing logistic integration of BSR is a common goal for every interested party in the region. Therefore, the door for collaboration with individual transport corridor initiatives, like EWTC II or Scandria, is wide open.

The objectives are to be achieved through cooperation and joint investments with other key players in the area. One of the most important things is to make companies from the financial sector interested in investing in a string of priority projects. Making Russia involved in the process has also been deemed essential for the initiative to take off, seeing as it is the closest and biggest non-EU trading partner for the Baltic Sea states. In order to do this, necessary legislative solutions will need to be lobbied for in all of the involved partner countries and above all, the TransBaltic spokespeople need to find their joint voice heard in the public European forum. Unity of vision and the power to promote it is as much a goal for the project as concrete infrastructural investments.

Partners and accomplices

The leading partner and primary initiator of TransBaltic is Region Skåne, and with EUR 800,000 placed in the common pool it is also the top contributor. The governing body of the southernmost region of Sweden boasts extensive experience in work on transnational development projects in the past. Region Skåne's major role in the project is likely to be that of the main coordinator of the organization's administrative

and communication processes, internal as well as external – it is here that a steady dialogue with the EU authorities will be cultivated. Needless to say, Skåne is also home to the project's secretariat.

Half of the other 20 project partners are likewise regional authorities, including Västerbotten (also Sweden), Lahti (Finland), Pomorskie (Poland), Sjaelland (Denmark), and Eastern Norway County Network. The remaining participants are mainly academic and research institutions from the transport and logistics sector, such as Gdańsk's Maritime Institute, Estonian Maritime Academy or Hamburg University of Technology. According to the official programme the total project budget, accumulated from partners' donations and EU contribution amounts to EUR 5,491,678.

Apart from the full-fledged members, there are as many as 29 associated organizations which have offered their support to the initiative. Chief among them are the national transport ministries of the involved countries. Very important strategically is the backing received from 8 institutions from Russia, such as Kaliningrad Region and City of St. Petersburg. A number of other pan-Baltic bodies round up the list.

Methodology of approach

TransBaltic's agenda is harmonized with the broader scope of the EU's Baltic Sea Region

Programme 2007-2013 (certain adjustments have been made after the initiative was rejected from the programme once before). The organization will work towards its overall aim of creating incentives for the development of BSR through a variety of steps. They intend to deliver forecasts on traffic increases to aid its business partners in the proper timing of their transport-related investments. Stakeholders are also going to be provided with a harmonized regional action plan and business concepts courtesy of the TransBaltic experts, pertaining to problems such as transport capacity or optimization of supply chains via the application of e-commerce solutions.

The body's headquarters will be made available as a neutral meeting ground for all involved parties, be it state owned or private. The underlying motivation is not about being in a position of power, but about serving the wider public interest, says Skåne representative and TransBaltic project manager Wiktor Szydarowski, and that is what his organization sets out to do.

The implementation of the project's ideas is scheduled over 36 months, from September 2009 through September 2012. The entire work has been divided into 5 clear cut segments, called Work Packages, each covering a different area of concerns: Project Management and Administration, Communication and Information, The BSR as a Transport Gateway



Photo: Scandlines

Area, Horizontal Measures and Key Business Actions. Every Work Package has its separate timeline of specific activities to be undertaken within every 6-month period.

What can go wrong

TransBaltic planners recognize that potential barriers on the way to fulfilling the project's ideas are twofold. Firstly, there is no guarantee as to the level of dedication on the part of national governments, especially transport and infrastructure ministries, towards cross-border collaboration, upon which the whole initiative rests. Secondly, there is the possibility that the private sector will not prove as eager to translate the project's future policy-making achievements into tangible investments.

Recognizing the danger, the project's leadership attempts to avert these threats by engaging in an intensive communication and information campaign. Direct contacts with public and private stakeholders have been maintained since day one, intended as much to explain the initiative to potential partners, as to profile it better to their individual needs. All these efforts are expected to ensure that the middleman work of TransBaltic representatives will not go to waste, and the desired relationships between state and business that it helps create will eventually result in an increase in prosperity for the Baltic Sea Region as a whole. ■

Adam Olesiejuk



How will TransBaltic make a difference explains its project manager – Wiktor Szydarowski

■ How did the whole initiative start?

In the preparatory process for the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013 eleven countries pointed out the need to implement a strategy of harmonising transport and logistic systems of the Baltic Sea countries and regions – an idea anchored in earlier initiatives, like Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation (BSSSC). Region Skåne, which led the transport development work of the BSSSC, took a political decision to consolidate the visions into one systemic framework and, together with several committed partners, submitted an application to the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013.

■ What role does TransBaltic wish to play?

As a three-years-long project TransBaltic should be perceived as a vehicle for streamlining various international initiatives and as a meeting place for public and private transport stakeholders. Instead of delivering an exclusive ivory-tower recipe for integrated transport system, we aim to assist the national authorities,

regional administration and business community to fulfil such an aspiration.

■ Which tasks do you consider the most crucial?

I would pick two of them as they are thought to leave long-lasting effects, if successful.

The first one is a set of preparedness measures, horizontal or case-specific, for the increasing intercontinental transport flows. In order to attract traffic from the rising Asian economies the Baltic Sea Region needs to compete with other macroregions, such as the Central Europe (within the Danube drainage area) or the Mediterranean Basin.

The other is about creating business plans in specific segments of the transport market, including a system of inland ports connected to the main seaport by rail, or a maritime container dismantling and assembly system to help reduce empty freight volumes and road-to-rail haulage cost.

In order to make integrated transport system veritable, we need to seek involvement of the

business sector already in the demonstration stage, which is difficult as the Baltic Sea Region Programme provides no co-funding for the private companies. Therefore, TransBaltic intends to launch intensive communication activities targeting the audience of both large and small enterprises. Also, the project deliverables are planned to be profiled to their expectations.

■ Is the time of global economic recession the right time to start a project like this?

The global recession period favours well conceived decisions on optimising investments. By engaging experts and decision-makers from all countries in the region, we intend to present a pan-Baltic context of the transport infrastructure, logistics and education activities. Such a systemic approach to investment decisions is worth promoting. The project has to raise awareness that a new or improved large-scale infrastructure in one country affects socio-economic welfare also in adjacent countries. ■

TransBaltic – key actions

Sep09-Mar10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project conference to present the ambitions and anchor the project in the target audience • Launched study on implications of the EU transport policy on development of sustainable transport in BSR • Empty freight reduction facilities concept: selection of transport routes with the highest share of empty container transport, identification of ports and hinterland sites suitable for demonstration, identification of main stakeholders • Competence management system (CMS) in harbour logistics: Presentation of the Hamburg system • Rail transport solutions for North-South and East-West flows: establishing of partnership (freight owners, rail transport companies, forwarders and relevant authorities)
Mar10-Sep10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BSR intermodal transport system 2030: launching of the foresight process; selection of scenarios based on alternative development paths • Debate 1 on main constraints in applying the Motorways of the Sea policy in the BSR • Seminar on the green corridor concept • Survey on selected routes, establishment of an implementation platform for affected stakeholders (ports, terminals, shipping lines, hinterland transport operators), workshops with participation of target groups • Deployment of ICT toolbox: survey on selected corridors (chains) – seminars/workshops with participation of actors operating in corridors selected for demonstration case(s) • Comparison of the harbour logistics training structures (DE/PL) • Assessment on bottlenecks in infrastructure and transport capacity, and making of recommendations for solutions
Sep10-Mar11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project conference to present conclusions from the BSR transport inventory work, visualisation of traffic flows and discuss the vision and optimum trajectory to achieve it • Debate 2 on the development of Baltic ports vs. hinterland connections (incl. the role of ports in the TEN-T and foreseen projects 2014-2020) • Report on the selected BSR transport corridors concerning modal split, development of environmentally friendly transport modes and green solutions • Dry port development activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Finland:</i> expansion planning towards full scale production use <i>Sweden:</i> completion of case studies related to the rail port network of the Gothenburg port (activity outside the project) <i>Germany:</i> Research and evaluation of innovative telematics and transport solutions, Port of Hamburg <i>Poland:</i> start-up of the dry port feasibility for Warmia and Mazury region • "Procedure Handbook of Freight Reduction Implementation" • Integration of a Competence Measuring module in DE/PL cases
Mar11-Sep11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debate No.3 on environmental concerns in the port activities • Seminar on interim findings on the application of the green corridor concept in BSR conditions • Running the demonstration case(s) in min 2 ports and possibly hinterland sites, negotiation and evaluation of results with participants • Running the demonstration case(s) • Implementation + test + Evaluation of the CMS in Poland
Sep11-Mar12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debate 4 on the future of smaller ports in the BSR
Mar12-Sep12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project conference to present project results and recommended follow-up actions compiled in the Regional Action Plan • Final version of the regional action plan