

Q&A: The New East Coast Line



Why is a railway in northern Sweden essential for Europe?

Sweden is a vast country with enormous natural resources. Our industry has extremely high standards for environmental protection and sustainable development. The raw goods and products Sweden produces are of critical importance throughout Europe; for example, steel used by European industry, hygiene products demanded by European consumers and high-quality timber for construction and interior design. These goods must travel long distances in the core network, and therefore sustainable transport solutions are crucial.

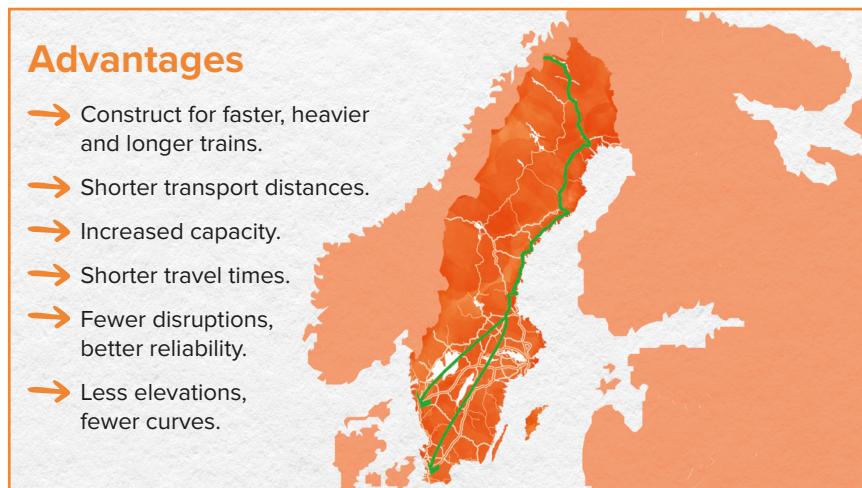
For these reasons, the New East Coast Line is critical from a European perspective. The single-track railway in central Sweden prevents goods from being transported efficiently by rail. For goods to shift from road freight to rail requires a double-track between Gävle and Härnösand. I consider the New East Coast Line to be one of the most important pieces of the transport puzzle. A double-track railway is the best way to secure a sustainable transport system from northern Scandinavia to central Europe.

Ingela Bendrot

Former State Secretary at
the Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation
CEO, New East Coast Line



Why is the New East Coast Line needed?



The existing single-track railway on the east coast north of Stockholm is a major bottleneck in the Swedish main railway network. The New East Coast Line would turn this heavily congested stretch of railway into a fast, efficient, sustainable rail network connecting the extensive east coast to the rest of Europe. A new double-track railway between Gävle and Härnösand will dramatically transform the capacity of the rail line to meet the economic and development needs of Sweden and Europe.

Very large volumes of goods from the industries located along the coast of northern Sweden are transported by train, and the volumes increase every year. The New East Coast Line is the only solution that meets market demand for efficient, high-quality rail transport. The national freight strategy calls for a 50 percent increase in rail freight capacity by 2025. Investment in the national rail freight network is also necessary to create the conditions for a greener, more sustainable freight transport system.

Most companies need a combination of road, sea and rail to meet all their needs. Moving freight from rail to road is difficult (not to mention the environmental cost). Much of the goods is too heavy or large to be transported by car. Shifting transport from rail to ship is also difficult. The railroad, unlike ships, can meet market demands for “just-in-time” and short lead times for expensive products. Rail is also well suited to transporting heavy goods over long distances.

What are the problems with the existing rail line?

Despite political initiatives and incentives, the 90-year old single-track railway does not cut it anymore. Capacity problems are choking off the flow of people, ideas and trade. The single-track line has steep inclinations and sharp curves, limiting cargo weights and the speed at which the trains can get to their locations, creating frequent delays. A single-track line is therefore very vulnerable for disruptions, which in turn cause industry great economic harm.

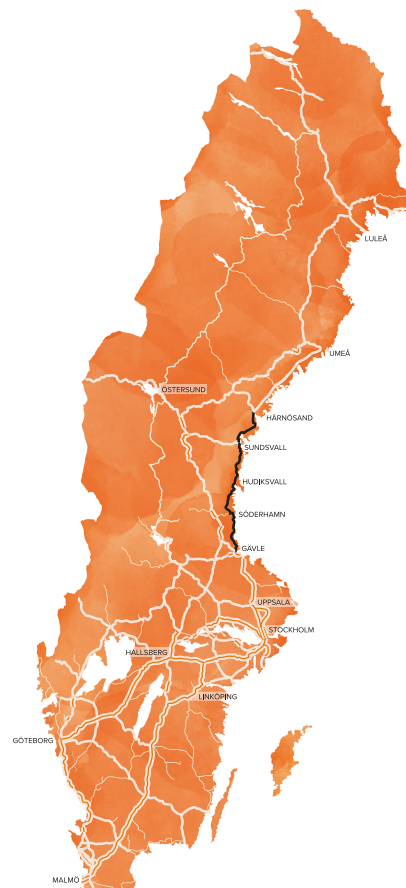
About 70 trains a day run between Gävle and Sundsvall, the busiest single track in Sweden. Traffic is expected to increase by 50 percent now that the Bothnia Line to the north is open. Since 2000, the volume of traffic has increased exponentially even though travel times have also gradually increased, mainly due to congestion.

Under current plans, for which funding is already in place, 10 passing loops are to be constructed between Gävle and Sundsvall. A passing loop is a place on a single-line railway where trains in opposite directions can pass each other. These new passing loops will enable the line to carry about 10 more trains a day, but will not improve journey times, which if anything will increase. A capacity increase of just 10 trains a day also falls far short of what is needed, given the large volumes of freight currently carried by other modes of transport on parallel routes.

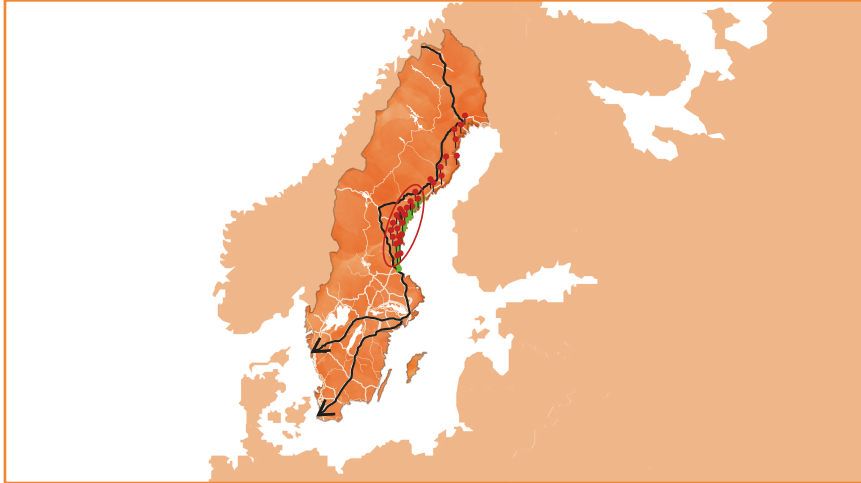
This lack of capacity creates competitive disadvantages for the vital industry in the north of Sweden and presents severe obstacles for raw material supply as well as refined goods to Europe's industrial market.

Why does it need to be a double-track line?

A double track all the way from Gävle to Härnösand (270 kilometers) would remove the bottleneck, increase freight capacity through higher axle loads of 25 tons, radically shorten travel time, reduce noise and improve safety by decreasing the barrier effect. The New East Coast Line would allow an increase from 70 to well over 200 trains a day. For passengers, journey times along the East Coast line would be cut in half; for example, between Sundsvall and Stockholm the trip would be two instead of four hours. A double-track line can support faster (250 km/h), heavier and longer trains. The significantly increased capacity makes it easier for the rail line to handle many more trains and decrease the number of delays. More efficient rail transport provides a powerful alternative to road freight, with a far lower carbon footprint.



How is the New East Coast Line important to Europe?



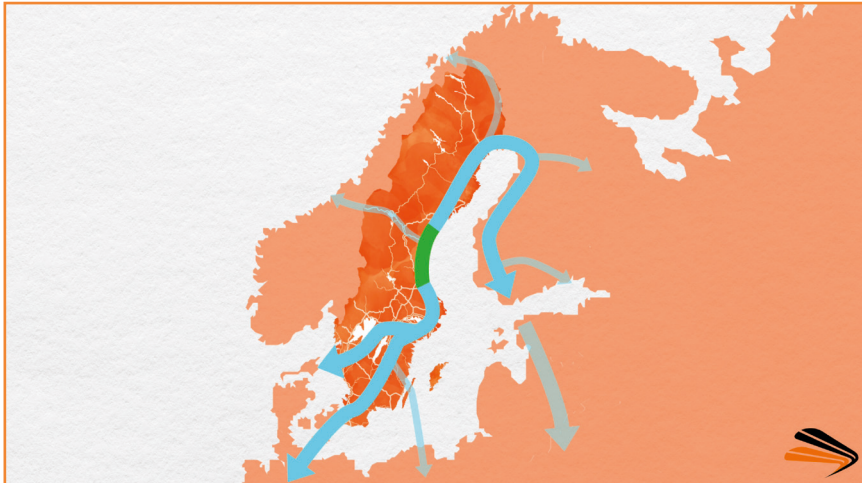
The East Coast Line is an important economic artery for the critical supply of iron ore and forest products from northern Sweden to Europe. Some 90 percent of the European Union's total production of iron ore is extracted in northern Sweden. Sweden is the leading supplier of gold and the second largest of silver, lead and copper. Some 80 percent of Swedish paper and pulp production is exported to the rest of Europe. The East Coast rail line passes through a number of cities which are home to some of Sweden's most prominent industries such as Sandvik, SCA Graphics, Iggesund Paperboard, and BillerudKorsnäs. As a considerable part of the EU's supply of primary goods originates from industry in northern Europe, strong economic growth in Northern Europe has a significant impact on the European Union economy.

How is the New East Coast Line part of the Bothnian Corridor?

The East Coast Line is a key part of the Bothnian Corridor, a strategically important link within the transnational transport system of goods in Northern Europe. The Bothnian Corridor stretches out on both the Swedish and the Finnish side of the Bothnian Gulf. It connects east-westbound and north-southbound transnational links in Sweden, Finland, Norway and Russia. The Bothnian Corridor connects the northern part of the Northern Axis with the Nordic Triangle. The New East Coast Line is one of the biggest bottlenecks in the Bothnian corridor.

The Bothnian Corridor connects the northern parts of Europe, rich in natural resources, with the more densely populated areas of Europe. The freight transport to and from other countries contributes to industrial growth and integration. In fact, this corridor carries the biggest freight volumes in the Nordic countries today and ongoing investments by businesses in the region

will cause volumes to rise even further. A well-developed railway system along the coast line of the Bothnian Gulf plays a vital role for the skill supply in the region by reducing the travel time by half. And importantly, it will also make a significant contribution to the EU's climate goals by reducing CO₂ emissions from the transport sector.



Why is the East Coast Line important to Europe's overall infrastructure?

A functioning infrastructure is essential to secure the EU's future transports of raw material and its connection to the Arctic region. The Bothnian Corridor, including the East Coast Line, is therefore a vital part of the TEN-T core network. The TEN-T regulation stipulates that the trans-European transport network shall strengthen the social, economic, and territorial cohesion of the Union and contribute to the creation of a single European transport area. Part of the approach to meeting TEN-T is the establishment of an integrated Core Network together with nine strategic Core Network Corridors, including the proposed Scandinavian-Mediterranean Core Network Corridor and North Sea-Baltic Corridor extension to the North¹. The Corridors create an important fundamental structure for the European transport system for the transport of crucial raw materials and other refined products to the European market.

This extended corridor would greatly enhance trans-national goods flows within the EU and to/from the EU. As European integration continues, the importance of the corridor will increase further. Short lead times, high-precision, low emissions and flexible transports are of utmost importance to maintain the attractiveness of the region.

¹Extension proposed by the Swedish and Finnish governments. Scandinavia Mediterranean Core Net Corridors (CNC) to be extended to Haparanda/Tornio and Narvik (NO border) and North Sea Baltic CNC to Haparanda/Tornio.

How does the New East Coast Line support environmental goals?

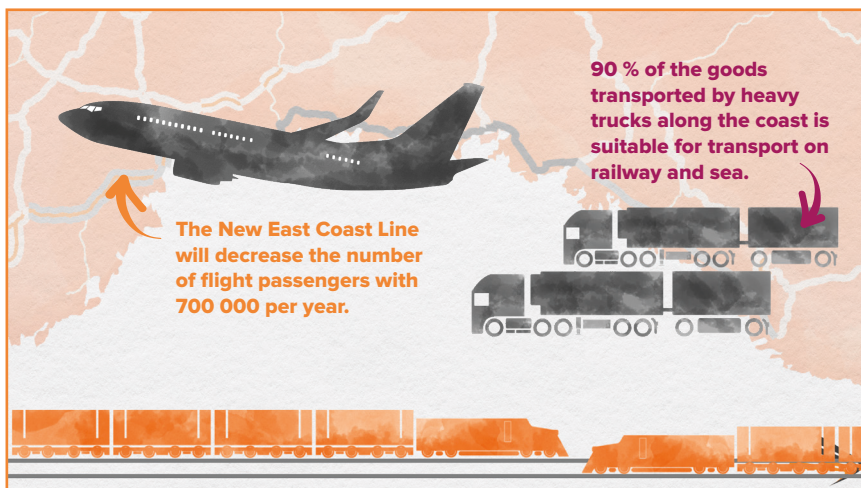
Railway transport is more energy efficient and climate friendly. In order to reduce the climate effect of the transport sector it is essential to transfer freight transports from road to railway.

Train transport is the most environmentally sound form of transport. To transport 1 ton of goods and release no more than 1 kilo of CO₂ would mean travelling 20 km by truck, 200 km by ship, and 9,000 km by railway.

Every day 1,400 to 2,500 trucks travel on the E4 highway along the coast. The Swedish Traffic Administration estimates that this will increase between 26 percent and 38 percent by 2040. With a double track, a significant portion of this road freight can be transported by rail.

The current congestion and delays on the current single-track line are among the reasons why many companies prefer the use of other transport methods such as trucks and semi-trailers, but at the cost of negative environmental impact.

The New East Coast Line would reduce dependence on fossil fuels. The double-track would make it possible to not only transport goods by rail but also transport people by rail rather than personal vehicles or by air. By reducing travel time by half, the number of travelers who switch from air travel to train is estimated to reach about 1 million people based on typical market shares at different travel times by train and the environment, according to estimates from SJ, the government-owned passenger train operator in Sweden.



How will the New East Coast Line support tourism in the region?

Northern Sweden has a significant tourism industry with further potential for expansion. More and more Europeans are interested in exploring Sweden's unique landscape. The north of Sweden has potential to attract even more European tourists, with the speed and convenience of a double-track railway linking Stockholm to the High Coast north of Sundsvall, the highest coast-line in the world. The New East Coast Line would make possible faster travel to the Swedish mountains in both the north and west of the country, including Jämtland. For example, travel time from the Arlanda Airport outside Stockholm directly to Sundsvall would take about 1.5 hours with the New East Coast Line.

What is the investment needed for the New East Coast Line?

The projected investment is approximately 2.9 billion EUR. The Swedish government will make a decision in May 2018. That may sound like a large figure but from a sustainable development perspective it is a sound investment. Due to its strategic importance on both the national and European level, development of the East Coast Line is eligible for up to 30 percent co-funding from the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), an EU program.

What is the current status of the New East Coast Line?

The company that is driving the New East Coast Line project was founded in 2015. The goal is to accelerate government approval for double-tracking between Gävle and Härnösand and for the New East Coast Line to open in 2027. The Swedish Transport Administration proposed in fall 2017 that 624 450 EUR be invested in the New East Coast Line between 2018-2029. The major part of the investment would be carried out between Sundsvall C - Dingersjö, estimated to cost about 222 million EUR. The next largest portion of the new railway is Gävle-Kringlan, which requires an investment of 180 million EUR, of the total estimated cost for the New East Coast Line of 482 million EUR.

It is of the outmost strategic importance on the regional, national and European level to meet market demands for fast, reliable, low-emission and high-capacity transport along the Bothnian corridor. By removing the bottleneck, the New East Coast line would make this possible.

Who is behind New East Coast Line?

In 2015 the company Ostkustbanan 2015 AB was founded by Gävleborg Region, the County Council of Västernorrland and the municipalities of Gävle, Söderhamn, Hudiksvall, Nordanstig, Sundsvall, Härnösand, Kramfors and Örnsköldsvik.

The mission of the company is to accelerate the expansion of a double-track railway between the cities of Gävle, Sundsvall and Härnösand.

The company would like to show the positive impact this double-track railway would have on these communities and the rest of the country. It would result in more work opportunities, make it easier for people to travel and therefore expand the job market. It would also help contribute to create a cleaner environment.

The goal is to have the railway completely finished no later than 2030.

The CEO of the company is Ingela Bendrot, former State Secretary at the Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation.



How is this a win-win solution for Europe and Sweden?

The importance of the New East Coast Line in northern Sweden cannot be overstated. It will remove one of the biggest bottlenecks in the Bothnian Corridor, spur industrial investments in the region, make commuting easier and expand the labor market. By shifting the transport mode from road to climate-friendly rail, it will have a significant positive environmental impact in support of the EU's climate goals.

I see it as a win-win solution for both Sweden and Europe, enhancing overall growth and competitiveness throughout the region.

Erik Lövgren

Chairman of Regional Council
Västernorrland

