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FINDING A PERMANENT STRUCTURE FOR THE NORTH SEA CYCLE ROUTE

With reference to the informal meeting in Bergen 6 April 2005 between the President and Secretariat of the North Sea Commission and the Chairman and Secretariat of the North Sea Cycle Route project, we would like to approach the North Sea Commission more formally in this matter.

As already pointed out, an important part of the North Sea Cycle Route project involves finding a permanent solution for the maintenance of the important results from the project.

The present partnership is actively working to find a feasible solution to this challenge. The leadership of the Interreg-III B North Sea Programme are closely following this work because EU (and the EU Commission) are interested on a broader basis that successful projects do not disappear and that their results can be carried forward in each country.

The partnership in the "North Sea Cycle Route" project consists of 68 regions (counties or equivalent) in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, England and Scotland. In fact the partnership covers a very large percentage of all member regions in the North Sea Commission area.

The North Sea Commission is in many respects the only formal and political link beyond national borders for these regions. It therefore seems natural to look more closely at the possible role The North Sea Commission could play in creating a model that will secure the 6000 km long cycle route a permanent future for the benefit of all who live near or on the route.

A future involvement from the North Sea Commission will mainly mean taking responsibility for any further development and maintenance of the web site www.northsea-cycle.com

The Internet, in terms of information and dissemination of knowledge, is becoming more and more important. The web site for "The North Sea Cycle Route" was established in the year 1999. At the last count more than 2 500 000 hits had been registered on this site and the number is expected to rise substantially when the on going total revamp of the site is completed by the autumn of 2005. This is the only interactive web site (to our knowledge) to cover a very high percentage of the member regions of the North Sea Commission. As the owner of this site we feel that this unique opportunity ought not to be lost.

This year, we have entered a close partnership with the Interreg III B project "NAVE Nortrail" for the development of a joint database and map link, although the two sites will be different in content

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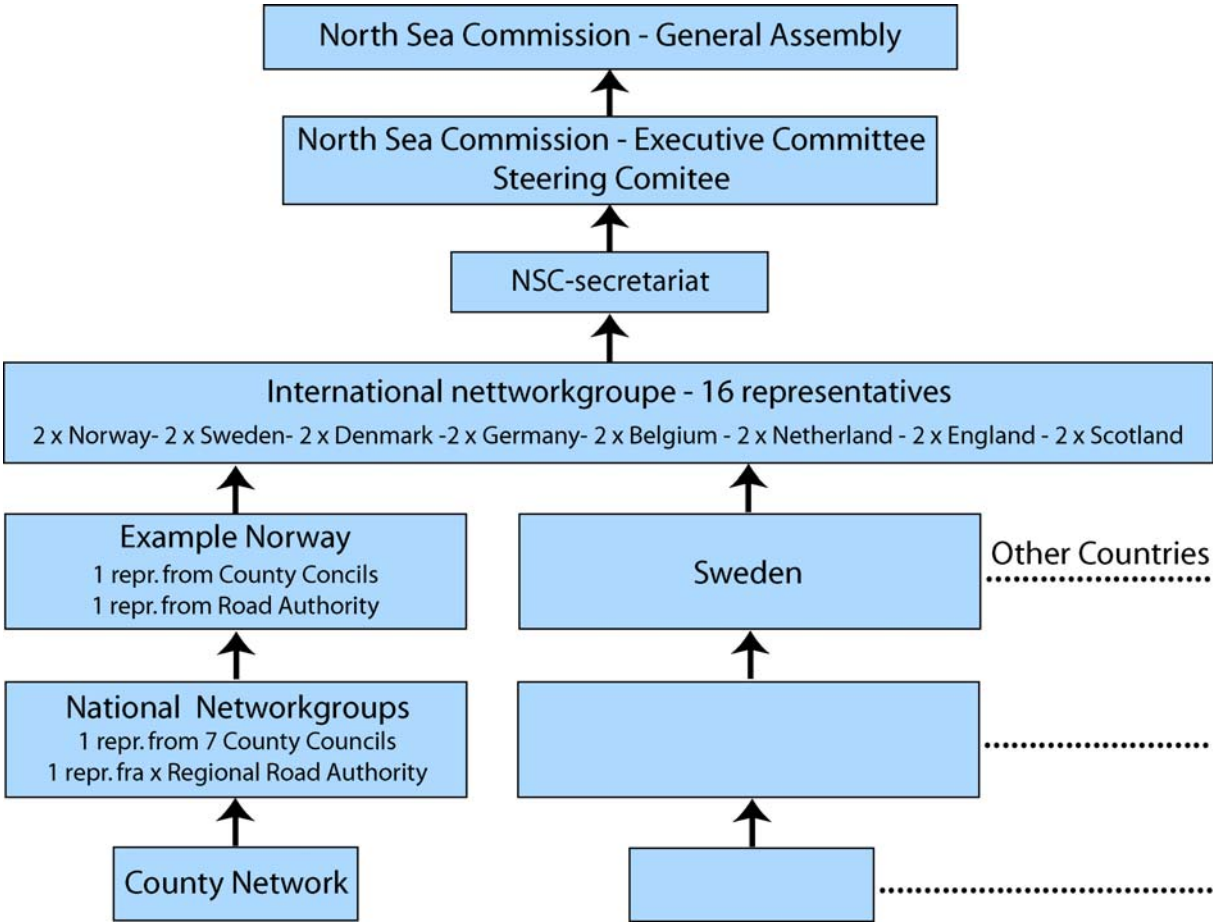
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and appearance. These two databases are covering nearly all of the North Sea Commission member regions. It is envisaged that any member region not included can be added, if of interest.

Different models for a permanent structure

Following a request for tenders in both the TED and DOFFIN-bases, the consultant firm OneMarket in Brussels was chosen to create models for a permanent structure for “The North Sea Cycle Route”. On page 12, ref. 1.6 NSCR Light, the report suggests maintaining the NSCR-network with the same partners as today and to create a political base within the North Sea Commission in order to guarantee a long-term commitment.

The international management group of the North Sea Cycle Route discussed this topic at a recent meeting (14-15 April 2005). The following structure was suggested and the secretariat was given permission to approach the North Sea Commission in this matter.



A national network in each country

1. We envisage a professional, national network in all 8 countries in which each region (county) or other public body take responsibility for the role of coordination. This would resemble the manner in which the project has run in the two project periods. (1998-2001 and 2003-2006).
2. Two skilled/professional representatives from each country to be elected. It is considered advisable that these representatives should come from one county council and an organisation similar to The State Road Authority in Norway. Participation will have to be on a voluntary basis.
3. The two skilled/professional representatives will be given responsibility for the physical route and marketing and product development, including responsibility for inquiries from the general public (i.e. the end user).

An international network

1. The national networks will form an international network with a secretary attached to (employed by) the North Sea Commission. The network would report to the North Sea Commissions “Executive Committee” producing an annual report for the “General Assembly”.
2. The international network would meet (minimum) once a year possibly in connection with the General Assembly.
3. The North Sea Commission would function as the political body keeping “North Sea Cycle Route” together.

An international secretariat

1. In the above model, the Secretariat is located at the North Sea Commission, in constant cooperation with all relevant regions and road authorities. Main tasks may include:
 - Maintenance of and further improvement of the route
 - Maintenance of and further development of the web site www.northsea-cycle.com
 - Coordination of the North Sea Cycle Route as a high quality small scale tourist product.

Finance

The most realistic method of financing would appear to be a small annual fee put up by the participating regions to be used on joint initiatives. This fee, on a magnitude of a 500-1000€ a year per region, will represent the regions cost to maintain the web presentation of their regions and the international coordination work. It would be advantageous if the North Sea Commission could offer help from the Secretariat. The financing of such services needs to be more closely investigated. The regions will have to fund the necessary update of information within own region, including own staff and travel costs.

Model project

Should the North Sea Commission and “The North Sea Cycle Route” partnership succeed in finding a solution that will operate both in practice and the long term, this would be of considerable value for other projects in the “Interreg family” and other EU-related programmes.

It is not impossible to envisage this process as being defined as a model project, which could receive partial financing within the EU-system.

As representatives of the North Sea Cycle Route project, we would like to present this opportunity of future cooperation to the members of the North Sea Commission.

If this can be of interest, we will be more than willing to hold a short presentation at a convenient moment during the North Sea Commissions General Assembly in June 2005.

We hope that the North Sea Commission will be able to take a stand on the principal questions of responsibility and organisation of this matter in June, as a platform for further development.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

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