

# Strategy 2025-2028

## 1. Introduction

The Eastern Norway County Network is a political network for the county councils of Akershus, Buskerud, Innlandet, Telemark, Vestfold, and Østfold. According to the mission statement in the cooperation agreement, the Eastern Norway County Network aims to "contribute to the development of Eastern Norway as a sustainable and competitive region in Europe, with regionally balanced development within the region."

The primary role of this network, as a joint tool for the counties, is to enable them to unite and achieve stronger political influence by speaking with one voice. Additionally, the network serves as a platform for counties to share experiences, learn from one another, and utilize resources more effectively through project collaborations.

For the strategy period 2025-2028, the network's two prioritized policy areas are (1) transport and (2) energy, climate, and environment.

Business and skills, and European policy work will no longer be separate focus areas within the Eastern Norway County Network. However, individual activities, measures, and tools in these policy areas may still be relevant to strengthen efforts in the two prioritized areas. These priorities will be integrated into annual action plans and/or through separate decisions by the Board of Representatives. In this way, the Eastern Norway County Network will remain a flexible tool for counties in matters where their interests align and where collaboration can add value.

The Eastern Norway County Network also has a network for regional youth councils in the area, ØstsamUng, which is addressed in Chapter 4.

The Board of Representatives adopts annual action plans and budgets that clarify objectives and resource needs, as outlined in Chapter 5.

## 2. Transport

Eastern Norway is home to half of the country's population. Significant investments in the region's transport infrastructure are necessary to contribute to sustainable societal development and green transition in Norway. The counties have also been



given an expanded responsibility for county roads, which have a substantial maintenance backlog. Therefore, the counties in the region must unite and speak with a common voice to ensure that crucial transport projects are prioritized and that sufficient funds are allocated for both investments and maintenance of the region's transport infrastructure.

The counties will also collaborate to enhance the development of holistic and forward-looking mobility solutions in cities and rural areas, even in a challenging economic situation.

An increased focus on The Armed Forces in the region will also impact the counties' work with infrastructure and civil transport preparedness in the coming years.

### **Priority Focus Areas for the Strategy Period**

- Ensure budget allocations in the national budget for projects in the region that are included in the new National Transport Plan (NTP), encompassing both short- and long-term advocacy efforts with the government and parliament.
- Position the region for the next NTP to ensure that essential infrastructure projects in the region are prioritized.
- Secure funding for county road maintenance in the NTP and national budgets, including increased efforts for upgrading and maintaining bridges in the county road network in Eastern Norway (bridge program).
- Promote the development and ensure financing of comprehensive mobility solutions for small and medium-sized towns and urban areas.
- Serve as a platform for learning and experience-sharing among counties in their efforts to achieve sustainable public transportation and forward-looking mobility solutions.
- To serve as a platform for examining the ramifications of enhanced military investment in the region, and the subsequent effects on county councils' responsibilities regarding infrastructure and emergency preparedness.
- Assess the needs and opportunities for developing and implementing joint projects, including possibilities for external project financing.
- Follow up on the implementation of the TEN-T revision (Trans-European Transport Network) in Norway in dialogue with the Ministry of Transport and work to secure sufficient funding for projects on the Norwegian side that cannot be financed through the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF).



### 3. Energy, Climate, and Environment

The counties aim to promote a green transition in the region. To ensure sufficient energy for businesses, industries, and residents, there is a need for the development of both renewable energy production and grid infrastructure. The region is heading towards an energy deficit, making it essential to take a holistic view of energy policy across county borders to ensure adequate and appropriate investments.

Land development is a challenge in Eastern Norway. In autumn 2024, the government presented an action plan in connection with the white paper Meld. St. 35 (2023-2024) on biodiversity, which follows up on the UN biodiversity agreement in Norway. This will impact counties' work with land use, transport, climate, environment, and energy.

There is also a need to strengthen efforts in long-term climate adaptation in the region. Climate changes, including more extreme weather and frequent severe flooding in shared watersheds, will impose significant additional costs on Eastern Norway's society if not managed properly. Strengthening efforts in climate adaptation will be vital for societal safety and for developing a robust and resilient transport sector.

#### **Priority Focus Areas for the Strategy Period**

- Ensure prioritization of projects in the region for the development of grid infrastructure and renewable energy production.
- Influence funding schemes like ENOVA to secure financing for energy projects in the region.
- Facilitate joint meetings with energy and grid companies to promote the region's common interests.
- Act as a forum for learning and experience-sharing regarding the counties' roles in energy policy, including ownership roles, land-use policy, and supporting municipalities.
- Continuing projects on green energy stations for commercial transport and mapping carbon-rich areas, both funded by Klimasats.
- Serve as a forum to discuss the implications of the new biodiversity white paper for the counties' work on green transition and renewable energy in the region.
- Provide a platform for learning and experience-sharing in climate adaptation efforts and explore opportunities for resource-saving collaborations that strengthen the municipal sector's work on climate adaptation in the region.



## 4. ØstsamUng

The counties have their own youth councils and emphasize strengthening youth participation in the region through ØstsamUng, a network for regional youth councils within the Eastern Norway County Network.

### **ØstsamUng's Three Main Goals**

- Provide a forum where youth councils can share experiences, learn from each other, and discuss common challenges and solutions.
- Facilitate dialogue between youth councils and county politicians.
- Coordinate the youth councils' participation in European networks where all youth councils can engage.

Youth councils govern ØstsamUng through a working committee. Additionally, an administrative expert group supports the work of the youth council coordinators.

## 5. Organisation

The Board of Representatives is the highest political body in the Eastern Norway County Network. Each county has two members on the board: the county mayor/county council leader and one member from the political opposition.

The board adopts the network's strategy and annual action plans and budgets, operationalizing the strategy. New initiatives outside the adopted action plan must be approved by the board. If necessary, the board may establish other political bodies to follow up on prioritized policy areas and current issues.

The board's work is supported by an executive committee consisting of the counties' top administrative leaders. This committee can establish other administrative bodies if needed.

The network has its own secretariat, which prepares and follows up on meetings within the network's bodies and facilitates political influence, learning, experience-sharing, and resource-saving initiatives for the counties.

