

Honorable Mayor, dear colleagues, friends

Collaboration between Tallinn and Helsinki, Uusimaa and Harju County, Estonia and Finland goes back decades. Also, Helsinki and Tallinn are preparing for closer co-operation agreement, the key topics being economic development, information technology and environmental cooperation, joint marketing, and as one of the primary issues – accessibility, logistics and mobility of people and goods.

At the INTA World Congress which was recently held in Tallinn, I had the opportunity to meet my colleague Pekka Sauri and discuss specific ways of cooperation. We reached a common understanding that the most promising cooperation would be the transport sector with three themes: common ticketing system for public transport, common mobile travel planner and mobile parking. They are very innovative sectoral collaboration solutions that perfectly fit with the idea which the European Commissioner for Transport Violeta Bulc expressed in the beginning of February in Estonian newspaper Eesti Ekspress, that a single transport ticket system could operate all over Europe.

At the same time I am pleased that with the support from the Baltic Sea Programme Seed Money Facility we have completed a preliminary study of the feasibility study of Tallinn-Helsinki Fixed Connection – an undersea two-way rail tunnel. The fact that the European Union has contributed to the project, shows the importance of the issue in a wider context than just two cities - it shows that the European Union considers it important to connect the whole macro region and boost Estonian and Finnish competitiveness.

When talking about the context of the two cities, there are more people than ever before moving between Helsinki and Tallinn. Tens of thousands of Estonians and Finns live, work and travel in and between the two cities. Every year there are more than seven million trips between Helsinki and Tallinn. Passenger and cargo traffic is very dense and is predicted to intensify in the future. Some analyses suggest that this figure could rise even twice. The Baltic Sea is already one of the busiest traffic seas in the world.

The challenges that we are facing require closer and more intensive cooperation between the two cities. It is time that Tallinn and Helsinki together become of the main economical and intellectual

attraction centers of the Baltic Sea macro region. If it is possible to travel from one city to the other in less than 45 minutes via the envisioned tunnel, new opportunities will open for the ordinary people, businesses and countries. The future of two cities – one could even say – of the two countries, the entire region – would change considerably.

In principle, we consider that the work which has been done in the framework of the project should be continued, ending with a full-scale feasibility study - assuming that both countries and European Union will start to support it. We have, after all, the body for it, NGO Euregio. The time is ripe for both governments to join with the process, started by Talsinkifix, in order to move towards a competitive, innovative and environment friendly region.

Thank you!