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EU Strategy on reducing greenhouse gas emissions

The Stockholm region is one of the fastest-growing metropolitan regions in Europe. The population of the Stockholm county is expected to grow from 2.3 million residents today to around 3.4 million by 2050. The rapid population growth is positive for the region. However, it also entails major challenges in terms of housing, infrastructure and technical supply systems. The climate change imposes further challenges and requires measures in terms of both climate adaptation and limiting greenhouse gas emissions (GHG).

The Stockholm County Council appreciates the initiative to develop a strategy for long-term greenhouse gas emissions reductions. The county council considers it important that the EU maintains the goal of restricting global warming to 1,5 degrees and well below 2 degrees by 2100 and zero GHG emissions by 2050. In June 2018, the Stockholm County Council adopted the new Regional Development Plan for the Stockholm Region – a spatial and strategic masterplan for the Stockholm county. The plan is based on four long-term goals that point out the direction for the development of the region. One of the goals states that the Stockholm region shall be a resource efficient and sustainable region with no greenhouse gas emissions in 2050. The goal has four sub-targets for 2030:

1. Direct emissions of greenhouse gases shall be less than 1.5 tonnes per resident and greenhouse gas emissions from consumption should be halved.
2. The consumption of energy shall be no more than 16 MWh per person and year and the regional energy production shall be 100 per cent renewable.
3. At least 70 per cent of all journeys within the county shall be made on foot or using a bicycle or public transport. Bicycle travel's percentage of all travel in the county shall be 20 per cent (in accordance with the Regional biking plan).
4. Household waste shall be maximum 360 kilos per person and year and at least 70 per cent of this, including food waste, should be recycled.

Apart from the regional development plan, the Stockholm County Council is developing a climate strategy to further intensify the work towards carbon neutrality.

The Stockholm County Council argues that zero GHG emissions in the EU is impossible without mobilising local and regional levels. The process of developing the regional development plan included a comprehensive dialogue with the 26 municipalities in the Stockholm region as well as with various private and public stakeholders. This makes the plan function as a shared agreement.

Another important message is that the strategy must address how the EU can engage stakeholders to change behaviours and embrace sustainable ways of living. The regional development plan advocates a resource efficient and dense built environment which encourages walking, biking and the use of public transport.

The Stockholm County Council wants to highlight the importance of nature and ecosystem services. The regional development plan points out ten so-called green wedges, i.e. green infrastructure reaching all the way from the countryside to the centre of Stockholm. By preserving the green wedges, the municipalities in Stockholm secure biodiversity, climate adaptation and proximity to nature for the inhabitants.

In 2014, the GHG emissions were 45 per cent lower than in 2006. This has been possible due to a diminishing heavy industry in favour of a more service oriented industry. Also, the heat production and the Swedish electricity is almost fossil fuel free – although the Stockholm region relies on electricity imports, which is why the composition of the energy mix is of great importance.

An obstacle to reach the goal of carbon neutrality is that the transport sector (public transport excluded) is mainly based on fossil fuels and, thus, contributes to large GHG emissions. Another possible obstacle is the population growth, which requires new buildings and infrastructure. However, this is also an opportunity to use innovative solutions for energy efficiency. To reach the goal of carbon neutrality, carbon offsets will be necessary – especially after 2030.