



**METREX**

**SURE Eurodelta Network**

vereniging  
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# **Strategic Urban Region Eurodelta**

**Narrative and strategy for  
strengthening the megaregion of  
Strategic Urban Region Eurodelta**

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The SURE Expert Group

The SURE Expert Group constitutes of a broad network and contributes to stronger partnership between the cities and regions in the Eurodelta. From a broader perspective, the SURE Expert Group is since 2018 part of the METREX network of European Metropolitan Regions and Areas, and has an active platform for the exchange of knowledge, experience and projects on the European scale.

Another megaregion in the METREX network is the Nordic-Baltic Space. This Expert Group has made a first publication in 2019 that unfolds their macro-regional analysis and perspective for transnational developments. This example has inspired the founding of the SURE Eurodelta Expert Group, for working together on the transnational level and for developing collaborative agenda's and projects.

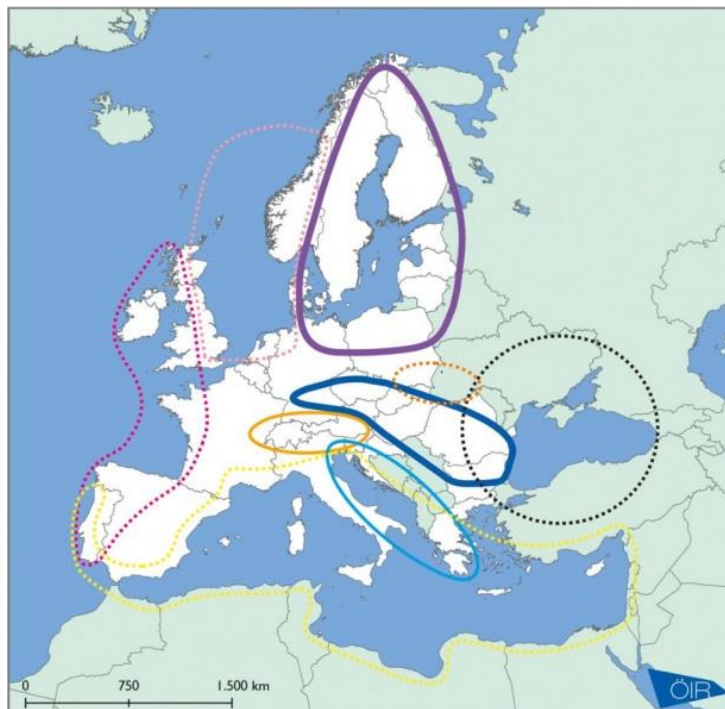
The SURE Expert Group consists of spatial experts from the urban regions of the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium and Northern France. The SURE Expert Group is for members of the METREX network, but the Expert Group also co-operates with cities that are not (yet) member of the METREX network. This applies particularly for the cities within Europe on 3 hours travel time from the centre of the urban region Eurodelta. This narrative shows a spatial-economic perspective of the collaborative power within the Eurodelta.

## 1.2 The megaregion

The urban region is worldwide known as a natural spatial-economic unit. The urban region is already important for creating a mass of talent, productivity, innovation and markets on local scale. Due to globalization, by distribution of the economic activity on the global scale, the urban region has become an important player in the worldwide competition. More competitive spatial-economic units are needed so that in an associated territory several big urban regions can successfully compete with each other on a larger scale.

The large amount of 40 associated territories over the world can be identified as megaregion. Those megaregions are home to 1.5 billion people. The megaregion is more than ten years ago observed and described by Richard Florida in his book 'Who's Your City'. The new spatial-economic unit of megaregion has a similar evolvment as a big version of an urban region. But the megaregion contains more than one major urban region and can even compose several big urban regions in a contiguous urbanized area, as is the case with the corridors of Boston-NY-Washington in the United States or the Shanghai-Ningbo-Nanjing in China. Those megacities are termed as such because of the size of their populations. The megaregions are also distinguished from the megacities by a contiguous urbanized area with a specific identity, a population size with a bottom limit on 5 million and a significant economic activity with large markets and highly skilled talent. The economic outcome of those elements on the macro-regional scale is an increased human creativity, scientific achievements and technological innovations among other things.

**Figure 1: The situation of all megaregions in Europe**



**Macro-regional strategy areas**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Existing</b>  | <b>Under consideration</b>   |
| <span style="color: blue;">—</span> EU Strategy for the Danube Region          | <span style="color: orange;">- - - -</span> Carpathian Region                                  |
| <span style="color: purple;">—</span> EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region    | <span style="color: red;">- - - -</span> North Sea (European North Sea Strategy)               |
| <b>In preparation</b>  | <span style="color: black;">- - - -</span> Black Sea (Black Sea Synergy)                       |
| <span style="color: cyan;">—</span> EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region | <span style="color: magenta;">- - - -</span> Atlantic Arc (Atlantic Strategy)                  |
| <span style="color: yellow;">—</span> EU Strategy for the Alpine Region        | <span style="color: yellow;">- - - -</span> Western and Eastern parts of the Mediterranean Sea |

### 1.3 The SURE Eurodelta

The SURE Eurodelta symbolizes a new megaregion by the name Strategic Urban Region Eurodelta. It stretches generally in between the competitive international cities of London, Paris, Hamburg and Munich. The neighboring international cities of the SURE Eurodelta are also important for the economic development of the area. Therefore, the urban regions within the SURE network are connected as well to surrounding major cities like Paris and Frankfurt. 40 Million people live in the Eurodelta within 3 hours travel distance. The territory of the Eurodelta is sometimes denominated as the 40 Million City.

The territory of the SURE Eurodelta consists of the river delta from the Rhine, Scheldt and Meuse and the urban polycentric network of smaller, medium and larger sized cities. The SURE Eurodelta includes approximately the countries of the West-South-Netherlands, Belgium, West-Germany, North-France and Luxembourg. Major cities in the SURE Eurodelta are the capital of Amsterdam, Brussels, Cologne and Lille. These major cities or regions have a population size just under or above 1 million inhabitants.

## 1.4 The urban regions

The most prominent urban regions and –networks of the Eurodelta are shortly below specified. The illustration of urban regions clarifies that the SURE Eurodelta evolves on a macro-regional scale though one level lower the smaller urban regions are part of a larger metropolitan SURE network.

### *Randstad and Eindhoven*

City network: Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam, Utrecht, Eindhoven.  
Population size: 8,2 million inhabitants.  
Economic activity: € 263 billion Gross Metropolitan Product in 2018.

### *Metropolregion Rheinland and Metropole Ruhr*

City network: Cologne, Bonn, Düsseldorf, Duisburg, Dortmund, Essen.  
Population size: 10 million inhabitants.  
Economic activity: € 310 billion Gross Metropolitan Product in 2018.

### *Brussels metropolitan area and Walloon triangle*

City network: Brussel, Antwerp, Ghent, Charleroi, Louvain/Leuven, Liège.  
Population size: 6,5 million inhabitants.  
Economic activity: € 133 billion Gross Metropolitan Product in 2018.

### *European Metropolis Lille*

City network: Lille, Roubaix, Courtrai/Kortrijk, Tournai/Doornik.  
Population size: 1,2 million inhabitants and 2,2 million inhabitants with Belgium.  
Economic activity: € 72 billion Gross Metropolitan Product in 2018.

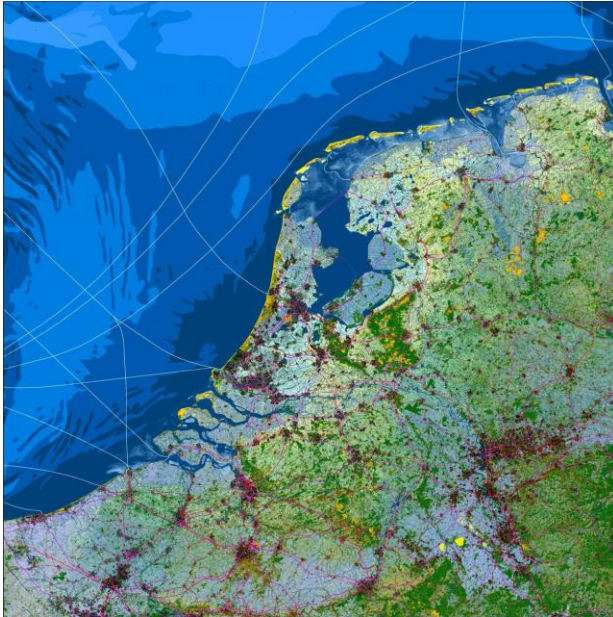
Hereby is the monetary measure of The Gross Metropolitan Product (GMP) used. The GMP makes a comparison possible for the relative economic performance of the most prominent urban regions. The GMP is an estimation of the economic value of all goods and services produced within the urban regions.

**Figure 2: The urban regions in the SURE Eurodelta**



In the megaregion lie some urban regions in Belgium and the Netherlands and Belgium that are less prominently presented however those regions are also integrated within the SURE Eurodelta. This is the case for the metropole of Charleroi in Wallonia (with cities Bergen, Charleroi and Namen included) and Arnhem-Nijmegen and EU region Meus-Rhine (with involved Maastricht, Heerlen, Aken in Germany and Liège in Belgium). Brainport Eindhoven is a somewhat unique metropole as its development made this city the 5<sup>th</sup> biggest of the Netherlands.

**Figure 3: The natural surface, networks and urbanized areas of SURE Eurodelta**



**Source:** Broesi, 2019.

## 2 The present

The Strategic Urban Region Eurodelta is the economic gateway to and economic heart of Europe. The cities within the urban regions have increasingly played an important role in creating an attractive and livable climate for business and its citizens. The Eurodelta has a strong adaptive (knowledge) economy and has a comparably good accessibility by its fine multimodal transport network. The 40 Million City, as the Eurodelta could also be named, generates an economic productivity of approximately € 1,5 trillion. With a macro-regional view on this economic gain, the megaregion can outperform other megaregions in Europe and in the world.

### 2.1 A probable threat

At the present moment, all urban regions in the Eurodelta deal with a common issue. A leading position in the global economy can't be taken for granted. Over an extended period of time all urban regions have reached a high level of economic prosperity and a high quality of life. However this is vulnerable and can rapidly change by alternated circumstances on the global market. When the threat for the Eurodelta becomes real, then an unpredictable economic situation occurs with huge impact for the open economy and with the welfare of 40 million citizens at risk. The Eurodelta is than not able to uphold or improve the quality of life.

The current tendency for several countries is the declining economic growth, leading to stagnated urgent transitions in urban regions of the Eurodelta. Suspending investing in the urgent transitions could create more opportunities for other megaregions in the worldwide competition. This speculative condition could lead to an advantageous situation for other megaregions in the world with a pursuit to outplay the Eurodelta. To conquer this logical matter of concern, a next move of the megaregion Eurodelta is necessary by strengthening cooperation and developing joint action by all urban regions in order to retain the prosperous economic situation in the Eurodelta (VDM, 2017, p. 11).

### 2.2 A potential approach with strategic assets and co-operative DNA

#### *Borrowed size*

Research has confirmed the assumption that a large part of the Eurodelta has a great potential for economic growth when there's more cooperation between the urban regions. After analysis different scenario's this study concluded that a borrowed size scenario will generate the greatest productivity growth. The borrowed size suggests basically that several medium-sized cities in each other's proximity may function as a larger metropolitan region by borrowing each other's functions. The economic growth is not uniquely related to (monocentric) megacities. Instead, economic growth may be distributed across various urban systems in different ways and in different countries (De Groot et al., 2016).

#### *Rhineland model in the DNA*

The Rhineland model indicates a few vital DNA characteristics in the megaregion Eurodelta. A major piece of this DNA determines the way of governing, cooperating and negotiating about common long-term issues. Hereby the governmental authorities play a crucial role, by its pursue for the public goals of a high standard of quality of life, sustainability and inclusivity.

There is in particular a general understanding for environmental quality, urban planning, education and social topics like a social safety net. There is good institutional system for high education and scientific research in the Eurodelta. Higher income groups pay higher taxes for public services, among which social services for people that can't regularly participate in the economy. The income inequality in the Eurodelta is quite low expressed by the Gini coefficient in comparison with the rest of the world.

The Rhineland model can be compared with the Anglo-Saxon model. The contrast with the Anglo-Saxon model is obvious whereby there is a relatively small government with short-term way of thinking, governing and profit-making for the shareholders instead of the stakeholders. The Rhineland model is applied to the polder model in the Netherlands or the corporatism in the other countries. It is considered as one of the ideal bases of the EU.

### *Strategic assets of the megaregion SURE Eurodelta*

#### *1. Cross border cooperation:*

The Eurodelta benefits of a broad experience with public-private cooperation and with cross border cooperation. At this moment, the cooperation is already put in practice on transnational themes. The Rhineland model is a proven best-practice for the megaregion SURE Eurodelta. This model represents the method of active government, public private cooperation and long-term perspective, so that for example high education and high quality of life can be ensured.

#### *2. Infrastructure*

The Eurodelta receives international credits for the very mature infrastructural system over a long period of time. Seaports in Rotterdam and Antwerp are some of the most important infrastructure developments for advancing the economy, by functioning as gateway to all countries in the hinterland. Bigger infrastructure nodes like the seaports and international airports have all kind of connections to other transport routes by high-speed roads, railroads, waterways and pipelines. The infrastructural system in the Eurodelta includes also the comprehensive TEN-T network. The TEN-T network in the Eurodelta has intersections with three main European TEN-T corridors: North Sea-Baltic, Rhine-Alpine, North Sea-Mediterranean.

#### *3. Living environment*

A lot of history is still intact. Many cities in the Eurodelta have a historical city center. Whether it has a historical center or not, the urban regions within the Eurodelta distinguish itself by its attractive living environment and impressive cultural-historical background. The influences of religion and of the occupation by Spain, France, Germans and Romans from centuries ago are often still viable. The flat landscape of the Eurodelta, where Dutch cheese and flowers, German cars and Belgium beer are produced, has an appealing effect on international tourism. Beside the delightful products made in the Eurodelta, the landscape is attractive because of the regional, cultural and natural variety and quality.

#### *4. Economy, innovation and a large variety of innovative products*

The area from Amsterdam, Brussels, Cologne and Lille shape an urban network of over 40 million people. All urban regions provide high qualities with services for social participation and -welfare, education, business and online- and offline traffic network. This well-developed economic structure create a high quality innovative region by a highly skilled labor force, high quality of business- and production facilities and scientific achievements. The urban regions often have their own special innovative- and economic performances. Together they provide a stable economic powerhouse for Europe.



### 3 The past

Cooperation in the Eurodelta has become a tradition over a long timeline. Back in the past, this megaregion had already coped with acute issues of water, landscape and migration. It has also withstood historical episodes of land occupations and economic renewal as result of international orientation, entrepreneurship and commercial spirit. Hereby the norms and value of tolerance, civility (politeness) and alliance have become principles for this megaregion. So cooperation in the Eurodelta is in the DNA of its inhabitants to solve common and complex problems.

#### 3.1 Historical proof of cross border connections

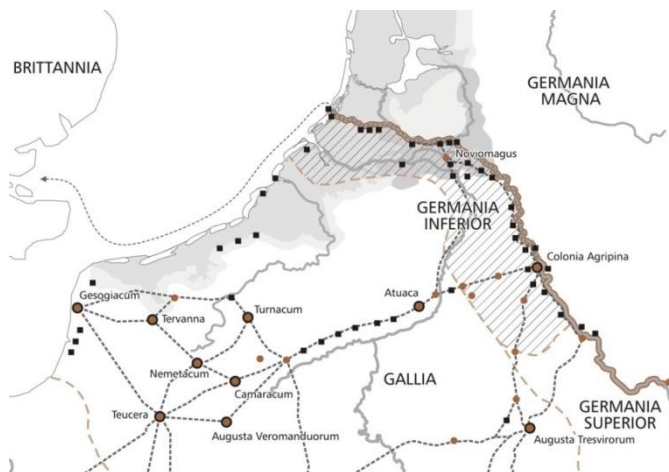
##### *The cultural-economic background*

The original situation of the Eurodelta is based on a similar cultural-economic background. With reference to its past, diverse countries, regions and cities in the Eurodelta have preserved and revived its territory. The various countries in West-Europe have throughout the time accustomed an equal historical-, cultural- and linguistic heritage. Although the unique identity and -diversity within West-European regions have remained, West-European regions have always adapted to the new modern circumstances. The various countries in West-Europe have experienced technological, societal and economic progress. They have these improvements applied onto business and society and have achieved more prosperity and happiness by these improvements.

##### *Strategic network connection of routes and cities*

During the Roman Empire the main routes and cities were constructed in strategic parts of the Eurodelta. This resulted in a network of connections over road and water from the South to Great-Britain. Many of these cities and routes are nowadays still key elements of the Eurodelta.

**Figure 4: Eurodelta around 200 A.D.**



##### *The Delta with the Rhine, Scheldt and Meuse*

The megaregion Eurodelta is situated in one of the most important deltas of Europe. The grand ports of Rotterdam, Antwerp and Amsterdam are strongly developed because of the extensive mainland of the Eurodelta. For a long time the rivers have functioned as the main transport infrastructure. Therefore many economic - and urban developments have flourished in the delta of Rhine, Scheldt and Meuse. In the context of the urgent transition to sustainability nowadays, the rivers will keep an significant role as the blue highways of the Eurodelta.

## 4 The future?

Professional urban planners of the SURE Expert Group make and share their ideas on topical themes during the network meetings. Comparative research- and practice-based findings from the urban regions are key to solve collective issues of the megaregion Eurodelta. Of course, current economic situation is starting point for developing ideas on topical themes and for creating together a strong and healthy megaregion in the future. Some key assets for the future of the Eurodelta come from our common history. Rather, the SURE Expert Group explores further the opportunities and all kind of variable circumstances for a futureproof megaregion and extrapolate findings of advanced exploration and insights. In the end, the SURE Expert Group aims on its way to design a strategic long-term perspective for a strong and healthy megaregion SURE Eurodelta in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The SURE Expert Group recognizes the following opportunities for the Eurodelta:

- The urban regions have more or less same challenges of city- and regional planning within the megaregion.
- The urban regions could benefit from a strong international economic profile by strengthening the economic development on macro-regional scale.
- The cooperation between public and private sector could be supported and utilized for developing the megaregion.
- With the economic development on macro-regional scale, the economic short term steps could also be beneficial to work on long-term improvements in quality of life and other long-term goals.

Thus, the megaregion can invest together in the economic powerhouse and could unleash the potential sources in all urban regions within the Eurodelta.

### 4.1 Time journey for a futureproof megaregion

About 40 and 50 million citizens will live in a sustainable and climate-proof Eurodelta. The majority of citizens benefit from economic success of the Eurodelta on the trans- and international market. The economic market in the urban regions create value by unleashing the potential economic power house as 50 Million City. It will facilitate all forms of creativity, sustainability, innovation and competition by businesses, entrepreneurs and self-employed persons.

The housing in the megaregion will produce energy for all inhabitants by innovative energy systems. Every newcomer can get access to self-sufficient energy systems. The housing will contribute to changes in the living circumstances of inhabitants. Health services will take care of the people at home and in their own environment. The inhabitants of the Eurodelta people will become older and will have more enjoyable moment as the people will be socially connected and will spend their spare time with their family, friends and other associates.

Online and offline traffic network will run so fast that the highly skilled inhabitants of the Eurodelta in the urban regions can easily connect with each other and to other economic partners in the world. There will be common economic rules in order to stimulate the technology, broad access for all citizens and socially inclusive use of fast digital- and traffic networks. In higher education youth will get educational programs matching the cultural, social, economic and technological interests for the megaregion. In this way, the youth will be qualified with required basic skills in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, such as data analyzing, programming software and artificial intelligence. The megaregion will have a cultural event calendar with festivals with experimental food, dance / theatre / music and popular political parties. The governmental culture will have shared network methods for governing together with all kind of governmental and civic-based partners on the principles of equality and tolerance.

## 4.2 Challenges in the future

In the Eurodelta live around 40 million people who by and large have access to high quality of life, employment, culture and knowledge. The governments in the Eurodelta are relatively stable. However for the future, these qualities can't be taken for granted. Some complex challenges will be ahead of us and our aim for the strong and healthy megaregion in the future. These complex challenges don't stop at the border but could be considered as cross border issues on the macro-regional scale. The key goal and collective approach of the megaregion is matching the challenges to opportunities from all kinds of sources, like supporting economic activities by combining all kinds of activities and sources with other activities and sources so that it creates synergy.

**1. (Knowledge) economy:** There is an unstoppable growth of mega regions across the globe, such as our Eurodelta. As a result, there is a shift in the global economic and political power, from nations to regions. To maintain the positive attributes that its citizens enjoy, the Eurodelta needs to compete at a global level.

**2. Mobility:** The network faces serious accessibility- and reliability problems. It is also challenged to fulfill the hinterland function it has for example by the new Silk Road. This will require a modal shift from road to water and rail, combined with multimodal terminal development. It will also need some improvements of the capacity and connectivity of the network.

**3. Climate and energy:** The changing climate increasingly affects us. The urban regions need to increase their resilience. The goal of a sustainable climate-proof megaregion is not the most easy task, as the climate has natural power that could be sometimes very unpredictable. The urban regions within the Eurodelta will have a climate-proof system that will be very nicely integrated in the infrastructure, the housing, the sports field and the public space.

**4. Affordable housing:** Our high quality of life makes the urban regions attractive and for some inhabitants also increasingly unaffordable.

## 4.3 Future perspectives?

### ***Standard regional connections***

The Eurodelta will stay in business with their global connections, when needed. However, the regional connections will be strong and powerful as urban regions within the Eurodelta do also more business with each other.

### ***High quality cities (well-being) and rural areas (biodiversity)***

The Eurodelta will create inclusive societies where people from cities and rural areas live long, stay very happy and socially connected.

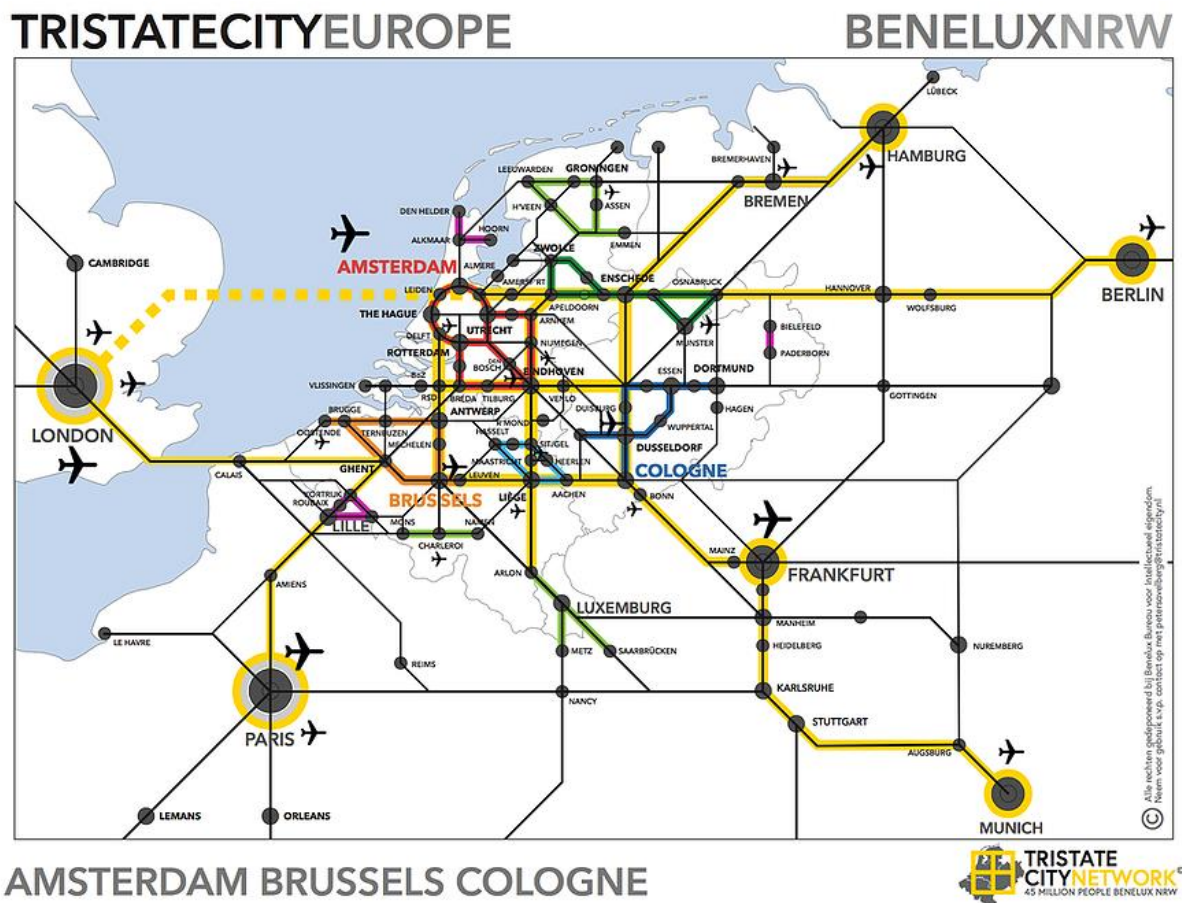
### ***Sustainable economy, energy networks and transport networks***

The Eurodelta will have sustainable networks within the markets of economy, energy and transport. Corporations, businesses and entrepreneurs set everything in motion to change the business-as-usual into a sustainable and/or circular way of doing business.

**Opportunity to realize a good connected international high speed traffic network**

The relatively small distances are ideal for a sound high-speed train network, as the radius from the urban regions is not bigger than 300 km. There is now a high speed traffic connection on the south corridor of the cities Amsterdam-Brussel-Paris. An opportunity is to strengthen the high speed traffic connection in the direction to the east corridor of Amsterdam-Cologne, Amsterdam-Hamburg/Berlin and Brussels-Cologne. By connecting the air ports Schiphol, Brussels and Dusseldorf there will be a more chances to use from each other's intercontinental network and flight routes.

Peter Savelberg of TristateCityEurope has developed an inspiring metro map of the Eurodelta.



## SURE Eurodelta Network



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