

Co-Chairs' Summary: Task Force on Telecommunications Infrastructure in the Arctic

Meeting 2 | Tromsø, Norway | February 2016

Norway hosted the second meeting of the Arctic Council's Task Force on Telecommunications Infrastructure in the Arctic (TFTIA-02) in Tromsø on 8-9 February, 2016. The TFTIA's mandate is to "coordinate a circumpolar assessment of telecommunications infrastructure and networks. The Task Force would deliver a completed assessment to include, among other things, recommendations for public-private partnerships to enhance telecommunications access and service in the Arctic." The TFTIA is co-chaired by Norway (represented by Bo Andersen) and the Kingdom of Denmark (represented by Niels Andersen).

Attendees

Representatives from all Arctic Council Member States attended TFTIA-02, as did representatives of Permanent Participants the Aleut International Association (AIA) and the Saami Council. Accredited Observers Germany, Italy, the Nordic Council of Ministers and UArctic also participated in the meeting.

Proceedings

Leading up to TFTIA-02, TFTIA delegates had been asked to provide both (1) coverage heat maps, ideally as GIS data, and (2) qualitative surveys of user needs in their respective regions. Norway provided an overview of the user-needs surveys received thus far and offered some key takeaways, while the Kingdom of Denmark presented an overview of the heat-map data received thus far. It became clear that it will not be possible to create a harmonized, circum-Arctic heat map of coverage with the time and resources available for the TFTIA. In addition, several delegations noted that it would be productive to overlay any available data with population data, as well as with air-travel and maritime-traffic data, in order to make important coverage gaps visible.

Prior to the meeting, the co-chairs had also provided delegates with (1) a draft table of contents for the assessment and (2) a draft work plan leading up to the Arctic Council's 2017 Ministerial meeting. During TFTIA-02, delegates focused largely on crafting consensus drafts of these two "core documents." The room agreed on the necessity of keeping the report as concise as possible, and of balancing details, relevance and readability. Many delegates emphasized the necessity of using clear terminology, and ensuring that all who contribute to the report will share the same understanding of what they are expected to provide. When discussing how to organize the report analytically, some delegates also suggested the possibility of dividing the region not by national boundaries, but instead by high-, low-, or no-density areas.

In addition to the above, delegates to TFTA-02 welcomed a virtual presentation by Robert McDowell, leader of the Arctic Economic Council's (AEC) working group on telecommunications. While the development of this AEC working group is still very much a work in progress, Mr. McDowell and the delegates to TFTA-02 clearly agreed that information-sharing is important to both sides, and that cooperation to the extent possible will be beneficial as the work of the TFTA progresses. In particular, delegates noted the value of the Arctic Economic Council as a possible collaborator in some of the TFTA's core tasks, such as identifying successful examples of public-private partnerships (PPPs) that have helped to expand broadband access in the Arctic.

Outcomes

During the meeting, delegates reached new consensus drafts of the table of contents and the TFTA work plan. The core author group for the assessment was chosen (co-Chairs, Arctic Council Secretariat, Norway, Kingdom of Denmark, United States). Dates and location for the next meeting were set (Copenhagen, Denmark on 7-8 September 2016). A series of inter-sessional conference calls were agreed to, including the agenda for the first such call.

In addition, the following tasks were distributed:

ASAP: Arctic Council Secretariat to circulate existing Norwegian (partial) assessment of national priorities

12 February: Co-chairs to submit documents for SAO meeting Fairbanks, including two-pager, table of contents, and work plan

16 March: Co-chairs (or SAO, in lieu) to present the idea of a "vision", as part of the eventual assessment, to be vetted at the Fairbanks SAO meeting as part of the TFTA agenda point

23 March*: Co-chairs to deliver draft chapter on available technologies

23 March*: Norway to deliver draft of section on maritime needs

30 March*: Teleconference (Agenda included in work plan)

27 April (or earlier): Iceland will contact ICAO to inquire about existing writing on aeronautical needs (27 April or earlier)

27 April: All delegations to provide any additional inputs for the section addressing (1) national priorities and (2) national gap analyses

22 June: EPPR to provide input on search-and-rescue needs and gaps

22 June: Delegations that have examples of successful PPPs are asked to submit brief descriptions of any such PPPs

TBD: US to reach out to the Arctic Economic Council for further discussion re: collaboration, possible provision of / contribution to a "vision" statement

TBD: Co-chairs to reach out to Arctic Council Working Groups for further input

**Dates may be changed due to Easter holiday*