

Summary:

The road to Lofoten. Effects on business, tourism and aviation

The mainland connection of Lofoten (Lofast) opened the 1st of December 2007, and has given considerable reductions in travel time, especially towards northern and eastern destinations. The total distance of the mainland connection is 51 km, consisting of several bridges and tunnels. Construction costs have been approximately 1,5 billion NOK.

Road traffic to/from Lofoten has increased by 46 percent from 2007 to 2008 (January-August). Local and regional traffic to/from the Harstad area probably explains a large share of the traffic increase. Interview data confirms that Lofast has facilitated an increase in short visits from the neighbouring areas. Statistics show that Lofoten has experienced a pronounced increase in the number of overnight stays (+29 000 nights) since the completion of Lofast. In the neighbouring region of Vesterålen, there has been a modest decrease in the number of overnight stays (-5 000 nights). The main airport of Evenes has experienced increased traffic from 2007 to 2008. The traffic increase can be explained both by a transfer of traffic from the regional airports, and by a growth in the market for international charter flights.

The report focuses on the effects of Lofoten's new mainland connection on business, tourism and aviation. Central issues are the impact of Lofast on tourism in Lofoten and Vesterålen, on the development of air traffic at the main and regional airports in the area, and on industry development, with examples from the fishing and freight industry.

The analysis draws on several sources: a survey performed at Evenes airport in August and September 2008, traffic censuses of various roads stretches and ferry services, air traffic statistics from Avinor, travel statistics from TØIs travel survey 2007, statistics on overnight stays from Statistics Norway, and interviews with various actors from the tourist industry, transport industry, fishing industry and the airports in the region.

The Lofoten mainland connection has greatest impact on direct transports from Lofoten to northern and eastern destinations such as Narvik, Harstad and Tromsø. On these transports, Lofast contributes to time savings and reduced ferry expenses, in addition to providing enhanced reliability, predictability and flexibility. Lofast also indirectly contributes to reduced travel costs through improved access to cheap air tickets from Evenes airport.

Lofast does not necessarily give reduced driving time for long-distance freight transports, due to regulations on resting time, which was previously complied with on board the ferry. On certain distances, Lofast also represents a longer driving distance than the former ferry alternative. The coordination of distribution to Lofoten and Vesterålen has in some cases also become more complicated after Lofast.

The negative impact of Lofast is the parallel reduction of ferry services on the distance Svolvær - Skutvik. The resulting reduced ferry traffic on this connection (-29 000 cars) is counterbalanced by an increase in traffic on the ferry connection between Bognes and Lødingen (+35 000 cars). This connection has been strengthened after Lofast by four extra daily ferries in both directions.

The report emphasises the need to follow up the Lofast investment with active strategies, plans and investments in order to stimulate the creation of spill-over effects and growth from the new mainland connection. Parts of the road network in the area need improvement, and public transportation needs to be developed. There is also a need for updating maps and signposts, as well as an improved coordination across the county borders on issues relating to communication and transport. Finally, the mainland connection should be followed up by a later study. Effects of infrastructure investments take time to materialise, and Lofast is a project worthy of further studies. Findings from a follow-up study will also add to our general knowledge on the relationship between investments in infrastructure and spill-over effects.