

Rail Baltic project continues to stir debate

There are ongoing discussions about where to build the track.

Following the news this summer that the European Commission (EC) approved funding for the Rail Baltic international railroad, connecting the Baltic states with central and western Europe, many were relieved that the project that has been discussed for over a decade and seen many heated discussions and arguments, is finally moving ahead.

But it seems that the arguments over where exactly to build the track have not stopped. For a long time, the dispute focused on whether the railroad would pass Pärnu or Tartu, as both local governments wanted the international railway to have stops in their towns.

Now, the finance minister Sven Sester has proposed an option that the track will be built through Nabala-Tuhala Nature Reserve. Sester said that there is nothing to suggest that the railroad would have a negative impact on the reserve and already sent the proposal for coordination to Ministry of Environment.

According to Sester, building the track in Nabala-Tuhala reserve would save tens of millions of euros in cost. "I don't think there is enough proof to indicate that the track through the reserve would damage nature or affect groundwater," Sester told ERR.

However, Estonian Nature Fund already expressed its opposition. The chairwoman Silvia Lotman said that one cannot build a railroad through nature reserve just because it is cheaper. She added that there is no sufficient evidence to say whether it would have a negative impact on the reserve or not.

The preparation for the Rail Baltic construction has already begun. This summer, the biggest archeology project in Estonian history started in areas where the high-speed track will pass through. Digs have so far taken place in Harju, Rapla and Pärnu counties.

The building of the new railway is expected to begin in 2018. The whole project is estimated to cost 3.68 billion euros. The EC will co-fund 85 percent of this sum.

Rail Baltic is an international project that connects the three Baltic States, with Finland and Poland involved as partners.

Source: <http://news.err.ee/v/economy/3af79aaf-9651-450f-b0fe-0d559da68cad/rail-baltic-project-continues-to-stir-debate>