



**Preliminary study of legislation
concerning special-needs
transport services**

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Transport Analysis

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Summary

Special-needs transport services, which are intended to provide groups of riders having special needs with more favourable conditions for travelling, include local and national special transport services, medical travel services, and school travel services. Such travel services are provided by society to those who qualify for special permits, and are usually not carried out in the context of normal public transport along fixed routes. These special transport services are managed at several organisational levels and regulated by a number of laws.

In the case of special transport services, national transport services, school transport services, and travel expense reimbursements for travel to upper secondary college preparatory schools, the responsibility lies with the municipalities, while in the case of travel expense reimbursements for medical travel, the responsibility lies with the relevant healthcare authority (usually the county council). Finally, the responsibility for regional public transport lies with the regional public transport authorities, which can be organised in various ways, but usually by a county council or an association of all municipalities in a county together with the county council. The riders who use special-needs transport services are anything but a homogenous group. Their needs differ radically not only from one individual to another, but also from one instance to another.

The special-needs transport services work well in many respects, but there are a number of reasons why the regulation of the system and its management needs a review. First and foremost, a comparison between costs and the number of trips made indicates that productivity is declining. Deficiencies in quality and usability are perceived from the rider perspective, and conditions and assumptions vary greatly between passenger groups and parts of the country. The obligations imposed on small and shrinking municipalities are becoming increasingly burdensome as a result of demographic trends, limited resources, and difficulties retaining sufficient competence.

The need for coordination has long been pointed out in many studies. Aggregating responsibility in a single body at the regional level would increase the potential to coordinate various special-needs transport services across municipal boundaries and with the general public transport system. There are currently some avenues for voluntarily choosing to coordinate certain parts of these services, but the progress is slow.

One consequence of the heterogeneous legislation and the different levels of responsibility involved is that multiple more or less parallel special-needs services are being provided, services that are not allowed to be coordinated with each other or with the regional public transport services. The Swedish Public Procurement Act currently makes it difficult to transfer tasks between the responsible agencies, as such services must be procured on the open market. Regional coordination is legally feasible only in the case of special transport services and national special transport services, and it is also possible to jointly procure school transport with regional public transport, as it is a compulsory municipal responsibility. However, the complexity of the applicable laws creates uncertainty among the responsible parties.

Transport Analysis concludes that the time has come to begin a true re-regulation process that will create conditions favouring the efficient and user-adapted coordination of all public

transport services, regardless of whether they are intended for the general public or for riders with special needs. The path of voluntary coordination has reached an impasse, arriving at a point where many, particularly smaller municipalities, are realising the difficulties involved in bearing the costs by themselves, while other municipalities need a push if they are to contribute collectively to the public good.

The report describes the evolution and current state of special-needs transport services. The problems and limitations have been analysed from three closely associated perspectives, i.e., efficiency, user needs, and the conditions necessary for a functional market. The fragmented distribution of responsibility and the limitations and uncertainties associated with our procurement laws are of major importance. The analysis discusses both the potential benefits of coordination and the potential problems connected with designing a new organisation.

Based on the background and analysis, several concrete starting points are presented for continuing the effort to organise special-needs transport services and regional public transport in a coordinated manner. In brief, these proposals pertain to the following areas: riders' needs and rights, boundary lines and definitions, comparable statistics, and developed systems for planning the traffic.



Transport Analysis is a Swedish agency for transport policy analysis. We analyse and evaluate proposed and implemented measures within the sphere of transport policy. We are also responsible for official statistics in the transport and communication sectors. Transport Analysis was established in April 2010 with its head office in Stockholm and a branch office in Östersund.