



**Accessibility and transport policy  
challenges in a rural context** **Summary**  
**Report 2015:9**



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**Transport Analysis**

Address: Torsgatan 30

SE-113 21 Stockholm

Phone: 010 414 42 00

Fax: 010 414 42 10

E-mail: [trafikanalys@trafa.se](mailto:trafikanalys@trafa.se)

Webaddress: [www.trafa.se](http://www.trafa.se)

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# Summary

Transport Analysis noted the accessibility and transport policy challenges facing our rural areas in Report 2014:16. This report will look at our Nordic neighbours to examine the scope and organisation of the transport policy-based support provided to peripheral regions in those countries.

The consulting firm WSP was commissioned by Transport Analysis to prepare the report.

State funding is used in Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark to bolster public transport and other means of transport in peripheral regions. The differences between the countries in terms of the volumes of and motivations and criteria for such support are, however, appreciable. Of the four countries, Denmark can be said to diverge the most, as targeted regional support for public transport and other means of transport is not a prominent transport policy tool there. Moreover, appropriations made for such purposes are seldom disclosed in economic follow-ups in Denmark.

Government agencies are responsible for the targeted support of public transport and shipping in rural areas in Sweden and Finland. The equivalent function is discharged by both ministries and agencies in Denmark. In Norway, the government and the Ministry of Transport and Communications are responsible for such targeted support. However, this may change as a result of an announced railroad reform initiative.

Support for transport is more clearly defined and larger in volume in Norway, Sweden, and Finland than in Denmark. Support is disbursed in those countries to railroad, aviation, and ferry and boat transport, but not to bus transport to any significant extent. Commercial shipments from peripheral regions are also subsidised under regulations resembling those governing support for transport administered by the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth. The appropriations for public transport and transport in peripheral regions motivated by regional policy are highest in Norway, while Finland can be said to have the most clearly defined criteria for such support.

One general feature of all these countries is that the clarity and transparency of the support change depending on its form. The most detailed rules governing the scope and criteria apply to the support provided to commercial transport. Support for public transport in various forms is, to a greater extent, the subject of more carefully weighed assessments within the framework of procurement processes or other assigning procedures. The least transparent is the approach taken when factoring accessibility in peripheral regions into the investments made to maintain and develop the transport infrastructure. That the degree of transparency differs between areas of investment according to roughly the same pattern in all the countries is probably related to the identity of the support recipient.

The fact that these countries are all members of or closely aligned with the EU does not appear to have provided any major impetus for greater uniformity or harmonisation. Nor have the changes been particularly sweeping if we compare the situation in 2015 with that in 2012. However, some evolution towards more decentralised responsibility, more market-based procurement solutions, and an expanded perspective that encompasses all types of transport is discernible.

A policy shift occurring in all these countries could affect the organisation and support of transport by the state. One common denominator appears to be a greater emphasis on transport supply problems in urban areas than in peripheral regions. The greater the attention paid to the role of transport in regional development and growth, the more concentrated the apparent interest in the major cities and transport corridors. On the other hand, it would seem that no drastic changes should be expected in the level of regional policy-motivated support in a more traditional sense, i.e., to level the playing field for transportation to, from, and within more peripheral regions, in any of the studied countries.

Comparing the countries indicates several issues that it would be interesting to examine closely from a Swedish perspective. For example, several studies in Norway have addressed the issue of what constitutes optimal support for public transport. The results of these studies could shed light on a Swedish discussion of the design and scope of our public transport. A more in-depth comparison of the Swedish and Finnish accessibility criteria for state support for interregional public transport would identify similarities and differences between them. Are there any explanations for any such differences? Both Norway and Denmark provide special stimulus grants to develop public transport in various respects. Such grants could serve as an alternative to the direct subsidy of certain lines.



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.