TRANSPORT ANALYSIS

Have our travel habits changed due to digitalization?

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Report 2017:10

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As Information and Communication Technology (ICT) gained prevalence during the 1990s, hopes were high that the new technology would lead to a dramatic reduction in the need for personal travel. The ability to work, socialize, do business and conduct meetings remotely, using ICT, would make it possible to eliminate many of our trips. However, the actual implications of ICT have proven to be difficult to study and measure. It has also turned out that there are many circumstances under which ICT use generates more travel. It has consequently been difficult to show, at the aggregate level, that travel has decreased as a result of increased ICT use, although there are many isolated examples in which new technology has been used to replace personal travel.

Much of the research concerning the connection between ICT and travel has focused largely on teleworking and telecommuting, as the ability to work from home was seen early on to have major potential to reduce the need for personal travel. The literature concerning the prevalence of telecommuting and its effects on travel is thus extensive. However, much of the research was based on what is now an antiquated form of ICT use, where the user is presumed to be sitting at a stationary computer. The conditions surrounding remote communication have changed fundamentally with the development of smart phones and mobile broadband, as these technologies can be used while travelling.

Studies of telecommuting show that various rebound effects have eroded much of the imagined travel savings, and that remote communication is being used as a complement to travel, rather than as a substitute for it. New technologies can facilitate new planning and information systems for public transport, telecommuters can make their trips outside of peak traffic times, and it is possible to work while one is travelling, thus making the use of time spent travelling more efficient.

Knowledge is readily available concerning how ICT is being used in various contexts and concerning Internet and computer access in Sweden. Both government agencies and various special interest groups provide information about various aspects of Internet use. However, they do not address the links between ICT and transportation demand to any great extent. The need thus exists for an improved knowledge basis in this field. We also need to know more about how ICT is being used during travel, and how this could impact transportation demand both at the aggregate level and in terms of travel patterns and distributions in time and space.

TRANSPORT ANALYSIS

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.