TRANSPORT ANALYSIS

More health for the buck – final report in-depth objective follow-up: living environment and health

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Publisher: Mattias Viklund
Publication date: 2020-01-16

Summary

Transport Analysis's remit includes an annual follow-up of the transport policy objectives. In 2018 Transport Analysis received a special government commission to present in-depth follow-ups of certain aspects of the transport policy objectives. In 2019 Transport Analysis worked on a thematic, in-depth follow-up with a focus on health and the living environment. In the summer of 2019, Transport Analysis published the sub-report In-depth objective follow-up: living environment and health as part of this effort.

We have analysed the connections between Sweden's transport policy objectives and public health objectives in order to better understand the impact of the transport system on human health. Phrases regarding robust health are found in the transport policy's impact objective. However, our analysis shows that the functional accessibility objective has many ties to public health as well. The transport policy goals contribute to the achievement of the overall public health objective of equity in health and to its secondary goals via greater access to the labour market, education, food, and social services, regardless of gender, place of residence, and socio-economic background. The public health objectives can be an effective tool when setting out to understand the effects of transport policy measures on public health. The secondary objectives can serve as a "to-do list" specifying the aspects to be considered when assessing transport policy proposals. It is likely that not all public health policy objectives are always relevant in a transport context, but they should nevertheless be considered in order to uncover potentially important health aspects or ways in which those objectives conflict with transport policy measures.

Transport Analysis has updated our knowledge of the effect correlation between the transport sector and human health. The primary negative health effects arise as a result of air pollution, noise, and inadequate traffic safety. Several studies have shown that active travel (e.g., walking and cycling) has positive effects on human health. DALY calculations have been performed to determine the extents to which traffic-related air pollution, noise, and active transport (e.g., walking and cycling) affect human health. Active travel stands out in these calculations, as it has the greatest impact on health. Active travel is currently helping to prevent the loss of roughly 73,600 DALYs. The calculations further show that active travel in the current transport system has roughly the same degree of positive health effects as noise (approx. 41,000 DALYs), air quality (approx. 19,400 DALYs), and traffic fatalities (approx. 10,900 DALYs) collectively have from a negative standpoint (total 71,300 DALYs).

However, calculations of the magnitude of the transport system's impact on health do not identify what measures should be prioritised to improve health. Transport Analysis has assessed the magnitude of this health impact, as expressed in DALYs, relative to preventive health measures and their costs with a view to determining whether any socio-economic benefits are associated with prioritising certain health-promotion measures over others. However, a review of state appropriations intended to promote health within the transport system shows that it is difficult to break down the appropriations to specific health-related measures. Health-promotion measures are included in a number of allotments, but the costs of these items are not reported separately based on their health effects. Of the appropriations earmarked for vegetation control and other environmental measures in the 2018–2029 national plan for the transport system, 29% are allocated to traffic safety, 8% to noise-

abatement measures, and 4% to safer cycling. The breakdown of earmarked appropriations offers no basis for concluding that more funding should be allocated to, for example, air pollution, noise, or walking and cycling. Understanding what these investments yield in return is needed to obtain guidance in determining the area that the appropriations should target. To know whether society should invest more or fewer resources in, for example, noise-abatement measures, traffic safety, or promoting active travel, we also need to know what is required to achieve these things.

Our report shows that, in the current transport circumstances, active travel has very great positive health effects. These positive effects would be increased further if more people were to choose walking or cycling. If active travel replaces motorised transport, it would in turn be able to reduce the negative effects of the transport system in the form of air pollution and noise. Moreover, a higher share of walking and cycling could also help free up attractive surfaces in urban environments and contribute to achieving the climate objectives.

Our assessment, based on the potential benefits of active travel, is that it should continue to be a major emphasis in Swedish transport policy and infrastructure planning. The orientation should be toward finding effective measures for realising these potential benefits. The specific groups that share the benefits of measures to improve the conditions surrounding the choice of active travel should be considered as well.

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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 2010 with its head office in Stockholm and a branch office in Östersund.

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