

**Changes in travel patterns in
Sweden during the first six
months of the corona pandemic**

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Report 2020:13**

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Transport Analysis

Address: Rosenlundsgatan 54

SE-118 63 Stockholm

Phone: 010 414 42 00

Fax: 010 414 42 20

E-mail: trafikanalys@trafa.se

Webaddress: www.trafa.se

Publisher: Mattias Viklund

Publication date: 2021-01-04

Summary

Travel decreased abruptly as of 11 March, when WHO classified Covid-19 as a pandemic and the Public Health Agency of Sweden and the Swedish government instituted the first restrictions on public gatherings in Sweden. There was great uncertainty about the contagion, and we were urged to socially distance, avoid “unnecessary” travel, and work from home if we could. This is directly reflected in the National Travel Survey, which we are, for the first time, analysing before the calendar year is out (up to and including August). We are focusing on the first six months of the pandemic, i.e., March–August 2020. We also touch upon certain other data sources and studies that yield concurrent results. The analysis paints the following picture.

Reduced total travel: All data sources indicate that total travel fell a relatively severe 23% in March–April, followed by a further 12% decrease in July–August. The average decrease over the six-month period from March to August was therefore –16%.

Impact on age groups – Proportion that travelled: Compared with last year, at the start of the pandemic, a larger proportion of people in all age groups stayed home, particularly children and young people under 20 years old and seniors over the age of 65. Among these groups, one-fourth of those who had travelled in 2019 stayed home in March–April of this year. As time went by, the proportion of those who travelled at least once per day increased, and by July–August it was at the same level as in 2019. Number of trips among those who travelled: Among those who did travel, the number of trips per person also initially decreased dramatically among children, young people, and those of working age (i.e., age 20–64 years), while seniors delayed reducing their travel until May–June. In July–August, it was only those in the 20–64-year age group who were making fewer trips than in 2019. In summary: After six months of the pandemic, the share of those travelling has decreased only marginally, attributable to fewer movements among those in the 20–64-year group who travel.

Redistribution of reasons for travel: The most affected types of travel are school-related trips, –43%, and work-related trips, –15% (March–August). Leisure-related trips also decreased (–18%), although this is still within the margin of error (95% CI). The reduced number of work- and school-related trips did not result in more trips being made for other purposes; on the contrary, for natural reasons, fewer errands were being done on the way to or from work or school.

Changes in modes of transport: The modes of transport most negatively affected by the pandemic are air travel, sea travel, and public transport, including long-haul trains. Public transport saw the biggest decline in absolute numbers, affecting the total decrease in travel the most. In the case of air and sea travel, the decrease was attributable primarily to restrictions on international travel, although domestic flights have also decreased dramatically, as long-distance domestic travel has been cautioned against.

Changes in destination and trip length: The numerous restrictions on both foreign travel and long-distance domestic travel resulted in severely reduced tourism during the warm months, primarily in the Stockholm region, but also in April in Central Norrland, as a result of unmade ski trips over the Easter holidays. The average trip length decreased by half, as the proportion of long trips declined.

People with functional disabilities, who travel less even in normal circumstances and include a great many seniors, have reduced their travel to the same degree as the rest of the population. However, the number of trips involving station assistance for those with disabilities has decreased dramatically, from a proportion of all trips that was already very small.

Travel has decreased more among members of higher-income groups, who travel more than average in normal circumstances. Those with annual incomes of less than SEK 190,000 have even displayed a tendency towards increased travel on average. Surveys other than the Swedish National Travel Survey also indicate that the populations of areas with a high proportion of low-income earners are continuing to use public transport to a great extent (e.g., in Stockholm County, the City of Malmö, and North American cities). How the continued travel by different groups breaks down geographically will consequently be of interest for further study in the future.

Digitalization has received a real boost from the pandemic, for example, in the form of telecommuting, distance learning, e-commerce, and video communication. This may prove to have a lasting effect on how we travel and where we live in the future, changing the conditions for the provision of public transport. We consequently see reason to revisit these issues, for instance, in our annual follow-ups of the national transport policy objectives.



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.