

Summary:

National Transport Planning in Norway and Sweden – A Comparison

The national transport planning processes in Norway and Sweden have been designed with several common features in respect of content, planning process and planning methods.

This report seeks to identify those differences in planning processes and planning systems that nevertheless exist and aims at analysing how such differences have influenced the process and the output. The report is based on two previous reports on the national planning processes in Sweden (Lauridsen and Ravlum 2000) and in Norway (Ravlum 2001).

The Norwegian and Swedish transport plans have a number of fundamental common features:

- *Long term planning:* 10 years planning horizon and a rolling system with full planning round every three or four years;
- *Contents:* All four transport modes are included;
- *Less detailed:* The parliaments are invited to make strategic decisions and leave project planning and implementation to the transport agencies; and
- *Methods:* The various measures available to planners are bundled and structured into alternative strategies. The strategies are analysed and achievements are assessed in respect of politically defined goals and objectives (Sweden) or a number of indicators (Norway).

From this common platform, the Norwegian and the Swedish transport planning processes diverge in regard of:

1. Goal formulation: (i) To what degree concise and consistent objectives are formulated. (ii) To what degree effectiveness (goal achievement) is in focus. (iii) How well objectives and measures at hand match each other.
2. Planning methods and contents: (i) The use of formal methods for selecting measures and designing alternative strategies. (ii) Whether transport agencies are directed to divide and allocate the overall financial resources for the planning period among themselves or not (iii) Whether the agencies are directed to design a recommended strategy or not.
3. Organising and division of responsibility: (i) How planning responsibility at central level is divided and (ii) How the regional level is incorporated in the national planning process.

Goal hierarchy?

The overall goal for the Swedish transport policy is to *ensure a socio-economic efficient and sustainable transport supply for citizens and for industry and commerce*. This goal is broken down into five objectives. The objectives are in turn broken down and operationalised into quantified criteria to be achieved within defined time perspectives.

Norwegian planning is not based on a consistent goal hierarchy. Instead, the Government have formulated a series of political considerations, frameworks and general policy guidelines, which shall be taken into account.

Goal achievement?

The Norwegian planning guidelines refer to “central goals and considerations in respect of efficient traffic flow, environmental policy, transport safety and regional development” that shall be taken into account when assessing the effects of the plan. Key indicators are developed with reference to these goals and considerations. In this sense, the Norwegian key indicators are similar to the Swedish criteria. But the key indicators are not linked to any specified objective. Consequently, they do not indicate a desirable level of achievement or effectiveness but only provide a measuring device. The indicators cannot tell whether the effect is satisfactory or not, or even if it is far better than necessary, which in case should have been followed by reallocation of resources to measures aimed at other objectives.

The current strategic transport planning system was introduced in Norway in the early 1990’s by a government appointed committee (NOU 1993:23). The committee emphasised that the planning system should be based on specific and measurable objectives. The objectives should be formulated in such way that it subsequently was possible to decide whether they had been achieved or not.

The Norwegian planning system as applied for the current National Transport Plan does clearly not meet the above conditions. If the government wants to maintain such strategic planning system, objectives have to be defined and specified.

Balance between objectives and applicable measures?

Contrary to the Norwegian planners, the Swedish counterparts were allowed to include among their measures a dedicated CO₂ levy on fuel. In the alternative Strategy of Environment and Transport Safety, the fuel price was increased to such level that this measure alone led to fulfilment of the CO₂ objective. The Norwegian planners, which were not allowed to apply other measures than those controlled by the transport agencies, experienced a considerable gap between ambiguous and ambitious policy guidelines set by government and the measures at hand.

Allowing transport planners to change exogenous planning conditions, like introducing a CO₂ levy, may shift the focus from the measures controlled by the sector. On the other hand, infrastructure measures have a rather limited impact on fulfilment of the transport policy goals the planners actually were requested to meet. It is, therefore, important to secure a better balance between the applicable measures and the objectives set by government.

Socio-economic efficiency as an overall goal?

Socio-economic efficiency shall pervade all considerations and decisions in the Swedish transport planning process. This goal was interpreted in two different ways by the planners: (i) Measures should be selected in such way that the planning criteria are achieved in the most efficient way. This implies that among the various measures aimed at promoting transport safety, the most cost effective should be selected. (ii) The most socio-economic efficient measures should be selected regardless of which criteria they aim at. This implies that transport safety measures should be considered together with measures aimed at other objectives than transport safety, also when designing the safety strategy.

The Rail Track Agency and the Road Agency were in favour of the first interpretation. The Swedish Institute for Communications Analysis (SIKA), supported by the Ministry, was in favour of the latter. This disagreement continued throughout the process and the two transport agencies formally dissented from the approach applied for the design of the Strategy of Environment and Transport Safety.

Use of formal methods and establishing financial frameworks for the various sub-sector

The Swedish planning process emphasised the development of methods and tools for assessing effects of the whole range of measures applied. New demand models for both passenger and freight transport were developed. The output of these models was in turn meant to be input to a new tool for impact analysis and cost - benefit analysis of rail and road transport investment projects.

The entire planning process was influenced by the high ambitions in this respect. The distribution of the financial framework for investments on the Rail Track Agency and the Road Agency was to be determined by the results of the cost – benefit analyses. Hence, the core interests of the two agencies were at stake. The Swedish planners did not succeed fully in their ambitions and the new tool for impact analysis and cost - benefit analysis was not completed in time. As a result, the financial frameworks for investments in the rail and road sectors had to be agreed by negotiations. Meanwhile, disagreements about goal hierarchy, principles for distribution of the financial framework and design of the Environment and Transport Safety Strategy had put its stamps on the process.

In comparison, the Norwegian process was characterised by harmony and compromises from the very beginning. This may be due to that the Norwegian agencies were not directed to distribute the overall financial framework among themselves. Their core interests were, therefore, not at stake to the same degree as in Sweden. Socio-economic efficiency was not an overall goal in Norway. In addition, the recommended strategy was generated by the Road Agency, the Rail Track Agency, The Civil Aviation Authority and the Coastal Transport Agency respectively, and was not subjected to joint assessment and negotiations among the four. Hence, the Norwegian process was less transparent and the agencies did not examine each other as closely as the Swedish agencies. Disagreement and differing professional points of views were not highlighted to the same degree as in Sweden.

Strategic analyses

The Swedish transport agencies did jointly make a series of strategic analyses, comprising analyses of planning conditions and analyses of so called integrated measures. The intentions of the integrated measures analyses was to identify the most efficient combination of different categories of policy measures aimed at promoting transport safety, environment, the optimal level of maintenance as well as the best measures for solving transport problems in major cities. Many integrated measure analyses were impeded by methodological and empirical shortcomings. Therefore, investment projects in major cities were not included in two of the alternative strategies. Nevertheless, the analyses contributed to clarifying knowledge gaps and areas of professional disagreement and uncertainty. They also paved the way for a more critical scrutinising of the various means and measures at hand and may put further emphasis on the realism and relevance of several transport policy objectives.

Recommended strategy or only alternative strategies?

Contrary to the Swedish transport agencies, the Norwegian agencies were directed to design a recommended strategy. This may explain why the Norwegian agencies to a lesser extent gave priority to the design of alternative strategies. Instead, they clearly prioritised design of the recommended strategy. This strategy was, however, not developed in close co-operation between the agencies. Their collaboration was concentrated to more general transport policy measures that provided a common policy framework for the planning process, organising and division of labour among themselves and other questions that did not concern measures controlled by the agencies.

As a consequence of the lack of quantified objectives for the transport sector in Norway, it appears that the alternative strategies developed by the planners rather reflect well known measures than that measures applied reflect the goals and objectives. This implies that the planning process is not in line with the principles of management by objectives or Rational Planning.

Distribution of responsibility

The planning in Norway as described above was carried out by the transport agencies, under the leadership of the Road Authority – both at the national and regional level. In Sweden, the transport agencies and the SIKa, with SIKa in an executive position, were responsible for the analyses at the national level. At the regional level, the work was carried out by the state commissioner in the county or, in some counties by the administrative body of the council.

The SIKa and the transport agencies had diverging opinions on several methodological questions. SIKa in its executive position could scrutinise the agencies' priorities. This made compromise between the agencies less likely and contributed to the identification of knowledge gaps and to the professional disagreement among the parties. The distribution of responsibilities in Sweden also made the process less harmonious than in Norway where the agencies already from the very beginning concentrated their efforts to matters of common interests and to joint visions.

In Norway, the agencies were formally responsible for their proposal to the Ministries and the managing directors signed it. In Sweden, signature was

delegated to planning directors or similar. Both the rail and the road agencies did formally dissent from parts of the joint report. Both agencies felt that SIKa was responsible for the process and to a high extent also responsible for the final product. This probably made it easier for them to dissent from parts of the joint report.

How to incorporate regional priorities in national planning

The Swedish Regional Strategy was based on direct input from the counties. Hence, one of the national strategies was a direct product of local priorities. On the other hand, regional priorities had no influence at all on the two strategies designed at the national level (The Environment and Safety Strategy and the Economic Efficiency Strategy).

In Norway, the regional offices of the national transport agencies in co-operation with the counties and the state commissioner in the county were directed to analyse challenges and draw up the major priorities of their county. This work contributed to a joint understanding of problems and regional priorities among the regional actors. The agencies' internal mechanisms contributed to consistence between their policies and priorities at the regional and national levels. However, the results of co-operation between the four agencies and the regional bodies as such, did not have any major influence on the national joint planning process. The main channels of influence were the links within the agencies between their regional offices and headquarters.

Sweden did chose another set up, but the experience is quite similar. None of the processes did effectively secure any regional influence on the national planning process.

The regional planners are more measure-oriented than strategy-oriented. They are primarily interested in solving concrete problems, for instance infrastructure bottlenecks and less interested in the more theoretical planning approach as applied for the national planning process. The national agencies should incorporate the regional approach more in the national planning process by involving regional planners in some of the preparatory work and the strategic analyses prior to the development of the alternative strategies.

Recommendations aimed at strategic transport planning in Norway:

- 1. Develop clear and consistent goal hierarchy:** The goals should provide guidance for selection of measures. Consistent and measurable objectives are a prerequisite for this type of planning system and required for the necessary ex post evaluation of goal achievement and a key factor in the division of labour between politicians and planners. There should be a better balance between the objectives and measures controlled by the planners.

2. **Emphasise transparency in the planning process:** Strategic analyses should be applied to identify the most efficient combination of policy measures aimed at promoting the various objectives. The analyses should be carried out by the agencies to secure their ownership to the process and its results.
3. **Recommended strategy and use of alternative strategies :** The recommended strategy should be developed in close co-operation by the four transport agencies and represent their joint recommendations. Cross-sectoral co-ordination and prioritisation of measures controlled by the agencies should be a prominent feature in this part of the process as well as for the more general policy recommendations.
The alternative strategies should reflect realistic policy options and demonstrate the latitude for decision. They must become an integrated part of the standard planning procedures applied by the agencies.
4. **Keep the main features of the planning organisation:** The agencies must feel ownership in respect of both the planning process and the results. Responsibility for and co-ordination of the agencies should remain with the Road Agency. The planning secretariat should include members from all four agencies.
5. **Include the regional level more actively in national transport planning:** The link between regional planning and national planning should be strengthened. The region's priorities should more directly influence national planning. The transport agencies could in their national planning process take better advantage of the concrete and problem-oriented approach applied by the regional level.