



Access and transport policy challenges in different rural areas **Summary**
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Transport Analysis

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Summary

This report describes and analyses the challenges facing transport systems in rural areas. The report concludes by touching on several tools and measures that might be used to meet these challenges.

Urban and rural areas are mutually dependent. Rural areas depend on cities, for example, for a more advanced selection of services and for higher education. Correspondingly, cities need rural areas, for example, for food production and recreation sites. The transport system is the glue that holds this network together.

Rural areas differ from urban ones in two respects. First, rural areas are characterized by their particular physical environment, comprising the natural landscape, the utilized landscape, and the developed environment. Second, rural areas' sparse structures and great distances affect nearly all human activities. The report notes that it is important to distinguish between rural areas that have a large population concentrated within a manageable distance and sparsely populated areas where access to services and the labour market is distinctly less favourable. Such a distinction is also made in categorizing municipalities into six types, as proposed by Growth Analysis – Swedish Agency for Growth Policy Analysis and used in this report.

There appear to be no notable differences between these six types of municipalities in terms of the types of trips made. Trips to work or school seem to be dominant in all types of municipalities because, fundamentally, we all have similar needs.

One characteristic of trips made in rural areas is the large proportion of short trips (<10 minutes); this is attributable to the fact that work, school, and other common destinations are found largely within the local community. Rural areas near major cities break with this pattern, transport being characterized by relatively long trips, which of course result from more extensive travel to jobs and services in the city.

The automobile is the dominant mode of transport in rural areas, public transport instead serving as a supplement or back-up when a car cannot be used. Public transport in the traditional sense is poorly suited to rural conditions. One challenge lies in finding other, more suitable forms of transport (including taxis) for people who do not have access to a car or are unable or unwilling to drive.

Access to local services (e.g., grocery stores) is worse in remote rural areas. To the extent that these services are inaccessible on foot or by bicycle, people are dependent on access by car. However, the major challenge facing remote rural areas mainly concerns interregional access and access to locations with a greater offering of goods and services.

Given our shrinking and ageing rural population, simply maintaining the current level of transport system accessibility and quality poses a challenge. Traffic flows are usually small, scarcely justifying large investments, and the priority is instead preserving a basic level of access in accordance with the functional objectives of our transport policy.

Investing in physical regional enlargement is usually not an option in remote rural areas, given the large distances in question. Instead, one must work with the existing service offerings and labour markets of small towns, building on the advantages present in the form of tourism, minerals, forests, and low-cost commercial space. Rural areas near major cities of course have completely different opportunities in terms of accessing what cities have to offer via improved transport options.

Our state/national transport policy has several tools at its disposal for developing transport systems in rural areas. The primary instrument of state infrastructure planning is the national plan, which has an appropriation of roughly SEK 522 billion for the period from 2014 to 2025. Under the national plan, funding is also allocated to the regional transport plans drawn up by county planning bodies (e.g., county administrative boards and regional offices). The major challenges in terms of maintaining current standards and access are found in remote and extremely remote rural areas. In such areas, the priority is maintaining

basic access in accordance with the functional objectives of our transport policy. For example, the government can set priorities, via its planning directives, specific infrastructure and other measures that benefit rural areas.

In addition to normal planning activities, the government has several important tools with which to address transportation in rural areas. These include two forms of state operating grants for airports: grants given to those airports for which the state procures traffic, and grants distributed according to the county plans, the county planning bodies determining which airports receive the grants.

Through its transport contracts, the government is able to influence interregional public transport. The Swedish Transport Administration is tasked with procuring interregional public transport through a special appropriation for transport contracts. The government can influence the offering via the amount of this appropriation.

With regard to public transport, the potential exists for improved coordination among various forms of socially funded travel, such as regular scheduled transport services, school bus services, mobility services, and travel services for the sick. Although this has been discussed for many years, several problems remain in coordinating these services. One problem stems from the lack of a single system that handles all types of transport, with the result that each is planned separately. Another problem is that different types of transport are subject to different laws. Consolidating responsibilities and more coherent regulation of public transport and special passenger transport services could be ways of improving coordination and increasing the accessibility and efficiency of public transport. Shifting the responsibility for special passenger transport services to the regional level would also incorporate them into the regional transport service programmes, which would then include school bus services and travel services for the sick as well.

A trans-sectoral approach is needed that includes initiatives going beyond transport policy to address primarily the most remote rural areas. This could involve various types of municipal services or an ombudsperson function tied to a rural grocery store. For example, it may be more cost-effective, primarily in the most remote rural areas, to support a rural store rather than trying to improve access by improving the transport infrastructure.

Finally, IT is an important tool in providing transport access in sparsely populated parts of the country. Broadband access is naturally a prerequisite for the ability to use various IT services.



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.