

Summary:

The traffic in the largest Norwegian cities today and in the next five to ten years

Congestion and delays are major concerns for businesses and those who are dependent on transport of goods and services in urban areas. There are several challenges. The major ones are the increased cost of transportation and that it is difficult to schedule deliveries. Lack of reserved parking for deliveries and badly designed facilities at properties in central areas of the cities implies also challenges for the drivers.

The report describes the changes in average driving speed on major roads in the three largest cities in Norway (Oslo, Bergen and Trondheim) the last few years, the current situation and expected development the next five to ten years.

In all three cities there are significant delays during peak hours. Traffic has increased at a relatively stable rate and is expected to do so also in the coming years. The periods with delays are getting longer. This development is explained by increased population and employment. The construction of new road capacity may both have allowed room for more traffic, but it has until now also prevented increased delays and severe congestion, roughly seen.

The current global economic crisis has also made its impact on the traffic in the three cities. The recession is seen as a major reason for a reduction of 5 to 8 per cent in Oslo. However, increased costs for passing the toll ring around the city and lowered fares on the public transport system may also have had effect. This can be considered as a three to five year “delay” of the expected traffic growth.

In the Oslo region it is expected a population growth of 230.000 persons the next 20 years. This means a growth of more than 20%. The region has an approved plan (the Oslo package 3) for heavy investments in road infrastructure and public transport. As most of the projects have an environmental focus they will not provide much increased road capacity because it implies expensive tunnels and measures such as priority lanes for public transport.

In parts of Bergen a new light rail line and a major new road may improve the situation from 2010. Still, according to the national transportation plan 2010-2019 the population growth will lead to a situation with more congestion in a few years.

The city council in Trondheim has approved ambitious environmental goals for the transportation system. The city will pay special attention to an improved network for bicycling and strong priority system for buses. The city may even reduce the road capacity on some major links (in favour of bus and bicycle lanes).

None of the cities have until now discussed or made special plans for improving the situation for the transport of goods. However, more attention is gradually given to the providing better facilities and regulations in favour of deliveries. Also

regulations of time for deliveries and type/size of vehicles to be used will probably be discussed.

The principles of road pricing may be introduced in all three cities in the years to come. In Bergen it is being studied whether the regular toll ring should have congestion fees. In Trondheim it has been decided to reintroduce a toll system and that the toll shall be time differentiated. Until now the politicians in Oslo region have voted against a time differentiated toll, but the toll has been increased, a new toll cordon has been established and the discount for frequent users has been abandoned.

The report concludes that in spite of plans for heavy investments in the road systems in all three cities the coming years, it will not be provided enough increased capacity to serve expected demand. Without special measures the congestion may be worse in the future. Therefore it must also be invested in improved capacity and attractiveness for other modes (public transport, bicycles, pedestrians) and alternative regulations and restrictions on the use of private cars. It is necessary to give special attention to the situation for commercial transports.