

Summary:

Possibilities and barriers for road safety work in Sweden

- an analysis of the Swedish Road Administration and other stakeholders

Background

Even if the Scandinavian countries have low fatality rates in road traffic compared to most other countries, the number of fatalities and serious injuries is considered too high, and the authorities in the Scandinavian countries have made visions, plans and targets for the reduction of road accidents. In Sweden the “Vision Zero”, implying no road fatalities and no severe injuries as the long-term target was approved by the Parliament in 1997, and it has been the basis for Swedish road safety policy ever since.

There is also a wealth of knowledge concerning effective accident countermeasures, responsible institutions with competent staff, and even money is available for road safety action to a certain extent. But the reduction in fatalities is slow, and the question remains why reduction is so slow? What are the barriers to implementation of more road accident countermeasures, and what is the potential for implementation of effective countermeasures?

In order to understand the barriers and potentials for implementation of further road accident countermeasures in Sweden, the Swedish road safety efforts have been analyzed in a project carried out for the Swedish Road Administration.

Approach and method

The focus of the project has been the Swedish Road Administration – SRA, which is responsible for road safety work in Sweden, and its relations with the political institutions and the police.

This project has focused intra- and inter-organizational matters as well as the aspects of formulation of policy that are important for the intra- and inter-organizational matters. Thus, the focus of the project is policy formulation and design, intra- and inter-organizational behavior and the context to a limited extent.

These factors are considered in general and in two case studies, the accident countermeasures median barriers and speed cameras. Six questions are asked as indicated in the figure below:

Structure of analysis of Swedish road safety policy and six basic questions

*The report can be ordered from:
Institute of Transport Economics, PO Box 6110 Etterstad, N-0602 Oslo, Norway
Telephone: +47 22 57 38 00 Telefax: +47 22 57 02 90*

	Objectives and management	Organizational interaction	Economic resources
Inter-organizational	1. Is road safety integrated into political objectives in the transport sector?	3. Does the interaction between SRA and the political institutions and the police contribute to road safety?	5. Are resources for road safety a priority at the political level?
Intra-organizational	2. Is road safety integrated into SRA's system of management by objectives and results?	4. Is road safety integrated in all relevant units within the SRA?	6. Are resources for road safety a priority within the SRA?

The data are documents and interviews. In total 11 qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 12 people have been carried out, i.e. six civil servants within the SRA, two members of Parliament, and one representative of the Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communication, one from the National Police Board and two from the Road Traffic Inspectorate.

Management by objectives and results

Management by objectives and results is applied in the political governing of the authorities and in the internal management of the authorities. In the field of transport in Sweden there is a hierarchy of politically established targets. The superior objective of Swedish transport policy is to provide economically efficient and sustainable transport. Safety is one of 6 subobjectives under this policy, and the "Vision Zero" which implies no fatalities or serious injuries, is part of this sub objective. There is also a short-term target, i.e. maximum 270 fatalities in 2007. In 2003 there were 519 fatalities, so the target is rather ambitious.

The so-called "appropriation directions" from the Cabinet to each authority is an important instrument in the management by objectives and results. In the appropriation directions to the SRA of 2004 the short-term target is repeated.

The SRA has established its own vision and business idea. The vision is: "We make the good journey possible." The business idea is: ".....to make opportunities for effective, safe and environmentally friendly transport for the citizens, industry and commerce." So-called "balanced scorecards" play an important part within the SRA internal management system, and they seem to be important in practice. Safety plays a certain part within the headquarter's balanced scorecard and is emphasized in the scorecards of the regional offices, but safety is absent in the balanced scorecards of several other departments within the SRA.

In general, road safety plays an important part in the documents of the management system of the transport sector, although in the internal management of the SRA safety could have a higher priority. The interviews indicated that the

short-term target of a maximum of 270 fatalities in 2007 is abandoned by most of the interviewees, a fact which reduces the importance of this target.

Interaction

There is a common understanding and open communication between SRA and political institutions and a genuine political interest and support for road safety. However, harmony is emphasized in interaction between SRA and politicians. Some years ago the SRA made explicit the need for more resources to fulfill the road safety targets, but for the time being the SRA emphasizes neither the need for resources nor the political responsibility for road safety in its communication with the politicians. The question may now be asked whether harmony dominates this communication to a degree that there is insufficient emphasis on need for resources and political responsibility for road safety.

The co-operation between SRA and police has been improved during recent years. However, there is rather poor co-operation between the relevant committees in the Parliament and between the relevant ministries. Moreover, road safety is not a priority for the police, and young police officers do not want to work in road traffic enforcement. The regional police, who have a high degree of independence, have other priorities, and the traffic police will often have to carry out other duties in addition to their road traffic enforcement. The regional police are supposed to carry out a certain degree of road traffic enforcement, but this is a challenge as when the police staff has been reduced. However, only one representative of the police was interviewed, and findings about the police may have been modified if more police representatives had been included.

In general road safety is more integrated in the SRA organization than before. Recent reorganization - in 1998 and 2003 - implies the integration of road safety in all SRA. All staff members have to know the Vision Zero and act in accordance with it. There are, nevertheless, differences between the headquarters and the regional offices in attitudes towards road safety. The regional offices are influenced by local politicians who seem to put a higher priority on mobility and a lower priority for safety than national politicians. There is an attitude in parts of SRA that: "Roads are for travel and for traveling fast.", implying that mobility is more important than safety.

In 2003 the SRA was reorganized, and the former Road Safety Unit was closed down. The intention was to make all parts of the SRA more responsible for road safety. Claiming that road safety is the responsibility of the Road Safety Unit only, should no longer be possible. This is considered a bold strategy, but the question is asked whether the SRA is ready for such a step.

Economic resources

The Swedish Cabinet has provided rather tight budgets for the SRA during the 1990's. Nevertheless, the politicians have maintained a high priority for road safety work. In the National Road Transport Plan for 2004-2015 resources for road safety in the national road network have a high priority. However, the SRA

has a certain economic freedom within its budget. Possibly as a consequence of a tight general budget and relatively high road safety budget, the SRA has to a certain extent reduced their spending of the general resources for road safety purposes, increasing the resources spent for other purposes.

Two case studies

Case 1: Median barriers

Annually some 60 people used to die in front-to-front crashes in Sweden, and the question arose how to improve highway safety without the costs of building four-lane highways. Sweden had an extensive network of 13-meter wide roads, which were formally two-lane roads with wide shoulders, but these roads were used as four-lane roads without a median barrier. Consequently, the accident risk on these roads was very high. The solution of two + one lane with a physical barrier in between was proposed and met with strong opposition from road engineers, the police and the media. Six trial road sections were planned; the first section became a great success in turning a road section with a high number of fatalities into a section with no fatalities. The media changed their attitude completely and started to demand more median barriers. Case 1 shows that:

- A vision may have concrete consequences
- Road safety may be more important than economic efficiency
- Political support may be established for new solutions
- Scarce resources may produce new solutions

Case 2: Speed cameras

Speeding is known to be a most important risk factor, and speed cameras are an effective way to reduce speed. Trials with speed cameras were brought about by a political initiative, but poor co-operation between the ministries of Industry, Employment and Communication and the Ministry of Justice became a barrier for continued use of speed cameras. However, initial opposition from the police was turned into support. Speed cameras are inexpensive for the SRA, compared to their expenses for construction and maintenance of a road network, whereas speed cameras are expensive for the police whose budget is dominated by personnel costs.

The conclusions from case study 2 is that it confirms the general findings concerning the commitment of the politicians, the interaction with the police and the SRA's possibilities to manoeuvre within its budget.

Conclusions and way forward

The main potential for further implementation of road safety measures is the commitment of the politicians, which has brought about an integration of road safety into the political objectives and targets as well as economic resources for road safety work. The commitment exists primarily within the committee of

transport within the Parliament, but the impression is that the whole Parliament supports the road safety work.

One of two important barriers is the limited road-safety commitment of the police on all levels. The other barrier is the limited priority for road safety in the county and municipal politics, which is also reflected in the regional offices of the SRA.

So what could be the way forward for road safety in Sweden? Firstly, a new political initiative is needed to make new objectives and more resources available for the police, i.e. to make the police priority for road safety higher. Unless the importance of police enforcement, especially of speed limits, is acknowledged politically and within all levels of the police, the chances of achieving the 2007 target will be negligible. More interaction between the committees of transport and of justice within the Parliament is also needed.

Within the SRA road safety should be included in the balanced scorecards where it is presently absent, and reestablishing of the Road Safety Unit is recommended.