

**Summary:**

# **Policies, legal frameworks and other means for improving accessibility of public transport systems in the Nordic countries**

## **Introduction**

The demographic changes in the Nordic countries will continue contributing to increased numbers of people with reduced mobility, among them older and disabled people. Accessibility of public transport systems is a necessity for independent living, social inclusion and sustainable development. Based on this, accessibility of public transport for people with disabilities will be increasingly important in order to provide a society with equal rights.

The Norwegian Public Roads Administration is heading a Nordic working group concerned with developing indicators for accessibility of public transport systems on roads. As a backdrop and starting point for this work, the working group wanted a study describing policies and strategies, prevailing laws, regulations standards and guidelines concerning the accessibility of public transport systems in the Nordic countries, as well as EU policy and legislation in this field. The working group wanted an overview of ongoing work and current status in the work with national travel planners as well. The Institute of Transport Economics (TØI) was asked to undertake this study. The findings are presented in this report.

The questionnaire that forms a major part of the data collection to the project was originally carried out as part of the ongoing project *For a European Accessibility of public transport for people with disabilities*, with the abbreviation Euro-Access, funded by the DG Research of the European Commission, under the 6th framework programme<sup>1</sup>.

## **EU policy and strategies**

EU has developed and is continuously working on an action plan called “Equal opportunities for people with disabilities: A European Action Plan” (Commission of the European Communities 2003). It says that contributing to shaping society in a fully inclusive way is the overall EU objective. In this respect, the fight against discrimination and the promotion of the participation of people with disabilities into economy and society play a fundamental role.

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<sup>1</sup> Contract number 044448.

During the 2000s, the EU has developed and implemented several directives and regulations aiming at making public transport systems more accessible and useful for all. We found that the following directives are the most important in our context:

- Special provisions for vehicles used for the carriage of passengers comprising more than eight seats in addition to the driver's seat (Directive 2001/85/EC)
- On coordinating the procurement procedures of entities operating in the water, energy, transport and postal services sectors (Directives 2004/17/EC)
- On the coordination of procedures for the award of public works contracts, public supply contracts and public service contracts (2004/18/EC)

There are also the directives On safety rules and standards for passenger ships (Directive 2003/24/EC) and On the interoperability of the trans-European high-speed rail system and conventional rail system (Directive 2004/50/EC), the regulations about air passengers (Regulations No 1107/2006 and 261/2004), and the proposal on international rail passengers' rights and obligations (COM 2004/13). These are transport related, but not directly related to public transport on road.

## **Policies, strategies and action plans in the Nordic countries**

All the Nordic countries have, or are in the process of developing, policy documents and action plans for more accessible public transport systems. The approach, depth and focus of these policies vary between the countries. We find that the Finnish accessibility strategy and the connected ELSA research and development programme, together with the Norwegian BRA-programme, are the documents featuring the most detailed and concrete action plans.

In all the policy, strategy and action plan documents, it appears that accessible public transport systems in general is viewed as a means to allow everybody, as far as possible, to live independently, and to work, study, enjoy leisure time and meet other people.

## **Legal frameworks in the Nordic countries**

From the information we received from the Ministries, as well as the information we came across through other sources, we have found that there is a manifold of legislation covering accessibility of public transport systems. Finland and Sweden have specifically mentioned the right of disabled people in their constitutions. Norway (and perhaps Denmark) are in the process of proposing non-discriminatory acts that include accessible public transport systems. All countries have planning and building legislation requiring accessibility in some way in and to new buildings and constructions. All countries except Norway have legislation requiring society to provide transport services for severely disabled persons who are not able to use ordinary public transport services (in Norway this is organised in other ways). Sweden, Finland and Denmark have laws requiring operators or authorities to take account of the needs of disabled people when planning and organising public transport services.

We found that EU Directive 2001/85/EC (the bus directive) for buses class I is implemented in the national legislation through regulations in all the Nordic countries, although Finland has not yet phased out their older national provisions. Only Sweden seems to have implemented some accessibility requirements for buses class II and III.

EU Directive 2004/18/EC does not seem to have had substantial influence on the legal frameworks or practices regarding accessible public transport systems. However, we found that Norway has developed guidelines for universal design in public procurements, also including public transport.

Standards and guidelines are important parts of the legislation. We also found that guidelines have been drawn up for topics that are not yet covered by the legal framework. Most countries have detailed guidelines connected to their planning and building legislation, which are important for accessibility to terminals and other buildings, and which require accessibility to be assessed when planning and building large constructions. All countries have some kind of guidelines for planning and design of roads and streets. These will have an impact on accessibility of public transport systems, not at least when it comes to bus stops and the journey from home to terminal, for example. We will highlight Finland's SuRaKu cards, which also cover maintenance as part of the accessibility strategy and the Danish *Transport areas for all. Accessibility Handbook*, which covers accessibility of pedestrian areas in a thorough way. There are, as expected, guidelines describing accessible vehicles. Among other interesting guidelines we would like to highlight the Norwegian *Guidelines for universal design in public procurements*.

## **Other initiatives**

Pricing systems to reduce individual financial barriers is one way to improve accessibility of public transport systems. We found that all countries have some forms of concessionary fares for the disabled, in order to reduce individual economic barriers to ordinary public transport systems. All countries also have special transport systems for severely disabled people, with user prices largely similar to the fares of ordinary public transport.

Apart from the legal framework, we know that various systems for encouraging improvement of accessibility of public transport systems exist. In the questionnaire, we asked if governmental authorities (like the Ministry of Transport) set requirements about accessibility of public transport for all/for persons with disabilities as a condition when the various public directorates, departments etc. (like the Road Department) receive money from the budgets, and if economic incentives are used in order to request or encourage operators or authorities to improve the accessibility of public transport systems. We found that some form of these incentives is used in most of the Nordic countries.

Training of bus drivers and service personnel who are in direct contact with passengers, and for architects, engineers, land use planners and transport planners planning, designing and building the physical environment, as well as persons with disabilities themselves, is an important means to achieve a (more) accessible public transport system. All the Nordic countries have some kind of training for drivers and other service personnel. To some extent, all of them offer training to planners, engineers, architects, transport planners etc. in universal design. Only Sweden has reported training for disabled persons in using public transport systems.

We asked how much influence various groups and factors have had on the development of the legal framework regarding accessible public transport in the countries. All respondents find that development in EU has had a high degree of influence, while user groups and the public administration are the groups that are found to have the second highest degree of influence.

## **National travel planners**

We were to describe the current status of national travel planners in the Nordic countries, and to find out if the information needed for persons with reduced mobility to plan a journey is included in the national travel planners. A travel planner is defined as a web site showing (all) the public transport services in the country. Such journeys can consist of several links with several modes (including walking).

We found that the Nordic countries (apart from Iceland) can be considered to be roughly at the same level in the development and provision of national travel planners. All the countries reported having a national travel planner covering all (or most) public transport systems in the country, but this does not necessarily mean that it is comprehensive or that it covers all scheduled transport possibilities. None of the travel planners offer information needed for persons with special needs to plan a journey in a comprehensive or systematic way. The MultiRIT project in Norway and the KOLL framåt project in Sweden may bring interesting new knowledge, examples and ideas into this field.

The role that national authorities have in the development and operation of national travel planners varies. The Ministry is an active driving force in Finland. In Sweden, the existing national travel planner is initiated and operated with national authorities involved. The national travel planners in Denmark and Norway are more a result of a gradual development and coordination of different information systems. We are not sure how this works in Iceland.

In all countries (we are not sure how this works in Iceland) it is expected that transport operators provide the necessary information. The quality of the information depends on data delivered by the operators. The frequency of revision may be stated by law or national regulations, but we are only aware of this being done in Norway. Thus, it must be expected that there are routes or areas of the countries with incomplete or incorrect information.

The respondents did not report national requirements or objectives related to travel planners. Apart from Norway, we have not obtained information on national guidelines about details in the travel planners, frequency of updating the data, etc.

## **Discussions**

As a starting point for our analysis we asked: will the prevailing policies and legal framework ensure accessible public transport systems in the Nordic countries? Or spelled out another way: are the policies and legal framework good enough? And if not, what are the main challenges?

It is clear that providing detailed answers to these questions for each of the countries or for “the Nordic countries”, based on the knowledge we have gathered and presented in this report, is not possible. The analysis or discussion has to be at a more superficial level.

An obvious challenge is to define what are “good enough” policies and legal frameworks. Two fundamental ideals are frequently referred to when discussing accessible public transport systems. These are the ideal of universal design, or design for all, and the ideal of a journey being accessible throughout the travel chain, “the whole journey”. In order to point out the main challenges for achieving accessible public transport systems, we will compare the status quo in policies and legal frameworks in the Nordic countries as

described in this report, with the ideals of universal design/design for all - throughout the travel chain.

Our analysis showed that several of the national policies on accessible public transport systems include the ideals of universal design and accessibility throughout the whole journey. Still, it is clear that the legal frameworks are not setting the requirements for fulfilling these ideals. Based on this, we concluded that prevailing legal frameworks are not “good enough”.

## **Challenges and possibilities**

So, what are the main challenges? In our analysis, we found that mobility impairments are still more in focus than others, but that sensory, and also cognitive, impairments are gaining more attention. The ideals and understanding of the problem are moving towards universal design.

The vehicles and the terminals/ (stops) seem to be the parts of the journey where the legal frameworks set the strongest requirements. In a perspective of accessibility throughout the travel chain, it thus appears that improving the legal frameworks concerning providing necessary information about the journey, the trip to/from the terminal/stop and the ticketing systems are the main challenges in this context. That said, it is important to point out that the prevailing legal frameworks do not require accessible terminals, stops or terminals for all user groups either.

The EU directives 2004/17/EC and 2004/18/EC clearly state that *Contracting authorities should, whenever possible, lay down technical specifications so as to take into account accessibility criteria for people with disabilities or design for all users*. Since public authorities are the major, and often the only purchasers of infrastructure and services that are part of the public transport systems (the whole journey), and control it in various other ways as well, using these directives in public procurements may be a quick and easy way to contribute to the improvement of public transport accessibility.

Another important challenge is that the legal frameworks deal mainly with building or purchasing new things. Looking at directives and regulations from the EU, for example, we see that bringing in people to support travellers is another approach. The whole chain of information is another important approach. Maintenance must not be forgotten, especially in the snowy parts of the Nordic countries, and especially when focusing on the whole journey. Without good maintenance, the accessibility of public transport systems can never be good enough. It is also clear that initiatives are necessary beyond what the legal frameworks require, if substantial improvements are to be achieved.

## **Inventory of policies, action plans, legal frameworks and guidelines**

As an appendix, references to documents mentioned and described in the report are organised by country under the main headings; EU-documents, Policies, strategies and action plans, Laws, provisions and regulations and Standards and guidelines. This listing is meant as an inventory, where one easily may get an overview of e.g. guidelines or policy documents in the Nordic countries. All documents in the inventory are also listed in the References (but not vice versa).