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Towards a new culture for urban mobility - considerations regarding the Commission Green Paper of September 25, 2007

The Norwegian Ministry of Transport and Communications appreciates this opportunity to provide Norwegian considerations to the Green paper: "Towards a new culture for urban mobility", presented by the Commission of the European Communities (hereinafter the Commission) on the 25th of September 2007. Below we will comment on some of the topics we regard to be of special interest for achieving a better urban mobility.

1. MAIN ISSUES IN PRESENT AND FUTURE URBAN TRANSPORT POLICY

Most cities and urban areas experience problems related to congestion, pollution and noise. The magnitude of these problems varies depending on factors such as population size and degree of centralisation/growth rate, land use patterns, transport infrastructure quality and quality of public transport services. There are also more general issues, such as accessibility for disabled people to the public transport system and climate changes, which are relevant for urban policy making.

Medium sized and larger Norwegian cities and urban areas are smaller than most medium sized and larger European cities, and thus the problems are of a different magnitude. In spite of the differences we believe there are many similarities in the views of challenges and measures that are considered effective to solve or reduce the problems. Some important measures are efficient pricing of transport activities (especially car use in peak time), better public transport services including universal design, integrated transport and land use planning and facilitation of non motorized transport modes (walking and cycling).

The barriers that prevent a successful implementation of effective measures seem to a large extent so be similar between countries. Financing transport infrastructure and public transport services is part of the problem. Particularly, financing more public transport capacity in peak time and more attractive public transport services, with regard to frequencies, travel times and

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a denser public transport network represents a challenge. Secondly, lack of co-ordination and cooperation between authorities both horizontally and vertically as well, as between neighbouring regional and local authorities, seem to be an important barrier against efficient implementation of relevant efficient measures.

2. NORWEGIAN INITIATIVES TO OVERCOME BARRIERS

Infrastructure packages, financing and planning

Norway has a long tradition in toll financing. This type of financing has traditionally been related to specific infrastructure investment projects, such as tunnels and bridges. However, there has been a development towards toll financing of so-called city-packages, which includes both urban and inter-urban road projects and infrastructure projects for public transportation. The first European toll cordon around a city centre, was in Bergen in 1986. Today the four largest cities in Norway, and several smaller, have toll cordons or city-packages.

The main objective of the city-packages has been to provide funding through road charges and state funding of a number of infrastructure projects. Over time city-packages have been developed into including infrastructure projects for public transport. All packages depending on road tolls are based on local initiatives and formal decision from local authorities. The Ministry of Transport and Communication finally presents the toll project to the Norwegian Parliament, who gives the final approval.

An example of a city-package that has been through this development is the one in the capital, Oslo. The Oslo Toll ring – Oslo Package no. 1 – was established in 1990, and the main issue was to raise extra money for main road construction. But it was an important compromise to get this toll ring and road construction scheme accepted, that 20% of the income should be allocated for public transportation infrastructure. In 2001 an additional of NOK 2 to every passing, was introduced. This was named Oslo Package nr. 2, and is allocated to public transportation infrastructure only. Public transport passengers contribute to Oslo Package nr. 2 as well with NOK 0,75 added to every ticket. The Oslo Toll ring was due to stop its collection within 2012. However, there has been forwarded a proposal from local authorities to the Ministry of Transport and Communication to carry on with the toll financing in an Oslo Package nr. 3. There is a stronger focus in this package on investments in public transport infrastructure and now also in public transport operations. But there is still no will among the local authorities to establish a system for road pricing. The Oslo Package nr. 3 will be presented to the Parliament in two steps. Step 1 was approved by the Government in February and will be discussed in the Norwegian Parliament this spring.

Although the experiences with city-packages have been good, there has been a growing recognition that the framework for establishing such packages tends to focus on investments in infrastructure, and to a lesser degree on soft measures such as combined transport and land use planning and promoting public transport services. Therefore the Ministry has proposed a new legal framework in order to expand the financing system to include public transport operations and to have stronger focus on the achievement of policy goals and soft transport policy measures. This work has its background in the local proposal of Oslo Package nr. 3. The Norwegian Parliament has acceded the bill.

Local authorities finance and organize local public transport in Norway. In 2004 the Ministry of Transport and Communication introduced a reward program for better public transport and reduced use of cars. The aim of the program was to strengthen the incentives for local and regional authorities to increase focus on policy measures that reduces car use in Norway's largest cities (Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim, Kristiansand and Stavanger). Tromsø was included in the program in 2006.

The main criteria for allocating funds from the program are outlined in the yearly invitation from the Ministry to the invited cities and the program's general guidelines. The cities receive funding for one year at a time and future grants are dependent on future applications and previous results. The program rewards cities that achieve growth in public transport and reduced use of cars. Further on the Ministry has made it clear that restrictive measures, such as restrictive parking schemes and road pricing, will be taken into account when funds are allocated. Several cities have taken the initiative to clear out the use of more restrictive means. After an evaluation in 2007 it became clear that the program had contributed to give the public transport in the involved cities more attention and a competitive edge, but that the program could benefit from some changes in the way it was practised. The Ministry has made adjustments in the program in accordance with the evaluation. The program has now been extended to include three additional cities (Drammen, Skien/Porsgrunn and Fredrikstad/Sarpsborg). The Ministry will consider further adjustments such as concentrating the public funds to fewer cities depending on the applications from the involved cities and increase the predictability by extending the grant period to more than one year.

An alternative to toll road financing is collection of a local financing contribution on retail sale of fuel. A legal basis for this was introduced in 1990 (Road Act § 27A). The scope is narrower than the one for toll road financing since the financing can only be used to finance public roads. The arrangement with "local fuel charges" has until now only been used in Tromsø, since this is of particular interest where the geographical conditions are suitable for it. The Ministry of Transport and Communications will examine whether such a geographical fuel charge also could be used for actions concerning public transport operations, after inquiry from the Parliament.

Institutional aspects

One major challenge in urban transport policy in Norway is to create a good balance between local, regional and central governmental policies. There is a latent problem that local and regional government levels have an incentive to ask for more budget resources from the central governmental level regarding rail and road infrastructure and public service obligations regarding national rail services, before using local means and instruments. Local means and instruments comprises budget means financing local public transport services combined with instruments regarding land use planning, traffic management, road-pricing and parking restrictions.

It is a major challenge to motivate local authorities to introduce road toll systems with time-differentiated tariffs, as a traffic regulation measure. Although different political regimes at the national level have introduced this as an interesting measure, both in mobility and sustainability perspectives, the political costs at the local level are regarded to be too high. Developing incentive mechanisms that could contribute to the realisation of this sort of road toll is therefore a major challenge.

The Norwegian Government has an intention to carry out a reform of the public administration from January 1st 2010. This reform will have consequences in the transport sector through an important transfer of tasks to the regions, for instance through a transfer of responsibility of nearly 17000 km of trunk roads and substantial parts of the “trunk road ferries” to the regions. The State’s direct influence in parts of the transport sector will be reduced as a consequence of this. The influence of local authorities on the other hand will be increased and give them better opportunities for a more general approach in the transport sector. The earmarked financial resources the State uses today for the above-mentioned trunk roads will be transferred to the regions through a financial contribution framework (non earmarked financial resources).

Recently a proposal concerning the territorial planning section of the Norwegian Planning and Building Act has been put forward. The amendment gives a clearer link between land use planning and transport planning, and makes it easier to plan a more environmental friendly transport –and development pattern. It will also facilitate the municipalities` possibility to set restrictions on parking in cities and towns.

The Ministry is working on the development of more binding agreements between state authorities and local authorities as an instrument to promote coordination and cooperation in urban transport planning and policy. How to find the right balance between different kinds of public spending and between different kinds of political instruments like using infrastructure investments (increasing transport capacity) contra using means of tax and tariffs, legal measures etc (regulating transport capacity) is a complex matter.

The Ministry believes that it in some cases would be efficient to use binding agreements, and that use of these agreements can increase the possibilities to achieve the desired results within the local territorial- and transport politics. In addition to the Norwegian National Transport Plan for the period of 2010-2019 there will be a further consideration of how binding agreements can be an effective tool to achieve a coordinated use of means in the land use and transport politics. The National Transport Plan 2010-2019 will be presented for the Norwegian Parliament in December 2008.

In this context we would like to emphasize that the Norwegian Ministry of the Environment, in cooperation with several other Ministries, has a project called “The future cities”, where the objective is to establish collaboration between the state and some selected municipalities to develop more climate- and environmentally friendly cities. In this cooperation such binding agreements will be used. The aim of the project is to reduce the total amount of discharge of greenhouse gas, and at the same time ensure the quality of life of the inhabitants.

Greener transport – cycling and walking

In the largest urban areas the Norwegian Ministry of Transport and Communications finds it important to focus on cycling and walking as a strategy for achieving greener transport. The efforts in cities and towns are aimed at planning continuous main cycle path networks, including parking facilities for bicycles. In all transport planning in cities and towns, competitive interfaces between modes of transport need to be addressed. Extensive use of bicycles will only be achieved if bicycles have advantages over other modes of transport. This means that all measures that make it less attractive to drive will make it more attractive to cycle or take public transport. Restrictive measures on car traffic, such as road pricing and parking restrictions, will thus have a positive impact on cycling as well as on walking and

public transport use. Such measures should presumably be used in addition to improved infrastructure if cycling is to increase substantially. The Norwegian Public Roads Administration has drafted a National Cycling Strategy for making it safer and more attractive to choose cycling as a conveyance. The Norwegian Public Roads Administration do also have a special responsibility for promoting knowledge and information about cycling.

Greening the transport sector – decrease emissions from private car use

Road traffic is one of the dominant sources of local air pollution. This sector therefore has a special responsibility to contribute to the fulfilment of the requirements in the Pollution Regulation. For this reason given cities in Norway have the possibility to introduce a tax for the use of studded tires. The three largest cities in Norway have introduced such a tax for all cars during the winter season. The tax has led to a decreased use of studded tires which gives lower concentrations of polluting particles.

In the winter season in Oslo the Norwegian Roads Administration introduces environmental speed limits on parts of E18 and National Road 4. The speed limit is then reduced to 60km/hour to reduce the emission of dangerous polluting particles. Results show that the emissions have been reduced by 40 % by this measure.

The Government uses various means to promote the development of a more environmental friendly transport system. The transport sector is covered by one of the highest CO₂ charges in addition to different charges on fuel and vehicles, technical regulations, land use policies and research resources.

Even with a wide spectre of means prognoses show that one is expecting an increase in the emissions from the sector. The Government will therefore go through the tax and charging schemes with the intention to undertake changes to promote environmentally friendly behaviour. The basis for the single charging fee has already been changed. Cars with low CO₂ emissions got a monthly reduction in charges from 1.01.2007, while cars with high emissions for the same period got a monthly increase of charges. The re-adjustment led promptly to major changes in the sales of new cars. From 2006 to 2007 the average CO₂ emissions from new cars has been reduced from 177g/km in 2006 to 160g/km in 2007.

The Government will furthermore decide upon the question of the establishment of national fund, Transnova. The fund will be used to encourage the research and development of environment friendly fuels and vehicles.

Safe and secure urban transport

The Commission presents several measures to help cities and towns meet their safety and security challenges in urban transport. The Ministry of Transport and Communication believes that the effort should be directed towards the most vulnerable groups of road users: pedestrians and cyclists. Securing crossing points will be a priority in Norway in the coming years, through the establishment of interchange crossing points and the improvement of walking and cycling tracks etc, and a special attention is given to tracks leading to schools. All tracks should be connected to a wider network for pedestrians and cyclists when possible. A good parking policy can be beneficial for road safety in urban areas as it will regulate the amount of cars in circulation. The Norwegian Public Roads Administration recommends that the speed should be limited to 30 and 40 km/h in urban and residential areas. High risk groups (such as young and elderly drivers) will be targeted in a joint effort by the Police, the Norwegian Council for Road Safety and the Norwegian Public Roads Administration, so that

campaigns are supplemented with intensive police controls. The EU should show best practice by promoting a holistic urban planning, where road safety is included at an early stage.

Operators and citizens can be better informed on the potentials of advanced infrastructure management and vehicle technologies for safety by information campaigns and through driver training. The Norwegian Public Roads Administration has established the webpage “Safe cars” with information about vehicle safety. The targeted audience is primarily the general public. The EU can set an example by setting strict security requirements for their own vehicles and vehicles delivering goods and services to the EU.

Automatic radar devices are already a road safety measure used in urban areas in Norway; however the criteria for use are strict: the frequency of accidents, expected accident density and average speed must be higher than on equivalent road sections.

Video surveillance can be a good tool for security in urban transport. It can have a preventive effect on vandalism and graffiti, and can be used for investigating cases, such as violent assaults. However its use has privacy implications and it is therefore important to apply video surveillance with caution and purpose.

Intelligent Transport Systems

The Ministry of Transport and Communications would like to stress the importance of Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) in enhancing the efficiency of existing transport infrastructure. In the Green Paper the Commission has pointed out one issue which in our opinion is a significant obstacle to the effective implementation of ITS: the lack of interoperability/standardisation of ITS applications.

It is our view that the Commission could play an important role in promoting ITS standardisation in Europe. The Commission could take the lead in trying to establish a common framework architecture for ITS applications. There are several initiatives in place in Europe today and one of them is a project named ARKTRANS developed in Norway. ARKTRANS is a system framework architecture for multimodal Intelligent Transport Systems that defines the interfaces that arrange for interoperability between ITS applications. The Commission could look into this and other similar systems with a view to take a lead in standardisation efforts.

At a more general level, the Commission could play an important role in facilitating the exchange of information and best practice between stakeholders involved in ITS at national level. Such information sharing could take place through various kinds of stakeholder forums set up by the Commission. The Ministry of Transport and Communications would like to emphasize Norway's interest in participating in such forums.

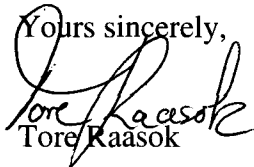
Universal design

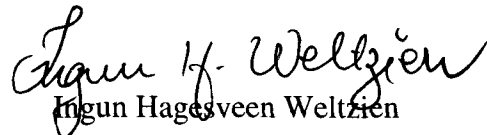
The Norwegian Government has decided to propose a new legal framework regarding accessibility for all individuals. For the transport sector the new legal framework will imply that all new transport infrastructure, transport facilities and public transport vehicles shall satisfy the criteria of universal design for as many transport users as possible.

Closing remarks

The Ministry is of the opinion that there is a need for further development of the professional basis for achieving a better urban mobility. There is also a need for a wider debate on these issues. Norway would like to be an active contributor in this field and sees the profit of cooperation.

Yours sincerely,


Tore Raasok


Ingun Hagesveen Weltzien

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