



Improved accessibility to corridors from remoted and connected areas in region Örebro

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Published: March 2021



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

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Cover photo: Region Örebro County

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Background

For those who live and/or work in the countryside and in smaller urban areas, the accessibility to municipal capital cities, larger urban areas and transportation nodes is crucial for a functioning everyday life due to its range of supply and service. The accessibility to these is also important to enable switching to public transport from other transport modes and thereby enable sustainable travel with an increased share of public transport, walking and cycling for rural residents.

To keep remote areas alive, it is necessary to find solutions to tackle the challenges of accessibility and connections to the transport corridors. These problems are common throughout the Baltic Sea Region.

In this report, we will investigate the accessibility problems that some of the municipalities in Sweden, Finland, Estonia and Latvia experience in the east-west corridor. Proposals for measures will be presented to solve the accessibility problems that exist between the first tier node and second/third tier nodes in municipalities in the surrounding area.

Sweden - Örebro region

The city of Örebro is the core of the region and fulfils an important function as transportation node for the entire county. Örebro also has a large regional function as a hub in the public transport system. Besides Örebro, also the city of Hallsberg functions as a main Swedish transportation node for railway, both for passengers and goods. Accessibility to and from Örebro affects the conditions for access to jobs, labour competence, education, healthcare and the university hospital, community services such as the police, tax offices, banks and the range of culture, entertainment, goods and services. The accessibility in the routes to and from Örebro is for large parts of the county also important for the accessibility to and from Stockholm and other node cities in the large Stockholm-Mälars region such as Västerås and Eskilstuna but also Karlstad and Gothenburg in the west. From Örebro via Hallsberg Malmö and Europe (via Copenhagen) can be reached. Improved connections to Stockholm are part of improved connections to Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Russia.

Method

In Sweden, 12 municipalities in the Örebro region were asked to respond to an inquiry document that contained questions about their own challenges today and the next 10 years and the municipality's target picture until year 2050. All municipalities in the county except Hallsberg municipality submitted answers. The participating municipalities were as follows: Askersund, Degefors, Karlskoga, Hällefors, Laxå, Lekeberg, Lindesberg, Ljusnarsberg, Nora, Kumla och Örebro.

In addition to inquiries to the municipalities, the County Administrative Board, the Swedish Transport Administration, Mälardalen Chamber of Commerce, Business Region Örebro, Örebro County Public Transport Unit and several other internal units have been asked for input.

In Finland, the municipalities between Turku and Helsinki were asked in autumn 2020 to respond to a questionnaire about the bottlenecks, problems and needs seeing along the E18-gateway. Representatives of municipalities were asked via email to fill in a questionnaire.

Sweden

The municipalities challenges - today and in the future

The situation of the municipalities today

The municipalities emphasize in their answers that there are mixed conditions in the county where differences between city and remoted areas become more and more clear. More people are attracted to living in the country and the business world is progressing. This requires that the labour market is accessible with the help of good connections with public transport and attractive infrastructure in the cross-connections between the municipalities' capitals and to Örebro. Business transport needs to move

forward and in the county many activities are transport-intensive, which places demands on both national and regional infrastructure.

In the county's more sparsely populated municipalities, it is emphasized that service is usually available at a distance. It is also emphasized that in those parts of the county where the land value is low, it is extra important that infrastructure and transport systems work so it provides conditions for the necessary constructions and investments to be carried out.

Population and labour market

The municipalities' input shows different and mixed conditions. Several municipalities have strong population growth, others have the opposite. The municipalities that adjoin, or have a strong connection to Örebro municipality, describe that they have a positive population development and/or housing shortage. Örebro in particular describes a balanced housing market and expects 2,000-3,000 people per year in population growth. Municipalities with relocation have had their population balanced with the influx of new arrivals in recent years, which presents other challenges linked to the municipal assignment.

Several municipalities clearly link the labour market and infrastructure. A large part of the able-bodied population commutes between municipalities and in some cases to other counties. Even school children sometimes change municipality. The school is raised by some municipalities as an important issue where the level of education needs to be raised.

The municipalities with large sparsely populated areas emphasize that there is great pressure to settle permanently in the countryside and see a trend of summer cottages being converted into permanent housing.

Business

Regarding the company establishments, it is generally perceived as a continued positive situation in the Örebro region based on the input. The establishments have a strong focus on logistics and transport, which places demands on infrastructure. Some municipalities point out that they have many larger transport-intensive activities in smaller urban areas in the municipality, which places demands on the smaller road

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network. It appears that timber and steel transports need to get there on narrow roads that are sometimes very curvy and slippery during the winter.

For the supply of skills, the connection in cross-connections is important both to be able to get to other labour markets but also to attract competence to the municipality. There is a need to be able to get to areas smoothly in a larger, or other, labour market region. It is mentioned that the infrastructure needs to be developed to give the municipalities the best conditions to attract companies and labour.

It is described by several municipalities that tourism is strong periodically and that the infrastructure is put to the test during the high season.

Economy

The situation is strained in several places with demands for efficiency at the same time as extensive investments are required. Some municipalities highlighted that they have a financial shortage.

The municipality's challenges for the next 10 years

Several municipalities mention that reducing public transportation is a challenge that must be tackled. At the same time, there are challenges in tackling increased car traffic, which in particular concerns the Örebro city and creates capacity and accessibility problems. Comments have been received that, where public transport is available, make stops and interchanges attractive for the possibility of changing vehicle types to buses/trains. This is to get a system effect where many people choose bicycle/public transport instead of the car. This applies to both intra-regional and large-regional travel.

One challenge that is being highlighted is deteriorating public health as a result of air pollution, traffic noise and physical inactivity, which is partly created by the design of today's traffic systems.

The municipalities believe that smaller urban areas have to a large extent neglected infrastructure where investments are required for living rural areas.

There is a great challenge for some municipalities to maintain and enable development for existing companies. It requires as good, or better, infrastructural

conditions than in other labour market regions. To keep the county together, investments are required everywhere. Several municipalities mention that housing construction needs to match the needs of the business community and that the supply of competence and school results are most important factors in order to maintain and enable development for existing companies. Digitization can help in those matters.

It appears that infrastructure and public transport need to be developed to cover the needs that exist for the population in the county's smaller municipalities to be able to reach central service functions in the county such as universities and hospitals.

Financial challenges in the municipalities are highlighted as a central part of the problem where infrastructure investments can facilitate the municipalities' challenges, such as providing better competence supply and enabling conditions for safe infrastructure for unprotected road users in areas that can, or are already being developed for businesses or housing. Safe pedestrian and bicycle paths on the municipal road network are highlighted as one of the issues regarding infrastructure where the municipalities have difficulty financing it and need support from the county plan.

It is emphasized that long-term consequences due to the Corona pandemic may arise, but that it is unclear at present what the consequences may be.

How to tackle the climate challenges in the future is raised and that question is actually related to several of these challenges, but it is not clear how.

Desired image year 2050

Several municipalities wish that in 2050 there will be a situation where companies and businesses can work to ensure that the municipalities continue to be attractive as settlements. This will be achieved by combining opportunities for work with good infrastructure connections and proximity to recreation in forests and land that will continue to be attractive. More regional train stops and fewer heavy transports by truck through the urban areas are hoped to have contributed to increasing the attractiveness of the county's municipalities. A new railway connection to Oslo (from Stockholm via Örebro and Karlskoga) is hoped to have created completely different conditions than

today, where as a direct consequence it has become more attractive land to exploit on and in turn easier to acquire competence/skills, which creates jobs. The investments to increase capacity on the railway are hoped to have made much of the goods now also run on the railway. The goods that need to be driven by truck have been electrified. The municipalities hope that the railway will continue to be developed and that the Norabanan in 2050 is a current issue and that the commuter train station in Hovsta is underway.

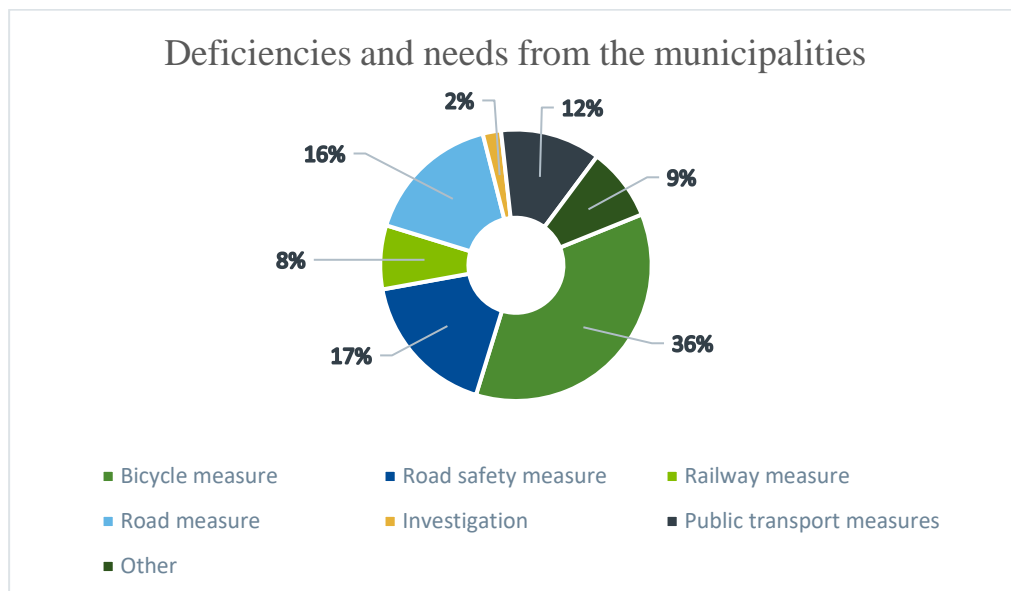
A municipality emphasizes that the municipality should be able to provide a genuine quality of life with well-developed service so you can live and work there. Other municipalities emphasize that such a (similar) genuine quality of life has been achieved through the expansion of bicycle infrastructure to, and within, several urban areas in the municipality and nearby municipalities. In 2050, cycle paths connect the county and have a good connection to interchanges for public transport and other important destination points.

Örebro has continued to grow in all directions, where high-capacity public transport is the core of the city's transport along with walking and cycling. Örebro is a densely populated city that is cohesive with well-functioning everyday life with many meeting places and offers a rich cultural and leisure life. Demanding activities are located on the outskirts of the city with proximity to important transport infrastructure. Knowledge-intensive activities must be located centrally. Örebro City and the Marieberg shopping centre are priority trade areas.

Deficiencies and needs

This section generally describes what has been recorded from municipalities, the Swedish Transport Administration and the County Administrative Board. The section emphasizes the rough brushstrokes that weight the very direction of the inputs.

A total of 91 shortcomings/needs/views were recorded, which are distributed as follows, by type of traffic:



Cycle measures are the area of action that is clearly recorded the most in number. The needs are found in many places in the county where investments in both the cycle path network along state roads between and within urban areas are desired. There are footpaths on some sections, but several municipalities pointed out the need for a widening to a pedestrian and bicycle path. Several of the mentioned sections where needs have been identified by the municipalities have been investigated in measurement studies. There have also been reports that there is a great need for expansion of the cycle path network on the municipal road network.

Regarding public transport measures, the needs are many. The input that the municipalities have provided is about infrastructure investments that are primarily focused on travel exchange. Commuter parking is seen as a central part for many to have access to the future range of travel, which will be focused on strong routes, both along the state and national road network. Measures that improve travel time both in urban traffic and on the state road network and can be financed by the county plan should remain (if they are already planned) and should be prioritized in the next plan together with new measures. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) must be completed, but that investment must not take place at the expense of other investments in the county in public transport.

Several shortcomings and needs have been identified on the **railway network** by the municipalities, where the need for investigation and continued work closely with the Swedish Transport Administration is central to bringing about measures. Involvement in other organizations and lobby groups such as the Stockholm-Mälar Council, Oslo-Sthlm 2.55 AB and Västra Stambanegruppen is part of getting measures via the National Plan to the county.

Some specific **road measures** have been mentioned and some have been identified in measurement studies, others have not yet been investigated. The input has come in with different levels of detail where certain measures are on the national road network and should be taken care of by the Swedish Transport Administration. Other measures are on the state or municipal road network and concern new connections, meeting-free roads and securing of intersections. A refurbishment of the bearing capacity in Nora, road 767 and refurbishment of the smaller road network are also being recorded.

Since no measures can be taken without investigating first, the above input may also be considered as input of investigations in cases where an investigation has not been carried out. Requests for investigations that have been mentioned, specifically via the tender documents or in meetings are as follows, in no particular order:

- Road 204 between Fjugesta - Mullhyttan - Svartå
- Road 534 between Fjugesta - Kumla, which was investigated relatively recently.
- Road 63 between Hammarkorset - Sikfors, through Hällefors
- Road 244 between Stribergskorset - Hammarkorset
- Road 205 through Degerfors (ordered)
- Road 205 between Degerfors - Laxå
- Road 205 between Laxå - Askersund
- Road 207 Rv51 - Örebro University (Norrköpingsvägen)

Other input that has been made is about refurbishing rest areas, expansion of fiber, consideration of electric aircraft, working for the possibility of implementing step 1 and step 2 measures (non-technical measures) and specifying what in each completed

measure selection study is what is reasonable to carry out within the current planning period. There is also a desire to release funds in the plan by reviewing existing objects.

Finland

The municipalities challenges - today and in the future

The situation of the municipalities today

Economy, population and labour market

In Finland the economy of municipalities varies a lot. There are municipalities that are economically doing well but on the other hand there are municipalities that are suffering about decreasing economy. There are many reasons for down sliding economy of municipalities. The main reason are:

- 1) age unbalance in population; older generations form majority,
- 2) loss of population and
- 3) escape of jobs.

All this reflects to housing; there are areas that have too many houses and apartments with respect of demand and on the other hand, there are municipalities, especially at the capital area but also at certain urban areas elsewhere, where housing markets are overheated and prices are increasing all the time. Evident this means diversified progress of economy at municipalities.

Municipalities are trying to change the direction of progress by trying to attract new business by offering cheap and well-located land. Some are successful, especially at the outer ring of capital area. There are many reasons for already established business to try new location to their business; The operating costs and fixed costs of business are all time rising at capital area and this is withdrawing business to so called frame municipalities (meaning municipalities outside Helsinki, Vantaa and Espoo cities). The

same phenomenon is seen also with four to five major cities around Finland but on the smaller scale. The problem with business relocation is that at the national level it does increase the economy very much - it just moves it from one location to another.

The more important thing is that there would new kind of commercial activity at municipalities and municipalities are trying to attract high technology start-ups and conventional business as well to settle down to their area. They promote their “goodness” with better infrastructure (IC connections, roads, fast and well coverage public transport systems, cheap prices of land, safe environment etc. and it looks like it is working quite well at least with the Covid-virus time. Remote working is increasing and even companies more aware about the fact that it would be beneficially to relocate the business outside crowded urban areas. To keep the reverse trend going it needs all time awareness to these sectors (available land for business and housing, well working infrastructure and other services).

Along the northern corridor (Turku to Russian border) all these challenges and opportunities is clearly seen: there are overcrowd capital area and minor city (Turku) and smaller urbanized areas like Kouvola, Hamina and Kotka that have traditionally been attractive areas for business. Now there are various kind of challenges; eastern cities are suffering from decrease of traditional pulp based industry and Turku has also suffered about the loss of working places and residents to surrounding municipalities. Between the major urban areas there are around 20 more or less rural or rural-semi urban municipalities hat may have now big opportunity to attract new business and residents.

It all depends highly about the how well or bad are these “between areas” are linked with major urban conglomerations. National and regional roads and railways are planned outside municipalities and the new invests are under the decision of Ministry of Traffic and Communication.

The situation of the municipalities in the future

It is very difficult to forecast the future but it can be state that at least there are possibilities for municipalities along the northern corridor get benefit from the future prospects of E-18 gateway. While there are national level progress about the fast rail

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connections (like between Turku and Helsinki) the threat for municipalities is the loss of accessibility to these fast connections. History of new fast road construction history of E-18 (Turku to Russian border) has revealed long lasting economic decline at municipalities facing poorer accessibility to new highway. It can be the same problem municipalities or some parts of municipality may confront when new fast connections are planned. On the other hand, there are at least some weak signals that ongoing trend of location doesn't matter will weaken the influence and if the local train and bus connections are improved parallel the influence on accessibility cannot be overestimated.

In the future it is difficult see that there will be no need for new logistic belts that will cover larger areas of southern Finland. Instead, for open logistic villages and areas of lower level size or logistic centres owned by one or two operators are on the move. Along the E-18 corridor, all these business changes and increase of online shopping will change the picture of present logistic areas. The planning of delivery terminal centres is at the beginning.

Some of the challenges are already described above but to conclude some of problems that are existing. Big urban areas like Turku and capital area are suffering the outspreading of urban style areas and that will continue the planning infrastructure and public transport and as described above the growing amounts of companies will consider to moving away from overcrowded and expensive areas. In addition, remote working and being less dependent of location from customers of market may increase the attraction of remote areas and along the intermediate areas (municipalities).

As mentioned above there will be new challenges with cargo transport delivery both at municipality and national/regional levels. At regional level, there may be some land use and accessibility challenges associated with the new trends of cargo. Municipalities have not seen terminal areas near the urban centres very attractive and evitable this needs new kind of rethinking in decision-making. The diversification of terminal networks will put pressure on land use and road and rail construction. The special challenge for E-18 is that almost all the cargo between Turku and capital area is carried via road transport. The rail is not existing at all. The growing demand for increase rail cargo has increasing pressure of development of logistic hubs along the E-18.

There is no overall consensus between the municipalities because they are staying at the different levels or positions in respect of population trends, because of variations levels of infrastructure. The municipalities along the E-18 are willing to get benefits from future regional and national invests for road and rail infrastructure and trying to adapt their own infrastructure as well.

On the other hand, municipalities have managed to attract more and more business and new residents from crowded major urban conglomeration. The daily commuting between municipalities is still vivid but highly fast road and transport connexions may not be so important compared present one. The local trains are operating effectively around the major cities.

Cargo delivery is effective along the corridor and well connected to municipalities along and near corridor and clear hierarchy and fields of operation are existing. It also looks that business linked with cargo handling and delivery has relatively bigger revenue compared to present and new business has emerged from transportation and traffic.

Deficiencies and needs

This section generally describes what has been recorded from municipalities so far. The general observation has been so far that many gateway municipalities see that they cannot do much when the development of transport of traffic is associated with national or south-western strategies. The planning and route orientation as well as the reconstruction etc. are determined by ministry or at some scale at regional level. For the municipalities the focus is to guarantee the accessibility to main gateway and run the development with the accessibility. It is also quite clear that there are lot of differences between municipalities. Those big ones like Turku or Helsinki have more power to care of their interest when there strategic outlines under process at Ministry of transport and Communication. Those rural or semi-rural like municipalities may less power to make lobbying.

To complete the concern of municipalities to the question about the needs linked with E-18 development were.

- Poor or threatened accessibility to E-18 now and in the future was coming out from the answers from “between municipalities.” New route planning for railway between Turku and Helsinki raised lot of concern.
- General and overall planning of accessibility of passengers to railway is lacking; long time parking areas, connecting bus lines, bicycle routes and parking and from distant parts of municipality, fluent nodes with reasonable waiting times and recharging of electric cars etc. Bigger municipalities have power to do planning by themselves but that is not the case with smaller ones.
- At many cases, the municipality suffers loss of population and weakening economic power to make this kind of improvements. It is also difficult to make the connection traffic economically profit. Furthermore, it needs economic input from state.
- At capital area (Helsinki, Vantaa, Espoo, Vihti, Kirkkonummi, Kauniainen) local railway work quite well with connection bus routes and bicycle network. The only concern is the lack of local railway capacity. It also has been recorded that the development of metro has brought some new alternatives to connections and, on the other hand, it has produced some passenger changes from busses to metro. At capital area, the amount of passengers is enough to make the passenger traffic profitable but it is not the case elsewhere.
- Now there is raised question about local train traffic around Turku area. Uusikaupunki (pop. 15 000), Lieto (pop. 20 000), Kaarina (pop. 30 000), Raisio (27 000) Loimaa (pop.12 000) and Salo (50 000) are urban centers along the existing railway. There are no local passenger railway traffic between them and Turku. The municipalities are eager to start again. The problem is how to make profitable business.
- The critical question is also whether to introduce railway cargo between Turku-Naantali and capital area. Nowadays there are no cargo transport, but the sustainable development policy will support this in the future. Again, there will question of carrying capacity of present Turku-Helsinki railway. The new (faster)

connection will be reserved for passengers and the older one for cargo. Municipalities are more or less only interested on passenger traffic developments and needs for cargo are not seen so interesting (logistic hubs, location and service of terminal villages etc).