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SWEDEN

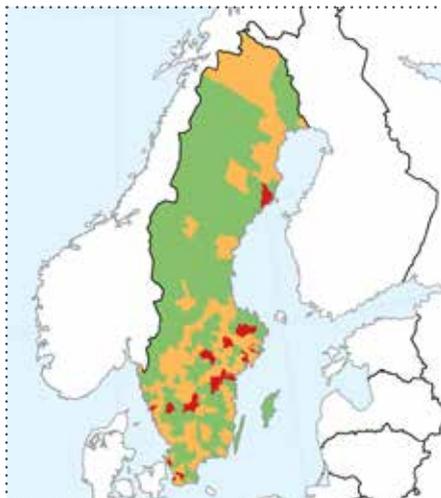
INSIGHT PAPER

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RURALITY (1)

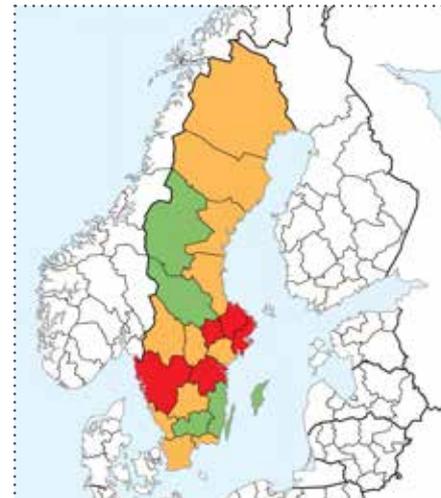
Degree of urbanisation for local administrative units level 2 (LAU2)



- Cities
- Towns and suburbs
- Rural Areas
- Data not available

Source: Eurostat, JRC and European Commission Directorate-General for Regional Policy, May 2016

Urban-rural typology for NUTS level 3 regions



- **Predominantly urban regions**
(rural population is less than 20% of the total population)
- **Intermediate regions**
(rural population is between 20% and 50% of the total population)
- **Predominantly rural regions**
(rural population is 50% or more of the total population)
- **Data not available**

Source: Eurostat, JRC, EFGS, REGIO-GIS, December 2016

DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION



Source: Eurostat, 2017

GEOGRAPHY

Sweden is a Scandinavian country in Northern Europe. It borders Norway to the west and north and Finland to the east, and is connected to Denmark in the southwest by a bridge-tunnel across the Öresund. Sweden has a population of 10 million and is the third largest country in the European Union by area at 447,400 km²¹. It has the second lowest population density in the EU (24.4 people per km²) and 67% of its land area is covered by woodland². Figure 1 shows a population density map of Sweden.

The highest population concentration in Sweden is in the more accessible southern half of the country where the climate is milder and there is better connectivity to mainland Europe, compared to the interior areas of the north which remain sparsely populated, with an ageing and sparse population, tied together by a low quality road system. These less-populated regions face particular challenges in terms of how its infrastructure can and should be used to tie population concentrations together.

Close to 85% of the population lives in areas with “very high” or “high” accessibility, which have a rather limited surface area. Almost 13% of the population is found in areas with average accessibility, comprised mostly of rural areas with smaller urban areas, primarily in southern Sweden. Two per cent and 0.5% respectively of the population live in the peripheral and sparsely populated areas, with low and very low accessibility. These areas take up a very large part of the country, but contain a small proportion of the population³.

In general, Sweden's rural communities are struggling with the effects of long-term population loss to the cities (especially by the young), resulting in an aging population in the shrinking areas. Since 2005, Sweden has been the EU country with the most pronounced urbanisation trend and in 2011 there was a decline in population in as many as 141 of the 290 Swedish municipalities. The northern counties in Sweden tend to have population concentrations on the coasts, but most municipalities are experiencing overall population loss. Cities are growing and developing while rural towns and areas are shrinking. The proportion of elderly in rural areas is higher than the proportion of young people, which results in an imbalance in the age distribution.

The demographic breakdown in most of the inland municipalities makes it difficult to recruit labour locally. Young people, particularly young women, are moving out of these regions. Only a small proportion of the population lives inland, spread over a large area, and as a result, the distances travelled are often great and the commuter flows relatively light. The road system is of deficient quality, with poor traffic safety and reduced speeds.

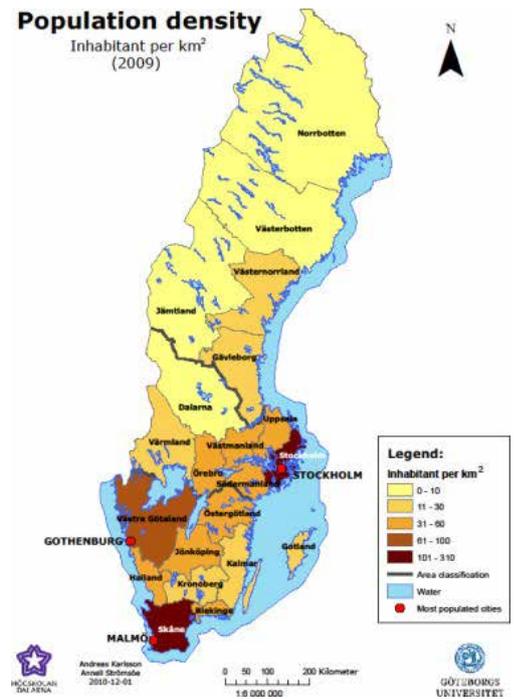


Figure 1 – Population density map of Sweden. Source: <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/844776842576040954>

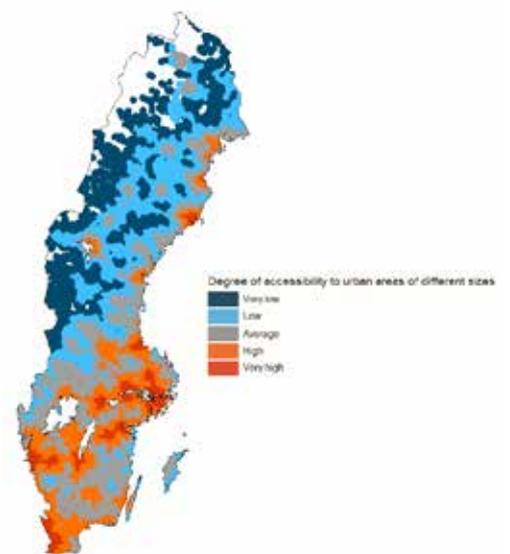


Figure 2 – Degree of accessibility to urban areas in Sweden in 2010. Source: https://www.tillvaxtanalys.se/download/18.1d7fbc414d2f83fc768326a/1431418934543/WP_PM_2010_10_EN.pdf

The main challenges therefore for the rural areas of Sweden are:

- Shrinking, aging northern regions
- Lack of reliable public transport throughout the more rural regions, particularly with regard to access to amenities which are often inaccessible by foot/bike
- Bad quality roads, or congested by larger lorries
- Finding other, more suitable (and feasible) forms of transport for people who do not have access to a car in rural areas or are unable or unwilling to drive



RURALITY (2)

20.6%

Share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in rural areas (Eurostat, 2017)

0.7 %

Share of people aged 16 and over who reported unmet needs for health care in the previous 12 months due to expense, distance to travel or length of waiting list in rural areas (Eurostat, 2017)

6.2 %

Unemployment rate, persons aged 15–64, in rural areas (Eurostat, 2017)

9.4 %

Share of young people aged 18–24 neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs) in rural areas (Eurostat, 2017)

Source: Eurostat

NATIONAL POLICIES RELATING TO RURAL MOBILITY AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Public transport can be divided into local and regional, interregional and international public transport. Local and regional public transport is regulated in the Public Transportation Act. Regional public transport is defined in the Act as “such public transport that takes place inside a county or if it stretches over several counties, with regard to the range of traffic services available is primarily intended to meet the needs of travellers as regards commuting to work or other daily travel needs and with regard to its actual use meets such needs”⁴.

Travel on local and regional public transport is continuously increasing in Sweden. During 2014, national use of public transport by bus, train, tram, metro and boat amounted to 1,435 embarkations, which is an increase of 28% as seen over a ten-year period.

At a national level, the Swedish Government has set an overarching objective for transport and infrastructure⁵ to “ensure the economic efficiency and long-term sustainability of transport provision for citizens and enterprise throughout Sweden”.

However, there is no specific mention of rural transport policy priorities in these objectives.

The Government has a set of objectives for general rural affairs⁶ and rural development. The overall objective is for Sweden to have the lowest national unemployment in the EU in 2020, and such an objective is therefore dependent on viable and thriving rural areas, in order to meet this ambition. The Government wants to make use of the opportunities of rural areas and combine environmentally sustainable development with economic growth that provides the conditions to create increased employment throughout Sweden. However, there is no explicit reference to accessibility, mobility or the role of transport in relation to these objectives.

Transport Analysis is a government agency charged with providing decision-makers in the sphere of transport policy with policy advice by reviewing, analysing, following up and evaluating proposed and implemented measures at the request of the Government.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

There are three levels of Government in Sweden:

- Local municipalities – retains control of land use planning (making plans and granting planning permission) and also runs most local public services (it is unclear if this also extends to ensuring alternative mobility services are available if public transport is not appropriate).
- Regional government – runs the health service, public transport and has some limited economic development functions.
- National government – owns the national road and rail network and sets the regulatory framework for transport, and part funds large transport investments.

At the national level, transport falls under the Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, which is responsible for the business sector, housing and transport, ICT, regional growth and rural affairs⁷. Within this Ministry, the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure is responsible for the provision of economically efficient, sustainable transport services for the general public and businesses

throughout the country, including railways, roads, shipping and aviation, as well as transport and infrastructure research.

The Swedish Transport Agency is responsible for most regulation and supervision in the transport sector, and for deciding on permit applications and maintaining records. The Agency has overall responsibility for producing regulations and ensuring compliance from all modes of transport (roads, railways, aviation, shipping). In addition, it also administers motor vehicle tax, congestion charges and the green car rebate⁸.

The Swedish Transport Administration works at a national level and is responsible for long-term planning of the transport system for all types of traffic, as well as for building, operating and maintaining public roads and railways.

As far as can be identified, specific responsibility for mobility in rural areas does not fall to a specific institution.

ORGANISATIONAL FRAMEWORK

The public transport service is meagre in rural areas, which results in a lack of flexibility and long travel times, and as a rule it is not used for commuting to and from work. The low population density and large distances between the towns make it highly cost-intensive to design services for commuters, and the public transport system is at present configured almost exclusively to meet the demand for travel to and from school. This leads to a heavy dependence on passenger cars⁹, and a lack of alternative transport options being provided.

Public bus services in urban and regional areas are provided by private operators running services under contract to Passenger Transport Authorities (or their subsidiaries). In smaller, more regional cities, buses run every 8-10 minutes on key routes during daytime, falling to half hourly at night. Small towns tend to have a local bus network of 3-5 routes operating half hourly. During morning and evening peak hours Monday to Friday, service frequencies on regional buses are significantly enhanced to up to double the daytime off-peak frequency. Low frequency urban and regional bus services are timetabled to connect with trains. In some regions, a system of demand responsive transport, requiring a minimum pre-booking time of 2 hours, is available outside areas with regular scheduled services to certain destinations, but at the same single fare¹⁰.

To help aid public transport use across Sweden, the government has begun looking into a national ticketing system for public transport across the entire country, which would have great value for more regional and rural areas. The government has begun an investigation which involves looking into how a nationwide ticketing system could and would work, and how it would help make it easier for residents and visitors to choose buses, trains and ferries¹¹.

Local level public rail services also exist throughout the country, and contracts are issued through a tendering process. Prior to 1988, responsibility for providing these services was with the Government, through state-owned operator SJ AB, but this was privatised in 1988. Currently, alongside the state owned SJ AB

operator, other private operators include Arlanda Express, Arriva, Veolia, DSB First and JLT. Large parts of the rail network serve parts of the country which do not generate enough passenger or cargo traffic to make a profit. For regional trains (within a county or up to about 100 km distance) the counties will buy traffic, signing a contract with an operator. The operator is often SJ, but sometimes another operator, either Swedish or from one of the other EU countries, provides the service. The operator for unprofitable services usually rents trains from the county transport authority or a special state organisation. This is because trains are expensive, take from two to three years to buy (from tender to delivery), and are hard to sell if the operator loses the contract.

Given the shrinking and ageing rural population, simply maintaining the current level of transport system accessibility and quality poses a challenge. Traffic flows are usually small, scarcely justifying large investments, and the priority is instead preserving a basic level of access in accordance with the functional objectives of transport policy¹².

However, with regard to targeted mobility services, the potential exists for improved coordination among various forms of socially-funded travel, such as regular scheduled transport services, school bus services, mobility services, and travel services to access medical services. Although this has been discussed for many years, several problems remain in coordinating these services. One problem stems from the lack of a single system that handles all types of transport, with the result that each is planned separately. Another problem is that different types of transport are subject to different laws. Consolidating responsibilities and more coherent regulation of public transport and special passenger transport services could be ways of improving coordination and increasing the accessibility and efficiency of public transport. Shifting the responsibility for special passenger transport services to the regional level would also incorporate them into the regional transport service programmes, which would then include school bus services and medical travel services¹³ as well.



REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

In most regions there is a politically-controlled body, that sets the policy direction for local and regional public transport. It is a sub-body of the elected regional council and one politician in the government of the regional council gives it day to day direction, although major decisions are taken by the whole regional council. In most regions this body then owns a public sector company that is responsible for the planning and franchising of urban and regional public transport, timetable and service planning, ticketing, and longer-term planning of investments and improved services. In some regions, some large municipalities retain control of the specification of their local public service.

The Public Transportation Act (2010:1065) came into force in 2012. This national act allowed public transport companies to freely establish commercial services in all geographical market segments. Previously, there had been in place a restriction preventing commercial transport companies from providing local and regional public transport, however, dissatisfaction was felt in

some quarters about a lack of “customer focus” in the Swedish public transport market. Therefore, this new policy has placed the broad specification of local and regional public transport to the public sector through a basic structure of franchised services; private operators do however have the option to register a deregulated service, should they identify a gap in the publicly-provided network (although there is no obligation on the public sector operation to permit such private operations).

This new policy was expected to increase the dynamics of the public transport market and help to bring about a broader range of public transport and alternatives into the market. Along with this, it also abolished the restriction for commercial bus companies to provide local and regional public transport, which again, was expected to increase the range of mobility options. However, the result has been very little impact in terms of new services.



FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

Under the national transport plan, funding is allocated to the regional transport plans drawn up by county planning bodies (e.g., county administrative boards and regional offices). Therefore, funding for rural mobility lies with the counties, but is dependent on being allocated funding on a national level. The delivery agency for spending this funding is not immediately clear.

The major challenges in terms of maintaining current standards and access are found in remote and extremely remote rural areas. In such areas, the priority lies in maintaining basic access in accordance with the functional objectives of the transport policy. For example, the government can set priorities, via its planning directives, specific infrastructure and other measures that benefit rural areas. In addition to normal planning activities, the government has several important financial tools with which to address transportation in rural areas. These include two forms of state operating grants for airports: grants given to those airports for which the state procures traffic; and grants distributed according to the county plans, the county planning bodies determining which airports receive the grants¹⁴.

The Government carries out targeted investment in road maintenance in rural areas. Continued operational grants for private roads are an important measure to also enable the maintenance of lesser-used road networks.

The Swedish government has outlined its transport investment priorities in the National Plan for Infrastructure 2018-2029¹⁵. The plan provides for a total investment of SEK 700 billion, and covers major investments in both new construction and restoration and modernisation of existing infrastructure. The plan contains major investments to develop the railway system and increase capacity. In total, SEK 622.5 billion will be invested as follows:

- SEK 125 billion for operation and maintenance of state-owned railways
- SEK 164 billion for operation and maintenance of state-owned roads
- SEK 333.5 billion for the development of the transport system

Since these improvements will cover the whole country, rural areas should also benefit.

OTHER INFORMATION

Drive Sweden¹⁶ is one of seventeen Strategic Innovation Programmes (SIPs), a new instrument for addressing complex areas with huge potential to come up with sustainable solutions to societal challenges through stakeholder cooperation, funded by VINNOVA, the Swedish Innovation Agency. Drive Sweden was launched in 2015 by the Swedish government to address opportunities and challenges with the next generation mobility system for people and goods and promote new mobility models in the domain of MaaS. The programme has invested in a number of projects in urban areas, but the vision is for nationwide MaaS operations to begin by 2026.

It has been recognised that a trans-sectoral approach is needed that includes initiatives going beyond transport policy to address the most remote rural areas. This could involve various types of municipal services or an ombudsperson function tied to a rural grocery store. For example, it may be more cost-effective, primarily in the most remote rural areas, to support a rural store rather than trying to improve access by improving the transport infrastructure. IT is an important tool in providing transport access in sparsely populated parts of the country – broadband access is naturally a prerequisite for the ability to use various IT services¹⁷.



KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND MINISTRIES ADDRESSING RURAL AREAS

| TITLE | ROLE |
|--|--|
| Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation | The Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation is responsible for matters relating to state-owned enterprises, enterprise and industrial policy, rural affairs and regional growth. |
| Swedish Transport Administration | Responsible for long-term planning of the transport system for all types of traffic, as well as for building, operating and maintaining public roads and railways. Also responsible for driver licensing. |
| Swedish Transport Agency | Responsible for most regulation and supervision in the transport sector, and for deciding on permit applications and maintaining records. |
| Swedish Transport Analysis Agency | Provides decision-makers in the sphere of transport policy with policy advice. Also responsible for the production of official statistics in the transport and communication sectors, including travel surveys and commodity flow surveys. |

LINKS TO WEBSITES

- <https://www.government.se/government-of-sweden/ministry-of-enterprise-and-innovation/>
- <https://www.government.se/government-policy/transport-and-infrastructure/>
- <https://www.trafikverket.se/en/startpage/>
- <https://www.transportstyrelsen.se/en/road/>
- <https://www.trafa.se/en/>

¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/EDN-20180606-1?inheritRedirect=true>

² <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/EDN-20180606-1?inheritRedirect=true>

³ https://www.tillvaxtanalys.se/download/18.1d7fbc414d2f83fc768326a/1431418934543/WP_PM_2010_10_EN.pdf

⁴ <https://www.riksdagen.se/globalassets/06.-utskotten--eu-namnden/trafikutskottet/tu-uppfoljning/the-public-transportation-act--follow-up-summary.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.government.se/government-policy/transport-and-infrastructure/goals-for-transport-and-infrastructure/>

⁶ <https://www.government.se/government-policy/rural-affairs/goals-for-rural-affairs/>

⁷ <https://www.government.se/government-of-sweden/>

⁸ <https://www.government.se/government-agencies/swedish-transport-agency/>

⁹ https://www.trafa.se/globalassets/rapporter/summary-report/2011-2015/2013/summary-report-2013_5-commuting-in-the-counties-of-norrbotnen-and-vasterbotten--a-current-state-analysis.pdf

¹⁰ http://www.urbantransportgroup.org/system/files/general-docs/UTG%20Scandinavian%20Transport%20Report_Final.pdf

¹¹ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-08/10/c_138297117.htm

¹² https://www.trafa.se/globalassets/rapporter/summary-report/2011-2015/2014/summary-report-2014_16-access-and-transport-policy-challenges-in-different-rural-areas.pdf

¹³ https://www.trafa.se/globalassets/rapporter/summary-report/2011-2015/2014/summary-report-2014_16-access-and-transport-policy-challenges-in-different-rural-areas.pdf

¹⁴ https://www.trafa.se/globalassets/rapporter/summary-report/2011-2015/2014/summary-report-2014_16-access-and-transport-policy-challenges-in-different-rural-areas.pdf

¹⁵ <https://www.government.se/press-releases/2018/06/the-governments-plan-for-infrastructure--how-we-build-sweden-strong-and-sustainable/>

¹⁶ <https://www.drivesweden.net/en>

¹⁷ https://www.trafa.se/globalassets/rapporter/summary-report/2011-2015/2014/summary-report-2014_16-access-and-transport-policy-challenges-in-different-rural-areas.pdf