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TRANSPORT SITUATION IN NORWAY IN 2008

1. Traffic trends

We do not yet have a complete picture of traffic development in 2008. However, trends seem to indicate the following:

A continued increase in road traffic: There has been an increase of 1,6% for light vehicles and 2,4% for heavy vehicles – a total increase of 1,7%.

Many factors affected the development in traffic levels: In 2008 the fuel prices have varied substantially from high at the beginning and in the middle of the year, to low towards the end of the year. Economic growth as measured by the GDP was very high at the beginning of the year. In the last months, the financial crisis has begun to impact on the Norwegian economy and consequently, the traffic levels. The cost of car holding and prices for alternative modes of transport has been fairly stable in the last year. Access to car is one of the most important factors affecting mode of transportation. In Norway nearly 87% of the population lives in households with access to car and 40% of the households have access to two or more cars. In the last 10 years there has been an increase in the proportion of people living in households with at least one car with 1% every year.

Over 87% of the populations over the age of 18 have a driving license. There has been an increase in that proportion with over 1% per year over the last ten years. There is a growing trend in the larger cities in Norway towards less car ownership and a decreasing trend of younger people possessing driving licences (only 73 % of those between 18 and 24 years of age possess a drivers licence).

The heavy vehicle traffic is still growing fast and this can be explained by the high economic growth that Norway has experienced in the recent years combined with structural changes in the industries whereby industries now use less warehouses.

Rail traffic

The passenger transport by rail has been in steady increase since 2003 and continued to grow through 2008. The freight transport by rail has increased until 2007, but will be on the same level in 2008. For 2009 a reduction is expected, due to the overall financial situation. Further ahead the demand is expected to rise above the 2007 level.

A continued increase in rail and maritime transport depends among other factors on the availability and competitiveness of combined transport. Combined transport plays an important role in Norwegian transport policy.

2. Obstacles to the development of transport

Given the Norwegian geography, climate and population distribution; both transport and infrastructure development and maintenance continue to be expensive. Limited capacity for goods on the railway system and on roads of varied quality creates obstacles for (heavy vehicle) goods transport. Road congestion is a problem in the rush hours in major cities and on some important road links between cities. Temporary congestion problems also occur as a result of weather conditions or holiday traffic.

In the beginning of 2008 increasing costs for construction, maintenance and operations could be seen as an obstacle for development of transport. It is too early to say anything about the impact of the credit crunch that led to the current financial crisis.

Road safety

In Norway the number of fatalities in road accidents has increased from 233 in 2007 to 256 in 2008 (preliminary figures). The increase is mainly due to an increase in the number of fatal single off-the-road accidents. The death toll among young car drivers (15-24 yrs) has increased by ca. 50 % in 2008. To counteract this increase the Ministry of Transport and Communications has intensified the general road safety effort in 2009 and is currently developing a new road safety strategy for the period 2010-2019, this includes a dedicated strategy towards young drivers. In 2009 the Norwegian Public Roads Administration will start a major campaign on speed and speed related accidents.

3. Best practices in transport and infrastructure regulation

Successful regulatory and infrastructure developments in public transport

Through surveys and practice in Norway it's revealed that frequency, regularity and punctuality are the most important parameters to increase the use of public transport. Number of departures and punctuality are crucial determinants of customers' overall satisfaction with transport services. Customers consider lower ticket prices less important than travel time (door-to-door).

Good public transport priority in the street and road network is important if customers are to be given the punctuality and regularity they want. From 2002 government budgets have been used to allocate resources to improve urban public transport mobility based on the following measures:

- More resources for public transport bus and tram priority
- Green light for trams and buses when they approach traffic lights
- Priority for trams and buses on roundabouts
- Sharper control of car drivers with regard to public transport lanes
- Simpler access to clear tram lines of illegally parked cars
- Higher priority to public transport, using signs, road markings and similar
- Separate signs clarifying lanes used by trams and buses
- The Norwegian Public Roads Administration (NPRA) manuals and road standards must be updated to address access for trams and buses.

In line with the Ministry of Transport and Communications' guidelines, close cooperation has been established between road authorities, local authorities, administration companies, operating units on planning and implementation of measures. The aim of the project is to reduce the travelling time in public transport by 20 percent. The project which had its origin in Oslo, have been extended to all major cities in Norway.

Work is taking place systematically and in phases on measures of varying scope. The county administration has responsibility for financing and running public transport. With its specialist expertise, NPRA compiles manuals containing solution alternatives and makes direct investments in defined main lines to ensure higher speed of delivery. A new manual on public transport was produced in 2008. Investigations show that not only public transport benefits from these initiatives; the business community and others who for various reasons continue to drive private cars, also benefit from a well functioning public transport flow.

Oslo accounts for between 55 and 60 percent of the on-going passengers in public transport in Norway. NPRA and the City of Oslo have worked actively together to prioritise public transport. The results of the collaboration have been productive. Since 2003 public transport has taken market shares from car traffic. Each year the share of passengers using public transport has risen more sharply than the population, car ownership and car traffic. One in three vehicle journeys is now made on public transport. Although Oslo has made good results, the target of a 20% reduction in travelling time which is the aim of the project, has not yet been achieved. However, we have found solutions which really work.

A good public transport system used by large numbers of travellers is a prerequisite for achieving the goal of developing a vibrant, fresh and green capital city region. Records show that priority for public transport is no longer a phenomenon to Oslo alone it is also a challenge for other major towns and cities. Consequently, experiences from the work in Oslo have been transferred to other cities in Norway.

To initiate and strengthen the infrastructure upgrading, there is a government grant programme available. Under the programme, local authorities from the main cities can apply for funding to upgrade the infrastructure in their own area of responsibility. This programme is administered by the Ministry of Transport and Communication.

Universal design of infrastructure is an important goal

One of the principal goals for Norwegian transport policy is for the transport system to be more accessible to users, regardless of individual functional capacity. With this in mind, the NPRA Director General adopted a universal design policy in January 2008. Under the policy, the principles of universal design will be fundamental when the NPRA builds new infrastructure or upgrades existing infrastructure.

The challenges are enormous. Of the 65,000 tram and bus stops in the public transport system, only a few satisfy the universal design requirements. The authorities' estimates show that it will cost between EUR1.4 and 2.3 billion to upgrade the existing infrastructure to a satisfactory standard. The upgrading operation must therefore be implemented over a long time period, with local authorities, counties and the government addressing their own areas of responsibility.

Rail traffic

In 2008 a project for extraordinary maintenance on the most important section on the railway network (the Oslo tunnel) was set up. The Norwegian Parliament has decided upon the budget for 2009 which will further increase the efforts on renewal of the same section. New double track lines outside Stavanger and Oslo are under construction and will increase the capacity respectively in 2010 and 2012.