Cooperation and Cross-Border Infrastructure Planning in Northern Europe

The purpose of this paper is to analyze prerequisites, opportunities and challenges for cross-border transport infrastructure planning in Northern Europe. We compare the transport planning processes in Finland, Sweden and Norway and analyze how the used transport model systems and CBA-guidelines can handle cross-border transport projects. The paper will address the following research questions:

- How does the transport planning process work in the three countries? What are the differences and similarities between the countries?
- Are there any differences between cross-border transport infrastructure planning and traditional national transport planning within each country?
- Does cross-border transport infrastructure projects put other demands on the planning process compared to national projects?
- Are existing analytical frameworks, CBA-guidelines and transport models suited to analyze cross-border transport projects in a comparable way as purely national transport projects?

The analysis is based on a review of the transport planning processes in Finland, Sweden and Norway and a comparative analysis of the analytical frameworks, transport models and cost-benefit guidelines used for decision making in the national planning systems in all three countries. In a case study we compare the outcome of an existing study of a cross-border transport investment analyzed in the National Norwegian freight transport model with the outcome when the same project is analyzed in the corresponding Swedish freight transport model.

On a general level, the national transport planning systems in the Nordic countries share many similar features. Transport planning in Sweden, Norway and Finland are all based around national transport plans. Since the main focus in the national transport plans in all three countries is to prioritize and appoint national infrastructure projects, this means that the transport planning process is not designed to deal with cross-border transport projects in a comparable way. Cross-border transport planning can also be more complex since it requires coordination between multiple planning processes in different countries with different planning traditions, division of responsibilities, project financing, requirements and decision cycles.
Analyses of the distribution of costs and benefits becomes more important for cross-border transport projects when the construction costs are shared between multiple countries. This may require adaptation of existing analytical frameworks and transport models.

The strong focus on national transport demand in the used transport models makes the model systems poorly adapted to analyze the effect from investments in cross-border transport infrastructures. The case study show both that the national model systems risk to underestimate effects on the transport flows in neighboring countries and that the model results in general are more uncertain in border regions. Differences between transport models, guidelines for CBA, valuations, forecasts, data etc. between different countries also makes it difficult to rank and compare cross-border transport projects in a consistent way. The national focus in the CBA guidelines also means that the benefit from cross-border transport projects may be treated in a different way than strictly national projects.

The strong national focus in the transport planning systems together with the revealed difficulties to analyze and compare cross-border transport projects in a comparable way as purely national transport projects can create a comparative disadvantage for border regions with a strong dependence on cross-border traffic. The strong national focus may also lead to a sub-optimization of the transport infrastructure from both a national and a European perspective.