

The Road to SUCCESS

With responsibility for all transport infrastructure planning in Sweden, Trafikverket keeps the country moving along smoothly.

Images courtesy of Trafikverket

In 2008 and 2009, a special committee established by the Swedish government was tasked with reviewing the efficiency of the Swedish Road Administration, the Swedish Rail Administration, and the Swedish Maritime Administration. The review found that the agencies could operate more efficiently if combined, and in April 2010, Trafikverket—the Swedish Transport Administration—was formed. Its role is to provide long-term infrastructure planning as well as operate and maintain transport services.

Torbjörn Suneson, now acting Director General, worked for the Swedish Road Administration at the time the merger took place. He became the director of strategic development at the new agency, before becoming a senior adviser and then in March 2015 being appointed acting director general. “I would say they appointed me because I was a former director of planning and had a place on the board,” Torbjörn says. “Before that I was the strategy director for the transport administration area. I knew the team, I knew the board, and it was a good solution because

we could keep going with all people in place full-speed ahead.”

Torbjörn has a different background to many of his colleagues. Originally a landscape architect, he came into the sector by chance, and has enjoyed himself ever since. “As a landscape architect, I am kind of the odd guy out in the transport society. I was formerly a professor in landscape architecture and was on the advisory board to the director general in the road administration at that time, in the mid 90s, and I was on the board for five years. They created a position as a chief architect in the road administration and asked me if I would be interested to come and do that. I thought, I am 51 years old, why don’t I change my career, take a chance. So I left and went into road administration.”

The new agency is responsible for all transportation planning, as well as the maintenance and construction of roads and rail lines. It’s a large job, one that Torbjörn is confident the agency can do better now that all transport agencies are under one roof. “In April 2010, we created a multimillion-dollar transport

administration. We are responsible for the planning of the entire governmental transport system—roads, rails, seaways, and airports, the planning of the airports. Airports are owned by the state government or smaller municipalities; we don’t own them but we have responsibility for the planning aspect.

“Then we do construction and maintenance of the state railways and roads, so it’s a huge responsibility. We have turnover of €6 billion per year, 50 billion Swedish crowns per year, and half of that is construction and half of that is maintenance. Architecture in the transport sector is about the statistics. Well, it’s partly about statistics but it’s more about organisation and sustainability, but I think that is one part and I can work with that. What I see now is you have to relate to society for planning, for special planning, for land-use planning. I think that people aren’t smart with decision processes and planning processes.

“The problem is relating transport planning to land-use planning, and when you are discussing developing the Stockholm metro and the great >



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- Torbjörn Suneson

infrastructure investments in the urban region, the [pre-merger] planning system wasn't enough. So a series of political negotiators went in and took all these issues and then they got an analysis from road administration, from rail administration, from municipalities and it was quite difficult for the political level to sometimes analyse this from rail and road especially. Merging the transport modes was the way to have a more modern administration, more relevant for the questions raised in political decision.”

Trafikverket is looking to improve on its already great reputation in transport. Sweden is world renowned for its public transport and infrastructure, and Torbjörn says that although there are always

hiccups, he is proud of the work the organisation has done. “If we look at the statistics, we are delivering the same level or a little bit better than we have done in the past 10 or 20 years, and compared to all of Europe we are delivering on average or a little above.

“We have an old railway system and sometimes it breaks down and we have delays, and so on. But the delays have been focused on the Stockholm region mainly, and we have better control over it than any administration before us had. We also deregulated and privatised the maintenance work, starting in 2001, and the last contract that was outsourced was last year. So we are in a process of learning ourselves and developing a market, and, of course, a lot of mistakes are made and we are developing the way we are doing the business all the time.”

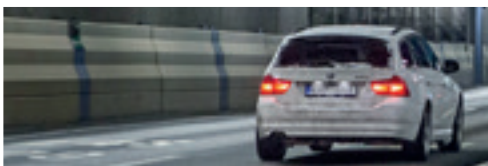
One of the key principles that Torbjörn says Trafikverket focuses on is planning for the future, and how technology will change that.

He says that transport infrastructure planning needs to be flexible, and allow for technological advancements that will change the way we move around the cities of the future. “We are making investments for the next 50 to 100 years,” Torbjörn explains. “We don't know anything about tomorrow really, but we have directed development so that it makes it possible to develop new types of transport and a new transport system.

“We have car sharing, and you have automated driving and that has changed transport totally. Use of space is a key factor in the cities. There have been studies done that if we have automated driving, with cars driving themselves, it could reduce the number of cars on the road by 25 per cent. And that will leave a lot of space for housing, for walking, for biking, for quality of life. We have to discuss the investments we are making from a flexible perspective. It's holistic but also flexible.” ●

“We are proud to have collaborated on one of Stockholm's biggest infrastructure projects, Norra Länken. In addition to performance, quality, and meeting deadlines, partnership-based cooperation is important to us, creating a win-win situation. Trafikverket can rely on our design and execution competence.” - Sofronios Kostelidis, Branch Manager Nordic/VP, HOCHTIEF Infrastructure GmbH

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