

CREATING SATISFACTORY ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED TO VÄSTRA GÖTALAND'S PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Background

Region Västra Götaland is the responsible authority for regional, strategic development issues. The transport system's infrastructure is one issue of strategic importance. The Region makes a plan for regional infrastructure investments and decides on contents and priorities. Priorities in the use of government funding are based on the plan.

The plan is produced in collaboration with associations of local authorities and traffic agencies. The comprehensive goal of transport policies is to provide socio-economically effective and long-term sustainable transport for citizens and the business sector.

There are six intermediate goals:

- Accessible transport system
- Transport of high quality
- Safe traffic
- Satisfactory environment
- Positive regional development
- Gender equalised transport system

Sweden issued a Public Transport bill in 1979 and 1997, stating that public transport should be accessible for the disabled. In May 2000, parliament stated unanimously that public transport should be accessible by 2010. Västra Götaland's Regional Council has decided that accessibility for disabled people to Västra Götaland's public transport should increase.

Measures in Västra Götaland

The Regional Development Committee's transport & communications unit formed a regional group for traffic planning to propose a county plan. The group was made up of representatives of Västtrafik (public transport company), the Swedish Maritime Administration, the National Road Administration, the Swedish National Rail Administration, the Region's Environmental Affairs secretariat and the Disabilities Committee's secretariat.

With a view to legislative, national and regional goals, the regional group for traffic planning appointed a thematic working group to adapt traffic to the disabled. The assignment was to define disabled people's accessibility to terminals / stops or stations, modes of transport (train, bus, ship, air transport and tram), information / service, management and maintenance.

The group's aim was to grasp how accessibility for the disabled is to be understood in the different parts of the public transport system. It could also be regarded as an interpretation of legislation and political aims.

The group was to define accessibility for people with varying disabilities such as visual impairments / blindness, hearing difficulties / deafness, cognitive dysfunctions, mobility impairments, environmentally related impairments, disabilities caused by disease and mental disabilities. The competent authority for planning, procurement and management of public transport will use the group's findings. They will also be the basis for the traffic administration in question and the traffic authority in analyses of deficiencies and proposals for amendments.

The results have been presented in "Guidelines and standards / norms for accessibility to Västra Götaland's public transport system for the disabled". The guidelines state requirements to be met in different physical facilities such as a bus and the standard / norm states the means to achieve this by presenting details such as where to place the stop button. The guidelines / standards are based on the needs of people with varying disabilities to get aboard, find their way and manage a stay in traffic terminals and on board a vehicle. The needs are translated into requirements on the physical environment. They do not suggest technical solutions or qualities. The material has also been designed so as to be clear and easily understood.

Representatives of Västtrafik, the regional offices of the Swedish National Rail Administration and the National Road Administration, the Swedish Maritime Administration, the Swedish Civil Aviation Administration, the four associations of local authorities and Västra Götaland's disabilities organisations made up the group. The process has been monitored by Region Västra Götaland's secretariat to the Disabilities Committee.

In the thematic group different kinds of traffic authorities, the traffic organisation and the disabilities organisations have worked together to collect knowledge on the issue, make use of skills and experience of the respective organisation and come to a conclusion on the guidelines and standards / norms. Extensive work in the form of an all-inclusive dialogue has taken place in the period 2000-2002.

The thematic group's results have continuously been reported to the regional group for traffic planning.

Region Västra Götaland's disabilities council has appointed users representing all kinds of disabilities, which has meant adjustments among different groups. The user representatives have informed the disabilities organisations in the course of the process.

The publicly elected bodies in Region Västra Götaland, the Regional Development Committee and the Disabilities Committee have each been informed continuously, and have met as a group to harmonise the process.

Västra Götaland's 49 local authorities have participated through their four associations of local authorities. Four conferences have been held to inform of the process and invite comments and discussion. The municipal disability councils have been informed at meetings with the Region's disability committee. Västtrafik and Region Västra Götaland's transport and communications unit have presented the process at meetings with the municipalities.

On national level, the National Public Transport Agency and the national co-ordinating traffic administrations' group (Handsam) have been continuously informed.

Present state of affairs

It is stated in Västra Götaland's regional infrastructure plan of 2004 – 2015 that investments based on the plan and government grants tied to it should meet the requirements of the "Guidelines and standards / norms for accessibility to Västra Götaland's public transport system for the disabled". The guidelines are also part of the specification of requirements used by Västtrafik for procurements.

At present, the part of the plan concerning the follow-up of disabled people's accessibility to traffic is being designed. The thematic group will formulate a proposal during 2003. The proposal will be presented to the regional group for traffic planning and will be part of the final follow-up of the plan.

Conclusion

Forming a basis for increased accessibility to traffic in Västra Götaland for the disabled has thus been part of the process to design the regional plan for infrastructure. The process has involved the traffic agencies, the municipalities, the public transport company, the disabilities movement and the Region. Designing public transport to suit the needs of the disabled is no separate expense but forms a natural part of investments based on the plan.