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The Vision Thing

Actors, Decision-Making and Lock-In Effects in
Swedish Road Safety Policy since the 1990s

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Abstract

This paper investigates the introduction of and consequences of the “Vision Zero” (Nollvisionen) that was part of a law passed in 1997 and called for a radical reduction of deaths caused by road traffic. We try to answer the question why the Vision Zero has failed to reach its goals for the last ten years. The introduction of the Vision Zero can be explained with a combination of changes in traffic policy and welfare policy, together with a reorganization of the transport sector that created new opportunities for old interest groups. Our main conclusion is that the strong idealistic and visionary political goals in the Vision Zero are in line with a Swedish tradition of over-arching visionary national goals for the transport sector in general. Idealistic goals suppressed critical objections, but at the same time there were insufficient resources for investments and lack of approval for the policy from actors within the sector, which can create lock-in effects and actually prevent effective policies from being implemented. This might explain the relative ineffectiveness of the policy, and the slim chances of the Vision Zero to ever being achieved.

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Introduction: Welfare change, traffic policy and the “Vision Zero”

In May 1997 the Swedish Parliament passed a pioneering new law on road safety.¹ The Vision Zero (*Nollvisionen*) called for a radical reduction of deaths caused by road traffic. The over-arching policy goal was clear. In the long run the number of people killed or seriously injured by road traffic, should be reduced to zero. In the short and medium term the annual death toll by motor accidents should be reduced to 400 by the year 2000, and ten years after the implementation of the vision the number should be more than halved, e.g. down to 270 people killed.

In 2007 it was apparent that the Vision Zero had failed to reach its goals (see table 1). The number of traffic deaths is lower than before, but the number has stabilized and the long-term target will most likely not be met. For example, during the period 1997–2004 fatalities in the UK were reduced from 3,599 to 3,221, an 11 per cent reduction, without adopting a vision zero. In Sweden during the same period fatalities were reduced with the same percentage, from 541 to 480 persons killed, also a reduction of 11 per cent, and considerably below the target for the Vision Zero during that period.² Furthermore, the inherent contradictions in the Vision Zero have been highlighted.³ Road investments had to be re-directed from new routes or other improvements into road safety measures to achieve the goals. In order to reduce accidents speed limits also had to be lowered and more strictly enforced, partly by hefty increases in speeding tickets. These policy instruments caused reactions against the Vision Zero from a number of interest groups, including motoring organizations and local actors wanting to secure new investments in infrastructure.

* This is a modified version of a paper presented at the fourth conference of the International Association for the History of Transport, Traffic and Mobility (T2M) in Paris 2006.

¹ Government bill prop. 1996/97:137 *Nollvisionen och det trafiksäkra samhället*.

² The Swedish National Road Administration and UK department of transport (<http://www.thinkroadsafety.gov.uk/statistics.htm>).

³ See KFB Nr 1 2000, *Leder nollvisionen till det trafiksäkra samhället? En kritisk analys av effektiviteten i trafiksäkerhetsarbetet*. [Is the Vision Zero leading towards safe traffic? A critical analysis of the efficiency of traffic safety work].

Table 1: Persons killed in Swedish road traffic accidents 1985-2007.

1985	808
1986	844
1987	787
1988	813
1989	904
1990	772
1991	745
1992	759
1993	632
1994	589
1995	572
1996	537
1997	541
1998	531
1999	580
2000	591
2001	554
2002	532
2003	529
2004	480
2005	440
2006	445
2007	490*

Source: The Swedish National Road Administration.

Note: * = preliminary number.

Altogether, the reform seems to have lost speed.⁴ The problem is twofold. To begin with there is a problem with combining fixed ideological goals with a changing reality on the ground. The gap between on one hand the goals set up by the Vision Zero, and on the other hand the available resources and the demands of other investments in roads and traffic, inevitably leads to tensions. The other part of the problem is that the realism or desirability of the Vision Zero is not questioned. The alternatives to the Vision Zero is seldom discussed, and then almost inevitably not taken into account by policy makers. And the question why fatalities due to road traffic shall be prioritized in policy and budget allocations, before fatalities due to other causes to a large extent lacks an explanation. As a consequence many of the reforms have been ineffective, and not led to the desired outcomes. At the same time many of the measures taken due to the Vision Zero has low legitimacy from those concerned, and has led to protests from those affected by for example stricter speeding regulations. But despite these problems

⁴ The Swedish road traffic inspectorate, *Trafiksäkerhetens utveckling efter beslutet om nollvisionen 1997 med fokus på 11-punktersprogrammet* [The development of road traffic safety after the decision on the vision zero in 1997], , 2004: TR 80 2004:4

the Vision Zero remains in place, seemingly impervious to both criticism and failure to achieve its goals.

In the light of this we will in this paper analyze the relations between idealistic and visionary policy goals, in the form of the Vision Zero, the strategies of concerned interest groups, and the policy instruments, in the form of investments and other reforms, in recent Swedish road safety policy. We will also look at the Vision Zero in a broad perspective including the effects of welfare change, institutions and historical traditions. The historical development of the basis for economic and political legitimacy behind the Vision Zero is also of interest, which will be dealt with in the following section.

The Vision Zero's context: new economic and welfare policies in Sweden since the 1980s

There have been some major changes in Swedish economic and welfare policy during the last decades with relevance for traffic policy, and with similar developments in many other European countries. Historically, large welfare systems and far-reaching public responsibilities, as is characteristic of the Scandinavian countries, are built upon, among other things, highly developed and systematic social engineering, a large degree of local autonomy, and a long tradition of social democratic governments. In most European countries, and especially Scandinavia, welfare policies have also been integrated into traffic policy and regulation, so that explicit social concerns were considered in the policy making.⁵ Hence have over-all changes in welfare policy also redefined the relations between public and private responsibilities within traffic policy. The new economic doctrines forced the government to abandon its traditional focus on managing the transport system through control of operations and investments in infrastructure, while at the same time they launched traffic safety as a new opportunity for interest groups within the state bureaucracy. Therefore, the Vision Zero became one of the last resorts for competition for resources and political control over the transport sector. Its establishment can thus partly be explained by the active use by interest groups of strong visions as a strategy in political decision-making.

⁵ Pettersson, T & Andersson-Skog, L, "Scandinavian experiences of network industries. Public enterprises and changing welfare policies 1950-2005", in Fransisco Comin, Judith Clifton & Daniel Díaz Fuentes (red.), *Transforming Public Enterprises. Europe and the Americas: Transnationalisation and Integration in the Transport Sector*, forthcoming on Palgrave 2006.

In Sweden the national government has used the transport sector as an instrument of welfare policy, emphasizing regional equality such as equal transport preconditions, access to communication services, and so on. This has been achieved via public investments in infrastructure, such as roads, railways and airports, or through subsidies to passenger traffic and goods transportation. Thus, it is infrastructure, rather than individual enterprises or their operations, which has been at the centre of transport policy. Examples of this strategy include the investment in new regional railways and the construction of regional airports in Sweden from the late 1980s. At the same time, however, the emergence of a more liberally orientated welfare policy is apparent. A typical example of this change is the new pension system in the 1990s that was geared towards emphasising individual responsibility for the management of the pension funds rather than a public guarantee that future pensions will be paid at a politically decided level. Another example can be found within Swedish telecommunications policy, when deregulation in the 90s created a formal market that was, however, in practice still controlled by the public enterprise Telia. In 1998, Parliament had to reinforce deregulation by actually privatising a part of Telia and at the same time strengthening the role of the government agency in control of the regulation. The different strategies deployed across Scandinavian countries to regulate investments in, and ownership of, the 3G networks are other examples of the emphasis upon services rather than enterprises within the context of deregulation. The Swedish government awarded concessions to those companies that promised to invest in 3G infrastructures in sparsely populated areas, which is connected to a tradition of providing cheap transports and communications to the entire country.⁶

Basically these changes reflect a shift in the division of responsibilities between the public and private sector. The general movement in all policy areas has been towards the state stepping back and adopting a more regulatory role, leaving more responsibilities towards the individual and market. This is especially apparent if we look at traffic policy, which can show a dual development in Sweden during the last decades. On one hand, there are new forms of political influence in the transport sector through a more extended and detailed regulatory process. On the other hand, from the 1980s, transport policy has become increasingly influenced by market principles.

⁶ Pettersson, T, "Transport Subsidies in Sweden and Norway - Two cases of Institutional Path Dependence?", forthcoming in *Journal of Transport History* 2006, and Andersson-Skog, L, "Compensating the Periphery - Railways and Interest Groups in Northern Sweden", in Magnusson L & Ottosson J (eds.), *The State, Regulation and the Economy. An Historical Perspective*, Cheltenham 2001

These over arching social and economic changes were a prerequisite for the Vision Zero, both for setting the stage for the reform and also for shaping the preferences for the involved State bureaucrats. But one aspect can not be stressed enough. The Vision Zero contradicts the general trend in the changing policy environment in Sweden, since it, as we will show in the following section, actually involves more, not less, state involvement in and direct regulation of traffic policy. This is something that must be explained. Furthermore, with regard of implementing it outside of Scandinavia, if the Vision Zero is connected to specific changes within Swedish welfare policy and other historical circumstances, these relationships must be identified to be able to spot potential difficulties when the traffic safety reform is exported.

The implementation of the Vision Zero in 1997

Sweden has for a long time been among the countries with the lowest number of traffic fatalities in relation to the size of the population. However, in 1990 the Swedish National Traffic Safety Program set a target of less than 600 fatalities for traffic safety by 2000. In 1993, the Swedish National Road Administration (*Vägverket*, SNRA), responsible for national traffic safety work, presented a National Traffic Safety Program for the period 1995–2000. This original target of 600 fatalities was achieved already in 1994. Therefore a new target of 400 fatalities for the year 2000 was adopted. The intentions of the National Traffic Safety Program were abandoned with the implementation by parliament of the Vision Zero concept in May 1997. An interim target of reducing the number of road accident fatalities from 600 in 2000 to 270 in 2007 was adopted as a move towards the Vision Zero target. In practice the annual number of fatalities has remained relatively constant during the period 1994 to 2004. In 2004, there were 480 deaths. Thus, the short-term goal for the vision zero has not been met. Despite this, there is no sign that the vision will be reevaluated or reformed in light of these results. On the contrary, it seems to spread to other countries and to the EU.⁷

In the 1997 government bill about the Vision Zero, the minister of communications argued that it represented a fundamentally new perspective on road safety. In practice Sweden was the first country in the world to adopt this kind of radical target for traffic fatalities. The traditional economic model where road safety is provided at reasonable cost and the traditional transport model in which safety must be balanced against mobility should be

⁷ Whitelegg, J & Haq, G, *Vision zero: adopting a target of zero road traffic fatalities and serious injuries*, The Stockholm environment institute, 2006.

abandoned.⁸ While it is accepted that crashes in the transport system occur due to human error, the Vision Zero requires that no crash should be more severe than the human body could endure. The blame for fatalities in the road system is assigned to the failure of the road system rather than the road user. Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that the Vision Zero puts “the State back in” to traffic policy, since it gave the government a paramount role in achieving the goals and through engineering, prevention and education bring down the number of fatalities. A position the State partly lost as a consequence of the traffic policy decision of 1963 when the parliament decided that market principles and the choice of individual actors instead of political planning should guide the development of the traffic sector.⁹

The origin of the vision zero as a political issue can be traced back to 1994 when an “iron triangle” of public sector actors came together when the SNRA, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities (*Kommunförbundet*) and the Swedish National Police Board (*Rikspolisstyrelsen*) presented a national program for traffic safety for the period 1995-2000. In this program, ten reforms were presented ranging from demands for safer cars to mandatory use of bicycle helmets. In 1996 the parliament decided that the SNRA should have the over all responsibility for road safety. In 1997 the parliament decided that the infrastructure plan for the years 1998-2007 should be developed with road safety as the highest priority. The vision zero government bill was based on the aforementioned national program for traffic safety. In the bill the government states that the vision zero sets the scope and the long-term goals for traffic safety, but at the same time it admits that the costs for reaching these goals are not possible to estimate. The bill also emphasizes that the implementation of vision zero should give attention to actors’ abilities to make the most effective choices from a traffic safety point of view. For example the actors’ abilities to demand safer cars and start using bicycle helmets through information and education is seen as more important in the bill compared to changes in the physical environment of road traffic. The government leaves the transformation of these visions into practice completely to the SNRA.

The actor perspective on the Vision Zero will be dealt with later in the paper, but first we will show how (and if) goals and instruments were matched together in the Vision Zero, since we

⁸ Government bill prop. 1996/97:137 *Nollvisionen och det trafiksäkra samhället*, p. 15.

⁹ Andersson-Skog, 2001.

need to see if it only was a political vision that never really was converted into practice. The Vision Zero's goals are firstly to adapt the traffic system to take better account of the needs, mistakes and vulnerabilities of road users, secondly to adapt the design of the road transport system to the level of violence that the human body can tolerate without being killed or seriously injured, and thirdly to focus on vehicle speed as the most important regulating factor for safe road traffic. The instruments to implement the Vision Zero are firstly a road environment that minimises the risk of road users making mistakes and that prevents serious human injury when designing, operating and maintaining the state road network. Secondly to set a quality assurance (from a road safety perspective) of journeys and transports in all areas of activity, both those undertaken in-house and those contracted. Thirdly to analyse accidents that have resulted in death or serious injury in traffic and, where feasible, initiate suitable measures so as to avoid the repetition of such accidents. Fourthly to stimulate all players within the road transport system to work towards achieving targeted objectives and conduct the work on road safety in co-operation with all players within the road transport system, and last but not least, to take advantage of, and further develop, the commitment of the general public to safer traffic through information and legislation.

From a regulatory point of view, the main change instigated by Vision Zero is a new way of dividing responsibilities for road safety. Rather than emphasizing the responsibility of the road user alone, Vision Zero explicitly states that responsibility is shared both by the system designers and the road user. The designers of the system are always ultimately responsible for the design, operation and use of the road transport system and thereby responsible for the level of safety within the entire system. Road users are responsible for following the rules for using the road transport system set by the system designers. If road users fail to obey these rules due to lack of knowledge, acceptance or ability, or if injuries occur, the system designers are required to take necessary further steps to counteract people being killed or seriously injured. But this is not to be confused with that traffic safety is just reduced to an engineering and planning problem. The road user must be forced to comply with the necessary rules. This has led to an increase in supervision and punitive measures to force the road user to behave in line with the demands of the Vision.

To summarize, it is quite obvious that the Vision Zero is a very strong visionary policy with great demands on and universal pretensions for the entire traffic sector. The Vision Zero also implies a centralized and hierarchal organization and administration of the policy. Experts

were to decide what the most effective solution was in a strong spirit of traditional social engineering and then implement it by force if necessary. This way liberalization in other areas of traffic policy is in contrast to the changes within traffic safety policy. Could this be related to the strategies of different interest groups in the decision making process? For example, the most effective strategy for an interest group in public decision making processes is probably to disguise its own self-interest behind a strong universal vision that signals a public interest, like the vision zero. To shed some light on these questions we need to look more closely into the actions of interest groups.

Interest groups and strategies: the initiative behind the vision zero

As in all policy-making the ideas behind the vision zero did not originate from nothing. The background to the decision to implement the vision zero was a PM by the SNRA, but this was not the only possible traffic safety policy to implement. Instead the reason behind the decision to impose the Vision Zero was the works of interest groups working in the national policy process forwarding their ideas.¹⁰

This short overview of the decision making process puts the searchlight on some of the central aspects of the development of the Vision Zero. To begin with it is obvious that strategic alliances between different government agencies were paramount in both formulating the Vision Zero and guide it through the parliamentary decision-making process.¹¹ It is obvious that the SNRA is a central actor in both bringing the Vision Zero onto the policy agenda and makes it a reality. Another interesting aspect is that despite the existence of opposition to the Vision Zero and public doubts against its efficiency, the opposition has failed to achieve any major impact.

¹⁰ Which is not uncommon in Swedish traffic policy. See Falkemark, G, *Politik, lobbyism och manipulation* [Politics, lobbyism and manipulation], Nora: Nya Doxa 1999

¹¹ The susceptibility of Swedish traffic policy to alliances of interest groups have, among others, been discussed by, Andersson F, *Mot framtiden på gamla spår? Regionala intressegrupper och beslutsprocesser kring kustjärnvägen i Norrland under 1900-talet*, [Towards the future on old tracks? Regional interest groups and decision-making concerning the coastal railways in Norland during the 20th century] Umeå Studies in Economic history 2004, and Carlsson M, *Det regionala särintresset och staten*, [The regional interest and the state] Uppsala universitet 2001

Part of the development can be explained by an institutional factor. In 1993 the Traffic Safety Agency (*Trafiksäkerhetsverket*, TSV) merged with the SNRA.¹² This had an important effect for the development of the Vision Zero. Where the SNRA previously had been pre-occupied with planning and physical infrastructure, the agency now both got in-house competence and personnel to handle traffic safety. But the transfer of traffic safety issues to the SNRA also meant that traffic safety left the relatively small and weak TSV and became the responsibility of the more influential SNRA, which gave the issues more weight on the policy agenda. Furthermore this did create a wedding between the different parts of the public road sector. With "softer" traffic safety and "harder" infrastructure construction issues under the same roof the SNRA had a strong preference in working for traffic safety. In connection to this be it must be noted that the SNRA in the mid 1990s was in search of a new direction and purpose. After expanding in the early 1990s, due to an ambitious road construction program to counter the economic crisis in the beginning of the decade, public funding on roads was by 1995 waning and in the future cutbacks were looming. In this perspective the Vision Zero was, from the SNRA perspective, a perfect way to keep or increase their share of the public budget.

The original proponents of the Vision Zero came from agencies within different strands of the state apparatus. In practice the main proponents of the Vision Zero were actors that would in different ways benefit from the implementation of the scheme. The SNRA would benefit from an increased policy focus on roads and additional public spending on traffic safety. Similar motives apply to the National Police Board, who would gain both status and funding from an increased focus on traffic safety and accompanying policing. Furthermore could the strong local authorities act both independently and forcefully through their parent organisation, as often happens in a Swedish political context. The local authorities had naturally these issues on their agenda, since they had responsibility of traffic safety within habituated areas. But if traffic safety was shifted towards national policy arenas and became more of a state responsibility, the pressure on the local authorities to act alone could decrease and national funding would become available for local investments.

The phenomenon that actors positioned themselves to the Vision Zero according to their potential benefits from its implementation was repeated in later stages of the parliamentary

¹² Montelius, J-O, *Från kungligt ämbetsverk till modernt serviceverk* [From royal government office to a modern service department], Borlänge: Vägverket, 2004. *Vägar. Dåtid, nutid, framtid* [Roads. Past, present, future], Borlänge: Vägverket, 1991.

process. When you look at the public hearing that appeared before the government bill on the vision zero, a similar pattern re-emerged.¹³ The strongest advocates of the organizations discussing the bill were, besides the three original proponents, organizations that in one way could benefit ideologically or materially from increased traffic safety efforts. The NGO's working in traffic safety issues naturally supported the scheme, and put their emphasis on their kinds of measures like information, drinking campaigns and anti-speeding measures. Different environmental organizations supported vision zero, seeing it in part as a way of achieving their over-arching goals of reducing road traffic as a whole. The motor industry did also support the vision zero. But their focus was on the need to transform the stock of Swedish cars to a fleet of safer, i.e. new, cars.

Another factor to take into account in this aspect was the fragmented structure of Swedish traffic policy.¹⁴ The Swedish transport sector has traditionally been organized along sector lines. Every traffic mode has been regulated by its own public agency, responsible only for its "own" sector. This has created a system where there is little in the way of steering of traffic policy as a whole. While at the same time the public agencies within each sector have pursued policies narrowly aimed at benefiting their own sector, often in close collaboration with the market actors in the sector. The effect has been problems to implement national traffic policies due to poor co-ordination of the different sectors, especially since the different public bodies have tended to compete with each other in order to maximize spending for its own mode of transportation. This has obviously been the case with regard to Vision Zero, with the public sector bodies responsible for road traffic. This is natural with regard to traffic safety being the domain of roads, but it is nevertheless problematic, since the vision zero involves public funding which could be used for alternative transport investments fulfilling other traffic policy goals. Furthermore has the tendency to organize public sector bodies into regional subdivisions played an important role. This has tended to create competition inside public bodies, where different regions have tried to secure investments, funding or similar resources to themselves. In the case of the Vision Zero we have seen tendencies of different regional bodies of the SNRA to use the traffic safety policy as means to secure increased funding to their own region. While at the same time you have a conflict between the divisions

¹³ These are available at The Government Offices Records Centre, DNr K97/687

¹⁴ See the discussion in Pettersson T & Andersson F, "Institutioner, intressegrupper och den svenska transportsektorns utveckling" [Institutions, interest groups and the development of the Swedish transport sector] in Andersson-Skog, L och Lindmark, M (red.) *Strukturernas dynamik. Kontinuitet och förändring i ekonomisk historia*, Umeå universitet, 2004

responsible for construction of the infrastructure and those used for “softer” traffic safety measures. To the effects that the Vision Zero has tended to be a negotiation within the public bodies responsible for it of how and where the efforts should be implemented.

But the political process did not also just show actors rallying behind Vision Zero in attempts to incorporate their perspectives into traffic safety policy. Another main facet of the policy process is the inability of actors to form an opposition to the Vision Zero. Throughout the policy process no strong coalition were organized against to the implementation of the vision zero. This was not due to the non-existence of competing ideas regarding traffic safety. From the onset doubts were aired against the realism and economic and social efficiency of the Vision Zero. But these oppositional views could not form the basis for political action against it. There are many probable causes for this, which will be investigated further in the future. One of the reasons is the fact that the Vision Zero could combine the interests of both political actors and other actors within the public sector, which created a powerful force combining both the formal political decision-making and the implementation that was difficult to oppose. Another important reason for the inability for an opposition was ideological. As we shall see in the next section the vision zero was in line in the tradition of Swedish traffic policy making of formulating goals that has such deeply rooted positive ideological notions that it created difficulties for actors to oppose it without putting themselves in a vulnerable position.

The effects of strong political visions on traffic policy

Ever since the late 19th century there has been a political bias in Swedish transport policy towards supporting sparsely populated regions with subsidized transports and communications. These regional considerations have also been motivated with “slogans” like for example “making Sweden rounder” from a transport cost perspective or “the people's railway” as a synonym for the State railway company.

In the 1963 traffic policy act the Swedish state railways (*Statens Järnvägar*, SJ) lost its special role in Swedish traffic policy.¹⁵ Whereas the railways previously had enjoyed a privileged position, and traffic policy in effect had almost been equal to railway policy, it did

¹⁵ See the discussion of the shifting roles of SJ in Andersson-Skog L, *Såsom allmänna inrättningar till gagnet, men affärsföretag till namnet. SJ, järnvägspolitiken och den ekonomiska omvandlingen efter 1920*, Umeå studies in economic history 1993 and Andersson-skog L & Ottosson J "Hela folkets järnväg mellan stat och marknad" [The People's Railway between state and market] in Banverket, *Spår i landskapet*, Stockholm: Arena, 1999.

now have to face competition from other modes of transportation and be subject to more of market pressures. This had several effects on the performance of Swedish railways, one being a downsizing of the network and traffic operations. But at the same time was the 1963 reform never fully implemented on the railway sector. The SJ still enjoyed some privileges, and railway traffic was still subsidized. At the same time the downsizing of operations face strong regional opposition from the affected regions. In practice did this reflect a classic conflict in the Swedish state railways, which stood between two simultaneously unattainable goals of profit maximization and social responsibilities, like for example equality in pricing and provision of transport services to all parts of the country. In order to legitimize both the proposed cuts, as well as motivate continued preferential treatment of the railways the slogan “The People’s Railway” was launched in 1930s.

The notion of The People’s Railway was about the SJ being a company that served all of the country. Despite the cutbacks made, the SJ still provided services to all of the country, for example by providing bus services. The slogan was launched in large advertising campaigns throughout the country. Regarding practical policy the initiative served two effects. It served as a means of continue subsidies to the state railways, since railway operations in the entire country only could be achieved by public funding of the losses of the loss-making parts of the railway network. The second effect was to make rationalization of the railway network more difficult. Actors opposing proposed cutbacks could always relate to the goal of The People’s Railway to gain arguments, which were difficult to counter given the logic of the vision of railway services to the entire country.

In effect the vision of The People's Railway served as a quite efficient but at the same time very blunt policy instrument. On one hand did it set goals for the governance of the Swedish railways and provide actors within the political arena or transport sector arguments for pursuing these policies. On the other hand did it also tie the hands of the same actors and narrow down the alternatives available for the decision-makers within the railway sector. Since the vision of The People's Railway clearly was unattainable, at least to reasonable costs, given the ongoing rationalization and competition pressures on the railways, it could not give any clear guidelines on how to organize the sector. This often created deadlocks that could

not, at least partially, be solved until the re-regulation and a partial privatization of the Swedish railways occurred from 1988 onwards.¹⁶

Another example of the effects of strong ideological visions becomes visible in 1971 when the Swedish parliament decided to continue a tradition of transport subsidies directed towards the northern parts of Sweden by introducing the Transport Aid. This direct form of transport subsidies had been used since 1895 in the form of a “Norrland tariff” within railway policy, but they were abolished in 1963 when the traffic policy turned in a more market liberal direction. The Transport Aid continued this tradition but within the framework of regional policy. At the bottom of the introduction of the Transport Aid in 1971 there were estimates showing that the firms in northern Sweden had some 50 per cent higher freight costs than firms in the south of Sweden. In the light of these facts, it seemed politically vital to reduce the cost-related disadvantages that were caused by the long distances from northern Sweden to markets abroad. The subsidy was to be paid afterwards to the buyer of carriage by road or by railway. It was ideas of fairness and equal distribution that was put forth in favor of the Transport Aid in parliament; the cost of carriage in relation to the price of the product should be the same wherever production or consumption took place within the country. “Making Sweden rounder” using transport subsidies was the official slogan for this subsidy.¹⁷ The argument was that by financially supporting the transport sector, the subsidy would boost industrial development. This positive effect on industrial development has nevertheless been very difficult to show in investigations made by public expert groups. Here we can discern an interesting difference between political intentions and economic effects. The subsidy rather encouraged transports than industrial development; it kept firms in northern Sweden into production of low value goods, since low transport costs made it possible to continue exporting raw materials to international markets. The argument that long distances depending on the geographical shape of the country should be compensated for has since been at the very basis of the development of the transport subsidies over the years, although this circumstance is not caused by market failure or any other reason that can be motivated with economic theories. The advocates for Transport Aid managed to give the impression that geographical distances was a “mistake” and an injustice and not an actual part of the production function.

¹⁶ But the notion of the People's Railway still lingers on in the public debate and are used as arguments. For a recent example see Parliamentary Motion 2005/06: T444

¹⁷ This paragraph is based on Pettersson, 2006

However, the goal of “making Sweden rounder” has effectively stopped all attempts from the government to change the transport subsidy in parliament.

Conclusions

Our main conclusion is that the strong idealistic and visionary political goals in the Vision Zero is in line with a Swedish tradition, since traffic policy in the past often have been made by formulating over-arching and visionary national goals. This is problematic since the combination of over-arching idealistic and possibly unrealistic goals that no-one can be opposed to, insufficient resources for investments and lack of approval for the policy from actors within the sector, can create lock-in effects and actually prevent effective policies from being implemented. This might explain the relative ineffectiveness of the policy, and the slim chances of the Vision Zero to ever being achieved. A starting point for an historical analysis of the Vision Zero is the development of Swedish economic and welfare policy at large, since one key aspect of the Vision Zero is that actors managed to redefine road safety policy to include welfare aspects and new social responsibilities. Another reason to broaden the context to include other political areas is that the Vision Zero also redefined the role of government authorities in traffic policy in a way that may have been supported by changes in other areas.

An important facet of the Vision Zero is that it originated as a project from within the state bureaucracy. The formulation of ideas and impetus for change came from independent actors within the public sector. This is also in line with a tradition of the Swedish public sector where with strong public agencies, capable of independent policy making. This is especially apparent with regard to infrastructure where state agencies played an important role for economic and technological development with regards to for example the railway, telephone and energy sector. This has often been connected to strong personal leadership within the state agencies, where it is possible to speak about a breed of "public sector entrepreneurs". The same pattern is evident in the case of Vision Zero. The ideas were mainly formulated within the SNRA, the body responsible for both road infrastructure and traffic safety, in conjuncture with other government agencies. It was then introduced to the political process. Furthermore we can see elements of public entrepreneurship at work. The formulation of a policy that got a large impact on society came from a small group of people mainly within the SNRA. The main proponent was the traffic safety director of the SNRA, Claes Tingvall, who played a paramount role to both formulate the idea of the Vision Zero and "sell" it in the political process. The perspective of how the actors worked within the decision-making process is vital

to the understanding of how and why the scheme got implemented and requires more thorough research. But one thing is already evident. The Vision Zero must be understood as an effect of the shift towards governance rather than governing of the public sector.¹⁸ Government and parliament have not been the only, or indeed the main, actors behind the reform. Instead all sorts of public, and to some extent, private actors have been influential in setting the agenda and influencing the decision-making process and implementation, which have contributed to the characteristics and outcomes of Vision Zero.

This investigation has shown the benefits of a broad historical perspective on the development of the Vision Zero. The introduction of the Vision Zero in 1997 can be explained with changes in traffic policy and welfare policy at large in Sweden during the 1990s as well as with the reorganization of the transport sector with new agencies appearing that are creating new opportunities for old interest groups. The context of traffic policy shifted during the 1990s in Sweden in a way that created an opportunity for advancing extreme visions within traffic safety that originated inside the newly reorganized SNRA. We started with the question what the vision zero would lead to in countries that do not share Sweden's historical traditions. We have shown that the Vision Zero did not have the expected outcome in Sweden and will probably meet even greater difficulties in other countries that do not have the institutional and political circumstances of the Swedish traffic sector in the 1990s. Guiding policy with strong visions probably always leads to difficulties in adapting these policies to new social and economic circumstances, but it will also lead to interest groups trying to further their own specific interests using the political vision to forward their own private interests. Opponents have difficulties arguing for example against zero fatalities in road traffic or against providing railway services to the entire people. In these cases strong ideological legitimacy lead to lock-in effects and a less effective use of available resources also within very specific and limited parts of the public expenditures.

¹⁸ For a theoretical discussion see Pierre J & Peters B G , *Governance, Politics and the State*, London Macmillan 2000, and Rhodes R A W , *Understanding Governance: Policy Networks , Governance, Reflexivity and Accountability*, Buckingham, Open University press, 1997.