

Implementing the impossible?

- *lessons from the Stockholm congestion tax*

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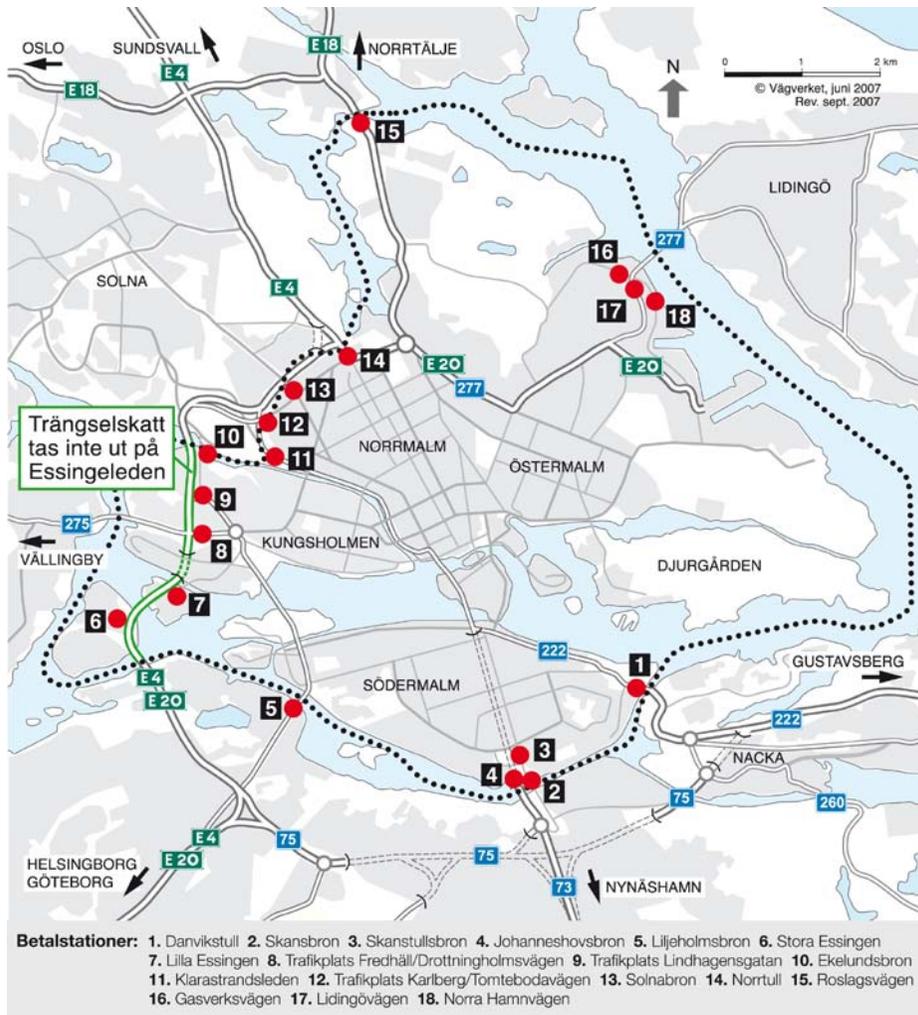
Presentation for the 2nd TEMPO conference on
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Research context

Research on the Sthlm congestion tax done in close collaboration with:

- » Anders Gullberg, Stockholm research institute, Sweden
- » Tim Richardson, Aalborg University, Denmark
- » The OPTIC-research programme:
 - » AustriaTech GmbH, Austria
 - » Centrum dopravního výzkumu, v.v.i., Czech Republic
 - » Department of Transport, Technical University of Denmark
 - » Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT), Germany
 - » Institute of Transport Economics (TØI), Norway (coordinator)
 - » Transport Studies Unit, University of Oxford, UK
 - » Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), Sweden
 - » Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute (VTI)

The Stockholm congestion tax



- » Motor vehicles passing one of the 18 charging stations have to pay
- » Camera technology
- » 10, 15 or 20 SEK (1, 1.5 or 2 Euro) per passage, depending on time of day
- » Journeys charged weekdays 06.30-18.29. Max 60 SEK/day.
- » No tax on Essingeleden (main road)
- » During the trial: tax revenue earmarked for public transport
- » Permanent scheme: tax revenue earmarked for Stockholm bypass.

Key dates from trial to permanent scheme



Oct 2002:

Decision to implement a congestion tax on a trial basis

Jan-July 2006:

Congestion tax trial
(improved bus service started already Aug 2005)

Sep 2006:

Public referendum in the city of Stockholm:

YES: 51,3 %
NO: 45,5 %

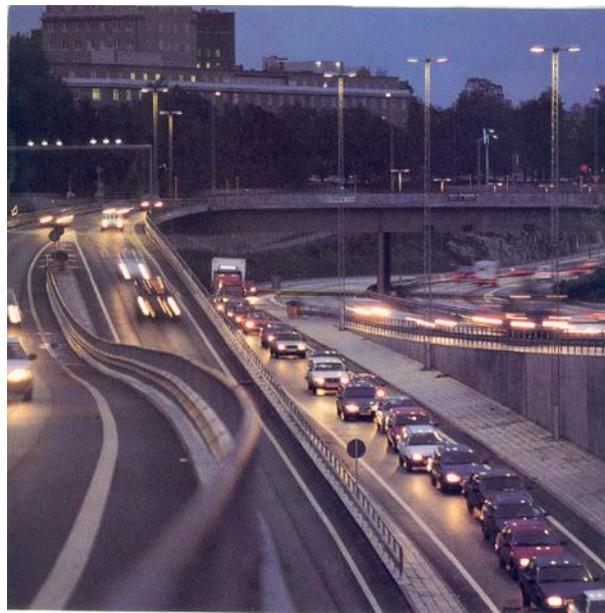
Oct 2006:

New political majority decides to implement a permanent scheme

Aug 2007:

Permanent scheme starts

Looking back: the political context



AVGIFTER MED EN BÄTTRE MILJÖ PÅ KÖPET

När vi väljer att åka på Ringen eller Yttre Tvärleden betalar vi för att komma snabbare och säkrare till våra resmål, var de än ligger i regionen. På köpet får vi allihop en bättre miljö.

- » Traffic-related problems have been high on the agenda in Stockholm since the late 1960's
- » Road pricing have been discussed since the early 1970's
- » Several attempts have been made to adopt policy packages including road pricing
- » Major political parties have learned to not champion road pricing policies
- » By the late 1990's, the question of congestion charging seemed dead

The 2002 election

- » Local social democratic leader Billström had promised to *not* implement road charging
- » Election result:
 - » Social democrats did not get majority position
 - » Green Party held the balance of power
 - » "Window of opportunity"
 - Congestion charging was the Green party's demand to support social democrats

"A full-scale trial over several years with congestion charging is to be carried out in the inner city of Stockholm"

(Gov. agreement 1/10/2002)

Many barriers

- » Massive negative reactions among a variety of actors
- » Mayor Billström accused for betrayal
- » Internal problems within the Social democratic party
- » The congestion charge was legally obscure – was it a charge or a tax?
- » Legislation nonexistent
- » Unclear roles and responsibilities among key organisations
- » Resistance within key institutions
- » No clear idea of how the scheme would look like – technical and practical challenges
- » etc...



How did implementation happen?

The implementation strategy

A strategy evolving over time,
involving four key aspects:

- » 1. The general approach: trial+referendum
- » 2. A flexible approach towards the scheme design
- » 3. Setting the limits for the referendum
- » 4. The information and communication-strategy

(Isaksson & Richardson 2009,
Gullberg and Isaksson 2009)

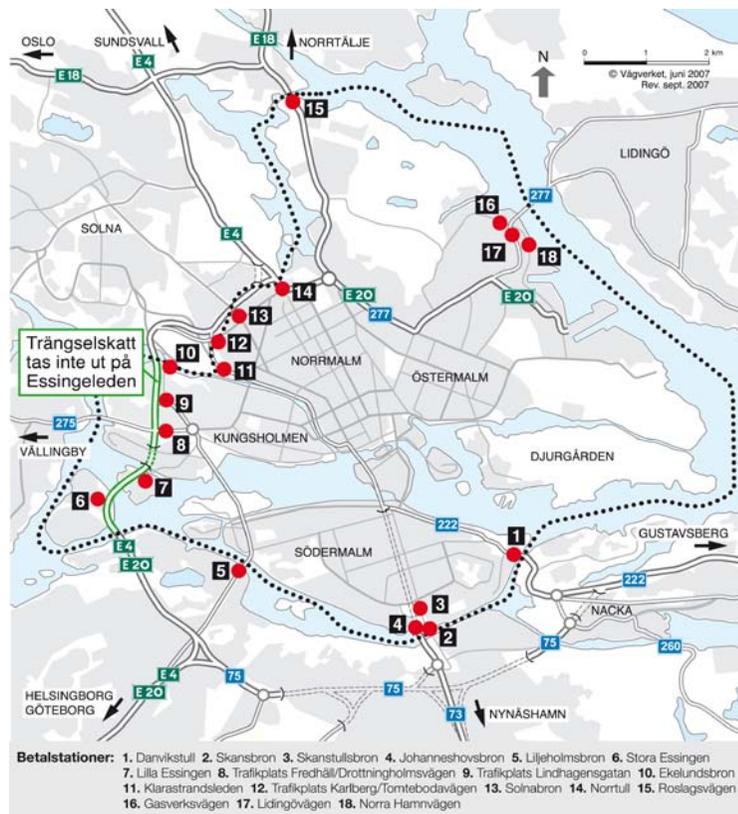
1) Trial + referendum

Holding a referendum *after* the trial

“This is such an odd issue, so it wouldn’t be possible to vote in advance, because then you wouldn’t know what you vote about. /.../ This is an issue where people need to get a chance to see for themselves, to get an experience ‘is it good?’, ‘is it bad?’, ‘how can it be improved?’, and so on. I was convinced that the referendum should be held after the trial.”

Annika Billström 17/4/2007

2) A flexible approach towards the design of the scheme



For instance: no tax on Essingeleden (for acceptance reasons)

“We were very anxious about this – was it worth it, to implement a trial with no charges on Essingeleden? Should we refuse? But eventually, we thought that /.../ the system could be good enough anyway.”

(Green Party politician 28/02/2007)

Accepting a much shorter trial than intended due to the delay in the legislative process

”We wanted a solid trial, with a / . . . / clear and measurable impact. We thought that too short a trial, much less than one year /.../ would only /.../ make a mess in peoples’ lives, with no clear output.”

(Left party politician 06/02/2007)

“If we did not conclude it in good time before the election, people wouldn’t really trust that it was a trial. /.../.”

(Mayor Billström 17/04/2007)

3) Setting the limits for the referendum

- » The local coalition promised to follow the result of the referendum in Stockholm municipality (where the main positive effects were expected)
- » Surrounding municipalities were much more negative and held their own referendums
 - » City of Stockholm:
 - » YES: 51,3 %
 - » NO: 45,5 %
 - » Average results from 14 referendums held in other municipalities in the region:
 - » YES: 39,8 %
 - » NO: 60,2 %

4) The information and communication strategy

- » "neutral" partner (Road Administration) responsible for all the "how"-questions
- » when trial started: results communicated from day 1

"You can't run a trial for a year and *then* make an analysis and show the results. /.../ If we wanted to give input to the media picture, we had to produce results within 6 hours. /.../ Success or failure – people would get to know what actually happened. /.../ "

(Evaluation steering group manager 16/01/2007)

Results of the trial

- » Average traffic to, from and within the inner city reduced by ~22%
- » On orbital roads, traffic remained more or less unchanged
- » Decreased journey times (except from Essingeleden where the journey times increased slightly)
- » Increases in numbers of travels by public transport

(find more info at

www.stockholm.se

www.stockholmsforsoket.se)

October 2006: decision on a permanent scheme

- » Sep 2006: a new political majority both nationally, and in the city and region of Stockholm
- » The main parties in the new government coalition had been strongly against congestion taxation (at least formally)
- » The referendum result was their main argument for deciding on a permanent scheme

The permanent scheme

- » Same cordon, same tariffs, same times of day and days of week
- » Differences:
 - » Congestion taxation made part of the overall “Traffic solution” for Stockholm, including massive investments in both public transport and new road infrastructure
 - » Tax revenue now earmarked for new road investment: the Stockholm Bypass



Lessons learned

- two alternative interpretations

a) Stockholm – "the success story" of implementing the impossible

- » An unexpected event / window of opportunity – and actors who took the chance
- » No single champion, instead a joint process, involving a range of actors from various institutions
- » An innovative strategy to create legitimacy: 'persuasion through experience' with the trial+referendum-approach
- » An incremental process, evolving stepwise, making necessary adjustments along the way
- » A risky process, a considerable amount of political courage was needed
- » ...eventually even leading to public support and a permanent scheme in place

b) Stockholm – the cost of avoiding conflict

- » ‘persuasion through experience’ = a strategy for subtly managing urban mobility, bypassing resistance
- » In the process, partners worked successfully to suppress conflict and work towards consensus and successful policy implementation, but perhaps at a cost:
a lack of discussion over the difficult question of sustainable urban mobility and what that would imply, concretely, for a city like Stockholm
- » The referendum created legitimacy for congestion charging – but still uncertain for what purpose: slightly revising existing mobility patterns or aiming for radical transformation?

(Isaksson and Richardson 2009,
Richardson et al 2010)

Final reflections

- » **The story of the Stockholm congestion tax illustrates:**

...how a contested policy instrument can be successfully implemented "against all odds"

- » ...how congestion taxation, once in place, can be framed and reframed to produce radically different mobility interventions (Richardson et al 2010)
- » Policy does not stop when implementation is finished

Tack!

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More about OPTIC-project at:
<http://optic.toi.no>