

JONATHAN BRAY



The Scandi approach to public transport

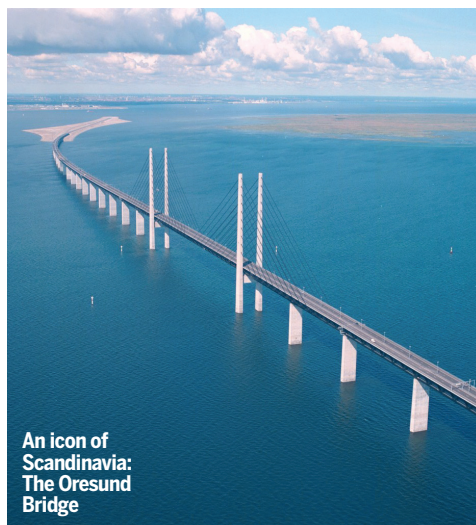
Devolution, franchising and innovation are getting results for the 'nearly perfect people' of Scandinavia. What lessons can we learn?

► Scandinavia has some of the richest, most successful societies on Earth, with exceptionally high levels of education, health care, and safety. The world goes to Scandinavia to see what countries that think big on public services, quality of life and equality (along with the high taxes to pay for it) look like. All this and all that nature too. Including places where everywhere you turn makes even Scotland's grandest scenery look anaemic. No wonder there's been the recent fascination in the UK with all things Scandi. Including their crime dramas, which we can watch on our IKEA sofas, feeling relieved at the confirmation that there is still some trouble in these Scandinavian demi-paradises.

Given how generally intriguing we find the world of what some English writer teasingly described as the 'nearly perfect people' of Scandinavia, we thought it was time to take a look at what we could learn from them on transport - particularly in the context of the Bus Services Act and wider devolution of transport powers back home in the UK. So we put Professor Tom Rye of Napier University on the case and he, and his team of on the ground experts in three Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Norway and Sweden), gave us their verdict. You can download the report from our website (www.urbantransportgroup.org) to see what they thought (spoiler alert: they liked it). Meanwhile here's a taster.

The Bridge

Better public transport is a bridge between where Scandinavian cities are now and where they want to be in the future. What they want to be is green, attractive and cohesive places that people want to spend time in, invest in, work in, live in and visit. High quality public transport (alongside the promotion of active travel) can underpin and symbolise these wider aspirations. This is why they are willing to back it with capital and revenue support via properly empowered transport authorities (which map onto journey to work patterns and economic footprints). Transport authorities which specify the networks which the private sector is then contracted to provide. Malmö is part of the wider Skåne region -



An icon of Scandinavia: The Oresund Bridge

which epitomises this approach. Skåne being at the Swedish end of the Oresund Bridge (of Scandi Noir fame). Since the millennium public transport provision has nearly doubled in Skåne and so has patronage. But they are just getting started. They want a further doubling of patronage over 15 years (with 2006 as the baseline) and for public transport's share of the motorised market to reach 40% by 2030. All of which helps Sweden to maintain its position as one of the nations with the highest public transport use in Europe.

Not 'if' to franchise, but 'how'

There's not much of a debate about franchising per se for local and urban public transport in Scandinavia because there's a consensus that you need to provide planned and integrated public transport. And franchising is seen as not only the most obvious and cost effective way of doing this, but also a tool for promoting innovation. So up in the North of Norway the county of Møre og Romsdal is using customer satisfaction survey results to provide bonuses direct to staff of up to 1.5% of the value of the contract for a number of bus and ferry contracts. In Oslo, each day travellers give feedback using the online Markedinformasjonssystemet (MIS) tool where they rate customer service from the temperature in the vehicle through to travel information, seat capacity and punctuality. At least 93% of the customers must be satisfied with their journey for the operator to get a bonus. Meanwhile, in Telemark (also in Norway), contracts require a set fee to be set aside for marketing for every passenger carried. Elsewhere there are incentives around greening of vehicles and patronage increases.

Another green world

Everyone wants to be carbon neutral and green these days. But the Scandinavians want to do it quickest. For example, Copenhagen intends to be the world's first CO₂ free city by 2025. The Scandinavians are moving at pace because of their affinity with nature, because they get it that livability will be one of the big selling points of 21st Century cities, and because small countries need to specialise (and green technology is a natural fit). They are also not afraid to use their big states with their big coffers to do it either. So Norway is using a fraction of the national treasure chest it has

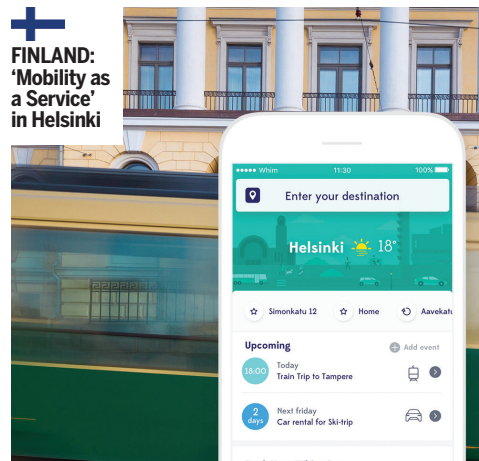
“Scandinavia is not so far away geographically or culturally that we can’t learn from it”



SWEDEN:
A bi-articulated bus in the Skåne region



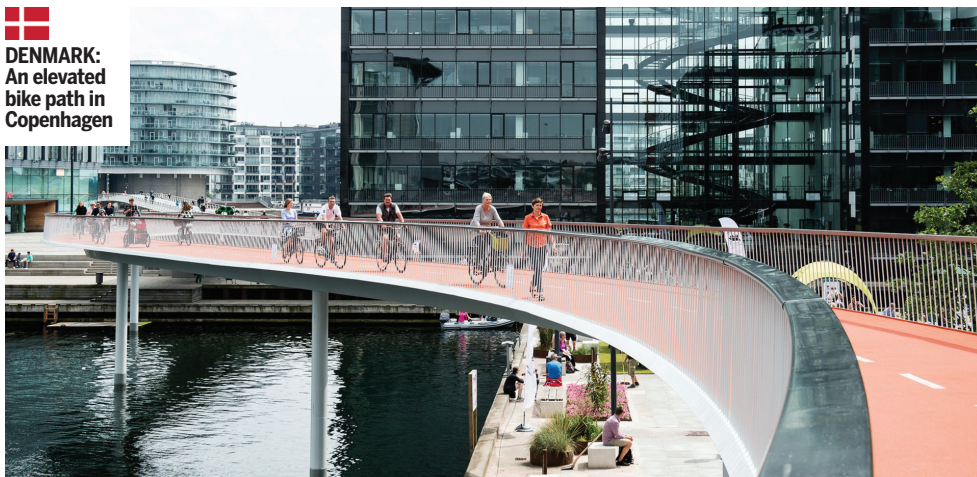
FINLAND:
'Mobility as a Service' in Helsinki



NORWAY:
Charging points for electric cars in Oslo



DENMARK:
An elevated bike path in Copenhagen



built up from its, ahem, oil industry, to turn itself into the electric car capital of the world, with electric cars making up nearly 40% of last year's car sales. They are doing this through tax exemptions and free power charging at public charging stations. Fortunately the commitment to de-carbonisation in Scandinavia extends to public transport too. For example, there will be no diesel-powered buses in Oslo by 2020.

Various lobby groups in the UK maybe attempting a grumpy and punch drunk fightback on behalf of diesel in the UK - in Scandinavia they have already passed the point of no return. The scale of ambition on green targets and related technology is also part of their wider drive to be a world leader on smart cities and technology more widely. Not only diesel but cash is also rapidly on its way out leading to some already very high levels of mobile phone ticketing on public transport. Helsinki has also been banging the drum for Mobility as a Service with the hope that it will be one of the first places to get the idea from concept and pilot to implementation at scale.

Think bike, get bike

There's a myth about cycling that people cycle a lot in some places because there's something unique in the culture that pre-destines high bike use. As if the Scandinavians decided at some point that the bicycle should take over from the long boat as their symbolic mode of transport of choice. Not so. Just as the Dutch took a conscious decision in the seventies that they wouldn't follow the path of mass motorisation at the expense of the bicycle - so countries like Denmark have done the same. They've backed that too with hard cash including \$140m on cycling infrastructure since 2005 in Copenhagen alone (where there are now more bikes than cars) complete with some spectacular 'Westway' style flyovers just for bikes. Bike ownership is now no more of a topic of conversation than owning a vacuum cleaner. It's just what people do because why would you live without one? There's no doubt that the epic scale of bike use takes a big chunk out of the public

transport market -but there's also no way that Copenhagen will change tack. However, there's more of a future overall for public transport in cities that are so thoroughly committed to sustainability than those that are not.

Through a glass darkly

Nowhere is perfect (those beer prices!) but I've never got the insularity there seems to be about where its acceptable to look for good ideas on making UK transport policy better. Scandinavia is not so far away geographically or culturally that we can't learn from it. Not just in our free time for their design, food and TV - but at work too, for their transport. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

▶ Jonathan Bray is the director of the Urban Transport Group. Throughout his career in policy and lobbying roles he has been at the frontline in bringing about more effective, sustainable and equitable transport policies.