

Northern Dimension & Traffic Safety Seminar

7th September 2009

Welcoming words; The traffic safety challenges facing the new transport administration

Dear guests,

On behalf of AKE, I warmly welcome you all to this road safety meeting.

The European Union has set an ambitious target of halving the 54 000 road deaths in 2001 by the year of 2010. Unfortunately, this goal will not be achieved. Instead of the average annual progress of 4.4 percent, the progress should be at least 7.2 percent.

The European Transport Safety Council has published three PIN reports to encourage the member countries to enhance road safety efforts. According to the most recent report, some of the European countries have been rewarded by the road safety PIN award. Unfortunately, none of the Northern countries were rewarded this year.

However, Sweden was able to stay in the Top European Road Safety League with Malta, the UK and the Netherlands. Among the 30 ranked countries, Norway was the 6th best, and Finland took 10th place.

Last year, Sweden was able to reduce the number of road deaths by 17% and Finland 9%; while in Norway, the number of road deaths increased 10%. It is interesting to see such big differences among the Nordic countries. It could be worth carefully analysing to determine the reason behind these different figures. Maybe we will hear some explanations today in this seminar from our specialists. Although, the seminar's idea is – as far as I have understood it - to raise good questions rather than concentrate on finding the answers.

From the beginning of next year, the Finnish road safety agencies are facing nearly the same organisational change as the Swedish agencies have had since the beginning of this year. Among the other Finnish traffic agencies, AKE will not exist as of next year. Instead, we will have a new agency – Transport Safety Agency - that will include all of the traffic and transport agencies. Among other things, it will be a bigger unit, which may increase the possibilities to enhance Finnish road safety.

European traffic and transport policy goals have been stated in the European Commission's White Paper.

The safety goal for the road sector is to improve the quality of the road traffic, especially with the tougher national lawful sanctions and better control.

The corresponding goal for the railways is to integrate European rail transport into the internal market and create a separate network for the goods transport.

The aviation safety goal states that the current high safety level should be maintained.

The goal for the sea and inland waterways states that the infrastructure should be developed to create the 'motorways of the seas'. Especially the work processes need to be made clearer, and the working rules should be simplified regarding all of the participants involved.

It is interesting to see how different the goals are. The difference reflects also differences in the volumes, traditions and actions taken of the transport modes.

We know from the recent statistics that about 400 people lose their lives in traffic every year in Finland. Although it is difficult to compare the different transport modes, of the fatalities, 92% die on roads, 6% as railway passengers and 2% die in aviation. In the Nordic comparison, the Finnish railway accidents are over-represented. So, we can learn a lot from our neighbouring countries and the actions taken in the different transport modes.

Traffic safety work is at best co-operation. Good co-operation seems to be also important in traffic security. A good example of this is the recent hijacking of Arctic Sea trading ship. We can only imagine the number of authorities that were involved in the process.

Finally, I want to once again welcome you to this meeting. It will certainly be the last meeting of its kind at AKE. But I hope it will be the first one in the list of following regular meetings arranged by the new Transport Safety Agency.

Thank You.