



Mistra Urban Futures

Report Summary of a project in Urban Station Communities – the way to resource-efficient travel

The Role of stations in small communities and the areas around them

1. Compilation of knowledge and research needs, February 2015
2. Statistical analysis, May 2015
3. Interview study, June 2015

The *Role of stations in small communities and the areas around them* project ran from 2014 to 2015. It was initiated via “Urban Station Communities – the way to resource-efficient travel”, a Mistra Urban Futures knowledge process. Project participants were: the Västra Götaland region; Region Halland; the municipalities of Trollhättan, Lilla Edet, Stenungsund, Kungsbacka, Varberg and Hylte; the University of Gothenburg; and, “Urban station communities”. The project was partly financed by the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth. Its main aim was to throw light on whether (and how) a train station in small communities of 500 – 5,000 residents can contribute to regional and local development. To achieve this aim, three reports were produced.

1. The role of stations in developing small communities and the areas around them – Compilation of knowledge and research needs, February 2015

In compiling the available knowledge, Elin Slätmo of the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences found that there were few studies focusing on small communities. As a planning ideal, the station community is largely rooted in the concept of regional expansion. Besides giving employees and residents access to more employment and study opportunities, regional expansion also involves giving employers a greater geographical area from which to recruit. Station communities are also considered to promote sustainable travel, sustainable community building and societal mobility. The ideal of strengthening centres and urban areas is so dominant in planning that it is never questioned. Investment in rural areas, on the other hand, must always be explained and defended. The two main, possible, positive, potentials that can be achieved using station communities as a planning strategy are that *community building near a station is area-efficient land use* and *investment in public traffic can contribute to both short and long-term (permanent) growth effects*. To achieve development that meets the various needs of various communities, the following are required:

- Formalised, trans-sector ambitions.
- Arenas that make trans-sector methodologies commonplace.
- Active municipal community planning to match investment in infrastructure.

2. The role of stations in developing small communities and the areas around them – mapping out, May 2015

Produced by Ramböll, this report is a statistical analysis describing development in 10 communities (Kode, Lödöse, Rävlanda, Sjövik, Slöinge, Svenshögen, Torup, Upphärad, Veddige and Åsa). The main aim was to see if there was a connection between the quality of the transport system and a community’s development. Generalising the study’s results, the following conclusions can be drawn as regards factors involving the development of station communities:

- Proximity to a major town with a large employment market is important.
- The community’s geographical location affects the attractiveness of the living environment.
- A reliable, robust and stable public transport system favours the community’s development.

A station does not, of itself, generate development. The quality of the transport system is determinative, as also travel times by public transport as compared to those by car. Physical planning is also of great importance not only for station function and efficiency, but also as regards the growth and development of communities.

3. The Role of stations in small communities and the areas around them – interview study, June 2015

Written by Terje Selnes at the University of Gothenburg, the report is an empirical study comprising a total of 15 interviews with residents of the communities of Lödöse, Floby and Kode. These interviews focus on issues regarding the interviewees' opinions of their living environment and what is valued in their communities. One purpose of the empirical study was to see: *which values of a small community make people choose to settle down there; and, the significance of a train station in the choice of a place to live.* Another was to *investigate how people travel to various activities.* The results cannot be generalised.

However, they serve as an indicator of what and how people feel when choosing to live in small communities. One conclusion is that the preferences of interviewees do not match the planning ideal of building densely in close proximity to the station. This is because the active choice to settle down in a place is often related to qualities that are directly opposite to an urban, concentrated, living environment. Rather than attempting to create new urban values in the communities, the testimonies of the interviewees show that the values which should be capitalised on and strengthened are those already possessed by rural communities. Because it leads to people shopping elsewhere, the car-centric structure creates poor conditions for local services. It contributes to “deconcentration” and weakened conditions for the community’s growth. Wishes for increased services (top-up shopping in particular) in the communities have been expressed. Of great importance in the attractiveness of public transport are: station accessibility, appearance and function; travel times; and, service frequency. Nonetheless, all these factors must always be placed in relation to the structure of the surrounding transport system.

The overall knowledge generated by the three reports can be summarised in five themes:

- *Joint planning is a successful methodology.*
- *Attractiveness is individual and can be influenced.*
- *A station is not necessarily used simply because it exists.*
- *A station alone does not generate development.*
- *The urban planning ideal is not always applicable in small communities.*