



Management Committee COST 342

Parking Policy Measures and their Effects on Mobility and the Economy

Subject: Overview of national and regional parking policies in Finland

1. INTRODUCTION

During the past few years, many Finnish urban areas have prepared transportation system plans. A transportation system covers the infrastructure required by the various modes of transport and the traffic using that infrastructure. The transportation network and facilities, terminals and traffic control systems are all part of the infrastructure. The traffic includes both passenger and freight transport. Transportation systems have been prepared primarily for urban areas, but also as pilot projects at the regional level as well as at the local level for sections of towns or municipalities, e.g. their centres. The target is to prepare plans for some 40 areas within the next few years.

The transportation system forms an essential part of the urban structure. Planning is an interactive process in which the common long-term strategic goals and objectives are jointly determined. A working group set up by the Ministry of Transport and Communications, with members representing the State and the municipalities, proposed in December 1999 a regional agreement procedure, in the form of a letter of intent, for implementing the projects included in the transportation system plans.

2. PLANNING SYSTEM

The new Land Use and Building Act entered into force on 1 January 2000. The new act has a significant effect on regional and local land use planning and future building activities in Finland. Its aim is to clarify the procedures involved in dealing with issues related to State and municipal planning. The act emphasises co-operation and participation. The decision-making power of the municipalities themselves increases, while the role of the State is mainly to give guidelines for actions.

According to the planning system, the Council of State approves the nation-wide land use targets. The Regional Councils prepare and approve the regional plans, which are ratified by the Ministry of the Environment. The municipalities themselves prepare and approve their own master plans. Master plans covering a number of municipalities are approved by a joint committee of the municipalities, which may then be ratified by the Ministry of the Environment.

The regional plans and the legally relevant master plans have to be observed as a guideline. A local plan is required for detailed implementation and development of land use, and are prepared and approved by the municipality.

The specific division of responsibilities between the different planning levels, introduced by the new act, is expected to facilitate the choice of a suitable plan, and at the same time enables the selection of appropriate control measures. If a detailed plan is not considered necessary, the legally relevant master plan can be used as a guideline in building activities, e.g. in small villages and on shorelines.

Apart from the Land Use and Building Act, there are a number of other rules and regulations, which influence community and traffic planning, e.g.:

- Municipal Act (1995): participation and influence of local residents in decision-making;
- Environmental Impact Assessment Act (1994) and Decree (1999);
- Publicity Act (1999): citizens' access to information, and dissemination of information by the authorities;

- Act on Administrative Procedures (1982): notification of issues and hearing of interested parties;
- Nature Conservation Act (1996) and Decree (1997): nature conservation programmes (Ministry of the Environment, Council of State);
- Road Act and Decree, including numerous amendments: planning, construction and maintenance of public (state-owned) roads;
- Road Traffic Act and Decree: regulations regarding traffic control and driving;
- Act and Decree on Parking Fines (1970): municipal parking control.

3. PLANNING OF PARKING

Planning of parking plays an important role in transportation planning of towns and particularly the town centres. The amount and flow of motor traffic can be partly influenced by the number, location and pricing of parking places. Parking policy is, of course, only one of the many factors affecting the development of the urban structure.

In Finland, municipalities have the sole right to land use planning. This offers them, e.g., a significant means by which to pursue their parking policy. Although the use of parking space outside the street areas cannot be directly influenced through land use planning, the municipality is able to determine the utilisation of parking space in the streets and public areas.

Police, and municipal parking supervisor in those municipalities, which have taken the supervising system into the use, can follow up the use of the parking places. In that case the income from the parking penalties are directed to the municipalities. The law provides for removing the wrongly parked vehicle from the disturbing place to vicinity or to the separate storage. The price of haulage is charged from the owner of the vehicle.

At present it is not possible to use wheel bolting for collecting the penalty fees, but it may be facilitated when the law is changed.

The municipality at the streets of its own and the road authority at its roads can place traffic signs regulating the on street parking. Similarly the municipality can decide on the fees collected from the parking place users.

4. NUMBER OF PARKING PLACES

The number of parking places was previously defined in the Building Act and by circular from the Ministry of the Environment. The new Land Use and Building Act no longer contains any parking space norms, but leaves their organisation and dimensioning to the building permit authority, i.e., to the municipality. In connection with the planning process, the municipality thus has to determine the calculation bases for various situations, taking into account the local requirements.

Reserving residential parking space according to demand has been and continues to be the overall aim affected by the development of housing density and car ownership. Maximum and minimum norms are utilised in the plans to determine the necessary

parking space in areas with working places and in business and shopping areas. The aim is to promote the use of public transport particularly with regard to work trips. The number of parking places can also be influenced through different types of agreements, such as shared parking.

The previous national parking space recommendations given by the Ministry of the Environment (1984) by certain activities were the following:

- Residential blocks, 1 pp / 95 sq.m., including visitor parking, or 1 pp / 105 sq.m. plus 1 visitor parking place / 1000 sq.m. (minimum 3 temporary parking places);
- One-family houses 1-2 pp / house;
- Offices and business premises 1 pp / 50-60 sq.m.;
- Retailers 1 pp / 50-60 sq.m.;
- Places of assembly 1 pp / 6 seats;
- Schools and training institutes 1 pp / 200 sq.m.;
- Day-care centres 1 pp / 150-200 sq.m.;
- Hospitals 1 pp / 1.5-2 beds;
- Industrial areas 1 pp / 50-100 sq.m.;
- Rail traffic and freight stations 1 pp / 2 work places + customer parking.

Some of the bigger towns, such as Helsinki, Espoo and Tampere, have prepared norms of their own which are applied in their town plans. These include division into zones – usually three: city centre, core city and suburbs – with different norms. These norms are shown within the case studies.

5. LOCATION OF PARKING SPACE

The basic principle in parking legislation is that the parking space intended for a given real estate is located within its own premises. The parking places of a building bloc may, however, also be located outside its premises as follows:

- The municipality may allocate the required parking places for the use of the real estate.
- A separate parking area may be included in the urban plan, indicating for which real estates' use it is intended.

The law prescribes that the location of the parking area is to be “at a reasonable distance”. The maximum distance in an area with blocks of flats, according to the Ministry of the Environment’s previous recommendations, was 200 m.

When a municipality allocates the parking space required by a real estate, in accordance with the planning regulations, it is entitled to collect a compensation, as per its payment principles, for the benefit obtained by the real estate in being released from the obligation to construct parking facilities. Such parking places can also be established as an easement to benefit the real estate or as part of a public parking area. However, not more than 50% of a public parking lot may be assigned to meet the needs of private parking.

Moreover, the required parking space may also be established in phases, as per the planning regulations, and the building authority is thereby entitled to grant a postponement to the obligation.

The obligation to construct parking space does not apply to minor extensions, repairs or renovations, unless the purpose of a building changes so that its new purpose essentially increases the parking requirement, e.g. shopping or business parking.

6. KEY STATISTICS

In Finland:

Number of passenger cars: 2,082,747 (1999); 403 cars per 1000 inhabitants; prognosis for 2020: 510 cars per 1,000 inhabitants. In the same time there was 345 cars per 1,000 inhabitants in Helsinki Metropolitan Area (HMA), and prognosis: 460.

Increase in number of cars: 2.5% per year (population growth 1.7% per year).

Finns travel 14,700 km per year, of which 11,900 km by passenger car.

Households owning a car: 72% of total population (62% HMA); 16% have two or more cars.

Average distance of work trip has increased from 6km to 8 km in 15 years.

Transportation accounts for 17% of total energy consumption, and 42% of oil.

Average number of trips: 3 trips per inhabitant per day

The structure of Finnish population centres is quite scattered in European terms. This kind of urban structure usually creates a large amount of traffic. Passenger traffic and car ownership has grown intensely. Migration within the country began to grow again in the latter half of the 1990s, mainly to a certain few urban areas.

