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STRATEGIC DIRECTION SESSION ST1
Road quality service levels
and innovations to meet user expectations

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Vägverket

*Swedish National
Road Administration*

The Service Commitment in National Road Management

Summary

In the last couple of years, we at the Swedish National Road Administration (SNRA) have been discussing ways in which to publicise our activities in a more assertive way than we have done in the past. These discussions have been one element in the development of a client-oriented approach that was initiated by a new process orientation within the organisation. These discussions resulted in a decision by the SNRA's top management to draw up a "service commitment", or what might be called a service declaration, to every household in the country.

The aim of the project was to create forms in which to improve the services provided by the SNRA based on a road user perspective. This means that we want to further develop the work on bringing about an animated and continuous dialogue between the SNRA and road users within the country. This dialogue will be the basis for presenting SNRA operations and undertakings with respect to the maintenance of the state road network.

It is essential not to set commitments that entail a higher level of quality than what can realistically be achieved. The level shall reflect what can be accomplished within the framework of ordinary activities using the resources available.

A service commitment is an obligation to individuals or the business community to deliver products and services that maintain a defined quality. Furthermore, service commitments shall target aspects that road users consider worthwhile. The SNRA has chosen the following services:

- Winter maintenance (action times for snow ploughing and skid control)
- Surface maintenance (repair of pot holes and cleaning/sweeping the carriageway)
- Maintenance of gravel roads (grading and dust-binding)
- Roadside maintenance (mowing, vegetation clearance, cleaning)
- Maintenance of roadside facilities (picnic and parking areas)

Service commitments are to be established for the most important external and internal products and services. The aim is to help strengthen democratic values. This is accomplished through road users receiving clearer information about what the SNRA has to offer and a better chance to voice their ideas on what is provided. Conducting a constructive dialogue with private individuals, the business community and other stakeholder enables a clearer and faster adaptation to the needs and demands of the world around us. It also creates better conditions for improving the efficiency within the organisation in that service commitments can be viewed in relation to the cost and compared from year to year.

Background

In the last couple of years, we at the Swedish National Road Administration (SNRA) have been discussing ways in which to publicise our activities in a more assertive way than we have done in the past. These discussions have been one element in the development of a client-oriented approach that was initiated by a new process orientation within the organisation. These discussions resulted in a decision by the SNRA's top management to draw up a "service commitment", or what might be called a service declaration, to every household in the country.

Aim

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Service commitments

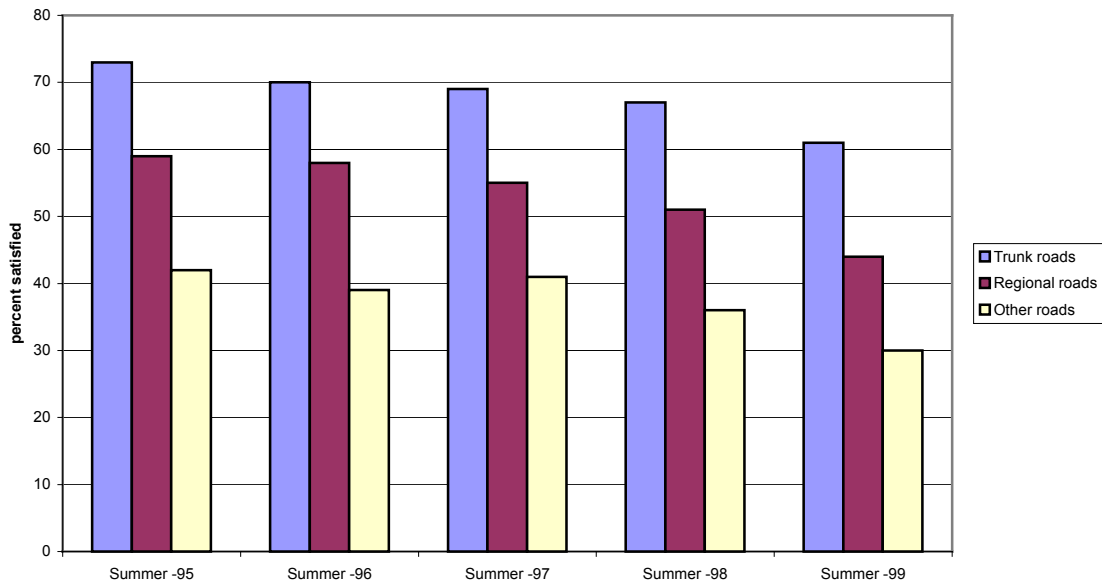
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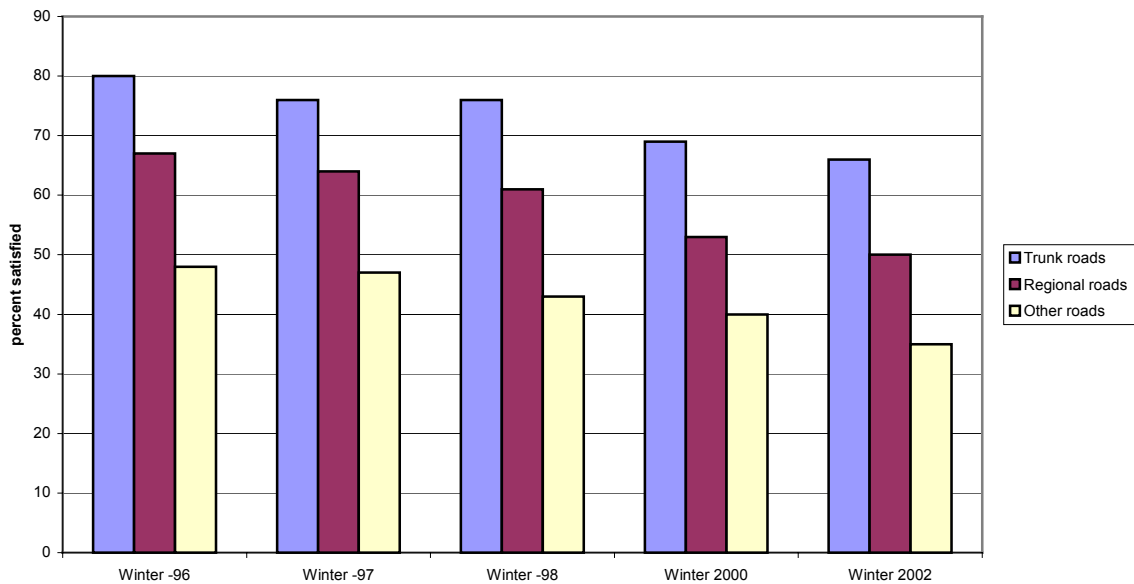
The reason for choosing these particular areas is that they are services that road users often have strong opinions about. Since the SNRA contracts all operation and maintenance in competition on the open market, there is a set standard regardless of its funding and budget. A few years ago, customer survey questionnaires were compiled for the foregoing services. The following diagram illustrates this through showing the percentage of private drivers who were satisfied with maintenance in general, divided by road category.

Maintenance, general



The questionnaires are divided into a number of different services and road categories. The findings are presented on the basis of how satisfied private and commercial drivers are with each service divided per region. The response frequency is often more than 80%, sometimes over 90%, which shows that the questions are considered relevant.

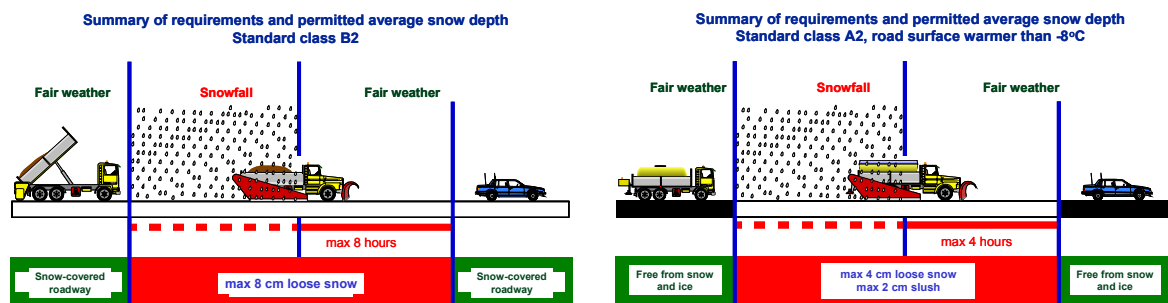
Snow ploughing



The questionnaires are, however, only part of our dialogue with road users. Fortunately, we have statistics from past years so that we can follow trends in customer satisfaction. This can also be a control instrument in the in-house dialogue between SNRA top management and heads of various units within the organisation. For the past few years, the balanced scorecard model has been used within internal management. The results of these road user questionnaires are also included in the form of different target levels.

The disadvantage with this type of dialogue is the lack of "direct" dialogue with road users, which would give us the opportunity to better explain what they can expect from the maintenance of different road categories.

It is important that the service commitment is always firmly rooted within the organisation as well as endorsed by road users. Internally, this does not present any greater problem as all services are governed by specifications that state the minimum standard in the form of quantifiable parameters like time and distance. The following illustrates both the highest and lowest standard class for winter road maintenance.



Similar specifications have been drawn up for surface maintenance, which specify how many days a pothole on a low traffic volume road can be accepted, while on a busy highway this could be a matter of a few hours. There are corresponding specifications for all the services included in the service commitment.

As mentioned earlier, a dialogue with road users is of uppermost importance. It has two basic purposes: to give road users an opportunity to present their views and complaints, and in turn to give the SNRA a chance to inform them simply and efficiently about the standard that applies for a particular stretch of road.

From January 2003, the organisation of the SNRA will be based on process management. As regards the operation and maintenance of roads, this means that two processes will be taken into consideration, "journeys by private individuals" and "business community transports". This will necessitate a dialogue between road users and the respective executive units to give these two processes a content that reflects actual needs.

Dialogue is the tool that carries the most weight within the service commitment. On the whole, it is based on providing road users with a simple way to voice their views and complaints. It is also essential that the routines for handling these be systematic and enable an integrated follow-up within those units responsible for handling them.

By the coming winter, all households in Sweden will have received a copy of an information pamphlet entitled "Winter Roads". This publication explains in clear and simple terms what can be expected as regards winter maintenance on the different parts of the road network. Different geographical editions have been printed to be able to describe the road network in the vicinity of the recipient. Maps are used to show the different standard classes for winter maintenance. The publication also contains contact channels in the form of addresses and telephone numbers where road users can direct their complaints. Certain districts also arranged an open house in conjunction with the distribution of the pamphlet as a natural opportunity to describe the possibilities and problems involved. A corresponding pamphlet entitled "Summer Roads" has been published to describe our maintenance undertakings on bare roads.

A large percentage of private households and companies in Sweden have access to the Internet. This puts a highly effective information channel at our disposal. We can quite easily publish maintenance information on our web site as well as efficiently handle any views and complaints received.

The following map illustrates the winter maintenance information provided within one maintenance district. Different colours are used to show the different action times for snow ploughing after a snowfall. Road users can click on the map for information about where to send complaints or viewpoints. This can involve an e-mail address or telephone number. Recipients of this information are the traveller information centres in each SNRA region and the contractor responsible for the works. In the future, there will probably be some kind of customer call centre to gather up this kind of information.



Concrete use is to be made of all views and complaints received from road users as part of the follow-up of the operations and to provide input for improvement measures. For example, when planning winter maintenance, a change can be made in the order in which roads are ploughed or de-iced within a given budget framework. This could, for instance be a road that for some particular reason needs to be ploughed early in the morning. In a longer time perspective, views and complaints could be the basis on which to compile new codes and specifications for different activities.

In certain geographical areas the SNRA is conducting so-called "dialogue projects" with local road user groups. These projects are, however, more extensive in that they involve regular meetings with road users, and different proposals for making changes are decided in a spirit of democracy. However, it is primarily only local and low traffic volume roads that are discussed in these projects, and they are not linked to any internal specifications in follow-up activities.

In conclusion, it can be said that the service commitment initiative is intended to lead to a better understanding of road user needs and more efficient in-house management with respect to the right action and standards for operations and maintenance. Service commitments are to be established for the most important external and internal products and services. The aim is to help strengthen democratic values. This is accomplished through road users receiving clearer information about what the SNRA has to offer and a better chance to voice their ideas on what is provided. Conducting a constructive dialogue with private individuals, the business community and other stakeholder enables a clearer and faster adaptation to the needs and demands of the world around us. It also creates better conditions for improving the efficiency within the organisation in that service commitments can be viewed in relation to the cost and compared from year to year.

- The purpose of giving a service guarantee is to instil trust and respect in road users as well as make it clear within the organisation that fulfilling the service commitment is important.
- Routines for handling views and complaints.
- Road users must be given a simple way to voice their views and complaints.
- The routines for handling views and complaints from road users must be systematic and enable an integrated follow-up within the recipient unit at the road authority.
- Concrete use is to be made of the views and complaints received from road users as part of the follow-up of the operations and to provide input for improvement measures.