

## Traffic safety

In addition to having a human dimension, traffic safety is also a major factor in the national economy and central government finances. According to official statistics, traffic accidents claimed 354 lives in Finland in 2011. Injuries are not reported as comprehensively as deaths. However, according to official statistics, a total of 7,931 people were injured in Finnish road traffic alone in 2011. Recent estimates put the cost of deaths and injuries in Finnish traffic at between 4 and 5 billion euros each year. Maintaining and promoting traffic safety costs the central government at least 200 million euros each year.

The main issue in the audit was to determine whether traffic safety has been maintained and promoted in an economical and effective manner. According to the audit observations, there is no comprehensive information available on the overall economic impact and effectiveness of the traffic safety work. Not all traffic safety actors make a distinction between traffic safety and other work when using their resources. For example, different infrastructure maintenance measures are also carried out with the aim of improving traffic flows and not merely with the aim of making roads safer. Indirect and partial indicators and estimates give some idea of the economic impact and effectiveness of the traffic safety work.

The benefits arising from traffic safety work are usually described by showing how much the calculated costs resulting from traffic deaths and other accidents have declined. Statistics show that there has been a significant long-term decline in traffic deaths and accidents and thus it can be assumed that the calculated costs that have been cut as a result have been relatively high. The number of deaths and accidents in other modes of transport have been significantly lower than in road traffic. It is estimated that achieving further reductions in the number of traffic deaths and

accidents is becoming increasingly costly. This is because the easiest and the least expensive methods have already been used.

According to the audit, there is a clear need for improvements in the knowledge base of traffic safety in some areas. Improvements are needed in such areas as the manner in which injuries and serious injuries in road traffic are entered in statistics and the coverage of the statistics. Likewise, not all suicides or suspected suicides in the traffic environment and personal injuries suffered by pedestrians are clearly stated in the statistics. The statistics on off-road traffic and non-professional and leisure-time water traffic are not as comprehensive as road traffic statistics. However, it seems that in these modes of transport, traffic safety is not of such importance to society at large as in road traffic.

The traffic safety target describing Finland's performance in international rankings should be more explicit and the follow-up should be clearly focused on this target. In European road death comparisons, Finland is in the middle group (11th place) when the comparisons are made per population. However, when the comparisons are made on the basis of the kilometres driven, Finland is doing fairly well (4th place). According to the audit, there is a need for more information on why in the view of the traffic safety authorities, Finland continues to lag behind the European countries considered as top performers in traffic safety and what would be the most cost-effective ways to improve the situation.

As part of the recent reorganisation of the central government, measures have also been taken to strengthen the economic impact and effectiveness of the traffic safety work. Such measures include the central government transport administration reform in 2010 and the reform of the police administration approved in 2012. One basic idea behind the transport administration reform of 2010 was to transfer a number of upper-level traffic safety tasks and activities to the Finnish Transport Safety Agency Trafi. It is natural that in the future, Trafi should be in a position to play a role in all such matters that have a major impact on the overall traffic safety situation and the work in the sector. Based on the audit, the selected model can be considered as well-justified.

The National Audit Office is of the view that the follow-up indicators measuring the meeting of the targets concerning the maintenance of the traffic surveillance levels introduced in

connection with the abolishment of the National Traffic Police do not adequately describe whether traffic surveillance will at least remain at its present level after the change. The situation should be improved.

According to the audit, the efforts to put the division of labour and organisation of the traffic safety work on a more effective and clearer basis are still in progress. For example, there should be a clearer division of labour between the Finnish Transport Agency and the Finnish Transport Safety Agency Trafi. Furthermore, the impacts of the reorganisation on other actors have not yet been adequately examined. Changes should only be introduced after the benefits of the old structures and the need to change them have been carefully assessed. Administrative savings should not be the only argument for change. The manner in which the changes affect traffic safety and any societal benefits and disadvantages that they might have should also be assessed and taken into account.