

SL's advertising ban is a blank lottery ticket

The political board of Stockholm's public transport SL has announced that it intends to ban advertising for online gambling. According to SL's own calculations, gambling advertising alone brings in roughly SEK 20 million per year. Together with proposed advertising bans on other products and services that displease the political regime, SL's revenue loss could exceed SEK 50 million per year. That is lost money that either leads to increased ticket prices or lost investments in Stockholm's public transport.

Of course, we who work in the gambling industry do not buy advertising for altruistic reasons, neither in the subway nor in advertising space in newspapers. But our advertising purchases enable socially important activities, such as independent investigative journalism in, for example, this newspaper, and well-financed public transport that does not cost the traveller a fortune. We would be sorry if all our advertising investment had to move to international media platforms instead.

Few people are crazy about gambling advertising, but gambling for money in some form is a popular pastime that three out of four adult Swedes engage in. It is a legal and regulated activity, admittedly not decided by the politicians on the Stockholm Traffic Board's board, but by their party friends in the Riksdag. It is fundamentally alarming when the regional politicians in Stockholm now review decisions made in what is supposed to be Sweden's only legislative assembly: the Riksdag.

It is particularly serious when Stockholm's regional politicians abolish freedom of expression in perhaps the most important public space we have in our capital: public transport.

The regional politicians in Stockholm also embark on a slippery slope. The next time it's advertisements for soft drinks or other sweetened products that are censored, or charter trips to sunny beaches, or health care offers from online doctors. And as the advertising income from the public space decreases, public transport becomes increasingly worse and more expensive for the traveller.

Gambling is not just any product, and it needs to be heavily regulated, as well as its marketing. Such regulation has been in place for a few years now. The Riksdag reregulated the gambling market in 2019 and introduced, among other things, new, stricter legislation for the gambling marketing. The new system proved to work well, and gambling companies that violated these limits were severely punished. From an unfortunately overly aggressive tone in gambling marketing when the gambling licensing market was new in 2019, the tonality in the public space decreased as the market matured.

Gambling advertising in public transport also fulfils another important function in that it helps the gambling consumer in his/her choice of gambling company. It is important to choose a gambling company that is regulated and licensed in Sweden. Gambling for money, especially online, is unfortunately exposed to fierce unfair competition from unregulated and unlicensed gambling companies in Sweden. These often criminal companies now have roughly 40 percent of the Swedish market for online casinos. The unregulated companies'

interest in complying with Swedish consumer protection rules is non-existent. That is why it is so important to keep the unregulated companies away from the Swedish gambling market.

Thanks to the fact that only Swedish-licensed gambling companies are allowed as advertising buyers in public transport, SL contributes to Swedish-licensed gambling companies ending up top of mind with the consumer when she/he wants to gamble. It is an important contribution to a safe and secure gambling market. And SL thus earns money by contributing to the creation of this safe and secure gambling market. Not only good for the Stockholm region's travellers on public transport, but good for all of us. Everyone wins in a safe and secure gambling market.

Gustaf Hoffstedt

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