

Summary:

The Transport Agencies National Transport Planning Process:

Comprehensive, Cross-sectoral and Transparent?

The four national transport agencies in Norway were asked to present a joint proposal for a long term national transport plan (NTP). The proposal was to form the basis for a white paper to parliament from the Ministry of Transport and Communication and the Ministry of Fishery.

This report presents the results of a study of the joint planning process, carried out by the Civil Aviation Administration, the National Coastal Administration, the National Rail Administration and the Public Roads Administration.

The guidelines from the ministries underlined the need for close co-operation between the agencies in the planning process. The agencies were also told that the plan proposal has to provide the background for strategic and comprehensive political decisions, to improve the efficiency in the transport sector and to strengthen the interplay between the transport modes. The guidelines further emphasised that the planning process should be open and transparent and involve NGOs and other stakeholders, among them also governmental environmental agencies.

The guidelines specified a planning method where the agencies were to develop four alternative strategies consisting of the various policy measures available to them: An environmental strategy, a road safety strategy, a rural development strategy and a strategy for more efficient traffic flow. In addition the agencies were to work out a recommended strategy. The recommended strategy should be based on both partial analyses and priorities of each separate agency and on a joint analysis worked out in co-operation. Both the recommended strategy and the alternative strategies was to be measured by several criteria, making it possible to evaluate the effects across the transport sectors.

The study

The research questions of this analysis are:

1. To what extent was the process characterised by real co-operation including balancing of measures and effectiveness across the sectors, as well as transparency and involvement of stakeholders?
2. What factors have contributed to the actual process?

3. What could contribute to a process even more in line with the objectives of real co-operation between the agencies and balancing of measures and effectiveness across the sectors?

To characterise the joint planning process as co-operation we demand more than the agencies merely “sit together”. Co-operation is a process of doing something you otherwise would not do. One level of co-operation is to develop and describe a common understanding of problems and conditions in the transport sector. The co-operation would be even more substantial if the agencies also try to work out a common policy involving their own core interests – i.e. the distribution of their financial means, co-ordination of their measures and mutual adaptation of their own plans to each other. To be called co-operation *between agencies* we require that the joint planning process is integrated in to their internal organisations and that the management of the agencies are involved in the process.

Method and data

We selected a sample of 25 interviewees from the four transport agencies and the two ministries involved. The interviewees were selected in such way that they represented all working groups established to work on the National Transport Plan proposal. All agencies were represented more or less equally. In addition we interviewed administrative and political representatives from the regional level and some of the largest cities. The analysis is constricted to the *participants*’ personal impression of the process. A set of events may be perceived differently by different parties. We attempt to explain why the process turned out the way it did, rather than trying to sort out who has “right or wrong”.

Main conclusions

The agencies did co-operate on general policy statements but not on co-ordinating their own means and measures

The agencies have been working together to find a common stand on the more general transport policy principles and to generate the four alternative strategies. The recommended strategies, on the other hand, are worked out in each agency. The Public Road Administration did integrate the planning process in to their normal planning procedures, involving both the management and the organisation as such. Also the National Rail Administration involved the internal organisational structures in the planning process. On the other hand, this agency had less human resources than the Public Road Administration. The National Coastal Administration was eager to participate in the planning process, but has less experience in strategic planning than the other agencies. A large part of the organisation is occupied with other tasks than strategic transport planning. The Civil Aviation Administration has less interests in common with the three other transport agencies and has not prioritised the work as much as the other.

Few assessments across the sectors

The agencies do not have formal methods to assess the effectiveness of their measures across the transport sectors. They did not agree on using more informal

methods to evaluate the effects of co-ordinated policy across the sectors and to evaluate the effects of transferring traffic from one transport mode to another. Behind this reluctance towards using more informal methods there is a disagreement on how much competition there actually is between the transport sectors.

More transparency and more involvement from some stakeholders

Participating in the external reference group has increased the influence of those stakeholders which normally are not in touch with the transport agencies and the planning process. The governmental agencies included in the reference group, found themselves being involved at the same footing as NGOs. In their opinion, this reduced their formal position as governmental agencies. Regional and local authorities and politicians find the process more transparent and participatory than previously, even though the regional input did not influence the national priorities. For the first time, the proposal from the agencies to the ministries was public. This made the agencies more eager to compromise and less frank on their conflicting points of view.

Institutional differences produce divergent interests and unequal power

Previous experience with this type of strategic planning (generating alternative strategies) has given the Public Road Administration the stronger position. Economic size, human resources and many interests at stake are all factors that contributed to strengthening the Public Roads Administration's position as *primus inter pares*, and the National Rail Administration as the second most involved. Most of the discussions and the work has taken place between these two agencies. The National Coastal Administration scores lowest on these institutional variables. Even though it was the Civil Aviation Administration which participated the least in the co-operation process. The fact that the Civil Aviation Administration does not depend on governmental funding and is relatively autonomous, may explain this position.

The guidelines may have increased the effects of the institutional differences

The planning methods did not fit The Civil Aviation Administration and The National Coastal Administration too well. They were not able to assess the effects of their measures nor differentiate their means into alternative strategies. Giving the Public Road Administration the formal leadership and the responsibility as planning secretariat, might have had both a positive and a negative effect on the agency's ability to promote their own interests. The leadership gave them the opportunity to put their stamp on the work at an early stage. On the other hand, it invoked the responsibility of promoting joint interests. Disagreements on some definitions and on defining what was to be included in the joint planning process, increased The Civil Aviation Administration's initial reserved attitude towards the process.

More concise and consistent formulation of policy goals, an other scheduling of the planning process and a joint secretariat might improve the process

The policy goals are broadly defined while the means controlled by the agencies are quite limited. The policy objections the transport agencies were asked to meet should have been more in line with the agencies' means. Moreover, discussions on more general transport policy principles and the on priorities of the agencies should

not take place at the same time. The agencies could work on strategic cross-sectoral policy questions and improve their evaluation methods in the time between revisions of the transport plan. A different scheduling of the process should take the need for a closer participation from the regional level into consideration. A joint secretariat consisting of high ranking officials from all agencies, but still placing the formal responsibility with the individual agencies, could promote both joint ownership and a true cross-sectoral way of working.

A closer look at the conclusions

To what extent was the process characterised by real co-operation including balancing of measures and effectiveness across the sectors?

The agencies have to a great extent achieved a common understanding of the problems and have given a common description of conditions in the transport sector. The development of the recommended strategy has, however, been done separately in each agency, not involving the other agencies. With the exception of the more general policy statements the joint recommended strategy is consequently a product of each agency's sector plans rather than a product of a joint process. Nevertheless, the agencies have given priority to investments in railways rather than roads in the South and West Corridors out of Oslo. Based on these findings, we conclude that the actual co-operation primarily has been one of presenting general transport policy principles, rather than mutual scrutinising of each agencies measures and means.

On the other hand, the alternative strategies, which illustrate how policy measures could be combined in different ways, were worked out through discussions between the Rail Administration and the Public Roads Administration. This resulted in the Rail Administration putting higher priority than initially planned on projects in central parts of Norway in the environmental strategy. The working group also proposed different distributions of funds in two strategies. The proposals from the group working on the alternative strategies are presented in the National Transport Plan. The plan, however, also includes a statement from the Public Roads Administration where by the agency disagrees with the proposed redistribution of funds from road to rail.

It is a general problem, that the agencies are not able to evaluate effects in a comparable way. The Coastal Administration and the Civil Aviation Administration have not been able to assess such effects at all. In addition, the agencies faced problems in handling intermodal transport in a satisfactory way. Consequently, the planning process has not come very far in assessing gains from co-ordination and overall effectiveness across transport modes. Several interviewees claim that the agencies could do more in respect of assessing the effects of better co-ordinated action. The agencies realised, however, that agreement on such a overall assessment would be difficult, due to lack of formal models and mutually agreed knowledge.

Participation in the process

The Public Roads Administration was to lead, co-ordinate and serve as secretariat for the joint planning process. Because of this position, its greater size, competence and planning experience, the Public Roads Administration played the key part in

the co-operation. The documents are mainly written by the Public Roads Administration, though often on the basis of input from the other agencies.

The Public Roads Administration has to a greater extent than the other agencies, involved its total organisation in the planning process. The joint planning process has to a larger extent substituted the normal internal planning process in the Road Administration than in the other agencies.

According to the other agencies, the roads perspective was by far the most dominant one in the process, partly due to the Public Roads Administration's formal position as *primus inter pares*. The Public Roads Administration, however, regards the situation differently. The representatives of this agency considered the responsibility as a leading partner as a constraint on their possibilities of promoting the interest of their own agency compared to what the other agencies could do. They sometimes felt that they alone shouldered the responsibility of the cross-agency perspective in the planning process.

Especially, the National Coastal Administration and the Civil Aviation Administration considered the roads perspective as dominant. This opinion must, however, be interpreted, taking into account that the National Coastal Administration was the least experienced party in this type of planning and had too few people for the work. This agency's capability of influencing the process was actually smaller than that of the other agencies.

The National Coastal Administration entered the co-operation with great optimism, participating actively in the process. They met, however, several technical problems, such as evaluation of effects and problems of differentiating their measures in alternative strategies. The National Coastal Administration also had a shortage of competence and experience with this type of long-term planning. Rather few representatives of the agency participated continuously in the planning process. Furthermore, it was difficult to include their total organisation in the planning process. The management of the National Coastal Administration was, however, strongly committed and gave a high priority to the work.

The Civil Aviation Administration put a lower priority on the National Transport Plan process than the other agencies did. Due to the Civil Aviation Administration is financed by user fees and has a more independent position vis a vis the Ministry, it is more autonomous than the other transport agencies. Their representatives regarded their agency's interest in the joint process as rather limited. They also found it difficult to make the other agencies accept that the Civil Aviation Administration is working under market conditions.

In general, the Civil Aviation Administration had more problems with the National Transport Planning process than the other parties, especially the so-called corridor analysis which ended up in the National Transport Network document. The Civil Aviation Administration's representatives claim that the definition of national corridors, the definition of long distance trips and the fact that the analysis was to include also local traffic and not only long distance traffic between one end of the corridor to another, tended to give marginal importance to aviation compared to other modes and a biased description of the transport flows. There are indications, however, that such disagreements reinforced a hesitation towards the planning process rather than creating it.

The National Rail Administration was better able to “speak the same language” as the Public Roads Administration. These two agencies have on the one hand the most diverging interests and on the other hand more interests in common than the other parties. The National Rail Administration participated actively in the cross-agency co-operation, and the planning process was well integrated in the organisation. Nevertheless, those who worked with the more technical matters had rather few other specialists to co-operate with within their own organisation. This agency’s representatives are generally positive to the planning process and its results.

Transparency and participation

Regional and local authorities have been involved in the planning process primarily through their work on the so called local challenge documents (See TØI working report No 1138/1999). The national planning process was, however, only to a very limited extent based on the local challenge documents. Counties and communities have also commented upon the National Transport Plan proposal, primarily regarding the county-specific priorities. The more general transport-policy principles and strategies have not caught the same interest by local authorities. Even if shortage of time made hearings and political processes at the local level difficult, the representatives of the counties and communities find that the actual planning process improved transparency and local political involvement compared to previous processes.

An external reference group was established to ensure participation from relevant governmental authorities, users and NGOs. The national transport agencies consider the reference group’s efforts as a positive contribution to the process, especially in improving the presentation and in introducing new points of view. Several members of the external reference group, however, claim that the meetings were characterised of information on the state of the planning process rather than real discussions. Except for the national bicycle strategy, the representatives of the reference group cannot point out matters that were directly influenced by the reference group.

However, organisations not usually in touch with the transport authorities felt that their influence increased by participating in the reference group. The organisations of the infrastructure users, traditionally closely in touch with the transport agencies, did neither improve nor reduce their influence by participating in the reference group. These parties have been in touch with “their” agencies in this process, as they normally are. Some representatives point out that a planning process requiring balancing of interests between the agencies reduces the possibilities of promoting special interests, compared with previous planning processes where each transport agency presented its own separate plan.

The public agencies (government environmental agencies) found their formal position as public bodies reduced when participating in the reference group on equal footing with the NGOs.

What factors have contributed to the actual process ?

The most evident institutional difference between the agencies is that three of them receive their funding directly from the government, where as the Civil Aviation Agency receive its income from the market (user fees). The agency has consequently less economical interest in the National Transport Plan than the other

agencies. The Civil Aviation Agency prioritised the NTP work at a minimum level. This difference in status are the strongest explaining factors to the major differences between the Civil Aviation Agency and the other agencies in approach and attitude towards the NTP process.

The Public Roads Administration is larger than the other agencies, both in term of funding and number of employees. The Public Roads Administration is the only agency which has experience in long term planning by the methods chosen for the NTP (alternative strategies and a recommended strategy, including estimation of effects). The Public Roads Administration has control over large parts of the chain of measures within its sector. To the extent that competition occurs between the transport modes, the other transport modes all compete with road traffic. The other agencies also depend on road connections to operate their own infrastructure. These facts make the Public Roads Administration the dominant actor among the public agencies in the transport sector.

Consequently, the Public Roads Administration has played the most central part in the co-operation, having also put the highest priority on this work. They have co-ordinated the cross-agency planning process closely with their own long-term planning. The process has been closely supervised by its management, and the wording of the plan proposal has been discussed within the executive organs of the Public Roads Administration .

The National Coastal Administration institutional features are almost the opposite of those of the Public Roads Administration. The National Coastal Administration has the lowest budget, fewest people, least control over the chain of measures within its sector and also least experience with this kind of long-term planning. This agency considered the co-operation as a possibility of improving its own planning capacity, increasing know-how, improving the conditions of the sector, gaining more responsibility for the agency concerning the national harbours, and gaining influence over the Public Roads Administration in respect of road connections to national harbours.

The National Coastal Administration reports to the Ministry of Fisheries whereas the other agencies report to the Ministry of Transport and Communications. The latter ministry had the more dominating position among the two in this work. In general most of the interviewees think that this relation did not influence the co-operation between the agencies. Still, the National Coastal Administration had to relate to another ministry in addition to the Ministry of Fisheries.

The National Rail Administration is by most criteria the agency second to the Public Roads Administration. The National Rail Administration was clearly interested in participating in the planning process, both as a governmental body and because of competition between roads and railways for government funding. To achieve some of the objectives of the transport policy, especially the environmental objectives, it is, according to the National Rail Administration, necessary to reduce the growth in road traffic. The National Transport Plan process gave the agency a most welcome opportunity to discuss the development and means in a more general perspective. Moreover, the National Rail Administration also considered the technical and methodological co-operation with the Public Roads Administration as advantageous, because of the latter's longer experience with strategic planning and estimation of effects.

The agencies are organised differently at the regional level. We have, however, not found that these differences influenced the central process, except possibly for the Coastal Agency, which had to apply resources from the central agency level in the preparation of the local challenge documents. This fact may have reduced the resources available for the process at the national level.

Another characteristic is the fact that the county roads agencies have a stronger influence in the Public Roads Administration's decision making process than the regional agencies of the other sectors. This lead to a stronger integration of the local agencies in the process in the Public Roads Administration. On the one hand the local involvement demands time and resources. On the other hand local agencies provide know-how and human resources available for the national process.

None of the agencies emphasises differences between the agencies in contact with politicians – centrally or in the counties – or in their relations with the users and NGO's as explanatory factors for the process.

Summing up, the agencies have to a great extent behaved according to their institutional characteristics. The Civil Aviation Administration has been least involved in the co-operation and been least interested in the process. The National Coastal Administration has been clearly interested in participating, but did not participate as actively as they wanted to, because of limited capacity and resources. Much of the discussions have taken place between Public Roads Administration and the National Rails Administration, with the former as the leading partner. External relations and regional organisational structures hardly influenced the process.

The guidelines – direct and indirect effects

All four agencies think that the economic frames should have been wider. They were, according to the guidelines, required to present combinations of measures on the basis of lower as well as higher frames (marginal estimations). Due to this it appears that the financial frames not was a restraint on the planning process.

In the view of a majority of the interviewees the plan proposal should have included measures beyond the control of the agencies. The agencies have described such measures in the more general part of the plan. They were not, however, given unlimited opportunity to base their own recommended strategy nor estimate the effects, on policy conditions not already approved by the ministries or parliament. On the one hand, this may have put pressure on the agencies to focus on their own contributions to the achievement of the transport policy objectives. The possibility of including other measures could have shifted attention away from the efforts of the agencies. Transport planning can, nevertheless, be frustrating, when factors effecting the transport sector most, such as demand for transport services, are to be treated as constants (external factors) in the planning. At the same time the transport policy objectives were ambitious and broadly defined by the ministries. This created a gap between goals and measures.

The guidelines may also have contributed to reinforce the effect of some of the institutional factors. The guidelines decided that the Public Roads Administration should have the leading and co-ordinating part in the co-operation. This has, of course, enabled this agency to influence the process and the product more than the other agencies could. Nevertheless, this leading part made the Public Roads

Administration take some extra responsibility for the cross-sector perspective. This might have restrained the effects of the institutional factors on the process rather than reinforced them. We do not think that dominance of the Public Roads Administration was greater than could be expected due to its position and power.

The Civil Aviation Administration does not consider the planning form and the approach well adapted to the special features of aviation, and consequently, the agency reduced its participation during certain periods. We doubt, however, that the guidelines for the process, organisation and definitions are the real cause of the relatively low commitment of the Civil Aviation Administration. These matters may, however, have reinforced the agency's modest interest in the process.

The National Coastal Administration considered the definitions of the national corridors to be poorly adapted to shipping and international transport. The National Coastal Administration chose, however, to contribute actively to the process and to promote its perspectives, with success.

Both the National Coastal Administration and the Civil Aviation Administration had problems in developing four alternative strategies. Both claim that it is difficult to differentiate measures and means in such ways. Moreover, neither have the tools nor the experience required to assess the effects as requested. The planning method defined by the ministries may have contributed to emphasise the relatively marginal role of these two agencies in the planning process. Still, this situation has made all four agencies want to start a joint co-operation for developing compatible evaluation methods. In this way, the work has produced a positive side effect.

What could have contributed to a different process?

In spite of the short time available, the agencies could have put more emphasis on co-ordinating their recommended strategies and not only the more general policy approaches. They did not mutually scrutinise each others means. The agencies could have put more emphasis on developing a joint recommended strategy, not merely presenting it as the aggregate of four separate ones. The work on the four alternative strategies should have had a more direct impact on the recommended one.

There seems to be a mismatch between strategic planning and the agencies' tradition of project focus, which lead to a bottom-up rather than a strategic top-down approach. A division of the planning process into first a phase of clarification of general policy principles and a second phase of developing alternative and recommended strategies on infrastructure, might have been a better solution. This might also pave the way for more involvement from the regional level at an appropriate time in the planning process.

The transport policy objectives which the agencies were asked to meet, should have been more in line with the measures the agencies actually control. Moreover, too widely defined and partly inconsistent transport policy objectives makes it easier to pull the attention away from measures controlled by the agencies towards policy measures controlled by others.

Before the agencies started the planning operations, a clearer distinction should have been made between efforts which must be carried out jointly and matters which do not necessarily involve all agencies.

The common knowledge basis, especially compatible evaluation methods, needs improvement. This work should take place before the next revision of the plan.

A joint secretariat for the National Transport Plan process (including staff from all four agencies) should be considered. Such secretariat should consist of employees holding key positions in the agencies to ensure ownership and agency responsibility for the cross-agency operations. The overall leadership of the planning process should still be placed in the agencies qua agencies. The co-ordination and operational management could be placed in the Public Road Administration as the largest and most experienced agency.