

mobil.TUM 2024 – The Future of Mobility and Urban Space, April 10-12, 2024

Understanding politicians' positions about contentious car restrictive measures: public protest and ways to build support for them

Robert Hrelja ^{a *}, Tom Rye ^b, Lisa Hansson ^c

a Department of Urban Studies, Malmö University & K2 - The Swedish Knowledge Centre for Public Transport, Sweden

b Molde University College, Norway & Urban Planning Institute of Slovenia

c Molde University College, Norway

Keywords: *Traffic restraint, car restriction, transport planning; policy, politicians, sustainability.*

This work addresses the following topic(s) from the Call for Contributions:
(Please check at least one box)

- Placemaking to integrate urban spaces and mobility
- Promoting sustainable mobility choices in metropolitan regions
- Governing responsible mobility innovations
- Shaping the transition towards mobility justice
- System analysis, design, and evaluation
- other: _____

Extended Abstract

Problem statement

Car restrictive measures are key measures when implementing goals about sustainable transport, but at the same time potentially contentious as they are likely to cause public protests and division between politicians and city inhabitants. By contentious measures is meant measures which prioritizes walking, cycling or public transport at the expense of cars, for example in relation to cost or access, to the extent that it is likely to cause public protests and division between politicians and city inhabitants. Such measures include parking pricing, removing on-street parking spaces, pedestrianisation of streets, rush hour charges etc. Car-restrictive measures are of analytical interest when trying to understand how to implement goals about sustainable transport for two interlinked reasons. Firstly, without car restrictive measures, the promotion of public transport, walking and cycling, is liable to have little impact on the modal split. Secondly, the handling of car-restrictive measures can be used to better understand the causes of the difficulties faced when implementing goals about sustainable transport. To understand the difficulties, research should direct the interest towards the measures that are necessary but potentially difficult to implement, since an analysis of these measures can contribute knowledge about fundamental factors that stand in the way of sustainable transport.

There is extensive research on barriers and implementation problems which arise when political goals on sustainable transport and measures are to be implemented. Previous research illustrates how transport planning policy and planning are performed by routinized decision making and planning practices embedded in discourses that often result in transport planning path dependences favoring cars. There is also research that has analyzed the roles and actions of key groups in sustainable transitions, such as officers (Olsson and Hysing 2012) based on the argument that we need to recognize the significance of key actors in policy and planning processes in order to be able to understand the potential for change. However, there is surprisingly little transport research on a group of actors that is central to policy making and implementation, that is politicians. This paper tries to

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +46 70 3540517.
E-mail address: robert.hrelja@mau.se

understand how the implementation of goals about sustainable transport, is shaped by politicians, as a key group of actors, and what policy instruments they see as appropriate or not etc. in their local contexts.

Research objectives

The aim is to contribute with knowledge about local politicians' positions about the role of contentious measures when implementing goals about sustainable transport, and how politicians support of contentious measures is influenced by ideological positions and politicians' expectations of public protest. Car-restrictive measures are examples of measures that push passengers to other modes of transport, by making these more attractive and the car a less attractive option. However, in local transport policy measures intended to pull passengers to public transport, walking and cycling are more often used to implement goals of sustainable transport systems (Rye & Hrelja 2020). One reason may be the contentious nature of the car-restrictive measures and the public protests they may cause, and, by extension, the risks of reduced voter support the implementation of car-restrictive measures can mean for politicians. The claim is that the implementation of contentious measures, as part of a needed change in transport policy and decision making requires a deep understanding of how politicians situate themselves in transport policy formation and implementation.

Politicians' positions about the role of contentious measures are investigated by answering the following questions:

- how do politicians view the different types of measures in terms of their effectiveness in achieving more sustainable transport systems?
- how does politicians' interpretations and expectations of citizens reactions influence their support of contentious measures?
- how do politicians think that contentious measures should be implemented?

Methodological approach

Empirically, the analysis builds on interviews with Spanish, Swedish and Norwegian politicians. The focus in the empirical and analytical work was on understanding politicians' positions as shaped by ideological stances about societal change processes, which in turn influence the measures they see as appropriate or inappropriate to use to achieve objectives in sustainable transport.

(Expected) results

The results show that politicians' positions roughly can be categorized into three groups. The first category consists of politicians who do not want to use contentious measures to achieve more sustainable transport. These politicians represent parties that emphasize individual freedom of choice and expect little support from their constituents for contentious measures. Instead, they want to use measures which mean that car users are offered alternatives to the car, for example better public transport. These politicians believe that the pace of change towards sustainable transport systems should be determined by the acceptance of potential measures among inhabitants, primarily those inhabitants who are their electors.

The second category consists of politicians who are more positive towards political steering to influence the travel behaviour of inhabitants. These politicians want to implement contentious measures, but they believe that reduced car use should be achieved step by step taking the acceptance of measures among the inhabitants into consideration when choosing whether to use contentious measures as well as deciding about the pace of change. The third category consists of politicians who support a more radical policy leading to faster implementation of goals about sustainable transport, for example by implementing contentious measures, even in the face of resistance from the public that risks reducing the party's voter support. These politicians represent parties that perceive climate change of being such a severe threat that behaviour of inhabitants must be changed fast. Politicians that want to implement contentious measures try to build acceptance of contentious measures by communicating the positive effects for the urban environment if implemented. Based on their experience, contentious measures need to be communicated as a means to for achieving urban development, and not as an end or as transport measures.

References

- Olsson, J., Hysing, E. (2012). Theorizing Inside Activism: Understanding Policymaking and Policy Change from Below. *Planning Theory and Practice*, 13(2), 257-273.
- Rye, T. & Hrelja, R. (2020). Policies for Reducing Car Traffic and Their Problematisation. Lessons from the Mobility Strategies of British, Dutch, German and Swedish Cities. *Sustainability*, 12, 8170.