Why do politicians include traffic increasing measures in a plan aiming at reducing traffic volumes?

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The Environmental Package

- Trondheim is a growing city.
  - The population is expected to increase by approximately 25,000 inhabitants within the next 10 years.
  - With a growing population comes an increase in different challenges.
- The National Transport Plan (2006-2015) did not provide Trondheim with any subsidies.
  - Toll roads had been removed in 2005.
  - No financial room for maneuver.
  - To trigger public funds, the process of initiating a package were started.
- The package was adopted by the City Council at April 24th 2008
  - A political compromise between 6 parties (out of 9).
How is the package composed?

• Primary objective - “reducing CO$_2$-emissions, limit the motor vehicle traffic and improve the conditions for those who travel by foot, bike or public transport”.
  ▫ Ten specific goals that will be evaluated during the set period.

• Measures
  ▫ To facilitate for ecofriendly modes of transport, and reduce the car’s competitiveness.
  ▫ These will, if necessary, be adjusted to reach goal achievement.

• Financial distribution
  ▫ 50 % will be spent on public transport-, safety- and environmental measures.
  ▫ 50 % will be spent on upgrading existing roads and building new ones.
Methods

- **Document studies**
  - To gain knowledge on why the package was adopted at that point, contributing factors and the final decision document including objectives and measures

- **In-depth interviews**
  - 9 representatives from all the political parties
  - 6 interviews were used as basis for following analysis

- The aim was to identify possible explanations as to why traffic increasing measures were seen as appropriate.
Framing

• "A way of selecting, organizing, interpreting and making sense of a complex reality to provide guideposts for knowing, analyzing, persuading and acting” (Rein og Schön, 1993).

• Multiple factors affect how we frame different situations and problems:
  ▫ An individual’s understanding of society
    • main discourses, perceptions and context
  ▫ An individual’s goals
    • objectives, interests, values and preferences
  ▫ An individual’s background
    • knowledge, understanding and theories

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Figure 1: How frames occur (based on Tennøy 2012 and Schön and Rein 1994)
Why increased road capacity is seen as an appropriate measure

- **Local context**
  - Increasing transport demand
  - Congestion affects public transport
  - The current road network are not equipped for future traffic situations
  - There is too much traffic in central and residential areas

- **Understanding and knowledge**
  - Congestion leads to increased emissions and noise
  - Congestion leads to increased costs for individuals and businesses

- **Objectives**
  - Congestion should be avoided
  - Traffic should be led outside central and residential areas
  - A more secure and coherent road network enhances traffic safety, and improves the level of service of public transport
How the politicians think they can improve the chances of still achieving their objectives

- Understanding and knowledge
  - Rising traffic volumes can be counteracted with positive and restrictive measures
  - Technological development will reduce CO$_2$-emissions
  - One did not believe the objectives would be reached
The politicians’ framing, assessment of the situation and actions

Figure 2: How does the explanatory factors contribute to the politicians framing, and thereby their assessment of the situation and actions

Why do politicians include traffic increasing measures in a plan aiming at reducing traffic volumes?
Reframing the problem to find alternative to solutions?

- The plan will not solve the original problem.
  - The problem gets changed so it fits the original plan.
  - The problem itself may also be changed to make sure certain elements fits the plan.
  - Interests and objectives may lead to a reframing of the problem.
- The original problem is unsolvable.
  - The problem gets changed to enable goal achievement.
- **Hypothesis**: Road construction and increased capacity was important all along, and it was necessary to identify problems where road building actually were a solution instead of a part of the problem.
Reframing the problem to find alternative to solutions?

• Whether road construction was *the reason* the package was initiated, one cannot know.
• The politicians are aware of the connection between increased capacity and increased car traffic volumes.
• Some politicians pointed out that the package was initiated for a reason - it was a way to receive funding for road construction desired by some.
Reframing the problem to find alternative to solutions?

- **Hypothesis:** Road construction and increased capacity was important all along, and it was necessary to identify problems where road building actually were a solution instead of a part of the problem.
- There are strong indications that road construction has been an important element all along.
  - “the City Council believes that in the interest of the environment, traffic safety and accessibility, it is absolutely necessary to complete the development of the main road network in Trondheim […]” (the decision document for the Transport plan for Trondheim 2006-2015)
- A possible explanation to why traffic increasing measures were included in a plan aiming at reducing traffic volumes might be that some problems were deliberately reframed so that road construction were a part of the solution, not the problem.
How does scale influence framing?

- Scale affects:
  - how we frame the situation and the problem
  - which measures are seen as appropriate
  - which measures will be implemented
  - which outcomes are expected

- “Analyzing problems at different scales will continue in planning, but planners and planning institutions can shift scale to identify alternative solutions” (Lowe 2011:58).

- Change of scale can happen in two ways:
  - Positively - to alter an unsolvable problem so it becomes solvable.
  - Negatively - to justify measures that were not supported in the original scale.

- **Hypothesis**: The politicians deliberately changed scale to justify road construction and increased capacity.
How does scale influence framing?

- **Hypothesis:** The politicians deliberately changed scale to justify road construction and increased capacity.

- The identified problems in the local scale in Trondheim are not unsolvable without road construction; the politicians could simply have chosen not to increase the capacity.
  - A positive change of scale has thus not occurred
  - Whether a negative change of scale has occurred is unknown.

- One explanation to why traffic increasing measures were included in a plan aiming at reducing traffic volumes, seems to be that local targets were prioritized above global targets.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The package says</th>
<th>Experts says</th>
<th>The politicians line of reasoning</th>
<th>Their solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reframing the problem</strong></td>
<td>CO₂-emissions and increased traffic volumes is a problem.</td>
<td>CO₂-emissions and increased traffic volumes is a problem. Road capacity should not be increased.</td>
<td>Congestion is a problem that must be solved, increasing the road capacity will help solve this problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scale</strong></td>
<td>CO₂-emissions and increased traffic volumes is a problem, as well as traffic through central and residential areas. Scale not mentioned specifically.</td>
<td>CO₂-emissions is a global problem. Reduced traffic volumes will lead to lower CO₂-emissions and fewer cars in central and residential areas. Road capacity should not be increased.</td>
<td>Congestion is a problem that must be solved, alongside with reducing traffic in central and residential areas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why do politicians include traffic increasing measures in a plan aiming at reducing traffic volumes?

- The politicians see road construction as a solution to other problems than those defined in the main goal.
- They mainly focus on local challenges when explaining the necessity of road construction
  - In a global perspective, road construction is not a solution as it can exacerbate the same challenges.
- Almost all of them truly believe they will be able to reach their main goal.
  - …even though they have been told otherwise!
How to improve the decision making process?

• Planner and advisors must ensure that politicians are actually aware of the consequences of their actions.
  ▫ Effects from each measure should be clearly defined and displayed
  ▫ Overall effects from combined measures should be clearly defined and displayed
  ▫ Conflicts between wanted measures and stated goals should be emphasized and problematized.
• Alternative measures which meets stated goals should be shown.
References

- Tennøy, A. 2012. *How and why planners make plans which, if implemented, cause growth in traffic volumes. Explanations related to the expert knowledge, the planners, and the plan-making processes*. Thesis no. 2012:1, Norwegian University of Life Sciences UMB, Ås.

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