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Introducing elements of due diligence in sustainable urban freight transport planning

Maria Lindholm^a, Erica E F Ballantyne^{b*}

^aChalmers University of Technology, 412 96 Göteborg, Sweden

^bUniversity of Sheffield, Sheffield S10 1FL, UK

Abstract

This paper presents the findings from a Delphi study that has investigated the feasibility of local authorities adopting an updated transport planning process that incorporates the concept of due diligence. The Delphi panel consisted of twenty experts representing local authorities, academia and other relevant freight stakeholders from Sweden, the United Kingdom (UK), Germany, France and The Netherlands that were engaged via email survey. This resulted in the development of a refined theoretical framework that enables freight to be fully considered in local authority transport planning.

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1. Introduction

A large proportion of negative externalities experienced in urban areas, such as noise, visual intrusion and emissions can be attributed to freight transport operations. Nevertheless, many local authorities seem to lack formal strategies that take into account freight transport movements, in the same way that passenger mobility is addressed (Lindholm and Blinge, 2014). Since freight is currently not addressed to any great extent by local authorities in the

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 -114-222-3378.

E-mail address: e.e.ballantyne@sheffield.ac.uk

development of transport strategies, there is a need to find structured methods of including freight in transport and policy planning (Ballantyne et al., 2013). Local authority transport planning is discussed in this paper within the context of transport related decisions made by civil servants, local officers, and locally elected politicians. It could be difficult for local authorities to know where to start, when planning for urban freight, since there are a variety of logistics or regulative measures that could be implemented. However, the ‘world of information’ is becoming increasingly complex and there are several factors that need to be considered regarding policy transfer in order to make it easier and more accessible (Timms, 2011).

Recent research has highlighted the difficulties of finding suitable and sustainable solutions to common problems associated with urban freight (Quak, 2011). This research aims to examine whether the principle of due diligence (a required step in business merger decisions) could be used in local authority transport policy decision making to ensure that freight is adequately considered from an earlier point in the process. However, one of the major barriers in the development of such a process is the lack of knowledge and awareness amongst local authorities, with regards to the importance of accommodating freight in urban transport planning. However, over the last few years’ research has noted an increasing local authority awareness of freight activities, particularly in the urban context (Lindholm, 2012).

Previous studies have highlighted a significant lack of freight stakeholder involvement in urban transport planning and policy making (Ballantyne et al., 2013; Lindholm and Browne, 2014) which have prompted the necessity to include stakeholders in decision and policy making to a greater extent. This research has aimed to identify opportunities for stakeholders to become involved in freight transport planning, and to examine the concept of due diligence used in business mergers and acquisitions to ensure a comprehensive evaluation is conducted. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is twofold, firstly to present the benefits of using elements of due diligence in urban freight transport planning to better accommodate the needs of freight stakeholders; and secondly, to present the findings of a Delphi study that has investigated the feasibility of local authorities adopting this process. The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: the first section describes the desk based literature review and the Delphi method; followed by a discussion around planning for urban freight, and the potential to incorporate due diligence in transport planning; then we present findings from the Delphi study including the proposed transport planning process incorporating due diligence; and finally the paper concludes with some recommendations on updating urban freight transport planning.

2. Research approach

To the authors’ knowledge, the idea of including and applying elements of the due diligence process to local authority urban transport planning has not previously been explored in academic research. Similarly, incorporating the due diligence concept as a method of considering urban freight transport in the local authority transport planning process has never before been assessed. In this paper we use a literature review and analysis of existing transport planning processes in order to develop a revised transport planning process incorporating elements of due diligence. Thereafter, the feasibility of using such a process is tested using a Delphi approach.

A systematic desk based literature review was conducted to determine current processes used in urban transport planning and urban freight transport planning, in addition to an overview of the due diligence process. However, our analysis and findings also build upon comprehensive previous reviews of urban freight and approaches to transport planning adopted by local authorities (Ballantyne et al., 2013; Lindholm, 2012; Lindholm and Behrends, 2012). This previous research, spanning Northern Europe, has been in the form of literature reviews, interviews, case studies and workshops carried out since 2005 by the authors – studying in detail more than 24 local authorities as case studies and performing more than 80 interviews with urban freight stakeholders. Those case studies and interviews have together with three workshops (Ballantyne, 2013) on the topic increased the understanding of how stakeholders of urban freight perceive and address urban freight transport issues.

Based on the detailed literature review, a suggested transport planning process for freight has been developed. A Delphi survey approach was then used to gather expert opinions on the feasibility of this proposed transport planning process for local authorities to better consider the needs of commercial freight vehicles.

The Delphi technique is a method of gathering opinions from a panel of experts that was originally developed in the 1950’s for the US Air Force to assist with long-range forecasting (Linstone and Turoff, 2011). The method takes

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