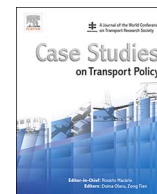




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The role of reporting mechanisms in transport policy implementation by local authorities in England

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ABSTRACT

The UK Transport Act 2000 made a number of reforms, requiring all local transport authorities in England, outside of London, to produce a local transport plan (LTP). A separate annual delivery report was also required to show how the LTP was progressing, however this system of close monitoring was abandoned in 2008. This paper analyses and compares the LTP 2001–2006 and the LTP Delivery Report for three UK cities in order to obtain an insight into the importance of reporting in the implementation of local transport policy. Analysis of why some policies were not implemented successfully is based on the application of a new hybrid theory of policy implementation combining top-down and bottom-up perspectives. Findings reveal that the reporting process in the three case cities misses some key information which limits the ability of local authorities to monitor their policy implementation. Moreover, applying the hybrid theory reveals that even in cases of good reporting, some important elements needed to evaluate the implementation of transport policy are lacking. The paper provides recommendations for effective implementation and better decision making that will aid local authority staff.

1. Introduction

Transport policies are developed to manage the social, environmental and economic impacts caused by transportation activity. Inappropriately designed transport policies can result in a network that excludes certain members of society, harms the environment and is detrimental to the economy. Without physical access to jobs, health, education and other amenities, the quality of life suffers (Banister, 2000). Therefore it is absolutely critical to implement systems that encompass all three aspects to ensure that a successful system is created.

A number of research studies have been carried out to identify the barriers to implementing sustainable transport policies at a local level. In 1995, the Institution of Civil Engineers published a review on transport policy and found that policy makers at a local level in the UK were concerned with how transport policy was being implemented. The review concluded that there was a need for clarity, consistency and commitment from national government in its interactions with local government. It also found that the principal barriers to effective policy implementation included the fragmentation of local government and the privatisation of public transport; lack of consistency in policy over time; failure to integrate transport and land use planning; lack of funding; inconsistent distribution of finance; and a lack of powers for

demand management measures (May 1995).

Another review published by ECMT (2002) found that the principal barriers to effective policy implementation were poor policy integration and coordination; counterproductive institutional roles; unsupportive regulatory frameworks; weaknesses in pricing; poor data quality and quantity; limited public support; and lack of political resolve.

The Department for Transport highlighted a number of weaknesses following the first LTP including conflicts between transport plans and those for other public policy sectors, managerial and political barriers, lack of integration between transport and land use planning, a weak evidence base, limited expertise in setting targets, reluctance to share good practice, limitations of staffing and skills, and inappropriate financial and political structures (Atkins, 2005).

The DISTILLATE research programme also carried out a study on policy implementation barriers and looked at six barriers deemed of particular importance to UK local authorities. The study found financial restrictions, staff shortages and divided responsibilities to be the most serious problems (Hull, 2009).

To overcome these policy implementation barriers, a number of research studies have attempted to investigate the best theoretical combinations of transport policies. The study of policy implementation has grown substantially since the late 1960s and many scholars have attempted to develop policy implementation frameworks in order to

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address the gaps that often occur between policy decision intent and policy performance, or implementation outcome. These frameworks are used to find out what makes a policy and its subsequent implementation successful, but also to eventually predict implementation success. The framework used for analysis in this paper is based on a new hybrid theory that combines top-down and bottom-up perspectives. By applying this theoretical framework to an analysis of policy implementation reporting, it can not only be used to evaluate the quality of reporting in individual cases, but also reveal to what extent the reporting process is able to address all the required elements of successful policy implementation, and thus achieve its overall goal of aiding policymakers and planners. Being able to predict what makes implementation successful helps policymakers address problems and issues through better policies and regulations, as well as to anticipate and plan for likely barriers. This paper will build on previous studies to produce recommendations for effective implementation and better decision making that will aid local authority staff.

This paper is structured as follows. Firstly, it presents a literature review of previous case study research on transport policy implementation, followed by a summary of UK local transport plans (LTPs) and the related reporting mechanisms. Section four provides an overview of policy implementation theories, divided into two parts. The first part gives a summary of top-down and bottom-up theoretical approaches and the second part identifies the critical variables of the theoretical approaches in order to develop a new hybrid theory. This is followed by an explanation of the methodology which is based on three case studies of the English cities of York, Greater Nottingham and Bristol, investigating the LTP 2001–2006 and the LTP Delivery Report for each city, specific to bus strategies. The results are presented in section six, followed by the application of a scoring system which is applied to rank the impact of the critical variables identified in the hybrid theory for the three cities. Finally, a summary of research findings is presented, followed by some concluding remarks and recommendations for policy makers and local authority staff.

2. Case study research on transport policy implementation

Many scholars across the world use case studies to address the gaps that often occur between policy decision intent and policy performance, or implementation outcome. For example, a study by [Mulley and Reedy \(2015\)](#) examined the way in which the connections between research and policy are made (or not made) between transport researchers and transport policy-makers using NSW, Australia as a case-study. This involved previous research conducted in NSW to provide quantitative and qualitative evidence on the needs of researchers, policy makers and other interested parties in NSW. It also helped to identify perceived barriers to making greater connections between the evidence base that exists and transport policy for relevant stakeholders. The study concluded with recommendations which emerged from the NSW case study as well as an exploration of the relevance of structural change, such as a government backed Strategic Research Agenda to create an effective transmission mechanism for evidence based public transport policy.

Another study was carried out by [Bray et al. \(2011\)](#) where 43 transport strategies published for the five largest cities in Australia between 1965 and 2010 were reviewed. This review consisted of observations from a survey of public servants in the policy and strategy divisions of the state and territory transport agencies. One key objective of this research was to identify from where policy lessons are learnt by using a framework by [Dolowitz and Marsh \(2000\)](#). The study found that there was little published evidence on the performance of previous strategies being critically examined.

A case study by [Olsson et al. \(2015\)](#) combines a backcasting study of urban road transport with an analysis of current policy processes in Stockholm, Sweden. The combination is used to help bridge the implementation gap between scenario-based research and actual policy implementation and thus increase the chances of research being

implemented in practice. The study identified the need for diverse fuels and vehicles and for immediate policy action. Furthermore, the policy analysis demonstrated that, given current policy structures, this is difficult to implement. The results of this study identified a mismatch between problem definitions and policy goals, which therefore suggests poor policy integration could hamper development towards a more sustainable transport system.

In the UK, a study by [Ison and Rye \(2003\)](#) analysed travel plans and road user charging with respect to a theoretical framework developed by [Gunn \(1978\)](#). The framework sets out 10 conditions, which should be satisfied if perfect implementation is to be achieved. The study analysed the model of implementation first proposed by Gunn against the empirical experience of attempts to implement travel plans and road user charging. This highlighted the most important aspects of the implementation process of both, however, the study found that Gunn's conditions do not cover all the essentials of implementation where travel plans and road use charging are concerned. This includes a need for monitoring, a policy champion, political stability, trust in terms of the parties' involved, consideration of public relations and careful timing.

Further case studies were carried out in the UK where [Marsden and May \(2006\)](#) reported the results of an investigation of the effects of institutional structure on transport policymaking in three UK cities (London, West Yorkshire, and Edinburgh) with very different current institutional arrangements and past experience. The results show that despite several attempts at local government reorganisation in the United Kingdom, there was continuing institutional barriers to the pursuit of sustainable urban transport strategies, and a particular need to develop conurbation-wide authorities, to introduce franchise-based management of public transport services and fares, and to avoid inconsistencies in the allocation of funding to larger capital schemes and to revenue-funded projects. The study did, however, conclude that experience from London suggests that a combination of the right powers and institutional structure, flexible funding, and a strong political champion can achieve significant improvements in a short period of time.

[De Gruyter et al. \(2015\)](#) carried out a case study to identify opportunities to enhance the impact of travel plans for new residential developments in Australia. A series of interviews provided insight on their perceived advantages and disadvantages, levels of involvement and stakeholder interactions, implementation challenges and potential solutions, and future expectations. The results showed general support among industry representatives for travel plans at new residential developments, but limited confidence in the ability to implement them successfully. By applying the interview findings to implementation theory, the study identified opportunities to enhance the implementation process and subsequent outcomes of travel plans at new residential developments.

Furthermore, a study was carried out by [Ariffin and Zahari \(2013\)](#) to analyse the implementation of policy and administration of urban transportation system in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. This area was chosen due to its phenomenal growth in the last two decades that affected the administration of its urban transportation system. Interviews were conducted which found practices, attitudes and beliefs of those working in the transport related field have shed some light on the relationship between agencies and the impact that these have upon transportation system in the Klang Valley. The study also found that the lack of synergy in the implementation and administration of the system has taken its toll on the efficiency and effectiveness of the system.

Finally, a study was carried out by [Tuominen and Himanen \(2007\)](#) to explore the potential of a target analysis method in acting as a link between policy objectives, targets, measures and their implementation in order to intensify the policy process. The study suggested this method can be quite useful in bringing transport policy targets closer to policy implementation by considering policy measures to meet the targets and their acceptance as a part of the target or objective analysis process. The

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