Building support for improving transport: Nine strategies & a framework

James Reynolds, PTRG, Monash University

October 10, 2023

Decisions about transport systems are often made in council chambers, ministers' offices, cabinets or party-rooms, or by voters (most of whom are drivers). Planning and engineering technical analysis, knowledge and evidence-based opinion may not necessarily drive the final outcome. This handout briefly outlines a new framework for mapping legitimacy and the implementation (or removal) and transport system improvements. This, and nine pragmatic strategies developed in a recent PhD project[1] which may help you implement projects and improve transport in the real-world of politics, NIMBYism and other non-technical challenges.

[2] emerging from case study research. Politics, NIMBYs, reluctant institutions and other non-technical issues can have much influence on transport systems. Hence, transport policy-makers, -implementers and -researchers need to pay more attention to such issues[3]. This handout briefly outlines recent research[Reynolds, 2020] responding to this call.

Why is improving transport so hard? What we might sometimes forget is that transport decisions are often made in council chambers, ministers' offices or by voters (most of whom are drivers), rather than by planners and engineers in technically-focused policy arenas. LEGITIMACY comes in many forms[4]. Engineers and planners might often be trained to find the 'best' solution, but that isn't necessarily the one that will be legitimate in the real world.

The findings described here emerged from case study research, which generated a simple, two-axis framework (Figure 1) for understanding legitimacy and implementation. The x-axis indicates the AMOUNT OF TRANSIT PRIORITY THAT IS LEGITIMATE, while the y-axis denotes the AMOUNT THAT EXISTS. The framework's underlying premise is that, in the long-term, x and y converge[5].

LEGITIMACY BEFORE IMPLEMENTATION is what is shown in Figure 1 as having occurred in Zürich. In part this was through a **A1. technical report** that built legitimacy (Figure 1, arrow 1a) for installing (1b) tram priority measures on tram route. Importantly, this technical enquiry influenced broader public debate about transport in Zürich, in a similar way to how the City of Toronto provided technical results in a manner that was understandable to (and about things that mattered to) the public during the King Street Pilot (Figure 2).

It also helped in Zürich that when they adopted a **A2. Transport**

[1] James Reynolds. *A framework and pragmatic strategies for transit priority implementation*. PhD thesis, Monash University, 2020. URL https://doi.org/10.26180/13377680.v1
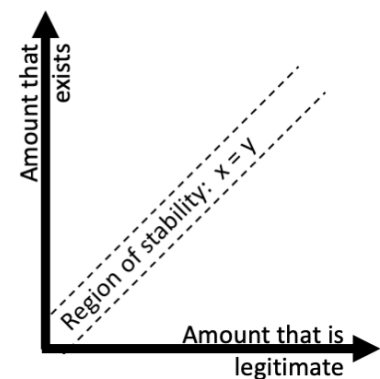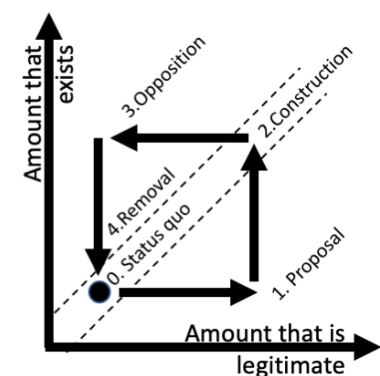
Figure 1: Legitimacy framework

Figure 2: Legitimacy framework

[2] These are: (A) legitimisation before implementation through (A1) technical enquiry, (A2) transport planning, (A3) public processes; (B) avoiding impacts through (B1) grade-separation, (B2) additional capacity or (B3) subservience; and (C) legitimisation through implementation using (C1) bottom-up and incremental implementation, (C2) pop-ups and (C3) formal trials.

[3] Greg Marsden and Louise Reardon. Questions of governance: Rethinking the study of transportation policy. *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice*, 101:238–251, 2017. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tra.2017.05.008

[4] e.g. standards and laws state what

Plan it was based on a vision for buses and trams to "travel along their lanes or tracks virtually as fast as is technically possible"[Nash and Sylvia, 2001]. Curitiba's famous Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) network was similarly led by a vision-based plan[6], for the city's transport and land-use to develop along linear 'Structural Axes'. This contrasts to the partially-removed Stud Road bus lanes here in Melbourne, for which the plan was objective-led[7]. The final pragmatic strategy for building legitimacy before implementation is **A3. Public Processes**, again perhaps best demonstrated by Zürich's Citizens' Transit Priority Initiative, which was narrowly passed in a public ballot[8]. Ballots appear rare, but the research found cases were council meetings, environmental assessment hearings and other public processes (including even court hearings) appear to have legitimised implementation.

BUT, WHY NOT SIMPLY AVOID IMPACTING those who might oppose implementation. This approach was successful for the Eglinton Crosstown LRT in Toronto, some of which is **B1. Grade-separated** so as not to impact traffic. In the context of Mayor Rob Ford's declaration that "the war on the car is over" putting the trams underground was the only way to get transit priority (even though very expensive). Similarly, the Stud Road bus lanes here in Melbourne were only removed where they had been converted from a traffic lane. Parts where they had been built as **B2. Additional Capacity** through road widening remain in place to this day. **B3. Subservient priority** similarly seeks to limit opposition by doing everything that can be done to help transit, but without impacting motorists, and is the genesis of Curibita's famous tubular bus stops and helps explains the retention of hook turns here in Clarendon Street.

LEGITIMACY THOUGH IMPLEMENTATION relates to the idea that "if they had a chance to actually see it, everyone would love it", as stated by Curitiba's Mayor, Jamie Lerner [McKibben, 2007]. With **C1. bottom-up and incremental implementation** successive small changes are made, building on initial successes (as in Curitiba). The gradual addition of tram separation kerbing in the Melbourne CBD over the last approximately 20 years provides another example. **C2. Pop-ups** and **C3. Trials** provide other ways in which people can see what changes might look like in the real-world, without having to commit to permanence first. For Jamie Lerner, it might help that he had the support of the military dictatorship ruling Brazil at the time his team converted central Curitiba into a pop-up pedestrian mall, but the guerrilla bike lanes of Seattle[Fucoloro, 2013] provide an example within democracies. At the least, as shown by Clarendon Street[Silkstone, 2005], temporary implementations can be used to
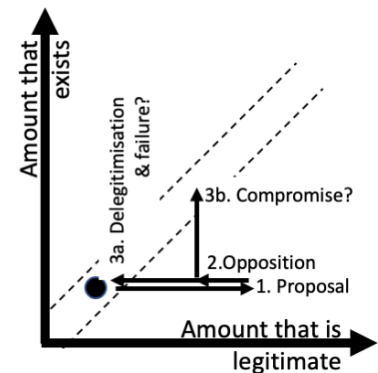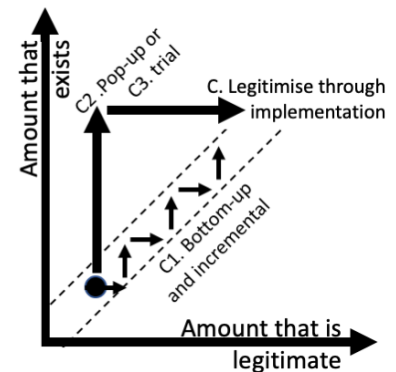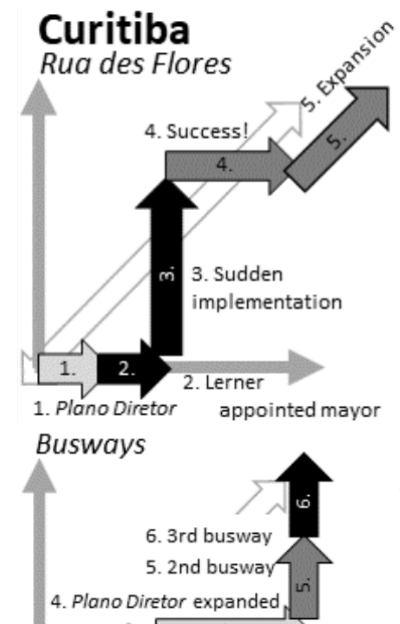
Figure 4: Legitimacy framework

Figure 5: Legitimacy framework

find out which measures actually are legitimate.

This two-page handout is not quite enough space to adequately squeeze in a 4-5 year PhD, 4 cases and an entire framework based on concepts from public policy analysis. Hopefully, though it might give you a start on some strategies for successfully improving transport systems in the real world of politics, NIMBYs and the other non-technical aspects of implementation.

References

Tom Fucoloro.   Guerrilla road safety group 'politely' installs illegal bike lane protectors on cherry street, 2013. URL `https://www.seattlebikeblog.com/2013/04/04/guerrilla-road-safety-group-politely-installs-illegal-bike-lane-protectors-on-cherry-street/`.

Greg Marsden and Louise Reardon. Questions of governance: Rethinking the study of transportation policy. *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice*, 101:238–251, 2017.   DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tra.2017.05.008.

Bill McKibben. *Hope, human and wild: true stories of living lightly on the earth*. Milkweed Editions, Minneapolis, MN, USA, 2007. ISBN 1571313001.

Andrew Nash and Ronald Sylvia. Implementation of zürich's transit priority program. Technical report, Mineta Transportation Institute, San José State University, 2001.

James Reynolds. *A framework and pragmatic strategies for transit priority implementation*. PhD thesis, Monash University, 2020. URL `https://doi.org/10.26180/13377680.v1`.

Dan Silkstone. Clarendon street tram stop trial gets the hook, 2005. URL `http://www.theage.com.au/news/National/Clarendon-Street-tram-stop-trial-gets-the-hook/2005/06/07/1118123842189.html`.