A **SUPPORTIVE** INSTITUTIONAL **COALITION:** BUILDING **SYNERGIES** WITH **RELEVANT AUTHORITIES**

CHAPTER 6. A SUPPORTIVE INSTITUTIONAL COALITION:

Institutional fragmentation and competition in large urban contexts can lead to ineffectiveness, dysfunction, and provision overlaps or lapses. Hence there is a great necessity to have planning departments that share common cycling values and funding priorities. Gaining such unity and support does not come easy. It requires continued effort, sensibility, and determination from the officials of cycling departments or proponents of a cycling programme. Amsterdam teaches us this lesson.

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6.1 Roles and responsibilities during the lifecycle of a cycling policy

Every policy process goes through various phases: planning, preparation, decision-making, implementation, evaluation and adjustment. Various parties play a role in each of the phases, each with their own expertise and vision on the objectives and appropriate approach. The complex division of responsibilities and powers does not automatically result in synergy, and cooperation is necessary to yield positive results.

Urban designers and traffic engineers are key players in the policy-making process. However, they often have contradictory views on the design of public spaces. While urban designers tend to think in terms of the aesthetics of public spaces, traffic engineers are more focused on the functional design. Contractors play a major role in the implementation phase, while other parties and fields of expertise are involved in the adjustment or maintenance phase. Each transition to a new phase brings the risk of deviations from the original plan. It is important that attention is given to feasibility in the preparatory phase and that the underlying aims of the planning phase are not lost during the implementation phase.

As plans become more concrete, they also become more detailed, and the details make a large impact on cyclists. Details such as location of signage and cycle parking may be considered, but others can often be unintentionally neglected. For example, cyclists feel every tiny bump in the road, because unlike cars, bicycles have no suspension. Road builders may need to be alerted to this fact. Cyclists are also greatly affected by the maintenance of infrastructure, where continued coordination can yield positive results. Detours are sign-posted for cars and public transport, and though the municipality may make agreements with the contractor on alternative bicycle routes, this sometimes amounts to no more than a sign indicating that cyclists should walk their bikes from this point, after which they are left to seek out a suitable detour themselves. Another example is ice control. Snow is pushed off the road as fast as possible for vehicle traffic, but the result is that the bicycle lanes on the side of the road can become impassable.

Key facts and figures on Amsterdam:

- 800,000 inhabitants; 2.2 million people live in the Amsterdam metropolitan region
- 500,000 jobs
- surface area of 219 km^2, of which one quarter is water
- compact city with the majority of services located within cycling distance
- cycling culture: bicycles are a daily means of transport for going to work, school and shopping, entertainment areas etc.
- 800,000 bicycles
- 500 km of bicycle paths
- 50% of all journeys take place by bike

EXAMPLE:
ORGANIZATION MODEL OF AMSTERDAM's BICYCLE POLICY

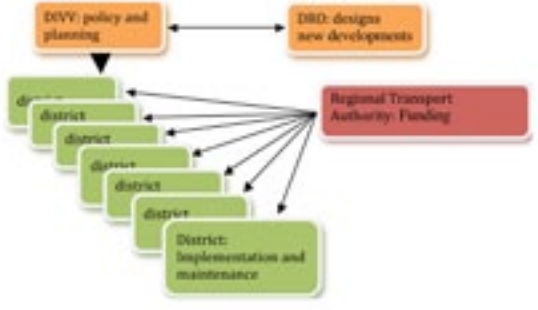
The organizational model of Amsterdam's bicycle policy is fairly complex, as shown in Figure 6.3. The central city, seven city districts and a regional transport authority each have their own responsibilities and powers.

BUILDING **SYNERGIES** WITH **RELEVANT AUTHORITIES**

The central city formulates the bicycle policy as a fully-fledged component of its general traffic and transport policy. The 'Long-term Bicycle Policy Plan' was introduced in the mid-1980's. This plan describes the policy objectives for the coming four or five years, along with the key projects that are intended to stimulate bicycle use in the city. The municipal Department of Traffic, Transport and Infrastructure (DIVV) is responsible for this plan. The policy is formulated in collaboration with the seven city districts.

The districts themselves are mainly responsible for implementing the bicycle policy. As with the central city, the bicycle policy is also part of the wider mobility policies of the city districts. The central city has officials dedicated to the specific task of developing and planning bicycle policy. Most of the city districts have placed the implementation of the bicycle policy under the control of one of their regular transport officials.

When new spatial plans are considered, the Department of Physical Planning (DRO) or its implementing bodies have primary responsibility for considering the interests of cyclists in the total design. The DIVV's role here is that of advisor and assessor.



Plans and designs for the construction and development (or redevelopment) of roads are assessed by municipal transport committees. They assess the plans for traffic safety, among others.

Because of the vulnerability of cyclists, the transport committees pay particular attention to bicycle safety. Transport committee recommendations often result in modifications that benefit bicycle traffic. The city's political elements place great importance in municipal traffic safety.

The bicycle policy is financed from the municipal budget and with funds from the Regional Transport Authority. The latter body distributes funding among 16 municipalities, of which Amsterdam is by far the largest. A small group of transport authority officials is responsible for bicycle policy. A huge chunk of the available funding (90%) and the majority of the Regional Transport Authority's available manpower are devoted to urban and regional public transport.

"It's very important that experts from different disciplines work together and cooperate in promoting cycling. Our experts on transport work closely with experts on land use planning, environment, health, education and the police."

Hans-Peter Wessels,
State Councillor of the Canton of Basel-Stadt, Switzerland

"The objective is to make the city more compact and to bring together various functions thus favouring short trips easily made on foot and by bicycle: the 'short distance city'."

Jacques Garreau,
Vice President of the Greater Nantes

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"I'm particularly proud that cycling takes a very important place on Gdansk's political agenda. Investing in more sustainable transport planning, expanding high quality cycling networks and safe routes to everyday destinations is a result-orientated strategy that pays back with a healthy, wealthy, clean and modern city, where people like to live. Thanks to the projects like Mimosa we are able to go further, to introduce travel behavior change programs that encourage people to walk and cycle. There is still a lot to be done of course, but we are definitely on the right path."

Maciej Lisicki, Deputy Mayor of Gdansk

6.2 Shared vision, early partnership and cooperation

In light of the potentially complex role and division of responsibilities of a great many parties during various policy phases, it is important that parties have a shared vision and start cooperating at an early stage.

In Amsterdam, there are plenty of examples of successful cooperation that are visible throughout the city. The municipal bicycle network now includes over 500 km of dedicated bicycle paths. When new housing developments are built, dedicated bicycle paths adjacent to busy roads are a standard feature. During recent years the municipality has placed tens of thousands of extra bicycle stands in public spaces, now numbering more than 250,000.

An important factor in successful projects is a joint vision on the importance of cycling for the area concerned. Preferably, this vision will be shared not only by the municipal officials concerned, but more importantly by the municipal and political decision-makers.

In Amsterdam the joint vision arose in the 1970's as the result of four factors:

- Resistance amongst Amsterdam's inhabitants to major changes in the old historic city for the benefit of the strongly growing car traffic at the expense of their homes;
- Preservation of the cultural-historic value of the monumental city;
- Emergence of the environmental movement which promoted the use of the bicycle instead of the car;
- A new generation of young politicians in the city council laid the basis for a new traffic and transport policy which aimed at making and keeping the city accessible, liveable, traffic safe and healthy. Cycling and using public transport were stimulated; driving a car was no longer encouraged. This policy is still in force.

"The real challenge in cities is defining how we want to use space - that is the key."

Jeanine van Pinxteren, Chair of the executive committee of the city-centre borough of the city of Amsterdam

In Amsterdam a change in thinking about the role of the bicycle in urban traffic resulted in a joint vision. In Paris, a strike of the public transport many years ago led to the discovery of the bicycle as an very useful means of transport. Other examples of the policies of bicycle friendly cities can be found in the Dutch publication 'Bicycle policies of the European principals: continuous and integral' (2009).

A shared vision and cooperation also helps secure funding. Although bicycle facilities are relatively very cheap to build, funding is still critical, and in the case of major projects, the funds almost always have to be obtained from various sources. At the same time, each party has its own system of prioritization. If all parties adhere stringently to their own procedures then it is more difficult or even impossible to get things done.

Sadly, there are examples of unsuccessful projects in Amsterdam too. Unsatisfactory designs often result when the Spatial Design and Traffic Planning departments fail to begin collaboration sufficiently early in the project. Where cooperation is what is required, parties often suffice with merely harmonizing their activities. Examples are bridges that look attractive enough, but are unsuited for cyclists because they are too steep, have the wrong surfacing or are exposed to the wind.

Sometimes, bicycle paths are well planned in a particular spatial design, but are too narrow or are constructed of the wrong materials (for example paving stones instead of asphalt) and so are uncomfortable for cyclists. Additionally, some urban designers choose the colour of bicycle paths and lanes for aesthetic quality over effectiveness.

A clearly visible distinction between the materials and elevation of bicycle and those of foot paths is sometimes rejected for aesthetic reasons, while these distinctions are what allow cyclists and pedestrians to move separately, freely and safely and without hindering each other.

The placement of bicycle stands in public spaces is sometimes hindered by aesthetic objections, resulting in chaotic bicycle parking. However, underground bicycle parks often fail to meet the needs of cyclists who only wish to park their bikes briefly. The result is sometimes an expensive but half-empty bicycle cellar. Moreover underground bicycle parks are often provided with much too steep steps or ramps.

One problem that has decreased considerably in Amsterdam has to do with the tendency to underestimate the importance of the bicycle in urban traffic. There is still a risk that the role of the bicycle will be considered too late in the processes of fund allocation, prioritization and area vision forming. The spatial dimension occupied by the bicycle relative to cars and public transport is still very small, despite the fact that Amsterdam has by now experienced its first bicycle traffic jams. An important factor in the spatial experience is the fact that the infrastructure for bicycles is less massive and spectacular than that for motorized vehicles. The opening of a new bicycle path is less likely to make the news than the opening of a new motorway or public transport route.

Of major importance is the fact that expertise in the field of bicycle transport is fairly new and limited amongst transport engineers. The bicycle has only really started getting attention in the traffic planning and traffic engineering study programmes in recent years, and due to fragmentation of the engineers' work, there remains little concentration of expertise on this subject.

6.3 Conclusion and recommendations

Many stakeholders are involved in the development of bicycle policy. Urban designers and traffic engineers are key players. In light of the complex role and division of responsibilities of a great many parties inside and outside the municipality, during various policy phases, it is important that parties start cooperating at an early stage, adopt a joint vision, and share expertise in the field of bicycle transport. Below arerecommendations to foster an effective culture of cooperation and to avoid pitfalls in order to maximize chances of bicycle policy success.

- **Get officials and politicians on their bikes.**
  As already mentioned in Chapter 1, getting officials and politicians to travel by bicycle and experience cycling in the city is an ingredient for success. This will give them a better idea of where bicycle policy needs to be improved. The strong increase in bicycle use has placed the subject much higher on the agenda of Amsterdam's politicians and policy-makers, and the media and public are also much more aware of the topic now.

- **Share statistics showing the importance of bicycle traffic.**
  Hard figures that demonstrate the advantages of bicycle transport can be of particular use in cities where cycling is not yet very popular and contribute to the bicycle being taken seriously as a means of transport. The current and potential performance of the bicycle in urban transport and the social benefits and costs of cycling can be demonstrated and compared to other modes of transport such as public transport, which is unjustly still often seen as the most sustainable form of urban transport.

- **Embed bicycle policy in all planning phases.**
  To ensure that the bicycle becomes embedded in all phases of policymaking and planning, the bicycle needs to be given permanent and systematic attention, not only by the traffic engineers, but also by urban planners, public space, school, and housing designers, the implementing bodies and the managers. Cooperation between the various disciplines, rather than only harmonization, is a prerequisite for successful bicycle policy.

- **Translate the needs of the cyclist in all planning phases.**
  The world of policy-making is a fundamentally different world to the world of policy implementation. For a successful result, it is important that all parties involved in each of the planning phases take account of the needs and wishes of cyclists.

- **Rotate responsibilities and roles by public officials.**
  One relatively simple recommendation is the rotation of responsibilities and roles in the field of bicycle policy. An official with experience in one of the seven city districts can bring expertise on implementing bicycle policy to the central city and help to improve the policy there. Likewise, staff members who switch between the roles of funding applicant and funding provider will gain a better understanding of how funding can contribute effectively to a 'higher purpose', which is usually the aim of both parties.

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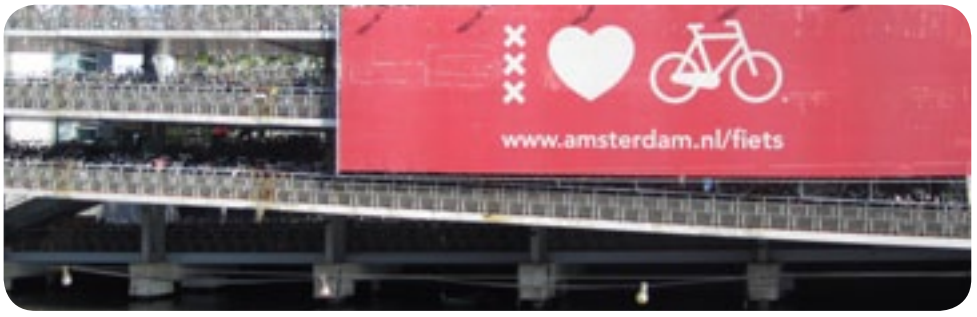

- **Involve residents and interest groups.**
  The transformation of the Dutch Cyclists' Union (Fietsersbond) from an action committee into a lobby group has had an effect that should not be underestimated. Their excellent contacts and influence with politicians have enabled them to place the bicycle much higher on the policy agenda. This applies both to improving undesirable existing situations and representing the interests of cyclists in new urban developments. Residents' committees and cyclists' interest groups are often the most knowledgeable hands-on experts on the subject. They can create a public support base for bicycle policy and the resultant measures.

- **People create synergy in institutions.**
  Institutions are important, but it is ultimately the people who work there who determine whether bicycle policy will be effectively developed and implemented. People who are focused on working together to come to good results are more effective than people who strictly adhere to their predefined role and responsibility. The synergy in an institution is predominately influenced by the people who work there.

- **Emphasize political weight behind bicycle policy.**
  Ultimately, it is the politicians who will decide whether the bicycle will be given more importance in the city. The City of Amsterdam demonstrates the achievements gained from a long-term and consistent pro-bicycle policy.

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