

Workshop 4. Criteria for successful collaboration

Tom Rye^a and Karolina Isaksson^b

^a *Transport Research Institute, Edinburgh Napier University, Scotland, UK*

^b *Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute, VTI, Division of Mobility, Actors and Planning processes and KTH, Royal Institute of Technology, Division of Urban and Regional Studies, Stockholm, Sweden*

* *TRI, Edinburgh Napier University, 10 Colinton Rd, Edinburgh, EH10 5DT, Scotland, UK t.rye@napier.ac.uk*

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1. Introduction

A client-performer or client-owner/administrator type of relationship often characterizes interaction between organizations in public transportation. However, many challenges facing public transportation require innovative solutions that do not easily emerge from such relationships. This workshop focused on voluntary collaboration between public and private organizations as a key dimension of public transport governance, seeking to explore whether it is something that can increase the capacity to manage complex planning tasks in fragmented governance arrangements. Collaborative arrangements can in some cases be a complementary approach to client-performer relationships (when allowed within the legal framework).

Collaboration between organizations with different resources and aims is often crucial in order to identify, develop and implement efficient solutions to problems that exceed traditional divisions of responsibility. It can foster trust (trusting partnerships) and joint capacity for innovation. However, precautions might be necessary to avoid corruption. It can also raise questions regarding legitimacy, transparency and accountability. Collaboration can take place in formalized partnerships or more informal networks.

The workshop addressed both positive and negative experiences of collaboration and drew some key lessons regarding collaboration as a critical dimension in the interaction between the organizations that drive the development of future transport solutions. The workshop played host to a wide range of research papers on collaboration in a wide set of circumstances and contexts, e.g. related to planning, infrastructure development and provision of public transport services in different institutional regimes. There were 17 participants in the workshop who together presented 13 papers and came from 8 countries (Canada, Chile, Brazil, Netherlands, Australia, Sweden, Denmark and the UK) and whose professional backgrounds included research, public agencies, local government, bus operators and industry groups. The workshop was deliberately structured using many small group breakout sessions which ensured lively and fruitful discussion.

1.1 Definition of collaboration

It quickly emerged in workshop discussions that the participants had no one single definition of collaboration and that it was a somewhat “fuzzy” concept. Therefore, some time was devoted to come up with a definition with which all participants felt broadly comfortable. This was as follows:

In collaboration, parties commit to working together to achieve what they cannot achieve (as well) on their own. They sign up to shared outcomes – although not necessarily to wholly shared objectives; and collaboration is normally used for “bigger things” than those that can be addressed through coordination. Coordination is working together without explicitly shared outcomes.

Several different forms of collaboration were identified by Sørensen in his paper and the group felt that these aided the definition. They are shown below. In this workshop, most papers that explored empirical examples of collaboration looked either at partnerships, or the development of mutual understanding.

	Contract	Partnership	Mutual understanding
Definition	Collaboration via contract that specifies how coordination is to take place	Collaboration via voluntary informal joint working without penalties	Collaboration via mutual understanding and common problem formulation
Key to collaboration	Contract – resort to court	Trust	Trust
Related concepts	Market Horizontal	Network Horizontal	Network Horizontal and vertical

Source: Adjusted from Hedegaard Sørensen (2017)

2. Papers presented

This section gives a brief description of the content of the papers presented. The papers are categorised to reflect their commonalities them and to help to draw these out.

2.1 Multi-agency collaboration in theory and practice – and the limits to it

Papers by Hrelja, Rye and Mullen, by Paulsson et al, and by Pettersson, Westerdahl and Hansson, all focused on the Swedish context for collaboration in public transport, looking at the nature of and limits to collaboration between regional transport authorities, municipalities and operators to ultimately deliver results that working alone each organisation would not be able to deliver as well. The first paper mentioned looked at partnerships and also brought in experience from the British as well as Swedish context, finding that partnership working had many commonalities across boundaries and regulatory regimes; its key qualities were found to be trust, a shared understanding of what the partnership was for, and a readiness to understand the point of view of the other organisation(s) involved – all of which takes time to

build. Echoes of this were also seen in the paper by Paulsson et al, who highlighted the importance of the process of collaboration, and also of building a common identity between collaborators. Pettersson, Westerdahl and Hansson's offering was important because of its dealing with the limits to what collaboration can achieve – their empirical work showed how the “voluntary enthusiasm of the participants collided with the formal requirements of planning and decision making”. Closely related to these first three papers and especially relevant to the issue of the limits to collaboration, the paper by Weeneman and Mulley used a multi-level governance framework to analyse how the distribution of agency and funding over different layers of government explain the directions in which public transport service solutions have developed over the years.

2.2 Collaboration in rail planning and operations

Several papers focused specifically on the rail industry and collaboration between the various parties within it. Sørensen's paper, as well as lending its typology of collaborations to the workshop overall, showed how institutional constraints on the optimisation of rail timetables in the Greater Copenhagen area still exist and result in timetables that are not sufficiently optimised or customer focused – in spite of the not inconsiderable collaboration mechanisms that already exist. The paper by Hultén, Alexandersson and Bondemark about the commuter rail market in Stockholm finds that new collaborations between different public sector bodies (the PTAs in the regions around Stockholm) and between public and private sector (PTAs and private rail operators) are developing as the market develops due, in this case, to increased public sector involvement in what was previously a more deregulated market. Finally, Bekius and Meijer used game concepts to analyse the nature of collaboration, and its outcomes, in two case studies in the Dutch railway industry, showing that existing showstoppers, the way in which issues are analysed by different parties involved, the administrative context and the history of previous decision-making processes are the main elements that contribute to the different outcomes of the collaboration processes.

2.3 Citizens' and stakeholders' contribution to collaboration

Two papers were very much focused on how collaboration is affected and improved by citizen and stakeholder involvement. Considering two case studies of public transport projects from Chile, Sagaris demonstrated the importance of public involvement in the planning process as a means of building trust and therefore acceptance of these projects in two different cities, Santiago de Chile and of Temuco-Padre Las Casas. She argued that, particularly in countries transitioning rapidly through stages of economic and political development, these experiences underline the need to pay more attention to both process and institutions for the sustainability of public transport projects. Reporting also on experience from an emerging economy, Pereira, Santos Senna and Lindau presented a paper focusing on a tool for analysing stakeholder linkages in public transport planning and operation. Using the case study of Porto Alegre, they identified 13 key stakeholders directly and indirectly involved in the process and a total of 59 “value flows” representing relationships between them. Identification of such linkages is, they argued, extremely important for the successful planning and delivery of an improved public transport service.

2.4 Practical examples of collaboration

Two papers from the state of Victoria in Australia described examples of collaboration in practice in the public transport industry, but also analysed these different theoretical lenses. Lowe and Wright considered the initiative taken to pilot the carriage of bikes on buses in Melbourne. The paper used stakeholder theory and agent theory to understand how the various parties involved (operators, regulatory authorities, public transport authorities and the voluntary professional association (VPA) representing the operators) worked through a series of institutional and organisational barriers in order to finally deliver the safe and approved carriage of bikes on buses.

Lowe and Huefner broadened their analysis of the role of the VPA showing how its role in the marketing and promotion activities that seek to enhance both quantity and quality of public transport ridership are a good example of collaboration in projects that achieve strategic level objectives, exemplifying how government and industry can collaborate to deliver more than they might alone. The paper argued that an open trusting partnering approach to achieve policy outcomes can create strong and positive community value in a way that collaboration based only on formal contracts may not do. Finally, Grönlund highlighted the role of the Swedish operator association in producing guidelines on contracting as a way in which such an organisation can facilitate collaboration between operators and PTAs in their contracting, in pursuit of a wider common goal, the doubling of public transport ridership in Sweden (the doubling project).

3. Key themes that emerged from papers

Altogether, the workshop presentations provided a rich palette of examples where collaboration and/or other cooperative elements were at the core. Overall, the papers gave new insights into four main themes: (1) reasons for collaboration, (2) conditions influencing how collaboration functions, (3) outcomes of collaboration and (4) limits and difficulties in collaboration. In this section, we will highlight some of the key issues that were raised in the papers and workshop discussions under each of these themes.

Main reasons for collaboration

Several of the workshop presentations focused on the question of *why* collaboration has become an important aspect of public transport policy and planning. Based on the papers presented, collaboration is largely based on relatively concrete and practical motivations. One such is related to limitations in the formal institutional setting. Several of the presentations referred to institutional reforms in western European public transport systems, which have led to a fragmented institutional context, where a range of different actors are responsible for various dimensions/parts of the public transport system – infrastructure, operations, information etc (Pettersson and Hrelja 2017; Paulsson et al 2017). Against this background, collaborative efforts are understood as a response to a situation where no actor is able to achieve desired outcomes on their own (Pettersson and Hrelja 2017). Here, there is a real need to work more closely together to avoid risks of sub-optimization, but also because it is a way to create a unity of purpose and to and set common goals among actors and organisations that are supposed to work together to accomplish comprehensive societal objectives.

Another result coming out of the conference presentations was that collaboration is a key dimension of the development of new, innovative approaches to managing and developing public transport. In their analysis of partnerships between operators and public transport authorities in Sweden and England, Hrelja, Rye and Mullen (2017) discussed how partnerships between public and private actors play an important role in managing both short term and long-term issues that otherwise tend to “fall between the cracks” or not be treated as well as they would if there is a working partnership. Empirical results from Sweden show that public transport operators, who have important knowledge of local operating and market conditions, travellers’ needs and so on, tend to share that knowledge much more with the local Passenger Transport Authority (PTA) if they work together in a partnership than they would if they just cooperate along strictly formal lines (ibid).

An important insight from the workshop was that collaboration is also important for building institutional and social capital. Sagaris (2017) emphasized the critical role of collaborative planning in the development of long term sustainable solutions for urban regions. She also explored the experiences of operationalizing collaborative processes in the development of public transport infrastructure in Chile. According to her paper, good governance and strategic planning processes must be built upon a trusting and inclusive dialogue with citizens.

At the same time, it is clear that collaboration cannot be clearly separated from the economic objectives of the actors involved. For instance, a paper that focused on collaboration in the market for local and regional trains in the greater Stockholm region found that collaboration between actors happening in this context was driven primarily by their pursuit of economic benefits (Alexandersson et al 2017). Thus, in some cases, collaboration happens just because legislation and/or contracts require it or create a situation that gives parties an incentive to collaborate.

Conditions influencing how collaboration functions

In the workshop, several examples were given of conditions that influence how collaboration functions. In general, the number of actors, the specific combination of actors (and the relationships between them), their formal mandates/responsibilities, the distribution of agency and funding conditions, their experiences of collaborating, their knowledge of each others’ aims, goals and interests, and the complexity of the issues to collaborate on, appear as key dimensions (Pettersson and Hrelja 2017, Bekius and Meijer 2017, Veeneman and Mulley 2017). According to Hedegaard Sørensen (2017) it also makes a difference if collaboration is developed in a situation with clear and strict formal arrangements, for instance when there is a contractual arrangement at place, or if the situation is less clearly defined, for instance if there are several actors who are mutually dependent but without any clear formal rules regulating how to handle this interdependence. Altogether, the workshop presentations gave many empirically grounded illustrations that showed that one important condition for collaboration is that the parties involved see a clear need for it, have incentives to give priority to it, and actually have a desire for shared outcomes (see e.g. Hrelja, Rye and Mullen 2017).

One aspect that was highlighted in the workshop was the importance of cultures, traditions and history. Two papers from South America brought up the challenges related to ambitions for building collaborative processes in situations where there are no strong institutions supporting the collaborative approach and stressed the importance of understanding the institutional conditions affecting the effectiveness of collaborative initiatives/ways of working (Sagaris 2017, Pereira, Senna and Lindau 2017). Pereira, Senna and Lindau (2017) put forward the Stakeholder Value Network method as an approach to model and advance the understanding of the relations between different actors involved in public transport development. According to their analysis, it is of key importance to go beyond the general emphasis on collaboration and further knowledge of each stakeholder involved, and to understand the role of strong and weak links between them. The paper presented by Sagaris (2017) demonstrated the importance not only of analysing the process of collaboration as such, but also the formal and institutional frameworks underpinning it. It takes time to build the trust required for collaborative processes to start to work and lead to productive outcomes in public transport planning.

One of the papers was specifically focused on identifying key qualities of collaboration, that is, qualities or features that have proven beneficial for making collaborative arrangements work. The existence of a shared understanding of the purpose and benefits of collaboration, just as having a clarity of objectives and responsibilities, roles and capacities (both within and among the organisations involved) were stressed as important factors. Joint rules and expectations should be clearly agreed on and documented. For each actor/organisation involved in a collaborative process, it is important to have an explicit delegation of power to the persons representing it so that they do not have to repeatedly go back to their own organisation for authority to act within the collaboration. It is also important that there are enough resources (time and money) for the involved actors to have a fair chance to engage in the collaborative process. In addition, it was stated as important to involve all actors/organisations from the early stage, and to make sure to raise difficult issues as early as possible, for instance who should pay for agreed plans and projects (Pettersson and Hrelja 2017). These “key qualities” echo aspects that have been discussed in literature on policy and planning before (see e.g. Hajer and Wagenaar 2003, Innes and Booher 2003). In theory, they may seem simple, but they often prove difficult to operationalise in practice. Therefore, they could be relevant to use in guidelines and other types of long term knowledge building measures for organizations who are involved in collaborative arrangements. In the end, the points are important for establishing the trust that is required for collaboration to work over time. However, it was also noted that there is no single and universal recipe for collaboration. Exactly how to develop it and make it work needs to be adjusted to the specific situation and the actors/organisations involved.

The issue of trust was being raised as a key point in several of the presentations (Hrelja, Rye and Mullen 2017, Lowe and Huefner (2017), Pereira, Senna and Lindau (2017), Pettersson and Hrelja 2017, Sagaris (2017). In practice, it is also central to learn more of other actors and organisations roles, needs and interests, and the conditions and constraints under which they operate. Against this background, it was noted in several presentations that a common language often plays an important role in collaborative processes. Linked to this, the importance of having the “right people” involved in the partnership, in the sense of individuals

who are positively committed to working to further its objectives, was raised in at least one paper.

Outcomes of collaboration

When it comes to the outcomes of collaboration, several presentations showed how collaborative processes, if they functioned well, seemed to facilitate joint decisions and the development of a strategic planning direction, even in complex and conflicting decision-making situations. A few papers also identified collaboration as a key dimension for developing and implementing projects with an innovative potential. One clear example was a case from Victoria, Australia, where a voluntary professional association working along collaborative principles implemented a trial with bikes on buses. The trial proved to be a promising way to strengthen co-modality, but it was such an "odd" initiative that it was unlikely that an actor at the state level would have been able to initiate it. Individual operators also had no opportunity to do so. It became possible because there was an actor with a brokerage function that could work collaboratively and bring other actors into a common innovation process (Lowe and Wright 2017). Similar conclusions were being made by Grönlund (2017) in the analysis of the Swedish Doubling Project, where a joint process of partner collaboration led to the development of new recommended standards for the tendering process in procured public transport.

Other papers specifically addressed learning as an outcome of collaboration. Pettersson, Westerdahl and Hansson 2017 discussed differences between more or less structured or open-ended collaborative arrangements, and how this affected the learning outcomes of each process. A few papers indicated that collaborative arrangements that lead to the creation of joint values between planning authorities and operators in the end also may lead to better services and increased satisfaction among travelers (see e.g. Hrelja, Rye and Mullen 2017). In their analysis of partnerships between government and private actors, Lowe and Huefner concluded that partnership can be an effective method not only for achieving common goals but also for contributing to greater benefits for society at large (Lowe and Huefner 2017).

Limits and difficulties in collaboration

The workshop also discussed difficult dimensions of collaboration. One such aspect, raised by Paulsson et al (2017) and Pettersson, Westerdahl and Hansson (2017), is that collaborative approaches are often characterised by a level of "uncertainty" and messiness. Sometimes, this leads to collisions with formal requirements, or problems in terms of legitimacy and accountability for the decisions and strategies that are developed through collaboration. Sometimes, too, formal frameworks do not give any legitimacy to collaborative arrangements, which of course undermines their value. A few papers also discussed the issue that collaborative processes are sometimes resource-demanding. A key point raised through these discussions was about the importance of having a clear political mandate to collaborate, and a clear idea what collaboration should "solve". Consequently, collaborative approaches should be used only when there is real need for them, that is, in situations when things cannot be managed efficiently through only formal structures.

Other difficulties that were raised at the workshop were related to situations with poor institutional arrangements, uneven power-relationships or a very uneven sense of engagement and commitment for the issue that shall be managed together. If collaboration is to work in practice, there is a need to create an awareness and somehow balance or mitigate uneven power relations and develop robust institutional arrangements. Otherwise, there is a risk that collaboration will just be kept as a buzzword without any real willingness to collaborate genuinely in practice (see e.g. Pettersson and Hrelja 2017, Sagaris 2017, Pereira, Senna and Lindau 2017).

4. Recommendations for effective collaboration

The workshop demonstrated that, within limits, collaboration between different parties in public transport can result in shared understandings and a process that ultimately can deliver certain things that the parties acting individually could not have delivered, or would have found much more difficult to deliver. Put another way, it provides capacity to manage complex tasks in fragmented institutional settings. Thus to improve public transport, the workshop concluded that collaboration was often a positive activity. This begged the question of what can be done by those involved in collaboration to make it as effective as possible. Pettersson and Hrelja (2017) looked in their paper at empirical examples of the collaboration and so they also were able to develop some recommendations on how collaboration might be made as effective as possible. These are useful and are reproduced here, although the workshop also agreed that these recommendations would be even more useful if accompanied by some explanation of how to operationalise them (see section on Further Research, below):

- Develop a shared understanding of the purpose and benefits of the collaboration.
- Ensure that parties participate early in the collaboration process, and then continue.
- Ensure clarity in objectives and responsibilities, roles and capacities (within and among organisations).
- Delegate power to the individuals representing the organisations within the collaboration process so that they can take decisions without referring back to their home organisations.
- Raise difficult issues early in the process.
- Ensure that there are sufficient resources for collaboration (which of course can be problematic if there are many collaboration processes occurring at once, or for small organisations).

In addition, a key conclusion from the workshop discussions was that to make collaborative arrangements productive, it is important to be aware of the nature of the institutional arrangements involved in the collaborative process.

5. Further research in this area

The workshop identified scope for considerable further work in this area, although participants were also interested not necessarily in completely new work *per se*, but in working alongside those who work on research topics (such as regulatory structures) that are typically more strongly represented at Thredbo to see what the two topics can learn from what the other has *already* researched. In terms of new or expanded research topic areas, participants in the workshop were interested in the following research questions and areas (and felt that long term studies of collaboration in public transport would be a means to investigate them):

- Does collaboration actually improve public transport in practice?
- What might comparative studies of collaboration in other fields such as healthcare show us about how collaboration is pursued in public transport, and how it might be improved?
- Is there a spectrum of collaboration (less to more complete), and does this affect how effective the collaboration is in delivering improvements to public transport?
- What is the role of (specific) individuals in collaboration activities?
- Work to explore the importance of and ultimately develop institutional frameworks so that collaboration is used when it really has a chance to contribute, and in a way that is productive.

6. Recommendations for Thredbo 16

A workshop on collaboration in public transport was, as far as the participants were aware, a new development for Thredbo or at least a topic that does not have a corresponding workshop at every conference. Flowing from the work presented on stakeholder and citizen involvement as a key element of collaboration in delivering new public transport strategies and projects, there was a call for a workshop on the democratization of governance, politics and power relations within public transport; and possibly also for a plenary presentations on civil society organisations and citizen participation in public transport planning (including a typical public transport user). This was felt to be essential both because, ultimately, public transport has to be user-focused; and because of the need to build trust in planning processes in public transport if the outcomes of these planning processes are ultimately to be used by the public.

More broadly, it was felt that there was a strong rationale for bringing the topic of collaboration into other workshops so that it is not “siloeed” with people only interested in that specific field. Many workshop participants felt that, for example, the Market Regimes and Bridging Funding Gap workshops could invite papers on collaboration, and that this would enrich the discussions in these sessions by bringing a different perspective, both theoretically and empirically, to the consideration of the overall workshop topics.

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