

Between the national and local level: The role of regional bodies

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Summary

ROA (Regional Organ Amsterdam) is a regional government for the municipalities in the Amsterdam region. This corporation is based on the so-called 'Kaderwet'. The municipalities have delegated some of their duties and responsibilities to the ROA. This concerns for instance regional planning and regional traffic. The regional public transport is a matter of ROA concern, so is the regional cycling.

The ROA and the several municipalities have made regional transport policy: 'Regionaal Verkeer en Vervoerplan' (RVVP). This RVVP is the basis for all activities concerning traffic and transportation in the Amsterdam region. An important part of the RVVP concerns the regional cycling policy.

The central Dutch government finances several transport activities in the Dutch regions. For this purpose they have created the 'GDU'. The GDU is a fund, to be used for infrastructural activities. The ROA is responsible for this GDU-fond for the Amsterdam region. The ROA municipalities can ask the ROA to finance their projects. These projects have to be part of the RVVP.

Projects to improve the infrastructure for cycling can also be paid by GDU-finances. These projects concerns in general the reconstruction of roads (cycle-paths), but it is also possible to finance parking facilities for cycles or projects to stimulate cycling in general.

The decision to finance those projects is made by the ROA and the municipalities. They have made agreements about the conditions those projects have to fulfil. Based on these conditions, each year a program is made and executed.

In this presentation the next subjects will be discussed:

- the position of the ROA between local and national government,
- the cycling policy in the ROA-region,
- the way the ROA gets to their cycling-program,
- the cycling-projects in the ROA-region,
- the results of the ROA cycling-policy.

1. Amsterdam Regional Consultative Body (ROA)

ROA stands for the “Amsterdam Regional Consultative Body”, comprising sixteen municipalities in the Amsterdam region. The collaboration within the ROA is based on the “Cadre Act”. Under this national legislation authorisations and resources for several sectors are delegated by government to the relevant body, which then becomes responsible for implementation of these tasks. Mainly concerned here are aspects including town and country planning, public housing, economy, traffic and transportation. Hence, to take one example, the ROA is responsible for regional public transport.

To help carry out its public transport tasks the ROA has set up a Regional Traffic and Transportation Plan (Dutch initials RVVP). This plan sets out how the region will implement its policy around traffic and transportation. This policy is designed to limit unnecessary use of private cars. In this context there is a considerable focus on travel by bicycle, as an alternative for the car. Hence, self-evidently, the ROA deliberately focuses on travel by bicycle in the region, and this is clear from the level of financial resources directed here.

2. ROA's financial role

In the first instance the municipalities in the region are responsible for implementation of the mobility policy contained in the Regional Traffic and Transportation Plan (RVVP). Hence, municipalities also carry financial responsibility in this area. However, investment – notably for infrastructure – involves high costs, often well out of reach of the financial resources of the municipalities. With this in mind the national government has created regulations enabling contributions to mobility projects at lower levels of government (provinces, regions, and municipalities). The GDU or Combined Objective Grant is particularly important for bicycle infrastructure projects.

The ROA receives a GDU from the national government, annually, up to and including the year 2002. These financial resources are dedicated to implementation of small-scale infrastructure projects. These projects must be aimed at limiting unnecessary use of private cars, and the maximum cost per project is NLG 25 million.

The ROA is responsible for ensuring that grants are devoted to the objectives for which they are meant. The municipalities can submit their applications for these grants to the ROA. In consultation with the municipalities the ROA determines which projects will eventually receive a grant, and this results in an implementation programme.

Criteria for these programmes have been determined in consultation with the municipalities, and form the basis for project prioritisation. Hence, the most effective projects are first in line for grants. Every year the ROA Regional Council determines an annual programme and an ongoing multi-year programme. This latter programme determines which projects will receive grants in the coming period.

The ROA receives an amount of some NLG 53 million a year. In principle the regions are free to decide which projects will get funding. Given their importance in the region, the ROA has decided to devote a substantial part of the GDU funding to public transport and travel by cycle. Hence, some 50% of the available GDU funding is being used for provisions for travel by bike: this represents around NLG 26 million per year.

Given the importance of the Amsterdam region and the scale of the mobility problem in the region, the ROA receives a relatively large share of GDU funding. The total amount available per year for the whole of the Netherlands is NLG 348 million, of which the ROA receives 16 percent or NLG 55 million.

3. Regional policy on travel by bicycle

3.1 General

The RVVP – which includes mobility policy for the region - is extremely important in the disbursement of funding. Projects financed from the GDU must at least match the spirit of

the RVVP. The RVVP focuses specific attention on the role of the bicycle in mobility policy. The role is further specified in a detailing of RVVP.

Regional bicycle policy has three main thrusts:

- enhancing the bicycle (path) infrastructure. In any event this means working towards establishment of a full ROA bicycle path network.
- accommodation of combined travel modes (chain mobility), whereby part of the journey is by bike and part by public transport or car.
- encouragement of ownership of, and travel by, bike.

In the first instance the ROA seeks a turnaround in the position of the bike versus the car - notably in the aspects of work, education, shopping and recreation. We seek to achieve this by offering a high-quality bicycling infrastructure, dedicated communication, traffic management, and measures from point of departure to the final destination.

Town planning measures are also important here. Travel by bike has also become more attractive in multi-modal journeys where there is an increased focus on proximity of locations for departure and destination points (bicycling distance) and by positioning of the various functions nearer together.

Bikes can play an even greater role in multi-modal journeys, before or after using public transport and cars. Our policy is designed to reinforce this position. Indeed, the ROA bicycle path network certainly matches with the junctions/termini - so that these are accessible for incoming and outgoing cyclists. Secure garaging facilities are also necessary for bicycles at these junctions and the ROA will contribute financially to their realisation.

Moreover, bicycles can also play an important role before and after car journeys ("sandwich journeys"). Hence – among other things - it is important that car-pool locations are easily accessible for cyclists. To this end, car-pool locations are included in the ROA bicycle network. With an eye to "sandwich" cycle travel, the ROA cycle path network includes direct cycling access to transfer centres (to be developed) and parking areas (which are also included in the network).

Lastly, bicycles have an important role in transportation management. Company transportation planners can pay specific attention to bicycle travel. This would include secure garaging, leasing and/or provision of company bikes, showers and changing rooms, as well as cycle maintenance at or via the company. Hence, our traffic management policy also devotes specific attention to the role and position of travel by bicycle.

3.2 The ROA bicycle paths network

We seek to enhance the competitive position of the bike versus the car. This requires a leap forward in quality. Experience shows that providing a high-quality network of bicycle paths can act as the trend breaker in the development of traffic by car – with more people cycling more often and over longer distances.

To this end we have developed a regional network of cycle paths - the ROA cycle path network. This network is not a mere collection of separate links. The ROA bicycle path network works at three levels:

- regional main routes
- regional routes
- local routes

In terms of structure the ROA bicycle path network is comparable to the national highway network for cars: the main highway network, underlying local network, and local a linkup network. At the same time, this says nothing about the number of users. Map 1 shows regional main routes and regional routes.

In principle the regional main routes mutually link-up all cores in and outside the region. The assumption here is that there is one regional main route between cores. In principle, the regional main routes meet high quality demands.

The regional routes have an inter-local function and/or are part of the municipal main network. The regional routes also act as feeders for the regional main routes. The local routes mainly have a local function, as well as acting as feeders for the regional main routes and regional routes.

The local routes are not shown on the map, but do form part of the ROA bicycle path network.

On the basis of the structure of the ROA bicycle path network, and related quality demands, an inventory is presently underway of the existing cycle-infrastructure in the region. This shows that the structure of the ROA bicycle path network is largely in place and only a few links are missing.

However, as yet, comparisons show that not all the bicycle paths meet the quality demands as set. As indicated in the Cycling Action Plan, it is mandatory for the infrastructure to meet these demands - indeed this is what will make it attractive for present and future cyclists. Hence, regional policy on travel by bike seeks to meet these quality demands in due course. It is also becoming clear that major investment will be needed to adjust the crossings.

We regard achievement of the ROA bicycle path network as a major priority. Hence, infrastructural projects should form part of the network.

4. Implementation programme

Annually, ROA drafts a programme, in close consultation with ROA municipalities, setting out bicycle projects to be implemented for that year. The essential aspect here is that the municipality has primary responsibility for “thinking up” the projects. They present these projects to the ROA which tests them against ROA bicycle action plan criteria. In principle, to be in line for financing, projects must meet these criteria.

The ROA and the municipality jointly examine which projects are and which are not in line for financing. Every year more projects are submitted than can be financed, hence choices have to be made. These choices are expressly based on criteria and the prioritisation system included in the ROA bicycle action plan.

The prioritisation system used is as follows:

1. New bicycle path links on regional main routes.
2. New bicycle path links on regional routes.
3. Real improvement of existing bicycle path links on regional main routes.
4. Real improvement of existing bicycle path links on regional routes.
5. New bike garaging facilities.
6. Real improvement in existing bike garaging facilities.
7. Other activities in the area of promoting regional bicycle travel (as included in the ROA bike action plan).
8. Bicycle infrastructure projects on local routes.

Where required, further prioritisation within these categories is based on the following qualifications:

- project's contribution to road safety.
- project's contribution to accessibility of new and existing locations.
- total existing or projected number of cyclists per kilometre on the relevant link.
- degree to which the project contributes to completion of the network (garaging at a public transport stop or car-pool location).

For construction or improvement of garaging facilities:

- the degree to which the garaging facility is part of the transportation chain (garaging at public transport stop or car pool location).
- number of registered bike thefts in the given postal code area

This potentially leads to drafting of an Implementation Programme, which is formally established by the ROA Regional Council.

5. Activities carried out and consequences

5.1 Activities

In the period since the ROA was given responsibility for distribution of GDU funding (period 1995 to 2000) we have distributed a total of NLG 225 million in GDU grants. Just over NLG 90 billion of this amount has been for bicycle-related projects – representing 40% of grants distributed.

During this period we have contributed to a total of 278 projects. These divide into construction of new bicycle paths where no such facility existed, and upgrading existing cycling provisions.

5.2 Consequences

Alongside the infrastructural results, it is also important to establish the impact of all this for cyclists. Are more people taking to the bike, and if so, does this relate to the above activities? An evaluation of the RVVP is presently underway to provide the answers. The

result of the evaluation should clearly show any increases or decreases in the number of people cycling, or the number of cycle-kilometres, or whether the bike has really taken over a part of the car's role in mobility.

As yet there are no results from this evaluation, so that no statement on the effect of the provisions can be made at this time.

6. Experiences with the regional cycle policy

After several years experience in implementing regional cycle policy, the ROA can now make an initial inventory of matters encountered on a day-to-day basis. There appear to be a number of striking aspects.

The ROA methodology, whereby municipalities can actively go ahead with projects under their own management, while they also exert influence on the degree of realisation of the project, appears to work well. Municipalities are encouraged to take up and work out projects. They also have a good insight on how these projects are to be prioritised. Hence, this enables certainty at an early stage on whether a proposed project will, or will not go ahead. Knowing at an early stage whether grant funds are available is also certainly good for project implementation.

The formula of regional corporation also prompts municipalities into joint projects: this also spurs implementation of projects that go across municipal boundaries.

The chosen approach means that municipalities have to notify which projects they intend to implement, in good time. This can be problematic as municipalities are not always accustomed or able to draft this sort of multi-year plan. This requires an adjustment to the methodology of these municipalities – which in turn takes some time.

The Implementation Programme covers several years - creating the danger that a given project could be shut down for several years. To a degree we have countered this threat by making annual adjustments. Every year, the next year's programme is fully allocated (100% of resources established) while the two succeeding years are established for respectively at 75% and 50%. This creates a degree of flexibility in implementation and puts a safety net under project delays and/or dropouts. It also enables the addition of new projects where necessary.

On occasion there may be delays to projects already adopted in the Implementation Programme. Reasons for this include the municipality reconsidering the project, or because a municipality eventually alters internal planning for projects. This requires a shift within the Implementation Programme. This is possible to a degree but leads both to additional work and to ambiguity, plus new discussions.

A further problem is that - having carried out the projects - a municipality is tardy or incomplete when it comes to "billing". The party is entitled to the funding – which is included as such in the programme, but the party occasionally "forgets" to claim this funding. The danger here is that there is a residue of unspent funds. Under the agreements with a national government concerning the GDU, these funds then revert in full to the ROA. However, the effect here is that funds have been reserved for a given project for a long period, whereby other projects - that did not come under the first prioritisation in the implementation plan - could have got underway (sooner).

Notwithstanding the aspects noted here, the methodology works so well, that the municipalities regard it as a clear improvement on the previous situation (also see below).

7. Conclusion

Prior to its decentralisation of GDU funding, the national government was in charge of distribution - a situation in which fewer municipalities applied for grants. On one hand this was due to the procedures used by the national government for distribution, which a number of municipalities regarded as non-transparent and complex. On the other hand, there was a lack of familiarity at the municipalities on the potential for securing grants. Moreover, municipalities would often not apply, on the principle that they thought they were not entitled to a grant in the first place.

With the ROA now in charge of distribution of funding, it appears that municipalities that did not apply in the past, may now well be entitled to a grant. Indeed, over the past several years, this has led to these municipalities carrying out a number of projects. Evidently, the ROA is nearer the municipalities and this enables it to remove certain barriers. At the same time, the ROA places responsibility for the projects and for applying for grants, with the municipalities. For the municipalities this is a challenge with a reward, as it often leads to a grant. This has proven to be an encouraging factor.

Very clearly, the fact that, as described here, the ROA has been able to obtain funding is one of its major binding factors. In the eyes of the municipalities it represents a certain added value. The outcome is that having established its credentials as a serious partner - the ROA can also help the municipalities in other areas.