

User inquiry as instrument for improving policies

Data collection as basis for policies: survey techniques

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Summary:

In the region of Rotterdam and in the province of South Holland in The Netherlands between 1997 and 1999 three surveys are executed: one in the region of Rotterdam (also a part of the province of South Holland; making an inventory of the quality of the most important bicycle routes) and two in other parts of the province of South Holland: an user inquiry, and an inventory executed like in the region of Rotterdam.

1. Rotterdam, inventory.

The total length of the (inter)regional through-cycle routes and regional connective routes in the region of Rotterdam, 918 kilometres, is examined in 1997 and 1998, using about 4.000 photographs (every 200 metres average). The following factors for each section of the route are examined: the attractiveness, the safety and the comfort.

2. South Holland, user inquiry.

On 25 spots, with a spreading in the whole province, 2.000 inquiry forms are given to cyclists in 1999. About 600 of these forms are returned. The results will lead to more priority for the improvement of the existing connections.

3. South Holland, inventory.

The roads managed by the province of South Holland are main roads, below the level of motorways. The total road length is about 500 kilometres. Along most of these roads bicycle facilities are available. These bicycle facilities are examined similar to the region of Rotterdam.

Introduction

The region of Rotterdam (1.2 million inhabitants, approximately 1.000 square kilometres) is a part of the province of South Holland (3.4 million inhabitants; approximately 2.800 square kilometres). Region and province are situated in the western part of Holland, about 50 kilometres south of Amsterdam.

Between 1997 and 1999 three surveys are executed: one in the region of Rotterdam (making an inventory of the quality of the most important bicycle routes - roadways, separate cycle paths, segregated cycle lanes - and criticize the parts) and two in the province of South Holland: a user inquiry, and an inventory like in the region of Rotterdam.

1. Rotterdam, inventory.

The total length of the (inter)regional through-cycle routes and regional connective routes in the region of Rotterdam is 918 kilometres. Using about 4.000 photographs (every 200 metres average), the following factors for each section of the route are examined: the attractiveness, the safety and the comfort.

At every point where a photograph is made, the bicycle route (roadway/path/lane) is criticized on 9 sensors:

- the nature of the bicycle provision,
- the general intensity of motorized traffic or the width of the cycle path/lane,
- the quality of the cycle route's surroundings,
- are there fixed or mobile obstacles (like cars),
- what is the maximum or advised speed for motorized traffic,
- do moped riders also use the cycle path (no accident statistics are used in this study),
- the surface material,
- general maintenance of the surface, and
- presence of lighting or road markings.

These sensors are compared and calibrated with well-known bad and good parts of the cycle network.

The results are: 8% is a 'missing link', 7% is 'bad', 53% is 'passable / average' (between moderate and sufficient), 24% is 'good' and 1% is 'very good'; from the last 7% is not made an inventory (no time, no money).

This inventory technique is used, because every town had its own way to fix the maintenance data; they were not comparable. The region got the mission to better the bicycle provisions, if necessary. But how can you compare the different facilities? This technique gave the answer.

The relevance for the policy is, that the bicycle network is not yet 'finished' and also is not yet 'good enough'; a lot of measures have to be taken to get a 'good' network.

The results are given to and discussed with the concerned civil servants of the about 30 boroughs and the two road managing water board districts, comprising the region of Rotterdam. A photograph can be watched easily, also a copy can easily be made. You don't need to start or take away a personal computer to watch a photograph, beside civil servants in Holland often don't have a CD-ROM player in their office-computer.

The region of Rotterdam is now stimulating these boroughs and road managing water board districts to make plans for the missing links and the 'bad' parts of the cycle network. To reach these aims, there is a possibility for a regional subsidy of 50% to 70% of the total costs. Problem: the remaining 30% to 50%, to be paid by the local government or water board district.

2. South Holland, user inquiry.

On 25 spots, with a spreading in the whole province, 2.000 inquiry forms are given to cyclists. About 600 of these forms are returned.

Some results: in general there are positive feelings on the existing cycle provisions. Good maintenance and lighting are important. About 55% judges the lighting as 'bad' and 'very bad', and 20% the traffic safety as 'bad' or 'very bad'. About 10% says they have to make often a detour; 25% sometimes. In common: 'first' make the existing network better, and 'second' make new connections.

This inventory technique is used, to get an answer of the users on the question how their experience is with the bicycle provisions in South Holland. Apart from that, since 1936 South Holland have made plans for extending the network of cycle paths, and they also are executed.

The relevance for the policy is of this user inquiry is, that in the new 'Bicycle plan South Holland 2000' and in the new 'Strategic mobility plan 2000-2015', beside the making of new connections, the improvement of the existing connections should get more priority. This will possibly lead to a survey for 'fast cycle connections' between the main towns in South Holland. After all, these towns are relative situated on 5-18 kilometres; distances which should be cycled within 15 tot 45 minutes. These distances are for sporty persons 'cycle distances' in Holland.

3. South Holland, inventory.

The roads managed by the province of South Holland are main roads, below the level of motorway. Nearly every provincial road has a bicycle path on one side (for cyclists in two directions), two sides (one direction path) or a parallel road. The total road length is about 500 kilometres. These bicycle provisions are examined similar to the region of Rotterdam. The provincial roads in the region of Rotterdam are excluded, because they are already examined in 1997/1998. Always here photographs are used to show the surrounding of the examined spot.

The results are: in general, the surface is asphalt, and in 'passable / average' to 'good' condition. However, the width of the bicycle path is not everywhere enough, in relation to the Dutch standards ('Designing new roads for the bicycle'), and the marking is fade away at and nearby crossings, and is not available at 50% of the total length. Also, at a big part of the examined roads cars have been parked between the road and the cycle path. At about 50%-60% maintenance is average, moderate or bad.

This inventory technique is used, to compare these results with the results in the region of Rotterdam. Also the same executive consultancy, 'Grontmij', is meshed.

The relevance for the policy is, that the existing bicycle provisions should be improved, based on this data.