



# A Journey Around the Public Transport Policy Cycle

An empirical study on the implementation and evaluation of national public transport policy design in different regional contexts in the Netherlands

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### Colophon

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## Preface and acknowledgements

Hereby, I proudly present you my master's thesis '*A Journey Around the Public Transport Policy Cycle: an empirical study on the implementation and evaluation of national public transport policy design in different regional contexts in the Netherlands*'. This research took place to fulfill the graduation requirements of the master's programme in Spatial Planning with the specialization 'Urban and Regional Mobility' at the Radboud University Nijmegen.

The research took place between March 2020 and July 2020 and was part of a research internship at Mobycon, a consultancy in mobility issues. I have learned a lot from both conducting my research and the internship. My involvement in projects at Mobycon gained me more experience in the spatial planning working field, something that will remain helpful for my future career. But more important, I gained a lot of knowledge on the organization of Dutch public transport due to conducting this research. And I am happy to share a great part of that knowledge with you in the form of my master's thesis.

The period of writing my thesis was mostly marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, asking for a lot of hours working from home and a different focus for collecting my data. Nevertheless, I am happy to have noticed that so many people were willing to help me graduate. Therefore, I would first like to thank all my interviewees for sharing their time, knowledge and experiences with me. You have been very flexible in conducting the alternative online interviews, although I hope we can meet in person one day. Two other persons I want to thank in particular for their great involvement, are my supervisors Sander Lenferink from Radboud University Nijmegen and Otto Cazemier from Mobycon. Both have provided me with the necessary feedback and were always available for discussion and other conversations on research and spatial planning in general and on public transport and policy in particular. Their knowledge of both research and practice as well as their critical eye has helped me a lot. Furthermore, thanks to everyone at Mobycon I collaborated with, even in this odd time of working from home in the COVID-19 pandemic, you have welcomed me with open arms. As promised, I would also like to thank Jeffrey Pot for providing me with beautiful overview maps. Last but not least, many thanks to all my friends and family that supported me throughout the somewhat lonely process of writing a thesis. You kept me motivated!

I hope you enjoy your journey along the policy cycle of Dutch public transport!

Mirjam de Bok

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## Summary

Public transport offers many benefits. It can for example offer transportation for large amounts of people, contributes to reductions in road congestion, lowers fuel emissions and improves traffic safety. Therefore, improving the performance of public transport is argued to be a promising policy strategy. The Government of the Netherlands presented this in the form of a long-term vision on public transport in February 2019. However, to reach the policy goals stated in this vision, the multi-level institutional context of Dutch public transport has to be taken into account. This has a varying, yet fundamental influence on the policy processes. The different layers in multi-level governance drive various perspectives and objectives, which poses a challenge to the coherence and consistency. Besides, policy designs develop over time, which makes it difficult to sustain a congruence between policy goals and policy instruments. An inconsistency of policy goals and instruments seems to trickle down through all levels of governance, which can endanger the effectiveness of policies and poses a challenge to achieving the intended goals. Maintaining a fit between the goals and means in policy design therefore is a key concern for policy makers.

Since public transport is largely decentralized in the Netherlands, with responsibilities with the so-called public transport authorities, it is interesting to gain insight in how such a national vision works through at the regional level of these transport authorities. And although much has been written about policy processes in the scientific literature, implementation and evaluation are oftentimes overlooked and policy processes are highly context-dependent. Therefore, this research sheds light on the specific context of Dutch public transport, by answering the main research question: *'How is Dutch national public transport policy operationalized and evaluated by decentralized public transport authorities?'*. Dutch public transport authorities were expected to have a different, yet fundamental influence on the policy process, due to different spatial and institutional characteristics (different contexts) and availability of tools. This was researched by conducting a case study research with a layered design, combining document analysis with a total of 16 interviews with participants involved with public transport. The aim was to gain more insight in policy operationalization in the multi-level context of Dutch public transport and by this contributing to the accumulation of knowledge on public transport policy.

Following from the research, it can be concluded that indeed, differences in policy operationalization and evaluation exist between the individual public transport authorities. These mainly follow from spatial dynamics and political influence, that lead to differences in the emphasis of policy goals. The institutional context particularly defines the decisiveness of the public transport authority and the amount of integration between policy formulation and operationalization – it was identified that policy goals and policy instruments necessary for their implementation are not always properly linked. Furthermore, the available policy instruments were found to be similar for all public transport authorities, although the implementation properties differ. This was especially the case for financial capability. Last, strong focus is on concession management, but this poses limited room for adjustment. As a result, finding a balance between taking control and leaving room for adjustment in policy implementation remains a challenge.

As policy processes are highly context-specific, policy design has to fit with these particular characteristics – both spatial and institutional. The goodness of fit of the national vision with policy operationalization at the regional level of responsible public transport authorities currently appears to be based on chance rather than being structurally guaranteed. A reconsideration of the available policy instruments and implementation properties for the individual public transport authorities, as well as better integration of policy formulation and policy operationalization would pose new opportunities.

## Samenvatting

Openbaar vervoer biedt veel voordelen. Zo kan het vervoer bieden aan grote hoeveelheden reizigers, leidt het tot minder verkeersopstoppingen, minder uitstoot van schadelijke stoffen en verbetert het de verkeersveiligheid. Daarom wordt het verbeteren van het openbaar vervoer als een veelbelovende beleidsstrategie gezien, welke de Nederlandse overheid in februari 2019 presenteerde in de vorm van een langetermijnvisie op het openbaar vervoer. Om de in deze visie genoemde beleidsdoelstellingen te bereiken, moet echter rekening worden gehouden met de multi-level, institutionele context van het Nederlandse openbaar vervoer. Deze heeft fundamentele invloed op de beleidsprocessen. De verschillende overheidslagen hebben diverse perspectieven en doelstellingen, welke een uitdaging vormen voor de coherentie en consistentie van beleid. Bovendien is beleid constant in ontwikkeling, waardoor het een uitdaging is om overeenstemming te bewaren tussen beleidsdoelen en beleidsinstrumenten. Een inconsistentie van doelen en instrumenten werkt door in alle overheidslagen, wat de effectiviteit van beleid in gevaar brengt en een uitdaging vormt voor het bereiken van de beoogde doelen. Het koppelen van de doelen en instrumenten is daarom een belangrijk aandachtspunt voor beleidsmakers.

Omdat openbaar vervoer in Nederland grotendeels gedecentraliseerd is, met verantwoordelijkheden bij de zogeheten ov-autoriteiten, is het interessant om inzicht te krijgen in hoe de nationale visie doorwerkt op het regionale niveau van deze ov-autoriteiten. En hoewel er in de wetenschappelijke literatuur veel is geschreven over beleidsprocessen, zijn implementatie en evaluatie vaak onderbelicht en zijn beleidsprocessen sterk contextafhankelijk. Daarom gaat dit onderzoek in op de specifieke context van het Nederlandse openbaar vervoer, door antwoord te geven op de centrale vraag: *'How is Dutch national public transport policy operationalized and evaluated by decentralized public transport authorities?'*. De verwachting was dat ov-autoriteiten een verschillende, maar fundamentele invloed hebben op beleidsprocessen, vanwege diverse ruimtelijke en institutionele kenmerken en de aanwezigheid van instrumenten. Dit is onderzocht door middel van een case study-onderzoek, waarbij documenten analyse is gecombineerd met in totaal 16 interviews met betrokkenen bij openbaar vervoerbeleid. Het doel was om meer inzicht te krijgen in beleidsoperationalisatie en -evaluatie in de multi-level context van het Nederlandse openbaar vervoer en daarmee bij te dragen aan de kennisopbouw over openbaar vervoerbeleid.

Er kan worden geconcludeerd dat er inderdaad verschillen bestaan in de operationalisatie en evaluatie van beleid tussen de afzonderlijke ov-autoriteiten. Deze komen voornamelijk voort uit de ruimtelijke dynamiek en politieke invloed, welke leiden tot verschillen in de nadruk van beleidsdoelen. De institutionele context bleek met name van invloed op de mate van integratie tussen beleidsformulering en operationalisatie – het werd duidelijk dat beleidsdoelen en beleidsinstrumenten die nodig zijn voor de uitvoering niet altijd goed met elkaar gekoppeld zijn. Daarnaast zijn de aanwezige beleidsinstrumenten voor alle ov-autoriteiten hetzelfde, maar verschillen de *implementation properties*, met name financiële capaciteit. Verder is er een sterke focus op de concessie als beleidsinstrument, welke beperkte ruimte biedt voor tussentijdse aanpassing. Hieruit blijkt de uitdaging om een balans te vinden tussen enerzijds controle en anderzijds ruimte voor aanpassing en eigen invulling.

Beleidsprocessen zijn erg context-specifiek. Daarom moet het beleidsontwerp bij de specifieke ruimtelijke en institutionele situaties passen. Hoe goed de nationale visie geoperationaliseerd en geëvalueerd wordt door de individuele ov-autoriteiten, is momenteel meer gebaseerd op toeval dan dat dit structureel gewaarborgd wordt. Een betere integratie tussen het formuleren van beleid en de operationalisatie hiervan, waarbij er rekening gehouden wordt met de *implementation properties* van de individuele ov-autoriteiten en de focus ook naar beleidsinstrumenten anders dan de concessie verschuift, kan nieuwe kansen bieden.

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## 1. Introduction

The topic of this research is introduced by outlining the context of Dutch public transport policy and challenges for policy design operationalization. This contributes to the formulation of the research aim and -questions, which are supported by the societal and scientific relevance of the research. The chapter concludes with an overview of the reading structure for the rest of the journey along the policy cycle of Dutch public transport.

### 1.1. Context

There is a growing demand for public transport together with a greater interest in making these public transport services more sustainable; in environmental, societal as well as economic terms (Johansson et al., 2017). Reason for this, is the fact that public transport can serve a lot of benefits, especially in urban areas. For instance, it offers transportation for large amounts of people, contributes to reductions in road congestion, lowers fuel emissions and improves traffic safety (Geurs et al., 2006). Public transport can hence contribute to mitigating the many negative effects that come along with increased car-use (Veeneman, 2002).

From 2014 until 2018, the use of public transport in the Netherlands increased with 11,5 percent (CROW, 2019), and is expected to increase even more (Rijksoverheid, 2019). This increasing demand for public transport contributes to challenges regarding capacity and quality for train, bus and other forms of public transport in the Netherlands (Rijksoverheid, 2019). With regard to the presented benefits of public transport, improving the performance of public transport is a promising policy strategy (Veeneman, 2002). Therefore, the Government of the Netherlands presented a long-term vision on public transport in February 2019: *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*. This long-term vision was created together with decentralized public transport authorities [PTAs], service providers and ProRail and consists of the following ambition:

*'By 2040, travel for people in the Netherlands will be fast, sustainable, safe, comfortable, reliable and affordable. To travel to work, school, leisure and social destinations, they will use their own transport, public transport or a combination. Connections will be good both within the Netherlands and with our neighbouring countries; big cities will have well-developed collective transport systems, with short travel times. Good transport links for individual users have made the Netherlands into one of the most competitive, liveable and sustainable countries in the world. Public transport is an essential component of the whole transport system which focuses on passengers and their door-to-door journeys'* (Rijksoverheid, 2019, p. 7).

This main ambition for the Dutch public transport network by 2040, is outlined by a division into three main pillars:

1. Focus on the strengths of public transport;
2. Seamless travel door-to-door;
3. Safe, sustainable and efficient public transport.

According to Banister (2005), the public transport system could serve to achieve societal goals. This can also be seen in the national vision on public transport of the Netherlands. These societal goals have been reason for the government to get involved in public transport in the past decades (Bakker et al., 2009). The outlines of the national vision, in which abstract policy goals are included, give direction to a desired future. But in order to reach these (long-term) societal goals, public transport needs to be seen as an integrated planning approach and the institutional conditions need to be taken into account (Hrelja et al., 2013).

## 1.2. Research problem statement

Currently, to determine if policy performance is successful and contributes to the intended goals, is seen as a challenge for many organizations (Kleine et al., 2019). According to van Geet et al. (2019), there is a growing abstraction of policy goals as a result of the decentralization of roles and responsibilities in planning. Resulting from this trend of decentralization, increased vertical interaction between governments at different territorial levels can be identified. This is also called multi-level governance (Faludi, 2012; Bache et al., 2016). Dutch public transport is organized in a multi-level way, and can therefore be seen as an example of multi-level governance. The arrangement of Dutch regional public transport is a formal regional responsibility, although the exact interpretation differs between regions. Bluntly, public transport providers are operating under PTAs (regional level) in the Netherlands. Currently, PTAs are mainly covered by provinces and some regional partnerships. They have their own authorizations, but remain orchestrated by the national government (national level). The layers of governance involved in Dutch public transport, have different responsibilities and drive various perspectives and objectives.

The way in which multi-level governance is organized, together with the different (territorial) levels and the way they interact, has a varying yet fundamental influence on the policy design- and implementation processes (Hooghe & Marks, 2003; Hirschhorn et al., 2020). Therefore, it is important to take into account the multi-level institutional conditions of Dutch public transport (Hrelja et al., 2013). This requires coordinated actions and integrated policies between and across the different levels (Bache et al., 2016). This can help secure consistency and synergy (Faludi, 2012). In that way, the presented ambition of *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* may be reached.

However, policy designs are not developed from scratch. They rather evolve over time, which makes it difficult to sustain a congruence between policy goals and policy instruments. This can endanger the effectiveness of policies and pose challenges to achieving the intended goals. Maintaining a fit between goals and instruments in policy design therefore is a key concern for policy makers (van Geet et al., 2019). Policy instruments are sometimes considered in absence of policy goals, and the other way around. This can lead to policy failure, as there is no good integration between the goals and instruments (Howlett, 2009). Howlett (2009) therefore argues that, for effective policy, goals and instruments have to be congruent with each other. In Dutch public transport, the additional challenge is the multi-level structure of the decentralized public transport organization. This asks for the integration of goals and instruments between different territorial levels. Goals therefore have to be coherent and the instruments consistent (Howlett, 2009). An inconsistency of policy goals and instruments seems to trickle down through all levels of governance, which may lead to unsatisfying outcomes (Majoer, 2008).

When the policy is designed, translating the policy ambitions into action is not as simple as it might seem (Howlett, 2009). There are no clear guidelines for policy operationalization (Rahman Khan & Khandaker, 2017). Besides, abstract policy goals, such as stated in the Dutch national vision on public transport, are subject to interpretation (Roa & Wong, 2012). This may lead to differences in policy operationalization by the various Dutch PTAs. To be able to determine how the PTAs operationalize the national policy design of *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* and reach the intended goals, their performance has to be monitored and evaluated (Dhingra, 2011). The long-term vision on public transport of the Netherlands is stated to be adaptive, and will therefore be actively monitored, evaluated and adjusted where necessary (Rijksoverheid, 2019). These are important aspects along the journey of the policy cycle, as monitoring and evaluation can lead to necessary policy adjustments. But it is yet unclear what monitoring and evaluation of Dutch public transport policy looks like and whether the PTAs take the same approach in monitoring and evaluation. In addition, to be able to monitor

effectively, it is important to assure that everyone is on the same track (CROW, 2019). This is in line with the statements of Howlett (2009) that policy design must be congruent, coherent and consistent. Keeping the Netherlands accessible and realizing the national ambitions of *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* therefore requires joint commitment of knowledge, expertise, policy goals and policy instruments. Insight in how different regional contexts manage policy design operationalization and evaluation in the Dutch multi-level setting hence is of importance, to be able to reach the long-term goals stated in the national vision.

### 1.3. Research aim and questions

This research concentrated mainly on the institutional angle of public transport, focusing on understanding policy operationalization in a multi-level context of Dutch public transport. In this way, the research aimed to contribute to the accumulation of knowledge on Dutch public transport policy. It shed light on how *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* is implemented at the level of the responsible, decentralized PTAs, and how they monitor and evaluate their performance. Along these lines, the research can be seen as descriptive and semi-evaluative.

The focus was on different PTAs, to be able to identify how different institutional contexts manage policy implementation, evaluation and necessary adjustment in order to achieve the intended (national) goals. This led to specific, real-world examples, which are supposed to be helpful for other PTAs. The involved PTAs were expected to have a different, yet fundamental influence on the policy process, due to different spatial and institutional characteristics (different contexts), availability of tools and normative understandings.

The research is carried out by answering the following main question: *'How is Dutch national public transport policy operationalized and evaluated by decentralized public transport authorities?'*

This main question was divided into different sub-questions, to make the central research question more feasible. Besides, the sub-questions help to define the different chapters of this research – the journey along the policy cycle of Dutch public transport. The sub-questions are as follows:

- How is Dutch public transport institutionally organized?
- What are the Dutch national public transport policy goals and how are these translated by the decentralized public transport authorities?
- What policy instruments are available for the public transport authorities to operationalize policy ambitions?
- How do the public transport authorities monitor and evaluate their policy design performance?
- How can Dutch public transport authorities adjust their policy when necessary?

The sub-questions can apply to the different territorial levels. However, the main focus of this research is on the regional PTAs that are responsible for Dutch regional public transport operationalization. Specific focus was with the chosen sub-units Vervoerregio Amsterdam (VRA) and OV-Oost. The national level was considered to a lesser extent, but provided context and a broader understanding.

The research was conducted by a multiple case-study research, in which 9 purposely selected PTAs were interviewed. These selected PTAs represent different institutional as well as spatial contexts, to be able to best cover the situation of Dutch public transport. Within the selected PTAs, two sub-units were selected that have been studied more in-depth with the help of additional interviews and document analysis. The sub-units were selected by purposive sampling, as they provided for identifying differences and similarities of policy operationalization and evaluation in different spatial and institutional contexts. The VRA is a partnership of municipalities in a largely urbanized area, while OV-

Oost is an informal merging of three provinces that take a joint responsibility in public transport operationalization. The way in which multi-level governance is organized was argued to have varying but fundamental influence on the policy process. Therefore, this was expected to be identified in this research.

#### 1.4. Scientific and societal relevance

##### 1.4.1. Societal relevance

The Dutch vision on public transport has the ambition to reach long-term societal goals. However, as the goals set in this national vision are rather abstract, it is relevant to investigate how this national vision is operationalized at lower territorial levels. Decentralized PTAs are responsible for regional public transport operationalization in the Netherlands. Their performance influences the achievement of the determined goals. According to Dhingra (2011), insight in policy design operationalization can help to recognize occurring changes and its effects. In addition, it can contribute to identify barriers and enablers for policy operationalization and evaluation. This can help to initiate a direction for needed improvements, to secure the achievement of the predetermined, abstract policy goals (Dhingra, 2011).

In addition, policy makers are interested in the optimal instrument choices for policy implementation to achieve the intended goals (Howlett, 2004). This can help to avoid inconsistency of goals and instruments, which seems to trickle down through all levels of government (Majoor, 2008). The empirical nature of this research can provide better advice to governments on the policy design process, instrument choices and alignment (Howlett, 2004). Furthermore, according to Vieira et al. (2007), the transferability of good practices of (public) transport policy implementation has to be further researched. Since this research is looking into a real-world case, good practices are expected to be identified. Other PTAs can draw lessons from this.

Altogether, it can be argued that this research contributes to insight in public transport policy processes at the regional level of PTAs. This can help to enhance the operationalization and evaluation of the Dutch national public transport vision, in order to reach the intended (societal) goals. In this way, the research is argued to be relevant for societal purposes.

##### 1.4.2. Scientific relevance

There is quite an extensive amount of scientific literature on policy design and policy analysis. However, so far, research on these topics has remained rather theoretical. Empirical research into the policy design process reveals new insights as compared to the theoretical implications (Howlett & Rayner, 2013). Policy processes are context-specific, as they are inherently shaped by contextual factors (van Geet et al., 2019). As policy design research has so far remained rather theoretical and is very context-dependent, it is relevant to apply policy design theory to a specific, real-world case: that of Dutch public transport policy. Since the institutional context is argued by van Geet et al. (2019) to play an important role in the policy design process, it is relevant to further explore the institutional context of multi-level governance in Dutch public transport. This is mainly because the way in which different (territorial) levels interact, has a fundamental influence on policy design and implementation processes (Hooghe & Marks, 2003; Hirschhorn et al., 2020). Besides, in scientific literature oriented on policy, there is a substantial focus on only one level of government (Veeneman & Mulley, 2018). As this research is taking into account the interaction between multiple levels of government, it is of added value to the scientific field.

Furthermore, although policy implementation is part of the policy cycle, it is oftentimes overlooked in policy research (Rahman Khan & Khandaker, 2017). Since this research focused on the implementation of public transport policy at the level of responsible PTAs, it contributes to empirical insights in policy

implementation. Moreover, this research also provides more insight into the evaluation of policy performance by the PTAs and adjustment of policies where necessary. In this way, another part of the policy cycle that usually does not receive much attention (Harmelink et al., 2005), is taken into account. It therefore connects well to the suggestions of van Geet et al. (2019) to focus on evaluation of policy design outcomes in future research. Hence, two somewhat neglected aspects in policy research – implementation and evaluation – are considered in this master's thesis.

The above-mentioned aspects help to broaden the empirical scope of policy research and can therefore be argued to contribute to the scientific relevance of this research.

### 1.5. Reading structure

The research (sub-)questions steer the focus of this thesis. This introductory chapter already provided for some insight on relevant scientific literature, which is further elaborated upon in chapter 2. This creates the scientific basis for the research, by presenting insights in the multi-level institutional context and travelling along the different steps of the policy cycle. The two-step case study approach in which the research was carried out, is outlined in chapter 3 on methodology. A descriptive overview and interpretative synthesis of the results is presented in chapter 4. To wrap it all up, chapter 5 offers a final conclusion together with reflections on the research in the discussion part.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Now that the background and relevance of this research are clear, this chapter presents the main scientific literature that is used. It gives insight in multi-level governance, which represents the institutional context of Dutch public transport, as well as it explains the different steps of the policy cycle. These understandings provide for the fundament to build upon further in this research. The theories are schematically displayed in a conceptual framework at the end of the chapter.

### 2.1 Institutional context

First, it is important to understand the institutional context of Dutch public transport. This can help to understand the way in which policies are designed and implemented (Hirschhorn et al., 2020). According to both DeGroff & Cargo (2009) and Howlett (2004), policy implementation is constantly affected by its institutional context. Dutch public transport is organized in a multi-level way, with different service providers operating under the power of regional PTAs. These PTAs are mostly provinces (meso-level), but in a few cases tasks are further delegated to (cooperating) municipalities (micro-level). The PTAs are in return coordinated by the national government (macro-level), the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management. Such a multi-level institutional context is further outlined below.

#### 2.1.1. Multi-level governance

Traditional, centralized governmental authority has made place for the current, ‘modern’ governance, where authority is distributed over multiple centers (Hooghe & Marks, 2003). The idea of a centralized state that governs top-down through laws, rules and regulations is replaced by new ideas of decentralized governance (Levi-Faur, 2012). As stated by Bovens et al. (2017): *‘the state as a central control body does not exist’* (p. 43). From the 1970s, national governments started to recognize the ineffectiveness of centrally determined policies for fields such as (public) transport, leading to a trend of decentralization (Salet & Thornley, 2007). It is argued that decisions are better taken on lower territorial levels and that this is more efficient in policy making, as it allows for customized design (Hooghe & Marks, 2003; John, 2011). Decentralization brings more control to a lower level, where better insight and overview are present. These are needed to make well-considered decisions (Bovens et al., 2017). It is assumed that the more complex the policy environment is, the more decentralized the institutional structure will and should be (Bovens et al., 2017). For Dutch public transport, this trend of decentralization can also be identified since the 1990s. Kerstens (1998) stated that there was a delegation of public transport responsibilities to the regional level, to be able to enhance the achievement of national objectives.

Decentralization has certainly influenced policy design and operationalization (Howlett, 2004). It generated increased vertical interactions between governments working at different territorial levels, where they are generally mutually dependent. This is also recognized as *multi-level governance* (Faludi, 2012; Bache et al., 2016). The main assumption behind multi-level governance theory is that the national government is not necessarily in control of policy making (Veeneman & Mulley, 2018). Hooghe & Marks (2003) therefore describe multi-level governance as a *‘system of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers—supranational, national, regional and local’* (p. 234). As the quote shows, the focus is generally on relations between governments at various territorial levels (Faludi, 2012). Veeneman (2016) also identified a growing cooperation between the Dutch PTAs. In this way, multi-level governance can be seen as a policy structure, where it indicates the composition of the involved (in)formal institutions (Levi-Faur, 2013). Multi-level governance can, besides vertical interaction, also imply horizontal interaction between different (sectoral) levels (Newig & Koontz, 2014).



Salet & Thornley (2007) state that in many countries, the national government nowadays is sharing power with local and/or regional government in their multi-level governance. There is especially a trend of delegation of responsibilities to intermediate levels of government, the meso-level (Piattoni, 2010). These are for example tasked with policy operationalization (Newig & Koontz, 2014), as is the case for Dutch PTAs (mostly meso-level). But even in the trend of decentralization, the national government continues to perform a steering role, albeit in cooperation with the regional and local governments (Hooghe & Marks, 2003). This is reflected in the Dutch case, as national legislation sets the formal rules for Dutch regional public transport (Veeneman, 2016). In that way, the higher territorial levels of government work through lower levels of government (Newig & Koontz, 2014).

Multi-level governance can be used as a policy strategy to regulate the arrangement of institutions and mechanisms in order to influence choices and preferences (Levi-Faur, 2013). It can be organized in different ways. For example, it can be organized around policy problems or around general topics, it can be generic or specific and it can be organized in an adaptive way or more stable (Hooghe & Marks, 2003). The multi-level governance practices that resonate in Dutch public transport, can mainly be seen as a policy structure that is based on territory (Faludi, 2012).

The way in which multi-level governance is organized, as well as the different (territorial) levels in multi-level governance and the way they interact, have a varying yet fundamental influence on policy design- and implementation processes (Hooghe & Marks, 2003; Hirschhorn et al., 2020). As stated by Bovens et al. (2017), the state itself comprises several layers of government, sectors and organizations that do not share one vision and one set of interests in advance. The scale differences that are typical for multi-level governance, thus drive different perspectives and objectives (Veeneman & Mulley, 2018). Besides, Piattoni (2010) argues that due to multi-level governance, there is no longer a clear hierarchical separation between policy-makers and policy-takers. The centralized, policy-making state that governs in a top-down manner, gave way to a distribution of tasks over the different levels. This made responsibilities more blurred and intertwined. Accordingly, continuous interaction between policy-makers and policy-takers at the various territorial levels can be identified. Multi-level governance therefore asks for a policy focus both across and between the different layers of government (Bache et al., 2016). As a result, a more networked policy-making environment has come into being (Marsden & Reardon, 2017), in which different layers of government discuss with each other and other organizations in order to achieve societal goals (Bovens et al., 2017).

## 2.2. Policy cycle

According to van Geet et al. (2019), there is a more separated development of policies resulting from multi-level governance and the decentralization of roles and responsibilities in planning. This leads to a growing abstraction of policy goals. Besides, policy choices and policy implementation at the micro- (local) and meso-level (regional) are often restricted by choices at the meta-level of abstract (national) policy ambitions, as stated by Howlett (2009). To better understand this influence of multi-level governance, it is relevant to gain insight in the policy process. This is usually illustrated by the simplified model of the policy cycle (Jann & Wegrich, 2017; see figure 1).

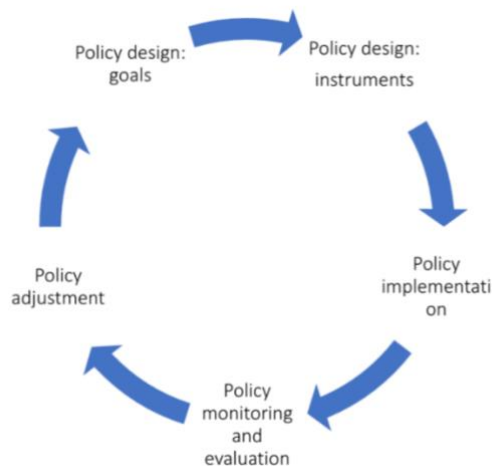


Figure 1: Policy cycle

In a perfect policy cycle, first, policies are formulated and designed. Next, these policies are implemented. Eventually, they have to be monitored and evaluated. Results of the latter may lead to necessary adjustments (Harmelink et al., 2005). In this research, the policy cycle is used to identify the important aspects and their interrelations in the Dutch public transport policy process.

### 2.2.1. Policy design

First, it is important to understand what a policy includes and how it comes about. According to Rahman Khan & Khandaker (2017), a policy entails the broad outline of future goals and indicates the means to achieve these goals. These goals can be defined as descriptions of governmental ambitions in a specific policy environment (van Geet et al., 2019), such as public transport. Governments or other public organizations have different instruments at their disposal, which they can use in various combinations throughout the policy process to help achieve these goals (van Geet et al., 2019; Howlett & Rayner, 2013; John, 2011). These policy instruments can be divided into regulatory, financial, informational and organizational (Jann & Wegrich, 2017). According to Kassim & le Galès (2010), policy instruments can be seen as a form of power, because they are used to generate specific effects.

Along these lines, we can thus differentiate between policy goals and policy instruments. These together form the policy design (Howlett, 2009), which is the first step of the policy cycle that we are travelling. In a multi-level environment like Dutch public transport, policy design is all about constrained efforts to match policy goals and policy instruments across and between different territorial levels (Bache et al., 2016; Howlett, 2009), with the aim to achieve the desired policy outcomes (Howlett & Rayner, 2013).

Howlett (2009) states that policy-makers usually work within a structure of preferred, abstract policy aims and implementation preferences. These guide and affect policy design decisions taken on meso-level. This meso-level influences the eventual policy choices at the micro-level. What is feasible and

desirable on micro-level thus is influenced by meta- and meso-level decisions on preferred and available policy instruments. This displays the multi-level structure of policy design. Policy goals and instruments exist at multiple levels of abstraction, as can be seen in table 1. Policy aims demonstrate the (often long-term) main ambitions that support policy-making. The Dutch national vision *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* contains such meta-level policy aims. Policy objectives further operationalize these policy aims, and the policy targets can be understood as more context-specific settings (Marsden & Reardon, 2017). Policy means exist on these same levels, where rather abstract implementation preferences are followed-up by more specific types of policy tools to implement the policy objectives, and the context-specific resources needed to operationalized these instruments (Marsden & Reardon, 2017). The different levels may also be identified as the strategic, tactical and operational level. Thus, policies can set out strategic lines and be rather abstract, or they can form more specific, concrete programs (Candel & Biesbroek, 2016). Usually, the higher the level of abstraction, the more subject to interpretation goals and means are (Rae & Wong, 2012).

	Higher level of abstraction		Lower level of abstraction
	Meta level	Meso level	Micro level
<b>Policy goals</b>	Policy aims	Policy objectives	Policy targets
<b>Policy means</b>	Implementation preferences	Policy tools	Policy calibrations

Table 1: Policy design levels (based on Howlett, 2009)

According to Howlett (2009), to design effective policies, the multi-level structure of policy goals and instruments as presented in table 1 has to be taken into account. Likewise, it has to be considered that these goals and instruments are not independent of each other. Policy design performance mainly depends on three important principles: goal *coherence*, instrument *consistency* and *congruence* between the goals and instruments (van Geet et al., 2019). As explained by Howlett & Rayner (2013), policy instruments have to be able to reinforce rather than undermine each other (*consistency*). Some instruments may work well together while others may not (Howlett, 2004). When instruments are consistent, they complement each other, leading to a higher effectiveness. Inconsistency of policy instruments may, on the other hand, lead to under-performance (Lieu et al., 2007). Furthermore, multiple policy goals have to be able to co-exist and be attuned to each other (*coherence*), and policy goals and instruments have to support each other (*congruence*) (Howlett & Rayner, 2013; Candel & Biesbroek, 2016).

However, policy designs are not developed from scratch. It is therefore challenging to sustain the above three design principles in policies that have evolved over time (Howlett & Rayner, 2013), such as Dutch public transport policy. Policies are often designed without actively developing supporting policy instrument mixes that can help to achieve the defined policy goals (Candel & Biesbroek, 2016). This may threaten the *congruence*. Besides, policy instruments are often considered in absence of policy goals and chosen based on *ad hoc* issues (Kassim & le Galès, 2010) and with the help of windows of opportunity (Bahn-Walkowiak & Wilts, 2017). The adequacy and attractiveness of policy instruments as a result is very much dependent of the context-specific empirical situation (Howlett, 2004). In addition to the principles of *consistency*, *coherency* and *congruence*, which focus specifically on the policy design process, Howlett et al. (2014) therefore highlight the importance of context. Policy design has to be suitable with the existing governance styles, the existing capabilities and with multi-level policy-making. This is called ‘goodness of fit’ (Howlett et al., 2014).

### 2.2.2. Policy implementation

As most policies develop over time, maintaining a fit between policy goals and means is seen a challenge and key concern for policy-makers (van Geet et al., 2019). Once policies are designed, the formulated policy goals are put into action with the help of policy instruments. This is considered the process of policy implementation (Rahman Khan & Khandaker, 2017).

Although Rahman Khan & Khandaker (2017) state that the success of a policy is positively linked to the way it is put into practice, clear guidelines on how to implement policies are generally lacking. Marsden & Reardon (2017) highlight the fact that, oftentimes, differences exist between the intent (policy design) and the actual implementation of policies. Nonetheless, there is substantial proof that wider policy-formulation processes – such as *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* – impact the specific policy outcomes and -performance (Rae & Wong, 2012). Besides, policy outcomes are strongly characterized by the actions of multiple levels of government (DeGroff & Cargo, 2009; Rahman Khan & Khandaker, 2017).

Vedung (1997) identified three important properties for policy implementation. Policy implementers namely must *comprehend* the policy design (both goals and instruments), they have to be *capable* of operationalizing it (e.g. resources) and they have to be *willing* to implement the specific policy design. As stated by Marsden & Reardon (2017), the policy therefore has to be considered in the context within which policy goals and means are applied. Thus, the ‘goodness of fit’ (Howlett et al., 2014) also strongly applies to the policy implementation process.

Following a rational model of policy implementation, as developed by Rahman Khan & Khandaker (2017), policy implementation demands, among other things, a clarification of ambitions and objectives, effective monitoring and evaluation, as well as means to help policy implementers to define the extent of their responsibilities. These aspects are argued to contribute to higher chances of successful policy operationalization. However, policy implementation is argued not to be a rational process. It rather is a complex action where continuous readjustments and compromises take place (Isaksson et al., 2017). The above-mentioned aspects therefore have to be taken into account to understand policy operationalization and its outcomes.

### 2.2.3. Monitoring and evaluation

To determine how policies are performing in terms of achieving the intended goals, monitoring and evaluation are considered important elements (Dhingra, 2011), as was also argued by Rahman Khan & Khandaker (2017). Monitoring and evaluation are part of the policy cycle, although oftentimes overlooked in policy studies (Harmelink et al., 2005). It is therefore argued that the elements of monitoring and evaluation have to be incorporated in the policy design process (van Geet et al., 2019). Before being able to identify and understand how monitoring and evaluation are integrated in Dutch public transport policy, the role of these elements in the policy cycle in general has to be further explored.

With the help of monitoring and evaluation, the effectiveness of policies can be measured (Vedung, 1997). The effectiveness of policies – also called policy performance – mainly depends on coherence, consistency and congruence of policy goals and instruments (Howlett & Rayner, 2013; van Geet et al., 2019), or on the policy implementation process itself (Rahman Khan & Khandaker, 2017). Monitoring and evaluation are generally mentioned in the same breath, and refer to the entirety of observation activities and moments of reflection and feedback to gain insight in progress, results, relevance and efficiency of policy activities (Arkesteijn et al., 2007). Nonetheless, it is important to make a distinction between the two elements.

Gaspar (2005) defines evaluation as *'the normative assessment of public policy activities, whether prospective or retrospective'* (p. 1). It is a periodic assessment of the relevance, effectiveness or efficiency of policies (Arkesteijn et al., 2007). Policy evaluation focuses on the end of the policy cycle; on policy outcomes and -performance. It provides a backward-looking assessment of these elements (Vedung, 1997). In this way, evaluation can be used to determine whether projects have delivered the intended policy goals. But evaluation can also be used to steer a project that is still underway (International Transport Forum [ITF], 2017), as is the case in the adaptive approach of Dutch public transport (Rijksoverheid, 2019).

Evaluation demands some standards, such as regular data collection (Vedung, 1997). *Monitoring* can be an effective tool for this. It can be understood as the continuous process of tracking and viewing of policy activities and project progress after policy operationalization (Arkesteijn et al., 2007; Rae & Wong, 2012). Specific indicators, qualitative and/or quantitative, provide the basis to determine this progress (Seasons, 2003). These indicators can help to evaluate whether the policy meets particular criteria (Browne & Ryan, 2011). For each goal, a combination of indicators should ideally be used to monitor. This provides for more information than the use of one single indicator (Rae & Wong, 2012). Besides, it is argued that both qualitative and quantitative assessment have to be incorporated (Browne & Ryan, 2011), as it is never just an objective evaluation of a range of accepted monitoring measures (Marsden & Reardon, 2017). Many goals for example cannot be fully reduced to the monetized terms of a cost-benefit analysis (Gaspar, 2005). Furthermore, Rae & Wong (2012) argue that monitoring indicators should be used across themes to create an integrated monitoring process.

According to Harmelink et al. (2005), monitoring and evaluation can both happen at the programme level (meso-level) where the effectiveness of a mix of policy instruments is evaluated, and at the instrument level (micro-level), where the effectiveness of a specific policy instrument is evaluated. The precise conditions of the evaluation, the resource use and the evaluation timelines are all important aspects in this process (Marsden & Reardon, 2017).

In the case of public transport, where public funding is involved, monitoring and evaluation is essential to make sure that this public funding is spent on policy operationalization with the best performance regarding the intended goals (Johansson et al., 2017). Monitoring and evaluation helps to generate insights on the basis of which judgements regarding the policy strategy can be made. Evaluation thus is of political importance, as it can help to substantiate decision-making. The common abstraction of policy goals and objectives – as was identified in 2.2.1. – is found to pose challenges for detailed descriptions for policy monitoring and evaluation (Jann & Wegrich, 2017). According to Johansson (2017), public transport policy goals seem to be less of measurable targets and more like societal goals. As such, it is more difficult to identify progress and even harder to evaluate policy performance.

#### 2.2.4. Policy adjustment

If monitoring and evaluation bring to light that the policy is inadequately contributing to achieving the intended goals – for example due to inconsistency, incoherence or incongruence of goals and instruments – policy adjustment is necessary (van Geet et al., 2019). Without policy adjustments, market failures are likely to happen (Browne & Ryan, 2011), which lead to unsatisfying results.

Policy designs usually develop over time and can be adjusted through processes of *'layering'*, *'drift'*, *'conversion'*, *'exhaustion'* and *'replacement'* (Howlett & Rayner, 2013). These processes can affect various elements of the policy cycle. In *layering*, new elements (goals and/or means) are added to the existing policy design without removing previous elements. This poses a challenge to sustain goal coherence and instrument consistency, as the added elements are often considered in absence of the existing elements. *Drift* is a process where the existing policy design is purposely maintained, while the

policy environment may change. For example, in a field with political influence, policy focus may shift every four years (in the case of the Dutch political system). As a result, the current policy design might have a different impact. The process of *conversion* uses the existing mix of instruments to serve new goals. This presents a risk of incongruence between existing instruments and new goals (Howlett & Rayner, 2013). These three processes can be used as ‘patches’ to restructure current policy elements (van Geet et al., 2019), and are therefore identified by Howlett & Rayner (2013) as ‘*policy patching*’. Furthermore, the process of *exhaustion* concerns the fading away of older design elements, while the process of *replacement* substitutes old elements for new elements. This can be seen as ‘policy packaging’, implying a large-scale substitution of a policy design (van Geet et al., 2019; Howlett & Rayner, 2013).

Governments and their policy operationalization are usually path-dependent (Howlett, 2009), which may pose challenges for policy adjustments. Policy design and -operationalization can only be adjusted within a certain ‘degree of freedom’ – working within the existing boundaries (Howlett et al., 2014). Furthermore, as was stated by Candel & Biesbroek (2016), changing existing policy instruments especially is a challenging process and the bounded rationality of one or more policy maker(s) can also lead to limitations anywhere in the policy process (Veeneman, 2002).

### 2.3. Conceptual framework

Figure 2 presents the conceptual model, which is based on theories on multi-level governance, Howlett’s policy design approach and the simplified model of the policy cycle. Different territorial layers can be found, although the focus of this research lies with the regional level of PTAs. These are responsible for Dutch regional public transport policy operationalization and evaluation.

Travelling the policy cycle, a division can be made into policy design and policy operationalization. First, policies are designed. This starts with formulating policy goals, which exist on different levels of abstraction. These policy goals should not undermine each other – they have to be *coherent*. Once the policy goals are formulated, policy instruments can be used in various combinations to help achieve these goals. Ideally, these policy instruments reinforce each other, which is considered *consistency*. For effective policy, to be able to successfully achieve the intended policy goals, the formulated policy goals and the available policy instruments have to support each other (*congruence*).

When policies are designed and implemented, policy performance has to be monitored and evaluated. This policy performance is dependent on the coherence, consistency and congruence of the policy design and on the implementation process itself. Because the Dutch national vision on public transport is adaptive, monitoring and evaluation of policy design and -implementation is important. This may lead to adjustments of policy goals and/or instruments where necessary, in order to enhance policy performance. In this way, the policy design has to be reconsidered and the policy cycle is being travelled again. It is a continuous process.

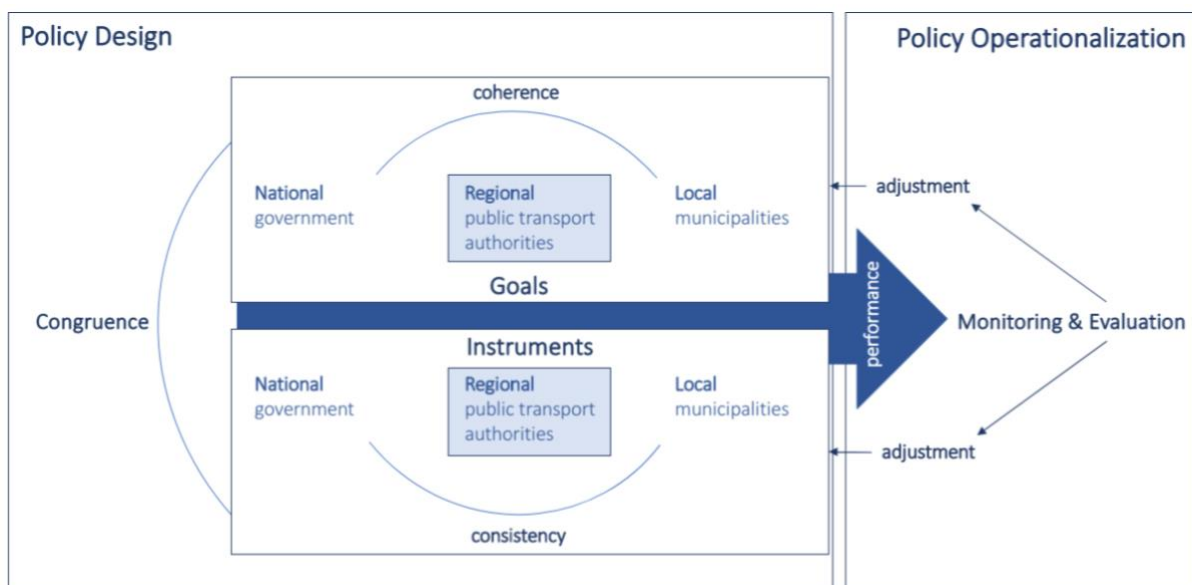


Figure 2: Conceptual model

### 3. Methodology

This chapter describes how this research was conducted and what methodological choices were made during the research. First, the case study research strategy is explained, followed by an extensive explanation of the research methods, data collection and data analysis. Section 3.3. pays attention to the reliability and validity of the research, that are important for the quality of the research. Last but not least, the ethical considerations of this case study research are taken into account.

#### 3.1. Research strategy

A case study approach was selected to investigate policy design operationalization and evaluation in a real-world context, that of Dutch public transport. A multiple case study was chosen, to discover the operationalization and evaluation of the national policy design in different decentralized situations, that of regional PTAs. These were expected to differ in their spatial characteristics, their institutional context and therefore possibly also in their perception of what is feasible, their available instruments and their normative understandings. According to Yin (2014), the use of multiple cases can help to enforce the evidence. Within the selected cases, two contrasting sub-units were selected that have been more thoroughly explored. This can also be seen as a *layered design*, as stated by van Thiel (2014), and allows for a more in-depth understanding of the selected cases (Yin, 2014).

This study focuses specifically on the operationalization of national public transport policy at the decentralized level of PTAs. It can be seen as descriptive and semi-evaluative research that has policy as a subject and can contribute to further insights that may provide for directions of improvement (van Thiel, 2014). The evaluative character of this research is also an argument for selecting the case study strategy, as was also stated by Yin (2014). The intention of the study was more focused on gaining insight into the processes of policy operationalization and evaluation in a specific real-world context than on the collection of generalizable knowledge.

Since there is quite an extensive amount of literature on multi-level governance and policy analysis already, this was used to apply to the specific case of public transport policy in the Netherlands. As such, the research can be seen as deductive of nature: it makes use of existing theories that are being researched in an empirical situation (van Thiel, 2014). Nonetheless, as it concerns a qualitative, descriptive research that aims to contribute to the accumulation of knowledge, it offers characteristics of inductive research as well (van Thiel, 2014). Inductive research is argued by van Thiel (2014) to be especially relevant when there is little knowledge about a subject – as is the case in policy implementation and evaluation, elements of the policy cycle that are oftentimes overlooked. Thus, this research contains elements of both a deductive and an inductive research approach. And although deductive and inductive research approaches can coexist, the content of the conducted interviews was based on existing literature and the research structure followed the steps of the policy cycle. The theoretical framework created the fundament of this research. Therefore, it can eventually be argued that this research is more deductive of nature.

The multiple case study research set-up allowed for comparison of public transport policy operationalization and evaluation in different decentralized settings and to better understand the reality. Therefore, following Guba & Lincoln (1994), this research can be identified as constructivist. The aim of such constructivist research in general is to understand specific situations, in this case that of the operationalization and evaluation in Dutch public transport policy. The research paradigm to a great extent influences how the research is conducted (van Thiel, 2014). Other research paradigms as introduced by Guba & Lincoln (1994) are positivism, post-positivism and critical theory. These however do not fit with this specific research on Dutch public transport policy. First, in positivism and post-positivism the main aim is to predict and control and to be able to make context-free generalizations



(Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As this research focused on the specific context of Dutch public transport policy and uses a case study approach to better understand this situation, it cannot be seen as positivist or post-positivist research. Furthermore, critical theory is primarily based on historical insights and aims to critique and transform (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Since this specific research aims to contribute to the accumulation of knowledge on public transport policy, it is argued not to belong to this research paradigm.

The constructivist paradigm this research can be placed in, has resulted in a dialectical methodology: that of semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The next section focuses on this methodology.

### 3.2. Research methods, data collection and data analysis

Data were collected with the help of document analysis and semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The document analysis forms the basis for this research, by giving insight in multi-level governance and the policy cycle in general, and on policy documents concerned with Dutch public transport more specifically. For the selected sub-units, more specific policy documents were studied. For both sub-units, their visions on public transport were studied as well as their most recent tender documents (IJssel-Vecht for OV-Oost and Zaanstreek-Waterland for VRA). The document analysis is argued to offer a stable and broad source of evidence for the case-study research (Yin, 2014).

Interviews provide for more insightful and targeted evidence (Yin, 2014), and therefore form the additional source of evidence for this research. The selected interviewees for this research (see table 2) are all involved in public transport and are therefore well-informed on this topic.

	Name	Function	Organization	Date	
1.	Jan van Selm	Director	DOVA	26-03-2020	Phase 1
2.	##	Senior policy employee	Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management	07-04-2020	
3.	Erik van Rijn	Senior policy officer mobility	Vervoerregio Amsterdam	21-04-2020	
4.	Kees van der Zwart	Policy advisor	Province Noord-Holland	17-04-2020	
5.	Marco Berloth	Policy developer public transport	Province Overijssel	31-03-2020	
6.	Ben Fisser	Senior policy advisor mobility	Province Zuid-Holland	23-04-2020	
7.	##	Senior policy advisor public transport	Province Flevoland	15-04-2020	
8.	Sjoerd Veenstra	Region coordinator mobility	Province Gelderland	31-03-2020	
9.	Arwina de Boer	Program manager renewal public transport	Province Noord-Brabant	01-04-2020	
10.	##	Project manager	Province Fryslan	26-03-2020	
11.	Alice van Unen	Coordinator public transport	Province Fryslan	26-03-2020	
12.	Erwin Stoker	Team leader public transport development	OV-bureau Groningen-Drenthe	22-04-2020	
13.	Antoine Uijtewaal	Implementation manager	OV-Oost	25-05-2020	Phase 2
14.	Machiel Kouwenberg	Policy advisor mobility research	Vervoerregio Amsterdam	26-05-2020	
15.	##	##	Keolis	19-05-2020	
16.	Guy Hermans	Senior program manager	CROW	08-06-2020	

Table 2: List of interviewees (## means that the interviewee wants to remain anonymous on this aspect)

As all interviewees were purposely chosen, the selection can be seen as non-probability sampling (van Thiel, 2014). The participants are concerned with public transport either on a general level (DOVA/CROW), at the national level (national government), the regional level (PTAs) or in implementation (service provider). As explained, this research can be characterized by its *layered*

*design*, in which two phases of data collection took place. The first phase (March and April 2020) consisted of mainly exploratory interviews that provided for broader, contextual information, while the second phase (May and June 2020) allowed for more specific, in-depth insights on the selected sub-units OV-Oost and VRA as well as the perspective of a service provider. Multiple interviews were needed to gain a thorough understanding of public transport policy operationalization, evaluation, and various perceptions in the different regional contexts. Figure 3 provides a schematic overview of the data collection process.

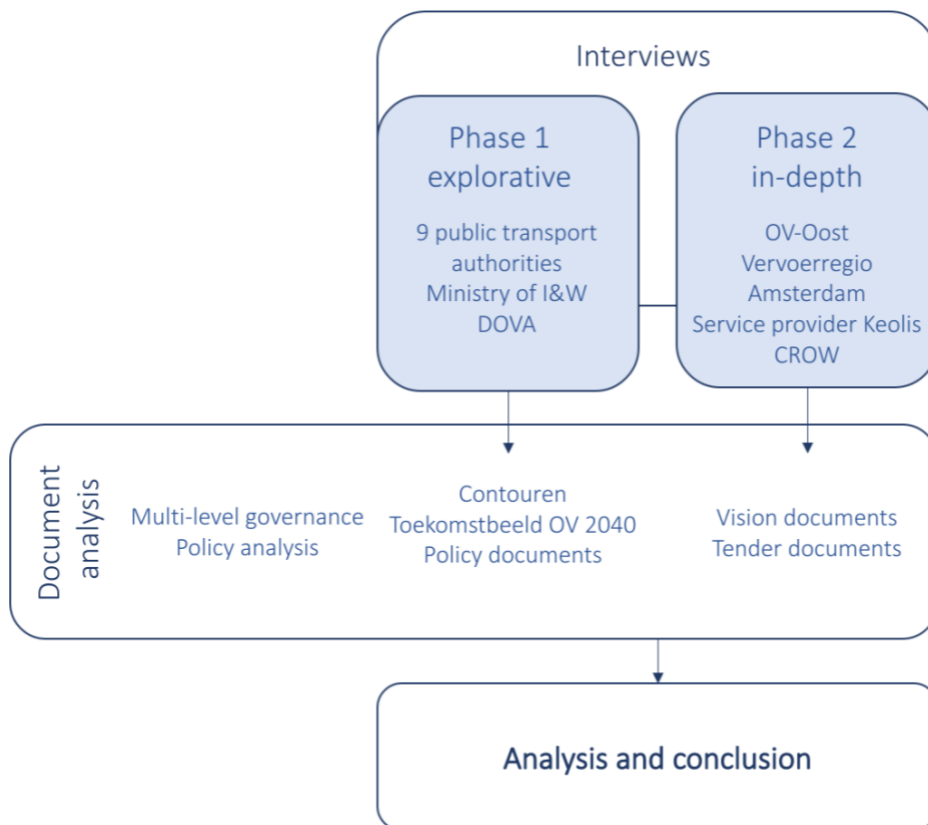


Figure 3: Schematic overview of data collection

The concepts of the policy cycle – that have been introduced in the theoretical framework – guided the focus of the interviews. As these concepts are generally well-known for people involved in policy making and policy implementation and evaluation, there was no need to further operationalize these concepts. Possible uncertainties were further explained during the interview. The semi-structured interview guides can be found in the appendix (7.2). They followed the rational structure of the policy cycle, from policy design to policy operationalization and policy evaluation. In some situations, additional information was gathered afterwards via e-mail or via a supplementary interview. All of the conducted interviews took around 45-60 minutes.

### 3.2.1. Data collection phase 1

As a starting point, an explorative interview with the director of DOVA was conducted. DOVA is a partnership of decentralized PTAs, that are working together on improvements in public transport. Besides, it is closely involved with the development and implementation of the national vision on public transport. The organization is concerned with public transport in a coordinative way on a general level. This interview provided for a broader understanding of Dutch public transport and its policy operationalization, as well as a more objective view. At a later stage, the same participant was interviewed for additional information.

Furthermore, an interview was conducted with an employee working for the national government. The national government initiated the establishment of the national vision on public transport, *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*. This was created under the direction of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management. The Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management is the responsible ministry for policy, implementation and inspection of, amongst others, the public transport system. They have a coordinating role for the regional public transport as well as an executive role for national public transport. The interview with the employee of the national government intended to offer greater understanding of the rationale behind the creation of the national vision, as well as a broader understanding of the general, abstract policy aims and implementation preferences (Howlett, 2009). The interviewee however was only involved in the establishment of the national vision for a small extent. Since the wish was to gain a broader understanding and the real focus of the research lies with the PTAs, this was considered sufficient.

Along with this, interviews were conducted with a selection of 9 PTAs (see table 3) that steer the focus of this research. They are responsible for Dutch regional public transport policy operationalization and evaluation. Due to the large amount of PTAs (a total of 14) and the amount of time for the research, not all Dutch regional PTAs were involved in the research. Nonetheless, sufficient different spatial and institutional contexts were covered by the selected 9 authorities. Metropolitan as well as rural areas were included, and ‘regular’ provincial PTAs as well as ‘special’ constructions of (in)formal cooperation and further decentralization could be identified within these selected PTAs. The institutional contexts of the selected PTAs are further outlined in chapter 4.1 on the context of Dutch public transport, as this research focuses to a great extent on the institutional angle of Dutch regional public transport.

1.	Vervoerregio Amsterdam
2.	Province Zuid-Holland
3.	Province Noord-Holland
4.	Province Overijssel
5.	Province Flevoland
6.	Province Gelderland
7.	OV-bureau Groningen-Drenthe
8.	Province Noord-Brabant
9.	Province Fryslân

Table 3: Selected public transport authorities

The interviews with the PTAs provided for more insight in policy design and policy operationalization in various regional contexts, and how the different authorities monitor and evaluate their policy. The interviews provided for broader contextual information and understanding on the Dutch public transport policy cycle as well as insight in the selection of the sub-units. The interviews with these sub-units offered concrete examples of a real-world context and hereby increasing empirical knowledge.

### 3.2.2. Data collection phase 2

After conducting interviews in data collection phase 1, the public transport authorities of OV-Oost and VRA (see figure 4) were selected for further in-depth research. Within these selected sub-units, additional interviews were conducted with an implementation manager of OV-Oost, as well as a policy advisor of VRA. Furthermore, an employee of the service provider Keolis was included in the data collection process. This provided a different perspective and more insight in differences and similarities of policy operationalization in various regional contexts. Last, an interview with an employee of CROW was conducted, focusing specifically on monitoring and evaluation of *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*.

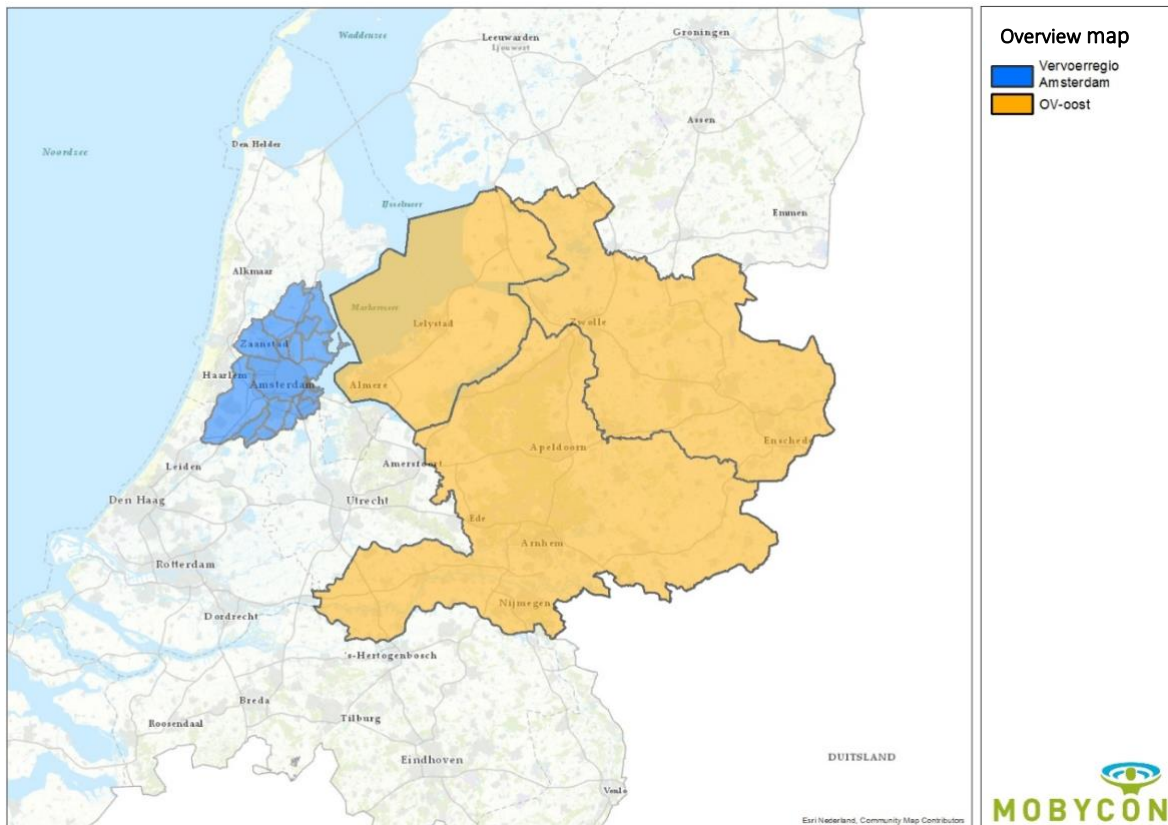


Figure 4: Geographical location of sub-units

The sub-units were selected by purposive sampling, as they were expected to provide for a greater knowledge on policy operationalization and evaluation in two different (spatial and institutional) contexts. First, these sub-units were selected as they offer a clear example of multi-level governance. The PTAs of Overijssel, Flevoland and Gelderland are carrying out tasks together as a (informal) PTA (OV-Oost) on the provincial, regional level. In contrast, public transport responsibilities are further delegated to cooperating municipalities (local level) in the case of VRA. Furthermore, OV-Oost is covering a large geographical area, while VRA covers a smaller, but largely urbanized area (see figure 4) – in this way highlighting different regional dynamics. The sub-units thus were selected as they offer insight in how public transport operationalization is managed in two different contexts. They present meso- and micro-level cooperating institutions as well as a metropolitan and non-metropolitan area. This offered the possibility to identify differences and similarities in their policy operationalization of *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*. More information on the context of the sub-units can be found in chapter 4.1.

Furthermore, service provider Keolis was selected as interviewee, since this organization is to a great extent involved in regional public transport policy operationalization and -evaluation. Besides, Keolis was granted the concession IJssel-Vecht, which is a part of OV-Oost (see figure 5). In its capacity as service provider, it was expected that Keolis could offer a different perspective and insights in how different PTAs manage national policy operationalization. Therefore, the focus of the interview with Keolis was mainly on recognizing differences and similarities.

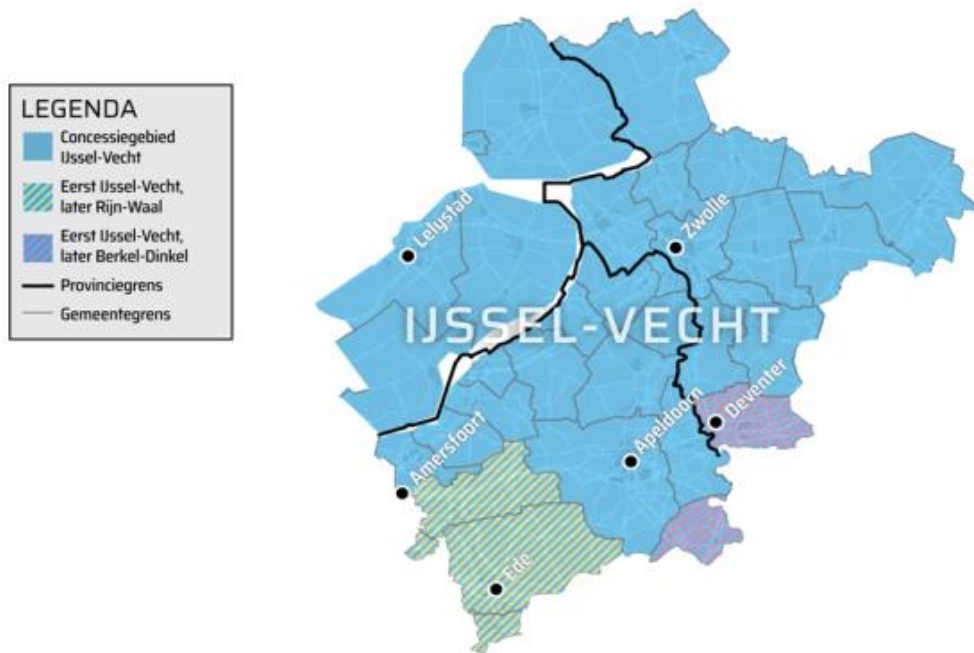


Figure 5: Public transport concession IJssel-Vecht (OV-Oost, 2019)

Data collection phase 2 was concluded by an interview with a senior program manager at CROW – a Dutch knowledge institute on, amongst others, public transport. In that role, the interviewee is engaged in the monitoring and evaluation of *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*. Therefore, this interview offered more information on monitoring and evaluation by the PTAs in general, and more specific on *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*.

### 3.2.3. Data analysis

After conducting the interviews, their recordings were literally transcribed and coded to offer the possibility for a qualitative data analysis. The identified codes were based either on the spatial context, the institutional context or on the concepts of the policy cycle (policy goals, policy instruments, policy operationalization, policy monitoring and evaluation, policy adjustment), that have been discussed in chapter 2. Furthermore, while coding, specific attention was paid to link differences and similarities. The coding scheme that guided the data analysis process of coding, can be found in table 4. This was executed with the help of Excel sheets because, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not possible to make use of a computer with an official coding programme such as ATLAS-ti. Some of the data could be classified by multiple codes (mainly for policy instruments and policy implementation), which created some overlap in these codes. This displays their strong interrelation.

The research was concluded by offering a broad description and interpretative synthesis of the insights that followed from conducting the document analysis and interviews with the participants involved with Dutch public transport.

Code category	Code category details and subcodes	Examples
Spatial context	Descriptions regarding the spatial setting of the situation	<i>'We are a rural province with a countryside where fewer people live, but where it is important that a form of public transport remains'</i> – project manager Fryslan (personal communication, 26-03-2020)
Institutional context	Multi-level governance; different levels; decentralization; roles and responsibilities; cooperation	<i>'That is why public transport is decentralized, these local parties who know exactly what works best or what is needed at that scale level'</i> – senior policy employee national government (personal communication, 07-04-2020)
Policy goals	Norms; values; ambitions; national goals; regional goals; objectives; coherence; levels of abstraction	<i>'And at the same time, we have all kinds of goals and ambitions ourselves. We have a mobility policy framework, which is our central policy document'</i> – van Rijn (personal communication, 21-04-2020)
Policy instruments	Financial instruments; regulatory instruments; informational instruments; organizational instruments; consistency	<i>'Well, the most important instrument when it comes to (bus) public transport is the tender. Since you are involved in that tender, you can bring your goals in the market'</i> – senior policy advisor Flevoland (personal communication, 15-04-2020)
Policy implementation	Quotes regarding the implementation of policy; practice; capability; comprehend; willingness; congruence	<i>'I am implementing that vision, and that will mainly take place in future concessions and contracts'</i> – de Boer (personal communication, 01-04-2020)
Policy adjustment	New elements; capacity to adjust; improvements; changed policy goals; changed policy instruments; layering; drift; conversion; exhaustion; replacement; degree of freedom	<i>'Symbolically, at the front of our tender documents was a very large F, from flexibility. And in theory we have the option to adjust 10% per year'</i> – Stoker (personal communication, 22-04-2020)
Policy monitoring and evaluation	Monitoring; evaluation; monitoring indicators	<i>'We do have constant monitoring, the core performance indicators [...] that is mainly for functional management'</i> – Berloth (personal communication, 31-03-2020)

Table 4: Coding scheme

### 3.3. Validity and reliability

After having explained the research strategy, methods, data collection and analysis, it is important to consider the research validity and reliability. These elements contribute to the quality of the research (Yin, 2014). Validity and reliability are closely related, but apply to different elements of the research (van Thiel, 2014).

First, reliability is about the accuracy and consistency of the research. In the case of a descriptive study like this research, reliability means that no or little distortion occurred (van Thiel, 2014). As this research was executed by one researcher, there was limited variation in the interpretation of the results. Besides, all of the interviews were transcribed literally, contributing to its accuracy. In this way, the reliability of the research was secured.

Validity focuses on whether the research measures what it is intended to measure, and consists of internal validity and external validity (van Thiel, 2014). Discussion with others about choices in the operationalization of the research contributes to constructing validity (van Thiel, 2014), and has therefore happened regularly with both supervisors. Besides, a session with one supervisor and two employees of Mobycon was organized to test and discuss the preliminary results. Validity can furthermore be constructed by using multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2014), which is also called triangulation. As this research gathered data in various ways, a combination of multiple interviews and document analysis, it offers a high amount of information. According to van Thiel (2014), this helps to enhance the reliability of the research.

Generalizing qualitative findings is more difficult than generalizing quantitative findings, and therefore achieving external validity is a greater challenge for case-study research (van Thiel, 2014). Nonetheless, the use of theory resulting from the document analysis helps to offer possibilities for analytic generalizations (Yin, 2014) and thereby contributing to the external validity. Furthermore, according to van Thiel (2014), the '*layered design*' of this research, in which two sub-units were distinguished within the cases, can likewise improve both reliability and validity.

Further reliability and validity can be enhanced by reproducing the research (van Thiel, 2014). As the research contains a lot of qualitative data and the researcher has an important role in collecting this data, an exact replication of the research is unfeasible. Nonetheless, the research strategy and research design can be followed for a great part, as they have been described in a way available for reproduction. This can offer related or additional results that can help enhancing the reliability and validity of the research. The aspect of replication is not feasible within the scope of this master's thesis, but offers a good opportunity for future research.

### 3.4. Ethical considerations

Every scientific research involves a code of conduct for the researcher, the researcher has to follow certain research ethics (van Thiel, 2014). As this research followed a constructivist paradigm, ethics is considered intrinsic to it (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Since the research involved participants (the interviewees), it is even more crucial to consider these ethical aspects. Van Thiel (2014) listed five ethical rules for doing scientific research, which are used to discuss the ethical considerations of this research.

First, it is important to protect the *privacy* and *confidentiality* of the participants, to make sure that they are not put in unwanted situations (Yin, 2014). Therefore, it is important to come to a transparent agreement with the 'sponsor' (the internship company) and the participants on how the information that is being gathered will be used (van Thiel, 2014). It was decided that the research can be shared, but that interview transcripts and recordings remain private and are only accessible for the researcher and the supervisors. This information about privacy and confidentiality was shared with the

participants in the form of a privacy contract, which they had to sign before taking part in the research (see appendix 7.1).

Furthermore, the interviewees have the right to refuse to participate or to hold back information (van Thiel, 2014) and it is the responsibility of the researcher to respect such decisions and inform the participants about these rights. Besides, the participants have to be alerted to the nature of the case study and give permission for conducting the interviews (van Thiel, 2014; Yin, 2014), which contributes to *informed consent*. Therefore, the interview sessions were introduced by informing the interviewees on the research aim and their rights as participants. Permission also had to be requested for recording the interview and to use the full names of the participants in the master's thesis. Participants were given the possibility to share only their function, or even remain fully anonymous. These aspects were also addressed in the above-mentioned privacy contract. In a few situations, due to the situation around the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants did not manage to sign the privacy contract. In these cases, their approval was obtained orally or by email. Furthermore, participants were given the possibility to adapt or supplement the interview transcripts.

Since attention was paid to introducing the research and its aim, the participants were well informed and chances of a misleading research were limited. This contributes to another aspect in the light of ethics, that of *veracity*. This means that a research should never be misleading (van Thiel, 2014). Last, the research aim has to be positive and should not intend to do harm. Van Thiel (2014) describes this as *beneficence*. As the main aim of this research is to gain more insight and thus contributing to the acquisition of knowledge, it can be seen as a positive intention that is not intended to do harm.



## 4. Results

This chapter describes the results following from desk research of specific Dutch regional public transport related documents and the conducted interviews with public transport professionals. These are interpreted and linked to the theoretical body of chapter 2.

The central research question explored in this research was: *'How is Dutch national public transport policy operationalized and evaluated by decentralized public transport authorities?'*

To be able to answer this question, first, the decentralized, multi-level context of Dutch public transport and the institutional context of the regional PTAs involved in this research are outlined. Subsequently, the different steps of the policy cycle are characterized for the specific case of Dutch public transport. For each section, more generic results are presented first, followed by specific attention to the selected sub-units of OV-Oost and VRA. Last, an interpretative synthesis of the collected data is given. Some concepts or names (for example of the PTAs) are best covered in Dutch. For these, an English explanation or translation is given. Specific, real-world examples that help provide more insight, are given in separate boxes throughout the chapter.

### 4.1. Context of Dutch public transport

Dutch public transport is regulated in the Wet personenvervoer 2000 (passenger transport act) [Wp2000], the Besluit personenvervoer (passenger transport decree) and their underlying regulations (CROW, 2019). Art. 1.1. of the Wp2000 describes public transport as: *'passenger transport that is open to everyone according to a timetable with a car, bus, train, metro, tram or a vehicle driven by a guidance system'*. This definition of public transport is followed by the official parties involved in the organization of public transport. This for example became evident from the interview with Veenstra (personal communication, 31-03-2020). One of the main changes that came with the Wp2000, was the decentralization of regional public transport planning (Hirschhorn, 2020). Currently, most public transport in the Netherlands is carried out on behalf of a decentralized government that fulfills the role of a public transport authority [PTA]. Only the national railway remains the formal responsibility of the national government (Hirschhorn, 2020). See figure 6 for the division of the formal PTAs. These guide the focus of this research.

Dutch public transport is arranged by tendering out concessions, which was also introduced with the Wp2000. These concessions provide for the right to carry out public transport in a certain area or for one certain public transport line (CROW, 2019). These concessions have a maximum time span (Veeneman, 2016). The national government awards the concession for the main rail network, while the regional PTAs do this for the regional train network and other urban and regional transport, such as bus and tram (Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management, 2010). Chapter 4.3 further elaborates on these concessions, since they are considered an important policy instrument, as was identified by the conducted interviews.

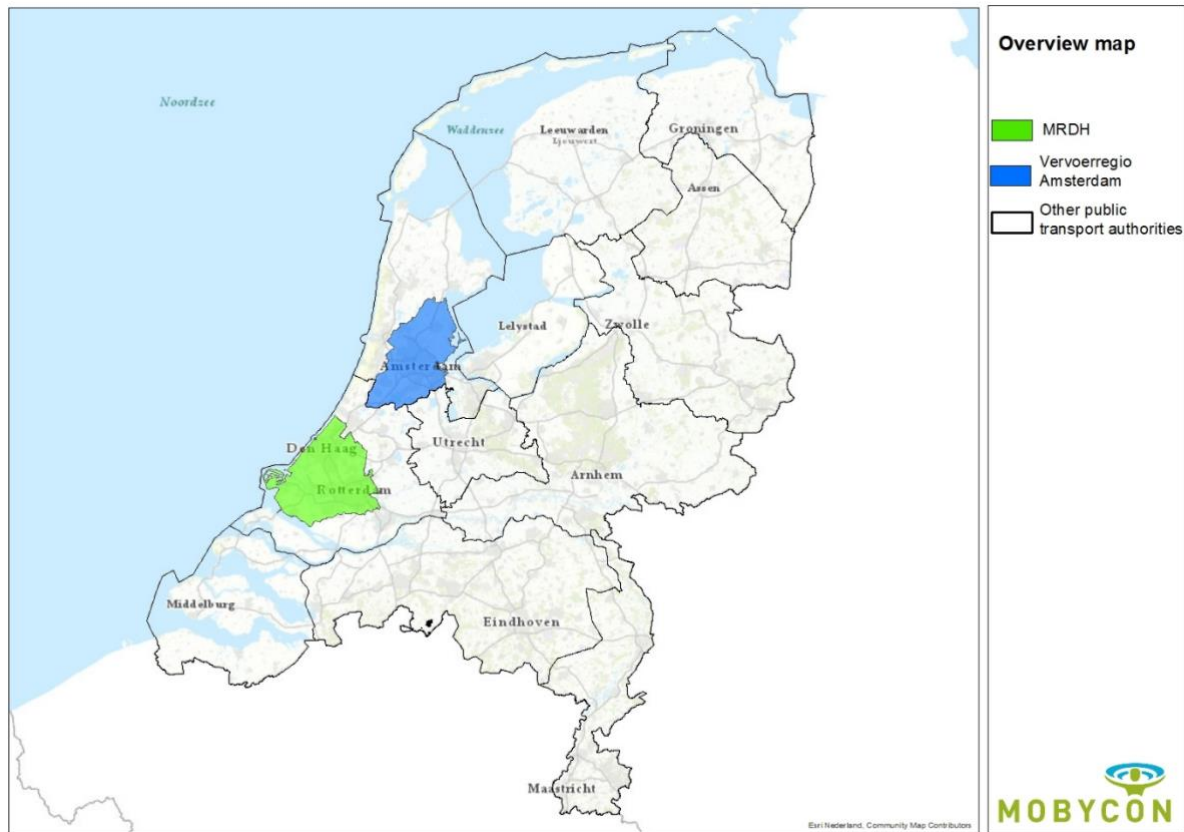


Figure 6: Public transport authorities

Thus, with the Wp2000, market forces were introduced along with a restructuring of responsibilities between national government and regional authorities. In this way, the Wp2000 created the opportunity to build an integrated regional train- and bus-network as well as it contributed to the current, mainly decentralized organization of Dutch public transport. According to Kerstens (1998), reason for a delegation of public transport responsibilities to the regional level was the belief that this is the only way of achieving national objectives – such as the objectives stated in *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*. As stated by the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management (2010), public transport was decentralized because the regional PTAs have a better understanding of regional needs. This was also confirmed by a senior policy employee of the national government (personal communication, 07-04-2020), who stated that public transport is decentralized because regional and local parties are better aware of what is needed at ‘their’ lower territorial level. In this way, the trend of decentralization provides opportunities for more effective policies, as is also argued in scientific literature on decentralization (Kerstens, 1998; Salet & Thornely, 2007). Another reason for this decentralization of public transport, according to the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management (2010), is the fact that decentralized public transport makes it possible for people to identify themselves with their regional public transport. This reason however is neither mentioned in scientific literature nor by the interviewees, and is therefore considered less important.

Veenstra (personal communication, 31-03-2020) describes the institutional context of Dutch public transport as being a layered network approach, where national policy works through to the regional and local level. Marsden & Reardon (2017) also mentioned this more networked policy environment resulting from multi-level governance. This implies different roles and responsibilities for the governments at the various territorial levels. According to van der Zwart (personal communication, 17-04-2020), differences can indeed be identified between the various territorial levels.

#### 4.1.1. Roles and responsibilities

In the Netherlands, public transport management is a formal responsibility of the national government, the provinces and the transport regions. With the decentralization of Dutch public transport, most of the responsibilities for urban and regional transport shifted to regional authorities, the PTAs. As was stated by Piattoni (2010), there is no longer a clear hierarchical separation between policy-makers and policy-takers at the various levels of government. The emphasis of policy is increasingly shifting to lower territorial levels, where the PTAs have become both policy-makers and policy-takers.

While the national government is responsible for the broader public transport system, the PTAs have been given the task of conducting public transport policy as part of their broader mobility policy (van Selm, personal communication, 26-03-2020). In this way, they are responsible for the operationalization of regional public transport, by tendering out concessions and maintaining the infrastructure. However, as mentioned by Hooghe & Marks (2003), the national government continues to perform a steering role. This can be seen back in the Dutch case, as national legislation (the Wp2000) sets the formal rules for Dutch regional public transport (Veeneman, 2016). Thus, the national government sets the foundation. According to van Selm (personal communication, 26-03-2020), the national government has the power to oblige provinces to incorporate essential policy components. As was identified by the senior policy employee of the national government (personal communication, 07-04-2020), the national government mainly has a role to play on certain policy themes, such as payment and security. Regarding the steering role of the national government, the senior policy employee (personal communication, 07-04-2020) also recognized *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* – a document initiated by the national government but strongly filled in by the regional authorities – as a steering document.

Furthermore, despite the fact that both national government (macro-level) and provinces (meso-level) have responsibilities in road management for the national and provincial roads, many of the road management tasks concerned with regional public transport lie with municipalities (micro-level). So, while most municipalities do not have a direct control over the organization of public transport, they are responsible for much of the public transport infrastructure as a road authority. Besides, municipalities have an interest in good public transport because of the contribution to the realization of societal goals (VOC, 2017), as was also identified by Banister (2005). As a result, cooperation between the responsible PTAs and municipalities is very important for effective regional public transport (see box 1). Berloth (personal communication, 31-03-2020) also stated that they work together with municipalities a lot, as they need them – amongst others – as road manager. This vertical interaction between governments working at different territorial levels is a typical feature of multi-level governance, as was also described by Faludi (2012) and Bache et al. (2016).

*'The interaction between a bus and the road it drives is evident. If we want a bus lane somewhere, or a traffic control installation has to be adjusted, we must arrange this with the relevant road management authority' – Stoker (personal communication, 22-04-2020)*

Box 1: Example road management responsibilities

Last but not least, service providers are an important party in the organization of public transport, because they are ultimately responsible for implementing the public transport policy via the granted concessions (Veenstra, personal communication, 31-03-2020). Within their capacity as service provider, they are also expected to take a development responsibility, as was stated by multiple interviewees (senior policy advisor Flevoland, personal communication, 15-04-2020; Fisser, personal communication, 23-04-2020) and is also touched upon in 4.3.2. and 4.5. In most situations, the service

provider is itself responsible for revenue, in some other situations the PTA is taking this responsibility, as is the case for OV-bureau Groningen-Drenthe.

The typical feature of vertical interaction in multi-level governance (Faludi, 2012) can be identified in the above-mentioned description of roles and responsibilities for Dutch public transport. There are many interconnections between the different territorial levels. However, as was identified by Newig & Koontz (2014), multi-level governance can also imply horizontal interaction between various (sectoral) levels. Both van Rijn (personal communication, 21-04-2020) and van der Zwart (personal communication, 17-04-2020) identified that their PTAs are trying to integrate mobility with other issues, such as housing and economy. This integration can enhance the different sectors, as broader solutions can be created. However, it also increases complexity.

4.1.2. Institutional context of cases

As this research focuses on the operationalization of public transport in different regional contexts, it is important to understand these of the selected PTAs. Chapter 3 on methods already identified that different spatial and institutional contexts are covered by the involved PTAs. The institutional contexts of the PTAs are further outlined below with the help of an organization chart (figure 7). The organization chart also helps to visualize the multi-level structure present in Dutch public transport. For the sake of completeness, the PTAs that were not involved in this research are also included in the organization chart. These are however not further elaborated upon. Besides, as service providers change regularly due to the maximum time span of concessions, they are merged under the name ‘service providers’.

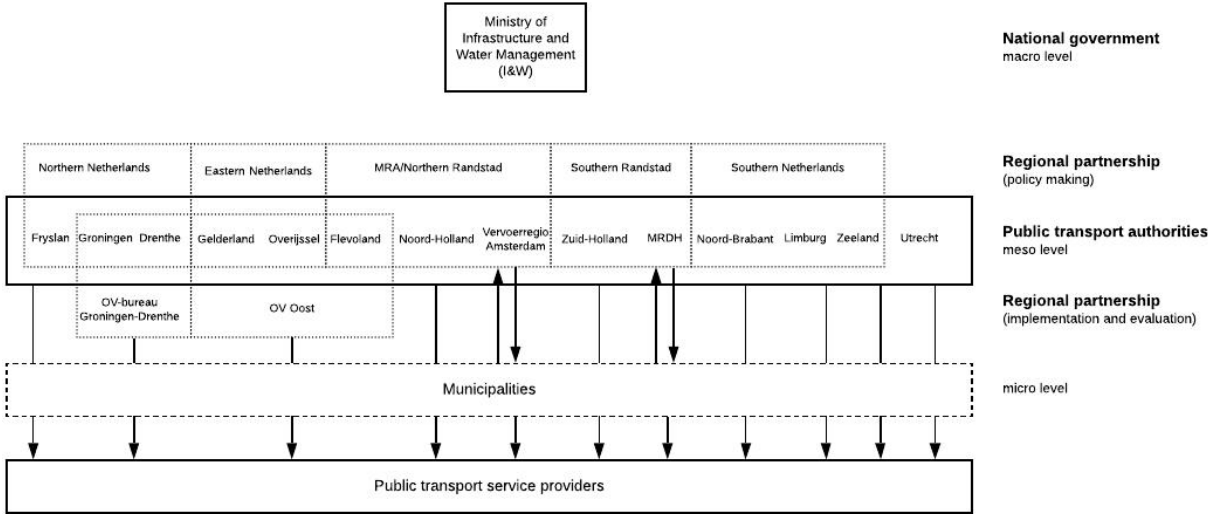


Figure 7: Organization chart of Dutch regional public transport policy operationalization

As explained, the decentralized PTAs are responsible for the operationalization of regional public transport. Decentralized governments, mainly provinces, have officially been assigned this task. Two PTAs involved in this research, offered insight in this ‘standard’ setting of Dutch regional public transport operationalization. These are the provinces of Fryslân and Noord-Brabant. Here, municipalities are strongly dependent on the provinces (van Selm, personal communication, 31-04-2020), as the latter are taking responsibilities for public transport organization in both policy formulation and operationalization.

Somewhat more ‘special’ in their institutional context are the provinces of Noord-Holland and Zuid-Holland, as they are responsible for public transport operationalization in the geographical area of their provinces but *not* in the metropolitan areas of Rotterdam-the Hague and Amsterdam, where

public transport is expected to increase most (Rijksoverheid, 2019). These metropolitan areas have their own responsible PTAs, consisting of cooperating municipalities. Vervoerregio Amsterdam [VRA] and Metropoolregio Rotterdam-den Haag [MRDH] are the formal partnerships that act as PTA in these metropolitan areas. Municipalities have a more direct influence in these situations, as they form a joint working unit (van Selm, personal communication, 31-04-2020). This can also be seen back in figure 5. In contrast to the other PTAs, VRA and MRDH do not follow provincial boundaries. VRA, that was selected as sub-unit for this research, consists of 15 cooperating municipalities (local level). The internal structure of VRA is arranged according to the steps of the policy cycle, as was identified by Kouwenberg (personal communication, 26-05-2020). As VRA is located within the geographical area of the province of Noord-Holland, a large amount of cooperation can be found between these PTAs. The province of Noord-Holland and VRA work together in transport projects and regional partnerships, as was identified by van der Zwart (personal communication, 17-04-2020).

According to Veeneman (2016), cooperation between PTAs can be found all across the Netherlands. This was also identified by Veenstra (personal communication, 15-04-2020) and a senior policy advisor of the province Flevoland (personal communication, 15-04-2020). They stated that there is cooperation between various public transport partners via various structures at the different territorial levels. The PTAs are for example cooperating in the structure of DOVA, where policy is being coordinated between the various levels of government (van Selm, personal communication, 26-03-2020). The great amount of cooperation was also identified under 4.1.1. on roles and responsibilities in Dutch public transport. Most of the cooperation in Dutch public transport contains informal partnerships. Many of them have been recognized during the interviews and can be found in figure 5. For this research, they have been distinguished as partnerships involved with policy making (e.g. goal setting) – particularly relevant for *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* – or in implementation and evaluation (e.g. granting concessions).

One of the partnerships that can be identified as involved with policy making, became clear from the interview with the senior policy advisor Flevoland (personal communication, 15-04-2020). This is the Metropolitan Area Amsterdam [MRA], or – as named in *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* – Northern Randstad, which covers a largely urbanized area. MRA is a structural partnership consisting of the province of Flevoland, Noord-Holland and the VRA that have been, amongst others, involved in writing a regional vision on public transport together. In the light of the national *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*, more such partnerships in policy making have been identified. These can be found in figure 5. MRA does, however, not have formal public transport responsibilities, these lie with the individual PTAs.

A clear example of partnerships in policy implementation and evaluation at the provincial level, are the cooperating bodies OV-Oost and OV-bureau Groningen-Drenthe. OV-Oost was selected as sub-unit and is the merging of the provincial PTAs Flevoland, Overijssel and Gelderland. These cooperate in performing many executive tasks in public transport. The policy goals are set by the individual provinces, but they jointly carry out and manage public tenders. Although the OV-Oost cooperation is captured in a management agreement, no formal responsibilities are transferred within this partnership. Therefore, the provinces remain independently authorized.

Flevoland in particular is institutionally divergent from Gelderland and Overijssel, since it is a relatively young province with a unique operating philosophy to delegate as much responsibilities as possible (senior policy advisor Flevoland, personal communication, 15-04-2020). A clear example of this, is the municipality of Almere. The province of Flevoland delegated public transport responsibilities on a lower territorial level to this municipality. As a result, Almere has the power to organize public transport as an individual municipality (van Selm, personal communication, 31-04-2020). Since mostly

meso-level, provincial PTAs carry this responsibility within the Dutch regional public transport context, Almere can be seen a rather unique construction. Another difference within the provinces of OV-Oost, is the fact that policy formulation and policy implementation responsibilities are found to be more clearly separated in Gelderland as compared to Flevoland and Overijssel.

As mentioned, another example of cooperation at the provincial level is OV-bureau Groningen-Drenthe. In this capacity, this PTA is not only sharing implementation responsibilities, but is also closely involved with the provinces of Groningen and Drenthe and the city of Groningen in their public transport policy design. Unlike OV-Oost, OV-bureau Groningen-Drenthe is independently authorized to take decisions (Uijtewaal, personal communication, 25-05-2020), which gives them a higher decisiveness. Besides, an important characteristic of OV-bureau Groningen-Drenthe is the fact that it is itself responsible for the earnings with public transport (Stoker, personal communication, 22-04-2020). Most other PTAs place that responsibility with the service provider. An important notice however, is the fact that OV-bureau Groningen-Drenthe is not responsible for the regional railway transport. That responsibility remains with the provinces itself.

#### 4.1.3. Conclusion

The decentralized, multi-level institutional context of Dutch public transport was outlined, where it became clear that there exists a great amount of interaction between the various levels of government. As already argued by Marsden & Reardon (2017), a more networked policy environment has emerged due to this multi-level institutional setting. This can mainly be seen back in the amount of cooperating bodies involved in public transport. Although the formal PTAs are mainly provinces, situations have been identified where municipalities form a joint working unit (VRA and MRDH), where provinces are working together (OV-Oost), where there is cooperation between two territorial levels (OV-bureau Groningen-Drenthe) as well as a situation where responsibilities are further delegated to one single municipality (Almere). This results in many unique situations, of which OV-Oost and VRA are further highlighted to see what similarities and differences can be identified in these contrasting institutional (and spatial) contexts.

## 4.2. Policy goals

As was stated in chapter 2.2., in a perfect policy cycle, first policies are formulated and designed. To understand how this takes place in the context of Dutch public transport, it is relevant to define what Dutch national public transport policy goals (meta-level) are presented in *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*, and how these are translated by the decentralized PTAs (meso- and micro-level), with a specific focus on the sub-units OV-Oost and VRA.

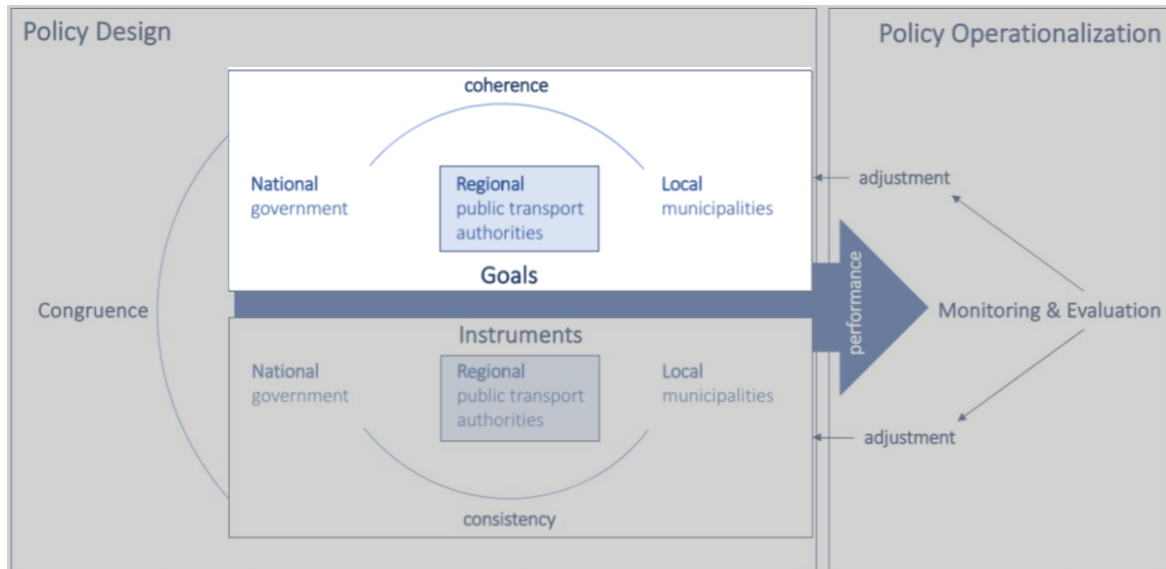


Figure 8: Policy goals

### 4.2.1. Policy goals *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*

The Dutch national vision on public transport, *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* – which forms a central theme in this research – presents a general, abstract ambition consisting of three main pillars. These are broken down into five policy objectives (see table 5). After addressing the intention and abstract goals of *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*, the three pillars are used to discuss the somewhat more concrete principles and actions. In this way, different levels of abstraction as presented by Howlett (2009) can be found back within *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*, see table 5.

	High level of abstraction		Lower level of abstraction
Howlett (2009)	Policy aims	Policy objectives	Policy targets
<b>Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Focus on the strengths of public transport</li> <li>2. Seamless travel door-to-door</li> <li>3. Safe, sustainable and efficient public transport</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Public transport will assume its share of the growth in demand for transport; in urban areas, public transport and bicycles will be the main modes of transport.</li> <li>2. Passengers will rate public transport with an average score of eight out of ten.</li> <li>3. The entire public transport sector will be emission-free and circular.</li> </ol>	46 actions (see appendix 7.3)

		<p>4. The Netherlands will pioneer public transport innovation.</p> <p>5. While intensifying public transport we will also seek ongoing improvements to safety and quality of life in surrounding areas.</p>	
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Table 5: Policy goals levels of abstraction – *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*

But although multiple levels of abstraction can be identified within *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*, the document remains mainly focused on the macro-level, with rather long-term, abstract policy aims and implementation preferences that apply to the whole of the Netherlands. The national policy document is therefore called *contouren* (contours). It still contains many uncertainties and the steps need further specifications (Rijksoverheid, 2019) to be implemented by the decentralized PTAs. As a result, the presented policy aims, objectives and targets are subject to interpretation, as was also stated by Rae & Wong (2012). According to de Boer (personal communication, 01-04-2020), this room for interpretation allows for the policy to be adaptive.

*Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*, although rather abstract, was found to help provide a framework for decisions and agreements that have to be made (senior policy employee national government, personal communication, 07-04-2020). As it is an abstract vision that provides a direction for the future, the senior policy employee of the national government (personal communication, 07-04-2020) identified the document as *steering*, as was also mentioned in 4.1.1. This is in line with Hooghe & Marks (2003), who stated that the national government continues to perform a steering role in multi-level governance.

Although the national government takes a steering role, chapter 4.1.2. already identified the large amount of regional partnerships and cooperation in Dutch public transport. This cooperation also played an important role in the establishment of *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*, where the regional PTAs were assembled into 6 larger clusters that were requested to write a regional vision (meso-level). These regional visions provided input for the national vision. As 4.1.2. distinguished between partnerships in policy making and partnerships in policy implementation, the clusters that together established the regional visions can be identified as partnerships in policy making (see figure 7). The great involvement of the decentralized PTAs in the establishment of *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* illustrates the blurring responsibilities between policy-makers and policy-takers, as presented by Piattoni (2010). What policy goals are presented by the PTAs and how these relate to *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*, shapes the remainder of this subchapter.

#### 4.2.2. Policy goals decentralized public transport authorities

PTAs formulate policy objectives in regional visions, together with other PTAs (partnerships in policy making, see figure 7) or specifically for their individual region. As was stated by van Unen (personal communication, 26-03-2020), all provinces are obliged to make a regional mobility program, which also includes the public transport component. As an example, the policy framework OV-bureau Groningen-Drenthe is working within, are the broader provincial plans that include a section on public transport (Stoker, personal communication, 22-04-2020), and VRA established a mobility program that includes the public transport component (van Rijn, personal communication 21-04-2020). The overarching ambitions with public transport identified during the interviews, were mainly societal and economic. For example, public transport was often argued to provide for a basic level of accessibility to take part in society (societal goal).



In granting concessions (see 4.3), PTAs translate their policy objectives into a Nota van Uitgangspunten [NvU] or Programma van Eisen [PvE]. The NvU translates the main policy principles and serves as a starting point for the PvE, which presents the requirements for the public transport concession(s) to be granted. In that way, the rather abstract policy objectives are translated into more concrete, programme-level policy calibrations (Howlett, 2009). The service provider in turn is translating these requirements into their subscription for the concession. Thus, the rather abstract regional visions most PTAs use as guideline for their policy, are further operationalized in the tender (see table 6). This is considered an important policy instrument (see 4.3). The investment agenda was also found to provide for a way in which abstract policy goals can be further operationalized (Stoker, personal communication, 22-04-2020; van Rijn, personal communication, 21-04-2020), although this was less dominant.

	High level of abstraction		Lower level of abstraction
Howlett (2009)	Policy aims	Policy objectives	Policy targets
Public transport authorities	Regional vision	NvU/PvE; investment agenda	Concession subscription

Table 6: Policy goals levels of abstraction – *public transport authorities*

The senior policy employee of the national government (personal communication, 07-04-2020) identified the fact that *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* may be too abstract for the PTAs to take concrete action upon. This is also evident from Van Rijn (personal communication, 21-04-2020), who stated that *‘the five main objectives are still quite general’*. The high level of abstractness and the long-term character of the vision provides for a lot of room for interpretation (Rae & Wong, 2012). As mentioned by de Boer (personal communication, 01-04-2020), it is a challenge to incorporate regional accents in the national vision, and therefore interpretation differences can be identified. Due to the great possibilities of personal interpretation, PTAs fill in abstract goals in different ways (see box 2), depending on the regional visions and spatial characteristics (senior policy advisor Flevoland, personal communication, 15-04-2020).

*‘There is not one unique formula for HOV [high-quality public transport] lines, each region each interprets this in its own way. For some it is already identified as HOV if you skip stops, while for others this may be only the case if you drive 8 times during rush hour’* – senior policy advisor Flevoland (personal communication, 15-04-2020)

Box 2: Example differences in interpretation

It was identified that, as public transport is organized in a decentralized way, regional visions are found to give a stronger guidance than the national vision does (Stoker, personal communication, 22-04-2020). According to multiple interviewees from PTAs, they have tried to bring ambitions into *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* instead of the other way around. As was stated by the senior policy advisor Flevoland: *‘we mainly tried to get our own ambitions into that national vision with the help of the regional vision’*. Some interviewees stated that they included even more ambitions in their regional vision than are present in the national vision (de Boer, personal communication, 01-04-2020; senior policy advisor Flevoland, personal communication, 15-04-2020).

#### 4.2.3. Coherence

The senior policy employee of the national government (personal communication, 07-04-2020) stated that, although policy goals on the operational level are politically very important, one should not lose sight of the broader strategy and vision. Therefore, as was stated by Howlett (2009), policy goals on the various levels of abstraction have to be coherent.

By presenting an overarching policy ambition that is endorsed by the involved parties, *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* can be argued to be coherent (Howlett & Rayner, 2013). According to Fisser (personal communication, 22-04-2020), the fact that there is a shared vision – *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* – means they try to include this in their public transport concessions. Veenstra (personal communication, 31-03-2020) also stated that the province of Gelderland tries to align their policy to the objectives formulated in the national vision.

However, the degree of coherence strongly depends on the level of abstraction and the specific context that is being focused on, which was identified by Howlett (2014) as the ‘goodness of fit’. As Veeneman & Mulley (2018) stated that the scale differences typical for multi-level governance drive different perspectives and objectives, and *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* was not found to actively influence policy formulation on a regional level, this may affect the *coherence* of policy goals on the various territorial levels. Although the regional visions provided input for the national vision, de Boer (personal communication, 01-04-2020) stated that some policy goals are taken along better than others, due to the differences in scale. Besides, van der Zwart (personal communication, 17-04-2020) stated that some policy goals may be more important on the national level (meta-level), while other policy goals may be considered more relevant on meso- and micro-level. As a result, achieving meta-level policy goals seems more based on coincidence than it is structurally guaranteed.

Nonetheless, Keolis (personal communication, 19-05-2020) stated that *‘the fact that the goals may be different does not mean that they are conflicting. It is simply a part that has been filled in differently’*. And while there may be differences in the coherence of policy goals on the various territorial levels, they were not found to undermine each other. Neither within nor between the different territorial levels and levels of abstraction.

#### 4.2.4. Policy goals sub-units OV-Oost and Vervoerregio Amsterdam

This section gives insights in the policy goals presented by the sub-units OV-Oost and VRA. The input for *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* was not provided by OV-Oost. Rather, the provinces of Gelderland and Overijssel together provided input for the national vision, while the province of Flevoland was part of a partnership in policy implementation together with the province of Noord-Holland and VRA [MRA]. This again shows the large number of interactions between PTAs (see 4.1). Nonetheless, this chapter focuses on how the selected sub-units translate national policy goals.

As was mentioned before (4.1.2.), a special feature of OV-Oost is the fact that policy formulation is not assigned to the cooperating body, but remains a separated task for the three provinces. As was stated by Uijtewaal (personal communication, 25-05-2020), the structure of OV-Oost does not guarantee that there will be one policy within the three provinces. They all create their own vision on mobility (including public transport). According to Uijtewaal (personal communication, 25-05-2020), it is a challenge to align the three provinces. Nonetheless, the ambitions defined in the vision documents of the three provinces were found to be as much in accordance with each other that it was possible to develop a joint NvU and PvE for granting the concessions (OV-Oost, 2018; senior policy advisor Flevoland, personal communication, 15-04-2020; Veenstra, personal communication, 31-03-2020). Although sometimes compromises have to be made for the individual provinces (Keolis, personal communication, 19-05-2020) and the detailed interpretation may differ per province (Uijtewaal,

personal communication, 25-05-2020), the fact that the visions were able to be merged into one NvU assumes them not to be undermining each other.

It was defined in the NvU, that comparable policy ambitions follow from *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* and that the objectives were formulated taking into account the national vision (OV-Oost, 2018). Nonetheless, Berloth (personal communication, 31-03-2020) stated that: *'we fed them [national government] with ideas and not the other way around'*. This was also mentioned by the senior policy advisor Flevoland (personal communication, 15-04-2020; see 4.2.2). During the tender procedure of the concession IJssel-Vecht, it was emphasized that the concession subscriptions should be based on the requirements in the PvE and not on *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*. As such, regional policy goals are found to be more dominant than those in the national vision, although it was stated that *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* is necessary for the long-term policy development (Berloth, personal communication, 31-03-2020).

VRA developed a broad mobility policy, in which public transport is one theme (van Rijn, personal communication, 21-04-2020). Five strategic tasks were formulated, that can be seen as policy goals for VRA (Vervoerregio Amsterdam, 2017). Van Rijn (personal communication, 21-04-2020) stated that, regarding the national vision, *'it does not mean that we have adopted [Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040] right away in our policy, but it is the national line, we have to go in that direction'*. The national vision in this sense can be seen a steering document, as was also identified in the paragraph above by Berloth and in 4.2.1. by the senior policy employee national government.

Table 7 provides for a comparison between the formulated policy objectives in the national vision and by the selected sub-units. The same level of abstractness was selected (meso-level). This comparison can also help to define the coherence of regional policy goals with the policy goals as stated in *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*.

Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040 (Rijksoverheid, 2019)	OV-Oost (2018)	Vervoerregio Amsterdam (2017)
1. Public transport will assume its share of the growth in demand for transport; in urban areas, public transport and bicycles will be the main modes of transport	1. Future-proof public transport by strengthening a core network that is affordable for travelers and provinces	1. An acceptable and reliable door-to-door travel time, regardless of the mode of transport
2. Passengers will rate public transport with an average score of eight out of ten	2. Connection to passenger flows, changing transport needs and quality requirements of travelers	2. The overall door-to-door journey judgment for all modes of transport is valued at a minimum of 7.5
3. The entire public transport sector will be emission-free and circular	3. Further sustainability of public transport	3. A CO2-neutral mobility system from 2050
4. The Netherlands will pioneer public transport innovation	4. Space for new modes of transport/mobility services	4. The use of space of the mobility system is efficient
5. While intensifying public transport we will also seek ongoing improvements to safety and quality of life in surrounding areas		5. Spatial developments contribute to a more efficient mobility system

Table 7: Policy goals

As can be seen, some of the broader policy objectives stated by the sub-units and the national vision can be directly linked to each other (such as number 3), others may not be directly linked but are not found to undermine each other. However, some of the national policy goals are found to be more relevant in one context than in another, see for example box 3.

*'One of the elements from our regional vision was - and still is - to extend the North-South metro line towards Schiphol and Hoofddorp. In this way, you can relieve train traffic in the Schiphol tunnel and you do not have to make major investments at Station Zuid for example. What you add to the metro creates more capacity on the national track. That connection between the national and urban-regional network is much less in the Northern Netherlands and the Eastern Netherlands'* – van Rijn (personal communication, 21-04-2020)

Box 3: Example differences in relevance national policy goals

Nonetheless, abstract ambitions that focus for example on increasing accessibility and better reliability, are included in all policy frameworks (Berloth, personal communication, 31-03-2020). There are differences in how far provinces go in what they put in public transport concessions (senior policy advisor Flevoland, personal communication, 15-04-2020). This was also identified by Uijtewaal (personal communication, 25-05-2020), who stated that the detailed interpretation of policy goals differs per province. Regarding accessibility for example, Vervoerregio Amsterdam (2019) described that: *'the premise is that, within a residential or work area, 90% of the addresses must be located at a maximum of 400 meters from a bus stop. For connecting lines and train stations this is a maximum distance of 800 and 1200 meters respectively'* (p.26). For OV-Oost this level of detail for accessibility was not described in the tender documents.

The main differences in policy formulation between OV-Oost and VRA, follow from the fact that formulation of policy goals is an independent responsibility. Besides, according to Uijtewaal (personal communication, 25-05-2020), different regions have different dynamics and challenges – the spatial dynamics vary. The emphasis of policy goals was also found to depend on the political belief of the deputy for the province (Uijtewaal, personal communication, 25-05-2020). Because every province has its own deputy, policy formulation differences hereby may also arise. This relates to the 'goodness of fit' presented by Howlett et al. (2014).

#### 4.2.5. Conclusion

*Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* can be seen as a steering document which, due to its high level of abstractness, leaves a lot of room for interpretation by the individual PTAs. For these PTAs, mainly spatial dynamics were found to lead to various interpretations and a different relevance of national policy goals. In general, PTAs appear to consider their regional policy as guiding principle and therefore do not directly adopt the objectives from *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*. But although the relevance of policy goals differs per context and while there are varieties in the degree of coherence of policy goals on the various territorial levels, the Dutch public transport policy goals were not found to undermine each other.

### 4.3. Policy instruments and implementation

As was stated in chapter 2, governments have different instruments available that can be used along the policy process to help achieve the defined policy goals. Policy instruments help to put into action the formulated policy – this is considered the process of policy implementation. Policy instruments are thus evidently interlinked with policy implementation. Therefore, this chapter elaborates on what policy instruments the Dutch PTAs have at their disposal for implementing the policy goals presented in chapter 4.2. After discussing the policy instruments, attention is paid to policy implementation and the sub-units OV-Oost and VRA.

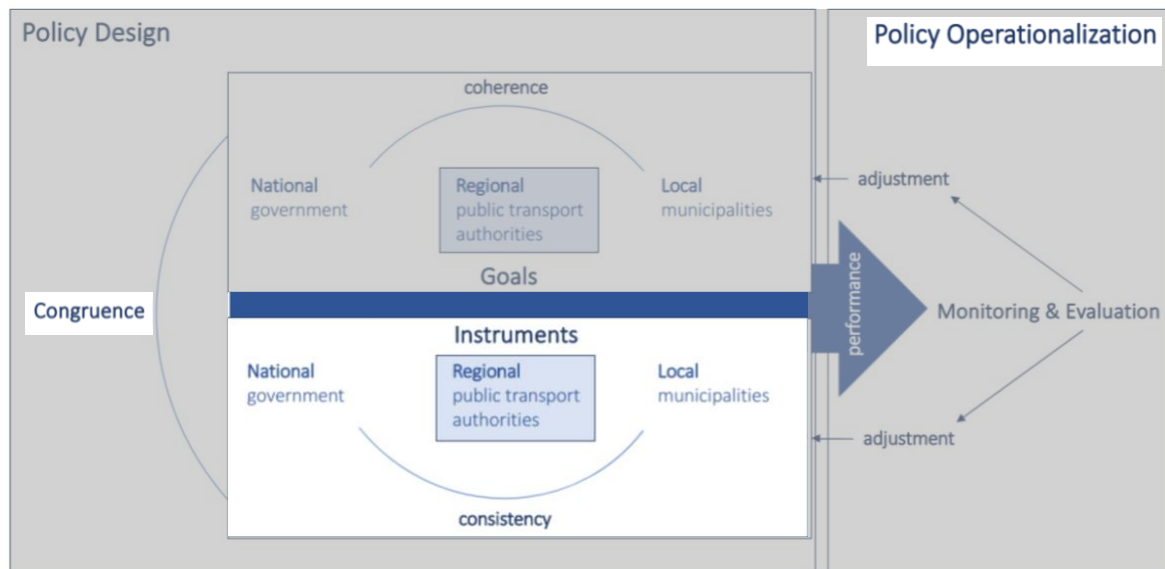


Figure 9: Policy instruments and implementation

#### 4.3.1. Policy instruments

According to Veeneman et al. (2015), public transport can function as a policy instrument itself, supporting a great number of societal values relating to sustainability. This was also identified by Veenstra (personal communication, 31-03-2020), who stated that *'public transport is not a goal in itself, but rather an instrument to achieve higher goals'*. In that way, public transport forms part of horizontal interaction between different sectoral levels (Newig & Koontz, 2014) that can help to achieve broader societal goals. Nonetheless, policy instruments can also be identified within the case of Dutch public transport, which are the focus of this section.

The policy goals presented in *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* are dependent on the available policy instruments to be successfully implemented. The decentralized PTAs have a variety of tools to guide the intended goals. According to the senior policy employee of the national government (personal communication, 07-04-2020), *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* can function as an umbrella for the use of all kinds of instruments. Jann & Wegrich (2017) distinguish between different kinds of policy instruments: regulatory, financial, informational and organizational policy instruments (see chapter 2). The most prominent policy instruments present in Dutch public transport, as were identified during the interviews, can be classified as regulatory and financial instruments and will be further discussed below.

#### 4.3.1.1. Regulatory policy instruments

Regulatory policy instruments were identified by the interviewees as, besides financial instruments, being most important for the operationalization of public transport in the Netherlands.

With the regulations of the Wp2000 (see 4.1) came a decentralization of public transport responsibilities and the introduction of organizing public transport by tendering out concessions. The Wp2000 gives PTAs the power to grant concessions, set rates for public transport and impose all kinds of requirements on the concessions they tender (van Selm, personal communication, 26-03-2020). With the legal task of tendering out of concessions, agreements with the service provider are made for a maximum time span of ten years (Berloth, personal communication, 31-03-2020).

The instrument of tendering out concessions was identified as the most dominant and extensive policy instrument in Dutch public transport, as became clear from the interviews. All of the interviewees mentioned this instrument explicitly. Veenstra (personal communication, 31-03-2020) identified the tendering out of concessions as an independent policy instrument that can help to realize various goals through the NvU and the PvE. In that way, the concession both provides for public transport policy goals (in the NvU and PvE, see 4.2) and is considered an important policy instrument for implementation, as the service providers carry out public transport based on the requirements set in the NvU and PvE (Berloth, personal communication, 31-03-2020). As the senior policy advisor Flevoland (personal communication, 15-04-2020) stated: *'because you [as a PTA] are involved in that tender, you can put your goals in the market'*. In that capacity, the market forces of the public tender make it a powerful policy instrument. In tendering out concessions, the PTA is ultimately in control of what will happen regarding public transport (Stoker, personal communication, 22-04-2020). Nonetheless, the senior policy advisor Flevoland (personal communication, 15-04-2020) identified that there are differences in how far provinces go in what they put in public transport concessions (see 4.2.4.). The adequacy of this policy instrument is thus very much dependent on the specific context, as was also identified by Howlett (2004).

Regarding regulatory policy instruments, van Selm (personal communication, 26-03-2020) also mentioned the Planwet Verkeer & Vervoer (traffic & transport planning act) that provides for a set of instruments relevant for public transport policy implementation. Other interviewees did not explicitly mention this regulation being an essential (regulatory) policy instrument.

According to the senior employee of the national government (personal communication, 07-04-2020), if necessary, everything could be arranged by regulatory instruments. However, this is not preferred. Hence, other policy instruments are also found to be meaningful. Nonetheless, Veenstra (personal communication, 31-03-2020) identified other policy instruments as being facilitating, supportive and initiating instruments. This connects well to de Boer (personal communication, 01-04-2020), who stated that the PTA can take different roles. In tendering out concessions, they take a steering role in prescribing requirements to arrange implementation in the concessions, while they can also take a more facilitating or stimulating role. For example in combining public transport with other forms of transport.

#### 4.3.1.2. Financial policy instruments

Next to regulatory policy instruments, financial policy instruments are also considered important to achieve Dutch public transport policy goals. Most interviewees mentioned subsidies and budgets as being essential for implementing policies.

Provinces (most PTAs) receive money from the national government via the so-called Brede Doel Uitkering (broad target payment) [BDU]. This funding supports investments in mobility. As was argued by Howlett (2009), the meta-level (national) influences policy instruments choices at lower (territorial)

levels. As the decentralized PTAs are dependent on the financial instruments they obtain from the national government, this can clearly be seen back in the Dutch case. This meta-level influence was also identified by the senior policy employee of the national government (personal communication, 07-04-2020), who stated that *'the national government ultimately distributes the money'*. In this way, the PTAs are dependent on the choices made by the national government regarding the financial instruments.

Nonetheless, provinces may distribute the BDU according to their own interpretation over public transport and other forms of mobility (senior policy employee national government, personal communication, 07-04-2020). In this way they have a great freedom in how to exactly spent this money. PTAs may for example use this budget to subsidize service providers in the concession, or they can subsidize municipalities in their broader mobility policy, in order to help achieve the formulated policy goals (Veenstra, personal communication, 31-03-2020). Van der Zwart (personal communication, 17-04-2020) and Fisser (personal communication, 23-04-2020) also mentioned subsidies as available policy instrument in Dutch public transport. As such, the BDU can be identified being facilitating. In most situations, the PTA is receiving the BDU directly, for others – such as OV-bureau Groningen-Drenthe – the provinces pass on (part of) the budget to the PTA (Stoker, personal communication, 22-04-2020). The fact that provinces may decide for themselves how to spend the BDU, relates back to decentralization of Dutch public transport organization as was discussed in 4.1.

It was identified that some PTAs have more money available to spend on public transport than others (Uijtewaal, personal communication, 25-05-2020). For example, as was stated by the senior policy advisor Flevoland (personal communication, 15-04-2020), the province of Flevoland has a fairly small budget available compared to other provinces. Resulting from the differences in available budgets, the importance of cooperation becomes apparent again. Van Unen (personal communication, 26-03-2020): *'you try to find coalition parties in that ambition to ensure that the financial resources are made available for the realization of that ambition'*. These differences in financial policy instruments influence the possibilities for policy implementation by the various PTAs, see 4.3.2.

Furthermore, regarding financial instruments, it was stated by Keolis (personal communication, 19-05-2020) that some PTAs include a bonus-malus construction (financial reward or penalty) in their tender contracts. These also function as financial policy instrument and may be used to correct during the time of the current concession (see 4.5. on policy adjustment).

#### 4.3.1.3. Other policy instruments

Although regulatory and financial policy instruments were found to be most essential, a few other policy instruments could be identified during the interviews. Van Selm (personal communication, 26-03-2020) identified road management responsibilities giving provinces additional instruments to help achieve policy goals. This was confirmed by Berloth (personal communication, 31-03-2020) and Veenstra (personal communication, 31-03-2020), who also referred to the road management tasks provinces have. However, as was already mentioned in 4.1.1., municipalities also play a major role in this road management task. Hence, the importance of cooperation becomes clear again.

Informational policy instruments, although to a lesser extent, were also identified. For example, van Selm (personal communication, 26-03-2020) mentioned the yearly *Dag van het Openbaar Vervoer* (public transport day), that is helpful to keep the national vision 'alive'. Furthermore, regarding organizational policy instruments, despite the fact that these have not been mentioned explicitly, the decentralized, multi-level organization of Dutch public transport as described in 4.1. can also be considered a policy instrument.

Berloth (personal communication, 31-03-2020) stated that the available policy instruments are limited. Van Selm (personal communication, 26-03-2020) in contrast identified the toolbox of available policy instruments as being quite substantial. The statement of Stoker (personal communication, 22-04-2020) helps to nuance this: *'on the one hand, we have no instruments as we can only establish the policy together with other stakeholders. On the other hand, you can argue we have a very large instrument: the concession'*. According to van Selm (personal communication, 22-04-2020), the main question is how capable one is of using these policy instruments. This is an important feature for policy implementation, as was recognized by Vedung (1997) and will be discussed in the next section.

#### 4.3.2. Policy implementation

Implementation power lies with the individual PTAs and service providers. A clarification of policy ambitions and objectives is important for policy implementation (Rahman Khan & Khandaker, 2017). It was already stated that *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* is rather abstract. Fisser (personal communication, 23-04-2020) identified that this high level of abstractness makes it more difficult to implement the national policy in the concessions. The senior policy employee of the national government (personal communication, 07-04-2020) confirms this by stating that *'I can imagine that it [Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040] is too abstract for most provinces to be able to do something with it very concretely'*.

Clear guidelines on how to implement policies are often lacking, and especially due to the fact that the formulated policy goals in *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* are rather abstract, policy implementation is subject to interpretation. Fisser (personal communication, 23-04-2020), in comparing the province of Zuid-Holland and the MRDH, stated *'the policy goals are the same, but the elaboration cannot be the same, because in the MRDH 23 municipalities decide on public transport concessions, and not the province'*. As the PTA has a considerable influence on policy implementation, the institutional context is thus considered to provide for differences. According to Keolis (personal communication, 19-05-2020), policy implementation may differ due to three properties: financial capability, the formulated policy goals and because of the personal characteristics of the people involved.

Vedung (1997) identified *comprehension*, *capability* and *willingness* as important properties for policy implementation. The first two were clearly identified during the interviews. First, policy implementers must *comprehend* the goals and instruments. Relating to this property, de Boer (personal communication, 01-04-2020) acknowledged the competences of people being important for the implementation of policy. According to van Selm (personal communication, 26-03-2020) *comprehension* of the policy instruments has grown over time. As a result, policy implementers have become better *capable* of using policy instruments to implement the formulated policy.

Relating to the property of *capability*, multiple interviewees mentioned the importance of cooperation in order to be better capable of policy implementation. For example, Berloth (personal communication, 31-03-2020) stated that *'we need to work together, because we cannot do it alone'*. Another aspect important for implementing public transport policy, and partly related to cooperation (see 4.3.1.2.), is the financial capability. Most of the interviewees mentioned this financial capability as being substantial for successful policy implementation. It was stated by van Unen (personal communication, 26-03-2020) that most goals can be achieved with the help of money. However, this financial capacity differs per PTA, as was also addressed in 4.3.1.2. Implementation thus depends on the context-specific resources that are needed to operationalize the policy instruments, as was already stated by Marsden & Reardon (2017).



The service provider also has a substantial task in the policy implementation process as it is responsible for the on-the-ground measures. At the start of the concession, there may still be implementation problems (Fisser, personal communication, 23-04-2020). But the service provider acquired a development responsibility, and will therefore try to further implement the formulated policy goals each year (senior policy advisor Flevoland, personal communication, 15-04-2020). It is expected that with the help of this development responsibility, the objectives can best be achieved (Vervoerregio Amsterdam, 2019). Because this development responsibility may result in policy adjustments, more information and specific examples can be found in 4.5.

#### 4.3.3. Consistency and congruence

As stated by Howlett & Rayner (2013), policy instruments have to be able to reinforce rather than undermine each other (*consistency*) and policy instruments and policy goals have to be *congruent* – they have to support each other. Since the regulatory policy instrument of tendering out concessions was considered the most dominant policy instrument, and other policy instruments being supportive (Veenstra, personal communication, 31-03-2020), these can be used to reinforce each other. However, this was found to mainly happen in combination with the financial policy instruments.

Regarding *congruence*, it became clear that policy formulation and policy implementation are oftentimes considered in absence of each other. As was stated by Uijtewaal (personal communication, 25-05-2020): *'sometimes policies are formulated that are less feasible in practice. Practice and theory are sometimes disconnected'*. According to de Boer (personal communication, 01-04-2020), policy implementation is not as instrumental as it is stated in policy cycles. In practice, the need to keep in mind the formulated policy goals is acknowledged, but these are not constantly reflected upon. Furthermore, it was identified by multiple interviewees that with *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*, policy instruments did not change. This relates back to Kassim & le Galès (2010), who claimed that policy instruments are regularly considered in absence of policy goals and the other way around. De Boer (personal communication, 01-04-2020) stated that policy instruments are only linked to policy goals on a higher level, mixes of these policy instruments can be developed for each specific context. This relates back to Howlett (2004), who identified policy instruments being context-specific, and therefore also congruence of policy goals and policy instruments being reliant on the particular situation. Only Fisser (personal communication, 23-04-2020) explicitly identified a linkage between policy goals and policy instruments, where they measure how much an instrument contributes to the formulated goal. This measures the 'goodness of fit', as was introduced by Howlett et al. (2014).

#### 4.3.4. Policy instruments and implementation by OV-Oost and Vervoerregio Amsterdam

The interviewees of the provinces of Gelderland, Overijssel and Flevoland all identified the tendering out of concessions as most important policy instrument, followed by financial instruments. As was mentioned in the tender document for IJssel-Vecht (OV-Oost, 2018), within the NvU and PvE a financial framework is created for the concession. This framework sets the available budget (financial policy instrument) for implementing the formulated policy through the concession (regulatory policy instrument). Furthermore, allocated budgets have been made available per province (Uijtewaal, personal communication, 25-05-2020).

As was already found in 4.3.1.2., differences exist regarding financial policy instruments. The financial *capabilities* for implementation were also found to differ within OV-Oost. The budget of the province of Flevoland was found to be considerably less than the other provinces within OV-Oost. See box 4 for an example of such differences.

*'In Flevoland, for example, we are doing a joint tender for DRIs panels, because we think it is important that the traveler has more insight into what bus will arrive at what time. But if we would do exactly the same as Overijssel and Gelderland, with whom we cooperate [OV-Oost], there would be a multitude of panels in Flevoland. Since we have a limited budget, we choose only the nodes and the very special destinations for such a panel and not all stops. The price-quality ratio always plays a greater role for us' – senior policy advisor Flevoland (personal communication, 15-04-2020)*

Box 4: Example differences financial policy instruments OV-Oost

Financial policy instruments were also considered important in VRA, as was the legal task of tendering out concessions (van Rijn, personal communication, 21-04-2020). Alongside their investment agenda on mobility, VRA uses the BDU to encourage road authorities to make improvements in the road network in order to reach the ambitions of the PTA, as was stated by van Rijn (personal communication, 21-04-2020). Regarding *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*, the policy goals were considered very ambitious in relation to the financial capabilities (van Rijn, personal communication, 21-04-2020).

According to the senior policy advisor Flevoland (personal communication, 15-04-2020), policy instruments contribute to the achievement of policy ambitions to a different degree, and most policy goals can be achieved in various ways. This is dependent on the 'goodness of fit' and links back to various authors (see 2.2.1.) that stated the same. Regarding financial policy instruments, VRA is using a bonus-malus construction. OV-Oost is only working with financial penalties, because *'a good basic quality is the norm'* (OV-Oost, 2018, p. 15). In this way, financial policy instruments are supportive to the regulatory policy instrument of granting out concessions.

It was already touched upon the implementation property of *capability*. Uijttewaal (personal communication, 25-05-2020) also identified: *'I think the main benefit [for the structure of OV-Oost] is the fact that you can share knowledge'*. This cooperation thus can help to increase *comprehension* of policy goals and instruments.

Nonetheless, as it was stated by Uijttewaal (personal communication, 25-05-2020), policy formulation and policy implementation are oftentimes considered in absence of each other. This can be seen back for example in the institutional organization of both sub-units. In OV-Oost, policy formulation takes place within the individual provinces, while policy implementation tasks are shared. Besides, VRA was identified by Kouwenberg (personal communication, 26-05-2020) to be organized in various teams according to the steps of the policy cycle. The gap between policy formulation and policy implementation can also be found back in monitoring and evaluation, as becomes clear in the next chapter.

#### 4.3.5. Conclusion

Regulatory and financial policy instruments were identified as most important for operationalizing Dutch public transport. The adequacy of these policy instruments is very much context-dependent, as mainly *capabilities* (financial and cooperation) and *comprehension* are found to be important properties and differ per PTA. Policy instruments were not found to undermine each other, they have even been assumed to be able to support each other. Policy formulation and policy implementation however are oftentimes considered in absence of each other, posing challenges for congruency. This can be for example seen back in the organizational structure of PTAs.

#### 4.4. Monitoring and evaluation

It is stated in *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* that the policy goals are actively monitored and periodically evaluated. This implies monitoring and evaluation of policy design operationalization that is still ongoing, as this national public transport vision is set for the year 2040. Monitoring and evaluation have been identified as important – but somewhat neglected – elements in the policy cycle. The elements can be used to determine how policies are performing in terms of achieving the intended goals (see 2.2.3.). How exactly this is done in the Dutch context was not elaborated upon within *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*. This chapter therefore pays attention to the way the national vision is being monitored and evaluated and how PTAs determine their policy design performance.

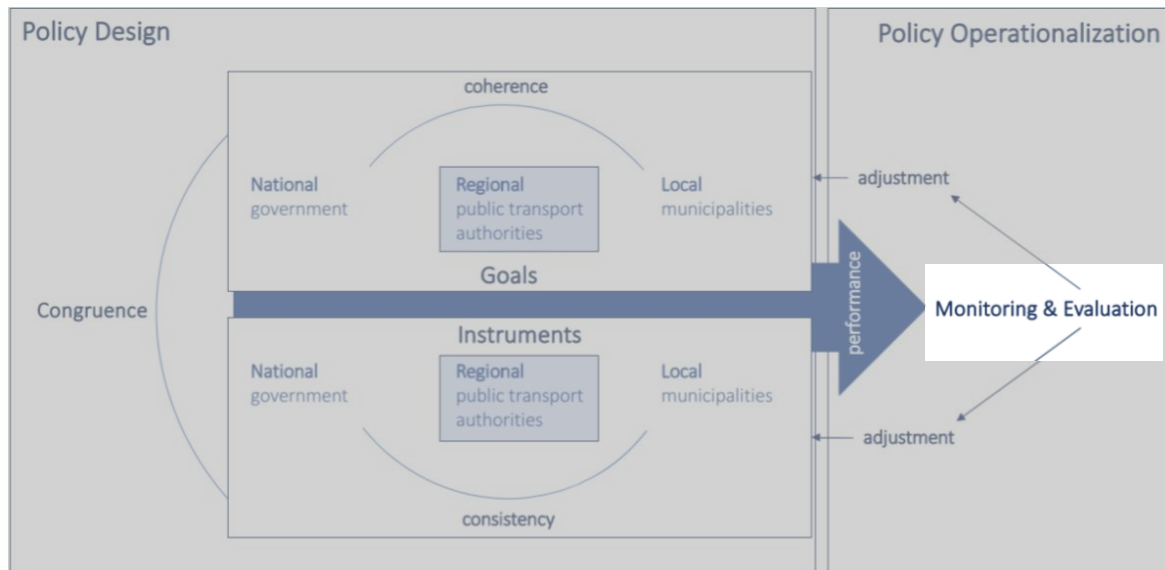


Figure 10: Policy monitoring and evaluation

##### 4.4.1. Monitoring and evaluation by public transport authorities

As was identified in 2.2.3., monitoring and evaluation are important aspects of the policy cycle. They help to determine policy performance and to generate insights on the basis of which (political) decisions can be taken. De Boer (personal communication, 01-04-2020) clearly identified these two aspects: *'we often monitor at two levels: the level at which we inform the [political] board and to improve our policy and its performance'*. Other interviewees also mentioned the importance of monitoring and evaluation to substantiate their choices. Stoker (personal communication, 22-04-2020) for example stated that OV-bureau Groningen-Drenthe is being judged by the [political] board on the basis of some performance indicators.

Regarding *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*, van Selm (personal communication, 26-03-2020) identified two types of monitoring: one is focused on the list of actions presented in the national vision, and the other focuses on the five main objectives. According to Hermans (personal communication, 06-08-2020), the five main objectives are being monitored on a national level by CROW. For each objective, it was researched what indicator – where possible an existing data source – could help determine the performance of the goal. It was stated multiple times that an objective as *'passengers will rate public transport with an average score of eight out of ten'* is rather easy to monitor with the help of the national OV-klantenbarometer. This OV-klantenbarometer was found to be used by all PTAs involved in this research. Other policy objectives are yet identified to be more difficult to monitor. Besides, translating back a large national target to what the individual PTA has contributed is difficult (van Selm, personal communication, 26-03-2020). This was also highlighted by Hermans (personal communication, 06-08-2020), who mentioned that some objectives from *Contouren Toekomstbeeld*

OV 2040 cannot – or do not have to – be translated to the regional level. As stated by Kouwenberg (personal communication, 26-05-2020): *'you know that there is information available, but it is difficult to tailor it'*.

PTAs can monitor and evaluate according to their own understanding of what is relevant. There are no national obligations for this. Van der Zwart (personal communication, 17-04-2020), identified that monitoring and evaluation within the PTA of Noord-Holland is not actively linked to *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*. The policy goals as stated in the national vision are more like societal goals and therefore less of measurable targets (Johansson, 2017). It was argued that it is expected for the PTAs to monitor the actions presented in *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* (Hermans, personal communication, 06-08-2020), although none of the PTAs touched upon this during the interviews. The PTAs were found to focus mainly on the performance of carrying out the task (concession management) instead of the contribution to the formulated policy goals (van Selm, personal communication, 26-03-2020). Hermans (personal communication, 06-08-2020) stated that: *'I think they [PTAs] focus more on the agreements made with the service provider, that there is more emphasis on that than on the objectives stated in Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040'*. This indeed became clear. De Boer (personal communication, 01-04-2020) noted for example, that most of the monitoring and evaluation is not so much about checking policy goals. Instead, performance indicators are being monitored by the PTAs as part of their concession management, which provides input for evaluation. These indicators are found to be easier to measure (Berloth, personal communication, 31-03-2020). Therefore, as was also identified by the interviewees, the PTAs mainly use quantitative measures to determine policy performance. Regarding these quantitative measures, the PTAs are often depending on the data provided by the service providers to determine policy performance (senior policy advisor Flevoland, personal communication, 15-04-2020).

Nonetheless, it was argued both qualitative and quantitative monitoring is necessary (Seasons, 2003), as most (abstract) policy goals are rather difficult to monitor with quantitative data alone. According to Berloth (personal communication, 31-03-2020), two difficulties can be identified here. First, how can you be sure that you measure what you want to measure – is the monitoring consistent. And the second is the fact that it is not always clear how to measure certain aspects. This applies for example to societal policy goals, as was also mentioned by Johansson (2017). Furthermore, it was identified during the interviews and data analysis that the exact way of monitoring differs per PTA, which makes it difficult to compare their policy performance. Keolis gave a clear example (see box 5) of such differences regarding the performance indicator *'punctuality'*. These differences result from diverse definitions that arise from – in this case – spatial characteristics.

*'The definitions may be different, there may be for example differences in punctuality. Decentralized governments look at it differently. If you are in Utrecht [urbanized area], and a bus is coming every 7 or 5 or 3 minutes, punctuality is less important for people who leave the station. If the bus leaves every half hour, and it leaves two minutes early, you will have to wait half an hour. That is more of a problem. So there are differences in how you deal with punctuality'* – Keolis (personal communication, 19-05-2020)

Box 5: Example differences in definitions for monitoring

Another example of differences in monitoring is OV-bureau Groningen-Drenthe, that is using a data warehouse system to continuously monitor the services (Stoker, personal communication, 22-04-2020). Other PTAs demand data for monitoring and evaluation of public transport performance within the concession on the basis of the so-called MIPOV – a monitoring information profile that includes elements required by law and regulations, supplemented by other necessary information for monitoring and evaluation. Most PTAs also require some additional information for monitoring and

evaluation, which differs per PTA. In order to ensure better uniformity in performance monitoring, a revision of this MIPOV is currently being composed.

Monitoring also provides input on the basis of which concession evaluations take place. A mid-term review and an evaluation after the concession mostly take place (van der Zwart, personal communication, 17-04-2020; Uijttewaal, personal communication, 15-05-2020). These policy evaluations are broader in scope than monitoring is, and are, according to van der Zwart (personal communication, 17-04-2020), used to determine whether the performance in the concessions still matches policy ambitions. As such, these evaluations can provide input for further policy development (van Selm, personal communication, 26-03-2020) or can bring about adjustments (Uijttewaal, personal communication, 15-05-2020). More information about policy adjustment can be found in 4.5.

While there is already a large amount of data available for monitoring, some information needs were identified during the interviews. These can help to further develop monitoring and evaluation of public transport performance. According to Berloth (personal communication, 31-03-2020), monitoring and evaluation especially can be more convenient. In addition, van Unen (personal communication, 26-03-2020) stated the need to indicate what the quantitative measures exactly mean, and what developments can be discovered. This links back again to Berloth (personal communication, 31-03-2020) who mentioned the need for recognition of trends during monitoring. Furthermore, as mentioned by the senior policy advisor Flevoland (personal communication, 15-04-2020), privacy may form a barrier for monitoring and evaluation.

#### 4.4.2. Monitoring and evaluation by OV-Oost and Vervoerregio Amsterdam

As stated, the exact way of monitoring differs per PTA. Therefore, this section highlights what it looks like within the sub-units OV-Oost and VRA. Both PTAs make great use of monitoring as part of their concession management, something all PTAs were found to do. This especially becomes clear for OV-Oost, where policy formulation takes place within the individual provinces, but OV-Oost was identified as a partnership in policy implementation and – more relevant in this section – evaluation. Monitoring and evaluation is one of the specific tasks for OV-Oost. For VRA, this is part of their broader responsibilities in (public) transport. Monitoring of concession management for both PTAs happens in accordance with the standards presented in MIPOV, although the additional information they request differs. Kouwenberg (personal communication, 26-05-2020) stated that they try to work with existing sources for monitoring and evaluation as much as possible.

To prevent the agreements made during the concessions becoming too fixed, evaluation takes place every 5 years within OV-Oost. The aim of these mid-term evaluations is to determine to what extent agreements still correspond to broader developments in the field of mobility and to offer sufficient space for the service provider to realize his plans with regard to public transport during the remaining term of the concession (OV-Oost, 2018). For Vervoerregio Amsterdam (2019), evaluation of concession management is considered important for identifying trends and (unexpected) developments, in order to provide for timely adjustments.

Monitoring and evaluation in concession management is found to be very important in both PTAs, but does not directly link back to the formulated (societal) policy goals. Instead, it merely measures the agreements made in the concession (van Rijn, personal communication, 21-04-2020). As these agreements slightly differ for every PTA, monitoring does as well.

Monitoring and evaluation regarding the formulated policy goals (and in that way to a certain extent linking back to *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*) does happen, although this could be identified less explicitly. Nonetheless, Veenstra (personal communication, 31-03-2020) mentioned that monitoring and evaluation within OV-Oost is also focused to determine whether they are still on track achieving

the intended goals. It remains unclear however how they link monitoring and evaluation to the broader (societal) goals. But it did become clear from the document analysis, that VRA links policy goals (strategic tasks) directly to how these can be measured. This was also recognized during the interview with Kouwenberg (personal communication, 26-05-2020), who is engaged with data and monitoring in this PTA. He stated that *'per strategic task, I look at what we want to achieve in the policy, and what information and data sources we can use to determine that performance'*. In this way, VRA can be found to be well developed in determining how their policies are performing in terms of achieving the intended goals. This did not become clear for the other PTAs. Nonetheless, Kouwenberg (personal communication, 26-05-2020) also stated that the available information sources do not always exactly match the policy.

#### 4.4.3. Conclusion

Monitoring and evaluation by the PTAs is found to be an important aspect that is used to provide input for policy development and to substantiate decision-making. Besides, based on monitoring and evaluations, adjustments may take place. As the PTAs can monitor and evaluate according to their own understanding of what is relevant, differences in data sources and definitions do occur. Currently, monitoring and evaluation in all PTAs appears to be primarily focused on concession management and quantitative indicators. Monitoring societal goals as stated in *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*, is found to be more difficult for the individual PTAs, as these cannot be easily monitored with measurable targets. Nonetheless, VRA was found to explicitly link their broader policy goals to how these can be measured.

#### 4.5. Adjustment of policy goals and instruments

Chapter 2.2.4. introduced processes of adjustment that help to develop policy over time. Adjustments may also become clear from monitoring and evaluation and can help to steer the policy in a desired direction. This chapter therefore focuses on the possibilities for adjustment in Dutch public transport.

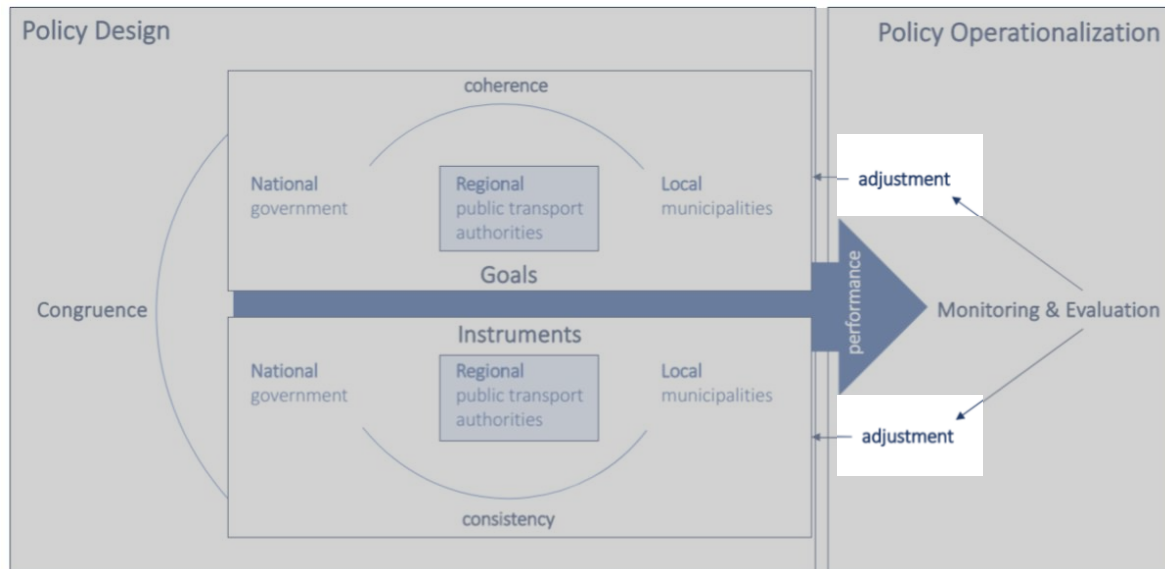


Figure 11: Policy adjustment

During the interviews, it was identified that *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* introduced new policy goals but that the policy instruments remained the same (van Selm, personal communication, 26-03-2020). These new policy goals may result from wider subsystem changes. For example, growing interest on (environmental) sustainability goals was identified, as can also be seen back in objective 3 of *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* and was stated by the senior policy employee of the national government (personal communication, 07-04-2020). Since the existing policy instruments are used to serve new goals, the national vision can be seen as a process of *conversion*. Because only policy goals changed, it implies a process of policy *patching* rather than policy *packaging* – the latter entails a large-scale substitution of the policy design. This may result from the fact that, as stated by Candel & Biesbroek (2016), changing existing policy instruments is a particularly challenging process.

Another process of adjustment that could be identified in the Dutch context of public transport is *drift*, where policy focus may shift every four years as a result of the changing political environment. Veenstra (personal communication, 31-03-2020) stated that there can be a shift in emphasis on political ambitions every four years. The senior policy advisor Flevoland (personal communication, 15-04-2020) identified that, as a result, every four years the PTA has to consider how to give substance to that goal. Box 6 offers an example of such shifting political emphasis. This can result in differences in policy focus between the individual PTAs.

*‘Suppose that there would be a cabinet on the far left, more money would probably be put into public transport and there would probably be more change for a proposal to provide low-income people to travel for free. And if there is a right-wing cabinet, there will be more focus on creating market forces’* – senior policy employee national government (personal communication, 07-04-2020)

Box 6: Example changing political environment

Although the above-mentioned processes can bring about major policy adjustments, policy implementation was argued by Isaksson et al. (2017) to be a complex action with continuous readjustments. This was also identified by Stoker (personal communication, 22-04-2020): *‘we are not*

*in a stationary situation. it is a process of constantly adapting to'. As Contouren Toekomsbeeld OV 2040 was presented being an adaptive vision, adjustments are possible on a regular basis. Van Selm (personal communication, 26-03-2020) identified this adaptivity as a joint process, where incentives for change can come from all levels (e.g. international, regional).*

Adjustment of policy goals and instruments by the PTAs resulting from *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* was not found back during data collection. Stoker (personal communication, 22-04-2020) for example stated that they will not actively adjust their policy goals as a result of *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*. Although a granted concession is rather fixed, resulting from monitoring and evaluation (see 4.4), continuous (small) readjustments within the tender do occur. This was also identified by both Berloth (personal communication, 31-03-2020) and the senior policy advisor Flevoland (personal communication, 15-04-2020), who stated that minor adjustments are possible during a tender. The agreements in the concession determine the 'degree of freedom' for adjustment. Changes identified within the tender therefore remain mainly related to the transport plan, timetables and rates – see box 7. Uijtewaal (personal communication, 25-05-2020) stated that if the adjustments fit within the agreements made with the service provider – thus within the 'degree of freedom' – this does not have to cause any problems. Financial policy instruments were found to broaden the 'degree of freedom' for policy adjustment.

*'Every year we set the rates, which are linked to a travel right. [...] Besides, we determine timetables every year, so that means you can just choose where to drive, what village is affected, but these are not large-scale changes' – Berloth (personal communication, 31-03-2020)*

Box 7: Example readjustments within tender

It became clear that changes occurred regarding adjustments within the tender. Reason for this, according to OV-Oost (2018), is the fact that the field of public transport is developing much faster than about ten years ago. Therefore, PTAs want to have better opportunities to make adjustments when necessary, which can help them to move along with (societal) developments. Multiple interviewees recognized to have included more adaptivity and flexibility within their most recent concession agreements to create more room for policy adjustment – the 'degree of freedom' for adjustment has increased. For example, the project manager Fryslan (personal communication, 26-03-2020) stated that *'what we are doing now is already including space and flexibility in the tender contract, to be able to adjust where necessary during the term of that concession'*. This was made even more explicit at OV-bureau Groningen-Drenthe, where Stoker (personal communication, 22-04-2020) stated that *'symbolically, at the front of our tender documents is a very large F, of flexibility. In theory we have the option to adjust 10% per year'*. This great degree of freedom for adjustment by OV-bureau Groningen-Drenthe also becomes clear from the example in box 8. Their great degree of freedom for adjustment is influenced by the fact that they are responsible for the revenue themselves, making them less dependent on the service provider and in that way offering more room to move along with developments.

*'The previous concession was designed in the same way. At that time, there was a tendering process for two tram lines in the city of Groningen, which was ultimately canceled. But it was already arranged in the concession. [...] Well in the end, the whole tram project was stranded for political reasons, and then in 3 months time we came up with an alternative that actually had a same structure, in terms of the routes in the city where the tram would be built, we created a high-quality bus system' – Stoker (personal communication, 22-04-2020)*

Box 8: Example degree of freedom OV-bureau Groningen-Drenthe

As it is rather difficult for the PTAs to do adjustments during the term of a concession, development responsibility is expected from the service provider (van Unen, personal communication, 26-03-2020).



This can provide for adjustments during the term of the concession. An example of such development responsibility that can provide for adjustment within the concession, can be found in box 9. Aside from the limited readjustments possible in the tender, broader idea development continues that can provide input for a later tender (Berloth, personal communication, 31-03-2020). This idea development can lead to future policy adjustment.

*'Another example, very specifically, is Haarlem-Amsterdam, bus 255. That bus line only runs during rush hour and I do not think it is in the concession, but Connexxion [service provider] offered it. They saw a potential demand there, also to relieve other buses, and therefore decided to deploy an extra rush line that runs from Haarlem to Amsterdam in one go' – van der Zwart (personal communication, 17-04-2020)*

Box 9: Example development responsibility service provider

It was identified by both Berloth (personal communication, 31-03-2020) and de Boer (personal communication, 01-04-2020) that, as changes are not directly visible, it takes a while before one can determine whether and in what way a policy has to be adjusted. This may pose difficulties to policy adjustment by the PTAs. As a result, adjustment mainly occurs for structural issues (Veenstra, personal communication, 31-03-2020). Besides, finding a balance between clear control and room for adjustment remains a challenge. This presents a tension between policy formulation and policy implementation, as was also identified by the program manager Fryslan (personal communication, 26-03-2020).

#### 4.5.1. Policy adjustment in OV-Oost and Vervoerregio Amsterdam

As was identified, continuous readjustments are present within the current concession. This can be seen back in the sub-units, where possibilities for policy adjustment were included in the tender documents of both IJssel-Vecht (OV-Oost) and Zaanstreek-Waterland (VRA). A specific chapter on flexibility and intermediate adjustment of the concession was therefore included in the tender document (Vervoerregio Amsterdam, 2019). A similar section on adjustment was identified in and considered important for the tender document IJssel-Vecht (OV-Oost, 2018).

Van Rijn (personal communication, 21-04-2020) stated that, as VRA is a very dynamic area, there is a lot of space and need for adjustment. There are always bottlenecks or big events that ask for *ad hoc* adjustments. Therefore, VRA has built in enough 'degree of freedom' in their tenders. The need for *ad hoc* adjustment is less significant for the concessions in OV-Oost as it is a less urbanized area. Other (spatial) dynamics are present here.

To be able to respond to current developments during the term of the concession, midterm reviews are included that can for example provide for a shift of emphasis, as well as (minor) adjustments can be made via the annual transport plan (Vervoerregio Amsterdam, 2019; OV-Oost, 2018; Uijttewaal, personal communication, 25-05-2020). These readjustments may follow from stakeholders' wishes, changes in the number of travelers or to optimize the timetable and improve connections (OV-Oost, 2019). These smaller adjustments within the concession are performed by the service provider, and are considered part of its development responsibility.

For OV-Oost, differences in the 'degree of freedom' for development responsibility can be identified between the various categories of lines (A-lines, B-lines, C-lines). A-lines have the least room for adjustment as these are described in greatest detail (OV-Oost, 2019). This subdivision results from the challenge for balancing between clear control and flexibility in concessions (OV-Oost, 2018). It was identified for OV-Oost that the development responsibility in combination with the responsibility for revenue results in continuous readjustments by the service provider (Uijttewaal, personal communication, 25-05-2020). Uijttewaal (personal communication, 25-05-2020) identified that within

the tender, margins for adjustment have been indicated. The development responsibility also became clear from the tender document Zaanstreek-Waterland, although it was not touched upon by the interviewees.

The PTA is thus found to be rather dependent on the service provider for readjustments during the term of the concession. Therefore, VRA explicitly works with a bonus-malus construction (see 4.3.1.2.) that can steer for adjustment (van Rijn, personal communication, 21-04-2020) and can also be seen as a (financial) policy instrument. This bonus-malus construction is not present for OV-Oost, as they do not use bonuses (OV-Oost, 2018). However, they do use penalties that can initiate adjustments by the service provider. As the service providers are mainly realizing the (minor) adjustments and the PTAs are ultimately responsible, it became clear both from the interviews and the tender documents that adjustments always happen in consultation.

#### 4.5.2. Conclusion

Processes of *conversion* and *drift* were identified to adjust Dutch public transport policy design. Policy instruments have not changed over the years, while policy goals have. Besides, political influence considerably determines the emphasis of policy ambitions. There is minor room for adjustment within granted concessions, as these are rather fixed. The 'degree of freedom' for adjustment is found to be an important dependence here. This is highly reliant on the agreements made with the service provider and therefore slightly differs per PTA. It was identified that the 'degree of freedom' for adjustments in the tender increased in recent years, due to rapid developments in public transport. Nonetheless, finding a balance between taking control and leaving room for adjustment in policy implementation remains a challenge.

## 4.6. Data synthesis

Now that the collected results are presented, this chapter provides for a synthesis that brings together the results of the different elements of the policy processes in the multi-level structure of Dutch public transport. First, an overview of the elements of the policy processes for the selected sub-units is presented, giving context-specific insights. Subsequently, an interpretation is given to explain the apparently distinct pieces of evidence that have been collected throughout the research. This helps to gain more insight in policy operationalization and evaluation in the multi-level context of Dutch public transport. The interpretative analysis supports the accumulation of knowledge on public transport policy.

### 4.6.1. Characterization of the elements of the policy process

As two sub-units were selected, these are brought together to provide a clear overview of the policy processes in these PTAs. It was identified that the institutional as well as spatial characteristics for OV-Oost and VRA significantly differ, leading to varieties in their policy processes. These are presented in table 8 and further explained and interpreted in the accompanying text.

Elements of the policy process	OV-Oost	Vervoerregio Amsterdam (VRA)
Policy goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Three provinces independently authorized for policy formulation</li> <li>- Individual ambitions merged into one NvU</li> <li>- Detailed interpretations differ</li> <li>- Gelderland and Overijssel together provided input for the national vision</li> <li>- Regional ambitions are considered dominant, but national vision is relevant for long-term policy development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Independently authorized to formulate policy goals</li> <li>- Distinct metropolitan spatial dynamics have considerable influence on policy goals</li> <li>- Need for focus on other policy areas (horizontal integration)</li> <li>- Abstract ambitions concretized into PvE and investment agenda</li> <li>- Policy goals from national vision not adopted directly but steer into a future direction</li> <li>- Strongly connected to the national network, national vision policy goals seem to be more relevant</li> </ul>
Policy instruments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regulatory policy instrument of granting concessions most important</li> <li>- Reinforced by financial policy instruments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Granting concessions, BDU and subsidies most important policy instruments</li> <li>- Financial policy instruments mainly used to stimulate developments</li> </ul>
Policy implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Need for cooperation to be <i>capable</i> of implementing policies</li> <li>- Cooperating structure OV-Oost helps to share knowledge, which increases <i>comprehension</i></li> <li>- <i>Capabilities</i> regarding financial instruments differ within OV-Oost</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Policy goals of the national vision are found to be ambitious compared to the financial <i>capabilities</i></li> <li>- Differences in <i>capabilities</i> for implementation identified for the involved municipalities</li> </ul>
Policy monitoring & evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One of the specific tasks for OV-Oost</li> <li>- For concession management in accordance with the standards presented in MIPOV2008.</li> <li>- Mid-term evaluations take place</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Primarily measuring agreements in the concession, in accordance with MIPOV2008 and some additional information</li> <li>- Linking broader policy goals directly to how these can be measured</li> </ul>
Policy adjustment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Only minor adjustments during the concession</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lot of need for adjustment due to spatial dynamics</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Distinction between various categories of lines with different 'degree of freedom' for adjustment</li> <li>- Development responsibility expected from the service provider</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Within concession, adjustments with the help of bonus-malus construction and development responsibility</li> </ul>
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Table 8: Elements of the policy process characterized for the specific cases

As the individual ambitions of the three provinces involved in OV-Oost were merged into one NvU, these are found not to be undermining each other and can therefore not be seen as incoherent. The spatial dynamics present in PTAs ask for a different focus of policy goals. The policy goals presented in *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* may be more relevant for VRA due to its strong connection to the national network. For both sub-units however, their regional ambitions were considered dominant.

For OV-Oost, policy formulation and policy implementation and evaluation are considered in distance from each other. The first takes place within the individual provinces and the latter within their cooperating body. This offers clarity in responsibilities, but it also poses challenges as it creates a gap between these elements. Besides, this structure makes OV-Oost less decisive. The structure of OV-bureau Groningen-Drenthe on the other hand, which is independently authorized, allows for greater decisiveness. Furthermore, as a result of the fragmentation between policy formulation and policy implementation and evaluation, the latter is less clearly linked to the formulated (societal) goals. Even though VRA also has a clear separation in responsibilities – the organization is following the structure of the policy cycle –, policy formulation and evaluation are more explicitly linked. In their vision on mobility, monitoring measurements are directly connected to the formulated strategic tasks. Nonetheless, both PTAs focus particularly on monitoring performance within their concession management. This clearly shows the strong focus on this regulatory policy instrument, that was found with all PTAs. Financial policy instruments were identified to be rather stimulating or facilitating – in that way enforcing the regulatory policy instrument of granting concessions. As VRA is working with financial rewards for the service provider, this financial policy instrument is used to enforce the regulatory policy instrument of granting concessions – which can be seen as *consistent*. However, the availability of financial policy instruments differs particularly per PTA. This seems to be especially challenging within OV-Oost, where the individual provinces have different budgets available. As a result, their capabilities for implementation are dissimilar.

#### 4.6.2. Interpretative analysis on policy operationalization

Rahman Khan & Khandaker (2017) presented three aspects that are at least of great importance for effective policy operationalization – and thus for achieving the intended policy goals. As this research shed light on how PTAs operationalize and evaluate Dutch national public transport policy design, these aspects together with the implementation properties presented by Vedung (1997) structure this last section. The institutional context resonates in it, as this inherently shapes and influences the policy design and implementation processes.

First, it was stated that a clarification of ambitions is needed (Rahman Khan & Khandaker, 2017) – this presents the first step of the policy cycle. *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* presented ambitions in various degrees of abstractness, although generally spoken they remain rather abstract due to the fact that they are long-term oriented and apply to the whole of the Netherlands. This poses challenges to the *comprehension* of the policy design and leaves a lot of room for own interpretation. As a result, policy goals on lower levels of abstraction are found to differ per PTA, mainly due to different spatial dynamics. One of the arguments for decentralization can be found back here, as PTAs tailor the policy to suit their spatial dynamics.

As the regional visions provided input to the national vision and Dutch public transport is organized in a decentralized way, one may wonder why a national policy was established. This is not entirely in line with the idea behind decentralization, where responsibilities are delegated to lower territorial levels. It does however clearly show the steering role the national government continues to perform in multi-level governance, as was presented by Hooghe & Marks (2003). *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* directs the individual PTAs in the same future direction, but the high level of abstractness allows the vision to be adaptive and gives individual PTAs the chance to customize the policy design to their regional needs. In this way, responsibilities are indeed vested with intermediate levels of government (Piattoni, 2010), because PTAs remain ultimately responsible for urban and regional public transport. This extent of responsibilities of the involved parties – one of the other aspects presented by Rahman Khan & Khandaker (2017) – was also defined in the Wp2000. However, Piattoni (2010) already argued that responsibilities become more blurred and intertwined as a result of multi-level governance. Looking at the enormous amount of cooperating bodies in Dutch public transport, PTAs and other involved parties have indeed become very entangled. This increases their *capabilities* for policy implementation, but may also pose challenges to the *comprehension* of everyone's responsibilities.

Although there is much cooperation between the various levels of government, a clear separation between responsibilities for policy formulation and policy implementation was identified within the PTAs. Furthermore, since the concession is considered the most important policy instrument, the service provider is eventually implementing the policy (formulated by PTAs) on the programme level via this instrument. In this way, although the decentralization of Dutch public transport did distribute tasks over various levels, a clear separation between policy-makers and policy-takers can still be identified. This poses challenges to the *congruence* of the policy design, as policy goals and policy instruments for implementation are not clearly linked. The integration of policy formulation and policy implementation however is of great importance for establishing effective policies.

Moreover, it was stated in literature (van Geet et al., 2019) that governments use their available policy instruments in various combinations. In Dutch public transport this interplay between various policy instruments did not become so clear. It is the default for all PTAs to use the regulatory policy instrument of granting concessions. This regulatory policy instrument of granting concessions focuses purely on the vehicles and timetables. The main combination this regulatory policy instrument is used in, is with financial policy instruments. These primarily follow from the BDU, which is orchestrated by the national government. In this combination, the financial policy instruments may strengthen the regulatory policy instruments and can therefore be identified as being consistent. Financial policy instruments were found to considerably influence to what extent ambitions can be translated into the concession. This is thus highly dependent on the financial capabilities of the individual PTA, that were found to particularly differ.

The dominant regulatory policy instrument of granting concession offers a lot of power due to its legal rigor, but it also poses limited room for flexibility. This presents a challenge that becomes evident from the collected data: finding a balance between clear control and the degree of freedom. This did not only become specifically clear in policy adjustment (see 4.5), where it was identified that over the years, PTAs have included more flexibility in their tender documents. The legal rigor of the policy instrument of granting concessions forms a barrier to adjustment. Also, as policy instruments have remained the same over the years, they are not found to be very flexible. Besides, the fact that monitoring and evaluation are substantial elements in the policy cycle of Dutch public transport, demonstrates a need for controlling the service providers.

Furthermore, although PTAs and other parties involved in Dutch public transport all endorsed *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* – suggesting they are *willing* to implement it – in the end they tend

to stick more to their regional visions and concession management. The regional policy goals are usually more short-term and less abstract, and concession management is generally anticipated *ad hoc*. This would both ask for more concrete steps in the national vision to offer a greater *comprehensibility* for implementation, as well as it asks for flexibility to be able to anticipate straightaway. The first goes against the idea behind decentralization and multi-level governance, the latter helps to represent the aforementioned tension between taking control and leaving room for flexibility. The ‘degree of freedom’ therefore seems to be an additional, considerable implementation property.

The last important aspect for policy operationalization presented by Rahman Khan & Khandaker (2017) is effective monitoring and evaluation. With this aspect, the elements that are central to this research are brought together. Monitoring and evaluation are found to be filled in differently by the PTAs, as there is no general standard that is mandatory. OV-bureau Groningen-Drenthe was found to be very well developed in their monitoring and evaluation of concession management, as they are using a system of continuous monitoring. Nonetheless, monitoring and evaluation by PTAs remains mainly focused on *ad hoc* concession management and to substantiate decision-making, and is not actively linked to societal goals. Only VRA was found to clearly link their strategic tasks to measurements, in that way establishing a better integration between policy formulation and policy evaluation. However, the available information sources do not always match the policy goals. Besides, as PTAs are not using one national standard, monitoring and evaluation cannot be compared between the different PTAs. Furthermore, the lack of monitoring and evaluation of societal goals by PTAs affects the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation of *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*. Again, policy formulation and evaluation are considered in absence of each other.

Although the aspects presented by Rahman Khan & Khandaker (2017) allow for a great understanding of how policy operationalization could be more effective, it has to be considered that policy processes are not rational and are highly context-specific. Therefore, there is a need for *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* to be adaptive and enough ‘degree of freedom’ for adjustment is necessary. Lowering the level of abstractness of the national vision would mean the national government is taking back full control and there is a very limited ‘degree of freedom’ for adjustments along the way. This would not fit the idea behind multi-level governance.

It can be argued that, when formulating policies, the properties for implementation (Vedung, 1997) should be considered. Especially financial resources, which increase the capabilities of PTAs for implementing the formulated policies. When developing new policy ambitions, the properties for implementation – especially capability – should therefore be tailored accordingly. This was already mentioned by Howlett et al. (2014), who named this ‘goodness of fit’. This emphasizes the context-specific nature of the policy design process. Since the policy instruments and implementation properties did not change with the newly formulated ambitions of *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*, currently, the ‘goodness of fit’ between national policy design and regional policy operationalization and evaluation seems to be mainly based on chance and is not structurally guaranteed.

## 5. Conclusion and discussion

### 5.1. Conclusion

This research was carried out by conducting a case study research with a two-step approach, that helped answering the main question: ‘How is Dutch national public transport policy operationalized and evaluated by decentralized public transport authorities?’ and its corresponding sub-questions. The aim was to gain more insight in policy operationalization in the multi-level context of Dutch public transport and by this contributing to the accumulation of knowledge on public transport policy. Dutch public transport authorities [PTAs] were expected to have a different, yet fundamental influence on the policy process, due to different spatial and institutional characteristics (different contexts), availability of tools and normative understandings. This was researched by a combination of interviews and additional document analysis. Although policy processes are not static and continue to develop, some major conclusions can be drawn from the journey around the Dutch public transport policy cycle that you have been travelling throughout this research.

Dutch public transport is organized in a multi-level way, with – bluntly speaking – service providers operating under PTAs, that are responsible for the operationalization of public transport policy. Currently, these PTAs are found to be mainly covered by provinces and some regional partnerships. They have their own authorizations, but remain orchestrated by the national government (national level). A great amount of cooperation between the different layers of government was identified in Dutch public transport – a typical feature for multi-level governance. This helps to enhance capabilities for implementation, but also poses a challenge to the comprehension of responsibilities as these become more intertwined.

First, it was identified that PTAs appear to consider their regional policy as guiding principle and therefore do not directly adopt the objectives from the national vision *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*. It was however stated that the national vision provides a direction for the future. *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* can therefore be seen as a steering document which, due to its high level of abstractness, leaves a lot of room for interpretation by the decentralized PTAs. For the PTAs, mainly spatial dynamics were found to lead to a different relevance and various interpretations of national policy goals. This results in varieties in the degree of coherence, although policy goals were not found to be undermining each other. Despite the fact that it was not touched upon in literature, political influence was also found to determine the emphasis of policy ambitions and therefore also directs interpretation differences between PTAs.

To be able to implement the formulated policy, the regulatory policy instrument of granting concessions was found to be most prominent for all PTAs. Financial policy instruments were also identified as important, although mainly used to support the regulatory policy instrument – by this securing consistency. Other combinations of policy instruments were hardly present. Although the available policy instruments did not change over the years and were found to be similar for the individual PTAs, their adequacy is very much context-dependent and as such leads to differences for implementation. Mainly capabilities (financial and cooperation) and comprehension were found to be important for implementation and particularly differ per PTA.

Policy formulation and policy operationalization were found to be oftentimes considered in absence of each other, posing challenges for congruency. This integration however is of great importance for establishing effective policies. Currently, policy goals are frequently formulated without taking into account the available policy instruments and the implementation properties of individual PTAs. Furthermore, societal policy goals as stated in *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* are usually challenging to monitor and evaluate due to the lack of available and suitable information sources for

these measurements. PTAs currently monitor and evaluate according to their own understanding of what is relevant, which mainly focus on *ad hoc* concession management and not on the national policy goals and other underlying, often societal, policy goals. As a result, differences in data sources and definitions exist that make it difficult to compare monitoring results between PTAs.

It can thus be concluded that indeed, differences in policy operationalization and evaluation exist between the individual PTAs. These mainly follow from spatial dynamics and political influence, that lead to differences in the emphasis of policy goals. The institutional context particularly defined the decisiveness of the PTA and the amount of integration between policy formulation and operationalization. Furthermore, although available policy instruments were found to be similar, implementation properties differ – in particular financial capability. Moreover, as there appeared to be a strong focus on concession management, this poses limited room for adjustment. A challenge that became evident, is finding a balance between taking clear control and the degree of freedom.

Policy processes are highly context-specific, and therefore policy design has to fit with these particular characteristics – both spatial and institutional. The goodness of fit of *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* with policy operationalization at the regional level of responsible PTAs currently appears to be based on chance rather than being structurally guaranteed. A reconsideration of the available policy instruments and implementation properties for the individual PTAs as well as a better integration of policy formulation and policy operationalization would pose new opportunities. This can help to break the path dependency of Dutch public transport policy operationalization.

## 5.2. Discussion

Now that the journey along the policy cycle has come to an end and the research question(s) have been answered, this last section offers a critical reflection on the implications, limitations and recommendations of the research.

### 5.2.1. Implications

Overall, this research is argued to have contributed to the accumulation of knowledge on public transport policy by gaining more understanding on the context-specific situation of Dutch public transport policy operationalization and evaluation by regional PTAs. In this way, it has revealed new insights as compared to the theoretical implications. These empirical insights and the attention to policy elements that are oftentimes overlooked, add on the extensive amount of scientific literature on policy processes. The results provided insight in how differences and similarities come about and help to recognize barriers and enablers for policy operationalization and evaluation. As such, the real-world examples of this research provide input to further optimize Dutch public transport operationalization and evaluation, which goes beyond the existing theoretical insights.

The research findings suggest that policy formulation and policy operationalization have to be more integrated. In line with previous research, this shows that policy goals and instruments are oftentimes considered in absence of each other. This became clear, for example, by the fact that policy goals changed with *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*, while policy instruments remained the same over the years. With this research, the lack of integration between policy goals and policy monitoring and evaluation also became clear. These elements are oftentimes overlooked in scientific research, but are of major importance to be able to determine policy performance. As this research gave empirical insights in monitoring and evaluation, it contributed to the expansion of knowledge on these elements. Hence, the scientific knowledge gap on monitoring and evaluation in the policy cycle has narrowed. Nonetheless, more research on these elements remains necessary – for example to offer suggestions on improving monitoring and evaluation of societal goals. Furthermore, the research indicated that a reconsideration of available policy instruments and its combinations is necessary. The rigidity of the



regulatory policy instrument of granting concessions currently limits the possibilities for adjustment and maintains the path dependency in Dutch public transport operationalization.

Due to the fact that policy processes are very context-dependent, the institutional situation of Dutch public transport was taken into account. The research implies that there is continuous interaction between the various levels of government, which was considered characteristic for multi-level governance. In this way, although the main focus was with the regional PTAs, the research did not remain limited to only one level of government. It did take into account the roles, responsibilities of and interactions with other governmental layers, and even that of the service providers. A mutual dependence between the different territorial levels in Dutch public transport was identified, although responsibilities are formally decentralized. Furthermore, following Howlett (2009), meta-level policy formulation was expected to be influencing meso-level and micro-level policy choices. Nonetheless, it became clear from this research that the regional PTAs, since they are independently authorized, value their regional ambitions more and therefore not directly adopt the formulated policy from the national vision. This indicates the importance to take into account the institutional context, which greatly influences the policy process.

### 5.2.2. Limitations

It should be noted that no research goes without limitations. These are therefore important to be considered. First, processes outside the scope of the policy cycle have not been explicitly taken into account in this research, except from the institutional context. As a result, the conclusions are mainly based on hard aspects that could be related to the policy cycle. Soft aspects – such as organizational culture and personal characteristics – have not been explicitly addressed. However, they can pose particular influence on the processes of policy operationalization and evaluation. Besides, horizontal interaction between different sectoral levels is increasing – for example with the arrival of the Environment and Planning Act. This was left outside of the scope of this research, although combining policy instruments from different sectoral levels can offer opportunities for more effective policy operationalization. Recommendations for follow-up research emerge from these identified limitations.

Moreover, OV-Oost offered an interesting perspective of a partnership in Dutch public transport. However, as it clearly showed policy formulation and policy operationalization being separated between the provinces and the cooperating body itself, this sub-unit was not the most suitable to draw conclusions about policy formulation from. Besides, the process of policy operationalization takes time. As *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* was only published last year February and the field of public transport continues to develop, results and conclusions as presented in this research may alterate over the years. Furthermore, there was a limited focus on the role of the service provider and the influence of market forces on policy operationalization. This is however of particular influence on this process, since the regulatory policy instrument of granting concessions was found to be dominant.

Regarding the research process itself, some limitations can be identified as well. First, the situation around the COVID-19 pandemic posed some challenges for the data collection, as the initial idea of conducting face-to-face interviews had to be turned into online interviews. This made the interviews somewhat more distant, but overall, it appeared to work out reasonably well. More important, although a broad range of interviewees was selected and this data was supplemented with document analysis, it has to be considered that a choice was necessary between a detailed or more generic descriptive study. The first would ask for the involvement of a smaller number of PTAs, but more interviewees per PTA. The latter gives a broader understanding of Dutch public transport operationalization, but asks for nuances on the findings of individual PTAs. As there was a personal desire to gain a broader understanding of the full situation of Dutch public transport, a more generic descriptive study was chosen with two additional sub-units to provide some more empirical insights.

Nonetheless, due to this choice, the in-depth insights remain limited. More in-depth future research could help provide further insights and context-specific examples to help accumulate knowledge on public transport policy. Besides, the choice to gain a broader understanding of Dutch public transport also posed challenges to the demarcation of the research. A personal pitfall becomes clear from this, due to a broad interest and wish to gain knowledge on a broad range of aspects. As a result, many elements were included in the research. Looking back, the research framework would have been defined more explicitly. However, it also has to be noted that there was limited awareness of the complex organization of Dutch public transport before delving into the subject.

Last, it has to be noted that the results of the study are very much dependent on the selected interviewees, as these are one of the primary sources of evidence. Since the organizations were approached in a broader sense and there was no insight in the most suitable participants, apart from the fact that they had to be involved in public transport, finding the right interviewees was partly based on chance. Nonetheless, as the participants thus were involved in public transport (most of them via the PTA), they appeared to be sufficiently suitable for the research.

### 5.2.3. Recommendations

There are multiple ways in which it would be interesting to expand or detail the scope of this research. This can help to anticipate on the above-mentioned implications and limitations of the research and help to answer a range of new questions that have popped up as a result of this research. The suggestions that are outlined below are divided into recommendations for practices and recommendations for research.

#### 5.2.3.1. Recommendations for practice

It became clear that in Dutch public transport, the focus is almost exclusively on the policy instrument of granting concessions. The only structural combination identified was with supportive financial policy instruments. Nonetheless, as was argued in scientific literature, usually a combination of various policy instruments is being used in multiple ways to help achieve the intended goals. As a result, as was also stated in the concluding section of this research, a reconsideration of the current available policy instruments is recommended. Further research on other policy instruments applicable for public transport can help policy makers in selecting the optimal instrument mixes.

Moreover, when designing policies, it is recommended for policy makers to take into account both the available policy instruments and the policy implementation properties of the authority that is implementing the policy. In this way, policy design and operationalization can become more integrated. Besides, public transport policy making can become more integrated with other policy fields. This provides new instruments and perspectives that can be beneficial for achieving the intended goals.

#### 5.2.3.2. Recommendations for research

Although *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* is still subject to interpretation and dependent on the implementation properties of the various PTAs, such wider policy-formulation processes do impact policy outcomes and performance as they steer in a future direction. However, as was already mentioned in 5.2.2., it will take some time before these effects can be noticed. Only then can be argued whether the intention (the formulated policy goals in *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040*) and the actual implementation are the same. Therefore, a longitudinal research on the operationalization and/or evaluation of *Contouren Toekomstbeeld OV 2040* is recommended. In this way, the long-term policy development of Dutch public transport can also be outlined. This can help to gain more insight in the processes of monitoring and evaluation and to identify the long-term adjustment processes,

which are challenging to identify on the short-term. Besides, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic may become clear from such future research.

Furthermore, future research could help to further verify or specify the conducted research. First, additional interviews with employees of the various PTAs and other parties involved in Dutch public transport, such as service providers, can help to further expand the in-depth knowledge on Dutch public transport operationalization and evaluation. Besides, focusing on one single PTA or one specific step of the policy cycle can help provide more detailed information on the specific topics. This would be especially relevant for the elements of monitoring and evaluation, as was mentioned in 5.2.1. Although this research shed light on these elements, additional research can further accumulate the knowledge on monitoring and evaluation.

Perhaps even more interesting for future research, is comparing the institutional context of Dutch public transport with other contexts outside the Netherlands. For example, further research can shed light on the situation in Denmark, which is somewhat comparable with the situation in the Netherlands, or on the situation in Japan, where public transport is privatized. Such future research is particularly relevant, as the institutional setting was found to influence policy processes to a great extent. Resulting from this, additional good practices can be identified that provide input to further optimize public transport policy operationalization and evaluation all around the world.

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