

A Framework of Collective Transport Planning: Case Study of Local Districts in Kelantan, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of most transport systems is to improve people's accessibility to basic goods, services, and facilities. An efficient transportation system not only enhances people's quality of life, it can also help to facilitate industrial economic activities and to sustain stable economic growth. Thus, it is ultimately important for transport planning to be properly planned and implemented. Improving rural access to transportation is essential as it can improve the social well-being of the rural community. An accessible rural transport system can be achieved with an efficient planning and implementation process. The study adopts a qualitative approach by conducting semi-structured interviews to illustrate the transport planning systems in the selected local districts in Kelantan, Malaysia. The target population of the study is the policymakers at the federal, state, and local levels who are directly involved in planning and implementing the transport plan. A total of 17 respondents were interviewed among them were 13 policymakers (federal, state and local); 2 local transport operators and 2 transport experts. From the study, it has been found that the fragmentation of the organizational structures between federal, state, and local governments throughout the planning and implementation process is mainly due to poor coordination among government agencies that are highly influenced by political factors. This situation has adversely affected the three government levels' relationship and caused friction between them. Therefore, a robust collective transport planning framework is significant in formulating and implementing a sound and sustainable transport policy in Malaysia.

Keywords: Transport planning; Case study; Qualitative; Accessibility; Transport system

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INTRODUCTION

The growing demand for accessibility to opportunities such as jobs, health, and education has urged countries to have an efficient transport system. Therefore, there is an utmost urgency in today's world to have a competent public transportation system as it is portrayed as the root of a country's economy in providing adequate access and in connecting places which helps to mobilize civilians to their jobs, education, and entertainment (Azmi & Fanim, 2012). Understanding the local's needs and demands would allow policymakers to implement a more accessible transportation system for all especially those living in rural areas.

Inadequate accessibility and mobility can result in low quality of life, well-being, and social exclusion (Pyrialakou, Gkritza & Fricker, 2016). Accessibility is a fundamental concept used in several scientific fields such as transport planning, urban planning, and geography as it plays a vital role in the policy-making process. Generally, accessibility simply measures the existence of opportunities together with the availability of transport options to reach them. It is also a clear concept in relating people and goods together (Geurs & Wee, 2004). The prior goals of rural access planning should consider the needs of rural people which include cost, facilities, and services provisions for their social and economic development (Donnges, 2003).

Poor accessibility in rural areas is a common issue experienced by countries worldwide (Petersen, 2012). These issues are common in many parts of the world but are alarming in Africa and in Asia, where services can be non-existent or thin on the ground, particularly in more remote rural areas. However, where transport services do exist, they can be unsafe and rather expensive (Hine, Huizenga & Willilo, 2015). Consequently, as stated by Litman (2017) how transportation is evaluated can affect planning decisions. Therefore, it is crucial for transport planning in rural areas to be properly planned, designed, implemented and maintained together with community involvement.

In this study, a closer look at the challenges of implementing the rural transport plan in the local districts in Kelantan is further explored. The inter-organizational relations between the three tiers of government at the federal, state and local levels in implementing the rural transport plan are closely captured to better understand how the government is realizing the initiated rural transport plan into action. A closer understanding of the rural transport accessibility scenario in Kuala Krai District is also captured from observation and insights from the villagers to understand the current transportation issues. The heart of the problem of this study is then carefully explained by gathering responses from the policymakers, transport operators, transport experts as well as villagers through in-depth interviews. After a critical evaluation of the existing transport system, a framework of collective transport planning is proposed.

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

There are several federal agencies that participate in the planning and implementation of state government projects or policies. In Kelantan, the South Kelantan Development Authority (KESEDAR) is a regional development authority established under the South Kelantan Development Authority Act 1978 (Act 203) and gazette on March 2, 1978. KESEDAR is one of the agencies under the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development (KKLW). The geographical area placed under the management of KESEDAR is the area of the southern part of Kelantan which is left behind in terms of development when compared to the northern area of Kelantan. KESEDAR's responsibilities are to provide suggestions for improvements to project planning, implementation, and implementation mechanisms as well as innovation efforts and transformation in the South Kelantan Region which includes Gua Musang District, Kuala Krai District, Jeli District, and part of Tanah Merah District. Apart from KESEDAR, the Federal Development Department (JPP), a federal government agency that is also responsible for assisting the state government to plan and implement high-impact development projects in Kelantan which receive a direct allocation from the central government.

Inter-Governmental Relations in Transport Planning

The concept of intergovernmental relations (IGR) as stated by Lowatcharin, Crumpton and Pacharoen (2019) is focusing on the interactions among different levels and types of governments. IGR is also known as the processes and institutions where governments 31 within a political system interact. Countries with more than one level of government, either unitary or federal have IGR (Phillimore, 2013). The analysis of IGR has always focused on the formal structures of the institutions as IGR is usually linked with the financial arrangements between the different levels of government (Painter, 2012:731). IGR also occurs in the informal processes of interaction and discussion and thereby is needed in establishing policy and accountabilities together with administrative protocols between levels of government, especially in areas like transport, water, environment, and business matters.

Different levels of government would have to interact with each other occasionally under concurrent federalism. Levels of government need strong cooperation between one another to have cordial interaction. At times throughout the interaction process, there are always possibilities of duplication, overlapping of roles, political opportunism, coercion, and gaming between the different levels of government. In response to this, the coherent practice of IGR is needed to govern government institutions through better coordination of roles and responsibilities. This practice 32 includes the challenge of returning powers to the states or additional powers for the central government (Wanna et al., 2009).

In the case of Malaysia where top-down approach (centralization) is preferred compared to the bottom-up approach (decentralization). Oliveira (2016) in his study on 'Bridging government relations in urban management: cases of solid waste management and climate change in two Malaysian states', argued that heavy centralization of public finances is in tandem with the centralization of state responsibilities in the hands of the federal government. He further argued that the government authorities should build robust institutions for

intergovernmental relations. Needs to build strong institutions for IGR should not only rely on the state structure or political relations between political groups in power to determine the outcomes of governmental relations.

Planning Capacity and Capability at the Local Level

Local governments have the responsibility to decide what should be built, where, and how it should be built. This requires working with rural people to identify their transport needs, possible interventions, and priorities, and to design the most appropriate projects that will either improve people's mobility or lessen their demand for transport. This cannot be done by a specialized institution far away from where rural people move themselves and their products (Donnges, 2003). An effective planning environment as argued by Sarkar and Dash (2011) should have features such as the existence of regular planning functions, the provision for people's direct participation in decisions, clear guidelines for the distribution of funds, and the provision for capacity building.

In most developing countries, the planning environment is non-existent as in many cases, the process of decentralization is not in practice. Sometimes local government bodies are incapable of the absence of meaningful transfer of executive and budgetary powers. In certain cases, even though decentralization has been achieved, the solutions generated and implemented by local bodies have failed to satisfy the population. This is due to the absence of active participation by the population in the decision-making process and a lack of suitable local-level planning tools. In a successful planning process, the members of a community should be aware of the needs of their community in a wider context. They should be mindful of the community's needs and they should have access to a decision-making tool that is well-understood and easy to implement (Sarkar & Dash, 2011).

Robust Communication and Coordination between Agencies

Many or most public policies involve the sharing of responsibility among different organizations – agencies of federal and state governments. Thus, policy implementation is a fragmented process involving various actors, and the management of its stages requires and depends on coordination, which is manifested to a greater or lesser extent in day-to-day actions in the policy area (Leite & Buainain, 2013). The demand for coordination in policy management has been widely highlighted by the pioneer top-down theorists, Pressman and Wildavsky (1984:133): “No phrase expresses as frequent a complaint about the federal Government as does ‘lack of coordination’. No suggestion for reform is more common than what we need is more coordination”. The result of poor communication between the federal and state government may likely cause inefficient financial management system.

Transportation planning as mentioned by Sarkar and Dash (2011) must be efficient because no single agency has the responsibility for the entire transportation system. State and local agencies can achieve significant benefits by incorporating environmental and community values into transportation decisions early in the planning phase by taking into account these considerations through project development and delivery. Benefits include relationship-building, by enhancing inter-agency participation and coordination efforts and procedures. Transportation planning agencies can establish a more positive working relationship with resource agencies and the public, and process efficiencies and improvements to inter-agency relationships may help to resolve differences on key issues as transportation programs and projects move from planning to design and implementation.

As argued by Venter, Rickert & Maunder (2003), inadequate monitoring and implementation of compliance with existing accessibility legislation are widely cited as the key weakness in providing inclusive transport in developing countries. The legislation has rarely been matched by adequately detailed regulatory frameworks and has therefore generated a very limited response on the ground. Another important reason given for insufficient access to policies and legislation is the lack of resources for implementation. Other barriers include insufficient coordination of programs and services. Several federal agencies and various local organizations are involved in coordinating transportation systems and programs with the least monitoring actions. As an outcome, rural communities often face challenges related to fragmentation and duplication of services among different programs.

METHOD

The main purpose of this study positively suggests the use of research methodology that can gauge and deeply capture respondents' insights and views on the whole implementation process. The qualitative methodology is able to explore multiple explanations in the context of this study. The qualitative nature of this research also

intends to obtain an in-depth understanding of the subject of study with a closer emphasis on individual views by interviewing them. Hence, it allows the researcher to study the phenomenon in its natural setting to understand the multiple realities based on the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

A total of seventeen (17) respondents were interviewed among them were thirteen (13) policymakers (federal, state and local); two (2) local transport operators and two (2) transport experts. The data collection process took approximately eight (8) months, starting from the end of March 2018 to early October 2018. Data were collected by conducting in-depth interviews that lasted about one and a half to two hours among the policymakers from the three tiers of government, local transport operators, and rural transport experts. The entire interview sessions were recorded using an audiotape recorder with the respondents' consent. This study is conducted following the Universiti Malaya's code of ethics. The respondents' confidentiality is highly protected and respected in this study. Prior to conducting the interviews, respondents were asked to fill up the consent form giving full consent to be interviewed in fulfilling the purpose of the study. The respondents were also informed that their participation is based on voluntary basis and they have every right to withdraw themselves from the interviews if they find any question asked to be sensitive or if they simply do not want to continue the interview session. Abbreviations of PM and TE were used to represent policymakers and transport experts respectively. Atlas.ti software and manual thematic analysis were used to further analyse the in-depth interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Three themes appear to emerge from the interviews. They are mostly inter-organisational issues of: (1) failing to adopt the local plan, (2) poor interaction between the federal and local authorities, and (3) poor communication and coordination.

Theme 1-Failure to Adopt Local Plan

It is evident that there is no single authority leading the rural transportation plan. Most of the transportation plans focus on urban areas and little attention has been paid to rural areas. One of the reasons is that Kelantan is trapped in a power play between different political parties. Since Kelantan is an opposition state, it does not receive equal attention as the other states ruled by the ruling political party, as highlighted by the state and local policymakers. The existing Local Plan is said to be under-utilized by the federal government agencies in Kelantan such as KESEDAR and JPP in developing the state. A state planner has this to say:

"...the Local Plan should be used as the main guideline although federal agencies like KESEDAR have their Development Plan. We took fifteen years to come out with the Local Plan...projects planned by any agency whether it is the state or federal agency should comply with the Local Plan..."
(PM_7)

Similarly, a top officer from the planning department in Kelantan expressed his frustration towards the under-utilization of the Local Plan by the federal agencies as according to him, the plan has taken so much time, money, and energy in its creation:

"...when implementation is different from the actual planning...it is rather worthless. The cost of producing one Local Plan is one million ringgit... there is no point producing a million-ringgit plan, but you end up keeping it rather than using it..."
(PM_4)

A transport expert who is also an academician strongly argued that by abiding the Local Plan and the State Structure Plan, there would be no problem in implementation:

"Planners and local governments are well verse in...development. If they follow the plans, it should be no problem..."
(TE_2)

Theme 2 - Poor Interactions

Apart from the failure to comply with the Local Plan as stated by the state policymakers, federal agencies are again accused of not informing the state government before developing any project in the state of Kelantan. One

of the state policymakers raised her voice over this matter by emphasizing the need to inform and consult with the state government before developing any project in the state as stated in the Town and Country Planning Act 1976, which was later amended in 2001:

"... as for the implementation context, federal projects prior to implementing in (the) state, should first consult with (the) state and this is under Section 20(A) Act 172. Clearly stated in the Act that the federal agency is held responsible to consult with the state's consultation committee (Plan Malaysia in state) on any development project under (the) state..."
(PM_7)

The root cause of the fragmentation is also captured from the gap that exists in undertaking policy formulation and policy implementation. The divorce of formulation and implementation has led to greater fragmentation of agencies which also seen as one of the contributors to the failure of government-initiated policies. This scenario has caused the popular blaming game among these agencies:

"...for example, KESEDAR. When they applied to the local authority with regards to land matters and when there are few terms and conditions, they need to follow then they (KESEDAR) started blaming the local authority for being difficult and reluctant to cooperate when federal is funding..."
(PM_7)

Upon the disappointment shared by the state policymakers over the blaming game among the government agencies, a transport expert highlighted that such situation is common in an opposition state where federal agencies in the state like to take credit over the development in the state by saying that:

"...like in Kelantan they have KESEDAR as the federal agency which controls the development of Southern Kelantan. The development planned by the federal agency is always redundant with state planning as the land belongs to the state. But the funds... come from the federal...problems like this happen in opposition states..."
(TE_2)

Theme 3 - Poor Communication and Coordination

Lack of coordination has been cited as one of the primary factors that weaken the implementation of the rural transport plan in Kuala Krai, Kelantan. This scenario is again entrenched in the fragmentation of authorities that are involved in the transportation sector. A federal transportation top officer emphasized that the absence of a proper platform in discussing transportation issues in Malaysia is evident and the federal government is taking this issue seriously by saying that:

"...we do not have a formal platform where we can consult one another... we can have a proper platform not only for local councils but all transportation-related agencies..."
(PM_3)

An engineer from the Department of Work shared his experience over this issue as such:

"...throughout my experience working with the federal agency in Kuala Krai, this matter (coordination) is not well managed and sometimes we do not know who built this road... that road..."
(PM_10)

In implementing a rural transport plan at the local level, there are several government agencies involved, and the involvement of multiple agencies are seen to benefit the implementation process financially, as each agency has its budget. However, these agencies need to coordinate among themselves to streamline the implementation

process especially in building roads, bridges, and basic infrastructures for the local communities. According to the state government planner:

"...it is actually beneficial as projects would be more competitive which I believe is good but coordination is needed and also the agencies involved need to be coordinated by someone..."
(PM_4)

The need for coordination is undoubtedly seen as fundamental in coordinating the related government agencies in transportation and the same issue is again raised by a local government policymaker. He also mentioned that having several government agencies taking care of the transport projects is indeed beneficial for the local people. He professed his opinion and slight frustration as follows:

"...there is supposed to be coordination among the agencies but unfortunately that is not happening..."
(PM_11)

DISCUSSION

Inter-organizational Conflicts

Organizational issues between the federal, state and local governments appear to be one of the prominent challenges in implementing a rural transport plan. Among the overwhelming issues are the under-utilization of the existing Local Plan by the federal actors as mentioned by the state and local policymakers. The blaming game among the government agencies, limited financial resources in the state to implement a transport plan, the absence of transport experts at the local government level, and the multiple actors and functions in implementing rural transport plan with the lack of coordination have caused fragmentation between the three layers of government. This situation is in tandem with the statement stipulated by Meakin (2002:8) that "the more departments that exist, the more institutional boundaries there will be and the more complex and formal must be the coordination arrangements."

Most of the policymakers agreed that there is an absence of coordination among the government agencies involved in implementing the rural transport plan. Having said that, integration among the implementing authorities is acknowledged by the top-down theorists, but hierarchical integration among the implementing institutions is still needed for successful implementation (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Hood, 1976; Gunn, 1978; Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1979). However, from the interviews, the relationship between the three tiers of government especially the federal and state government are not cordial. Due to the circumstances, a fragmented inter-governmental organizational structure is seen as one of the prominent challenges in implementing a rural transport plan. Fragmented inter-governmental organizational structure whether it is at the federal, state, or local levels is the outcome of poor coordination between the government agencies which caused fragmentation of roles and functions of the institutional actors.

Solid inter-governmental integration and coordination are needed to uphold the initiated rural transport plans in Kuala Krai. Thus, a strong organizational structure between the three tiers of government would lead to an effective rural transport plan implementation in the study area as mentioned by the policymakers during the interviews. A study conducted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) with the collaboration of Malaysia Technology University (UTM) under the Malaysia Sustainable Cities Programme found that a strong intra and inter-governmental coordination is needed between the three levels of government in implementing government policies especially when it involves multi-sectoral policies that need participation from various levels and departments in the state (Oliveira, 2016).

Limited Usage of Local Plan

In the context of Malaysia, town and country planning is a shared responsibility between the state and the federal government and is implemented through the three levels of government. The town and country planning process also has gone through several organizations at the federal, state, and local government levels to generate effective planning in Malaysia. Although the federal government has been given full mandate and authority in intervening

in the town and country planning process as stated in the Malaysian Federal Constitution, it is also mentioned under the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172) that a person is prohibited from carrying out activities or development without permission from the local planning authority unless the existing activities have existed before this Act came into force.

Unfortunately, in Kuala Krai District, the fragmentation of the inter-governmental structure between the three levels of government has negatively impacted the usage of the Local Plan as an implementation development guideline in the area. Malaysia's regional and local levels of planning framework is structured by the strong planning framework at the national level. The success and sustainability of planning are very much dependent on the local-level planning which covers the needs of the population that is needed for effective implementation (Ngah, 2015).

Communication and Coordination Gap

In Kuala Krai, poor communication is apparent at the upper-level agencies, mostly involving federal government agencies in Kelantan. There were indications that officers from federal agencies communicate less with the officers at the state level. A similar scenario can be seen in the implementation of urban transport policy in the Klang Valley whereby the detachment of the federal government from the actual scene of the local affairs has paralyzed the urban transport policy implementation (Raja Noriza, 2006).

Peters (2018) argued that the redundancy of programs is mainly caused by coordination problems. Despite the existing initiatives introduced by the government in making sure public organizations are working effectively, there is still no single standardized method concerning coordination issues and thus this issue remains the main predicament in the existing public administration system. Coordination appears to be an issue when organizations have different ideas about good policies and how to address problems. If these organizations can reach an agreement on the nature of the problem and the means of addressing the problem, then there will be more effective coordination, and more effective policies may emerge.

Organizations influence their members' behavior and promote the alignment of individuals' interests and goals with those of the organization. Thus, the organizational environment plays a crucial role in the process and results of coordination (Leite & Buainain, 2013). In tandem with the organizational environment argument, a bottom-up theorist, Bardach (1998) highlighted the process of creating mutual understanding in solving problems as collaboration. A federal policymaker argued that coordination among government agencies can be achieved if there is a platform for them to interact with each other.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the analysis and discussion written above, there is a need for the Malaysian government to enhance and strengthen its institutional capacity and capability in implementing a sound and sustainable transport policy. As mentioned in the analysis and discussion previously, the limitations in implementing a transport policy are the communication and coordination gap that exists among the government agencies at all three levels. Therefore, it is important to have an interactive platform of discussion and a standardised coordination system to streamline all transport initiatives to avoid project redundancies at the federal and state levels. Following the circumstances mentioned, it is highly recommended to operationalize a transport coordination unit at each level of the government to monitor and streamline all transport-initiated initiatives.

Meanwhile, in narrowing the communication gap among the public in the policymaking process, it is advisable for the government, especially at the local government level to organize a dialogue session with the villagers besides hosting a town hall once a year. In organizing an effective dialogue session with the villagers that involves interactive communication, it is recommended to organize a dialogue session at each sub-district respectively. Like in the case of Kuala Krai district, there are three smaller sub-districts under the Kuala Krai district and these smaller districts fall under two local's council's administration. Hence, instead of having a dialogue session involving massive crowd participation from all three sub-districts, it is more conducive and practical to host a dialogue session at each district.

Coordination has been a worldwide issue in the government administration and policy system for many years. Despite numerous efforts in solving coordination issues, unfortunately, there is still an absence of a standardized approach to managing coordination issues (Peters, 2018). Consequently, coordination can also be an outcome of program redundancy. In regards to this, one of the main reasons for poor coordination is due to the uncommon ideas of good policy and different ways of addressing the issues by organizations. Thus, in making sure that all policy actors at the three levels of government have a similar understanding of addressing transport issues in rural areas, collaboration among the agencies is fairly needed. Through collaboration, policy actors at different levels are able to integrate their ideas on respective issues coherently and effectively.

TRANSPARENCY STATEMENT

The author affirms that this manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study being reported; that no important aspects of the study have been omitted. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that she has no conflict of interest in this study.

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