

#### **Project4: Implementation of road pricing: vehicle technology, governance, and institutional transition**

We have written our research findings in three papers:

Paper-1: Ardic, O., Annema, J.A., van Wee, B. (2013) Is the Media acting as a “Policy Actor” in Road Pricing Policy Processes? The Dutch case. *submitted to Transportation Research Part A*

Paper-2: Ardic, O., Annema, J.A., van Wee, B. (2013) The media coverage of Dutch road pricing policy: have the media or the policy actors determined the news? *submitted to Transport Policy*

Paper-3: Ardic, O., Annema, J.A., Molin, E., Bolderdijk, J.W., van Wee, B. (2013) The effect of news exposure on public opinion towards the Dutch road pricing proposal (Kilometerheffing), *to be submitted in July 2013*

Paper-1 and paper-2, which are part of mono disciplinary study, have been finalized and submitted to the journals in March 2013. Paper-3, which have been undertaken in collaboration with project-3 (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen) as part of multi-disciplinary study, is well underway and to be finalized in July 2013.

In the first paper, we aim to investigate the objectivity of the media in reporting the Dutch road pricing policy debate. Our research questions are as follow: (1) did the Dutch media present the road pricing policy debate “objectively”, or did it act as a policy actor by distorting the reality/policy debate? (2) How did the individual newspapers position themselves in the policy debate? (3) did the position of the newspapers change over time? Our main conclusion is that the Dutch media was not objective and acted as a policy actor in the Dutch road pricing policy debate. Although all the newspapers violated objectivity to the same degree, they clearly adopted different policy positions. We found that de Telegraaf was almost always negative. Algemeen Dagblad did not show a clear position, having a generally mixed tone. De Volkskrant, Trouw and NRC Handelsblad were usually positive.

In the second paper, we have three research questions: (1) How were the Dutch road pricing policies presented in the media? (2) To what extent did the media coverage of two Dutch pricing proposals (Rekeningrijden and Kilometerheffing) differ from each other and change over time? (3) What factors caused changes over time (if any) in the media coverage? Our main finding shows that the tone, visibility and range of issues in the media coverage were very different for the two road pricing proposals and also fluctuated greatly over time for each proposal. Our analysis indicates that the main factor behind such a variation in the policy coverage is changes in the composition of the policy debate (e.g., the pricing proposal, the policy actors engaged in the debate, their messages about the proposal).

To sum up, newspapers are not objective and distort the reality while reporting the policy debate to some extent. However, newspapers were not the only factor that shaped the media coverage. The nature of policy debate, determined by policy actors, also influenced the media coverage of the policy. Newspapers, after all, mainly reports messages of policy actors in the policy debate. If most of prominent policy actors are against road pricing policy and make constantly negative statements during the debate, then newspapers are not only to blame for resulting negative media coverage. Therefore, it is always important to gain support of prominent policy actors and to give sufficient information to the media (unofficial or official), which explains the policy, in order to increase the positive messages in the policy debate. The content of an information package, however, should be paid attention. If the pricing proposal includes aspects which are not properly defined or planned to be settled in later stages of policy process, these issues are likely to be speculated about by opponents and to be raised by newspapers in their editorials and opinion pieces. If these uncertainties are also accompanied by a policy information package which excessively stresses the benefits of the system, the information package might lose its credibility, and both these uncertain issues and benefits of the system are questioned by policy actors and newspapers in the media coverage. Therefore, we suggest policy makers being cautious while stressing only the benefits of the system.

In third paper, we investigate the effect of exposure to news content about the Dutch road pricing proposal (Kilometerheffing) on public attitude. Our findings indicate that public opinion is affected by exposure to news content about Kilometerheffing. The more negative the news content people are exposed to, the more negative their attitudes are towards Kilometerheffing, and the other way around. Our results confirm the hypothesis that the effect of news exposure only exists for unobtrusive issues such as the impact of Kilometerheffing on congestion. Public

opinion is not affected by exposure to news content about obtrusive issues such as the financial impact of Kilometerheffing for the road users. We, therefore, recommend policy makers to focus especially on unobtrusive issues while organizing information campaigns and providing information to the media.