

AN APPROPRIATE GATEWAY?

A Critique of the Policy Analysis Undertaken for the Gateway Program

Andrew Devlin

17 December 2007

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
POLICY ANALYSIS: NORMATIVE CONCEPTS AND METHODS	3
Concepts	3
Methods	4
POLICY ANALYSIS AND THE GATEWAY PROGRAM	6
CRITIQUE AND ANALYSIS	8
DISCUSSION	10
CONCLUSION	10
WORKS CITED	12

INTRODUCTION

The environment within which public policy decisions must be made is growing ever complex and disoriented. Heightened risk and uncertainty, linked implications, and multiple objectives and stakeholders, for instance, often compound seemingly straightforward policy issues with regard to transportation, land use or economic development (Keeney, 1982). Ideally, this situation should force decision makers and policy analysts to act on and utilize decision-making and policy analysis methods that are well justified, efficient and responsible to reach appropriate and desired ends. Analysis that is undertaken in this vein may be held more accountable and transparent within the ever-cautious public eye. The reality remains, however, that governments and institutional bodies who make decisions are faced with comparatively short “life spans” with which to produce the ever-desired “tangible” result, limited resources and underlying political agendas which may impinge on their ability to undertake appropriate and accountable policy analysis and decision making. More often than not, this political paradigm seems to produce policy decisions that abandon any kind of rational and appropriate analysis framework for seemingly ad hoc, poorly structured and scoped methods that result in public outcry and a lack of confidence in government institutions and the decision-making process.

Policy analysis and decision making in British Columbia is no exception to this reality. The Gateway Program, for instance, which calls for increased highway and bridge infrastructure to alleviate congestion and traffic emissions has been the target of criticism and pegged as policy analysis gone awry (SPEC, 2007). Despite these claims, no analysis appears to have been undertaken or produced that demonstrates the flaws in the Gateway Program policy analysis. This paper presents an attempt to fill in this information gap by responding to the following:

How does the policy analysis process undertaken as part of the Gateway Program compare to the normative and prescribed process outlined in the literature?

It is the intent of this paper to articulate the deficiencies of the policy analysis framework used for the Gateway Program. The paper is divided into three major sections. The first section outlines the normative and prescribed policy analysis framework in order to determine what appropriate policy analysis should embody. The second section introduces the Gateway Program, the impetus for its creation and summarizes the framework followed to reach its so-called appropriate alternative. Finally, the third section will provide a detailed analysis and critique of the limitations and weaknesses of the Gateway Program policy analysis framework.

POLICY ANALYSIS: NORMATIVE CONCEPTS AND METHODS

Concepts

Simply defined, policy analysis is a systematic comparative analysis framework that provides insight about the pros and cons of a given set of policy alternatives (McDaniels, 2007). The policy analysis framework is unique compared to other, seemingly parallel processes like the rational comprehensive method in that it

acknowledges the limited resources, constraints and complexities within the public policy and decision-making realm and offers a procedure that enables problems to be scoped down and resources direct to a central issue (Patton and Sawicki, 1993). This is not to say that the process ignores or discounts certain aspects or ramifications of analysis and decision-making. At its core is an impetus on the use of value-focused thinking (McDaniels, 2007). Value-focused thinking is an attempt to utilize the decision-maker or policy analysts' values and preferences to guide how problems should be defined and assessed (Leon, 1999). In public policy arenas, what these values and preferences are should be those prevailing policies and opinions as defined by politicians, stakeholders and the public. By using value-focused thinking, complex and daunting problems can be approached from more familiar and recognizable angles in order to determine the best possible alternative.

Methods

Patton and Sawicki (1993) identify six important elements in the policy analysis process. Policy analysis should involve (1) a problem formulation and definition, (2) a determination of objective and evaluation criteria, (3) an identification of alternatives, (4) a comparison of alternatives, and (5) an assessment of outcomes. Each of these steps is described and discussed in more detail below.

The first step in the policy analysis process is problem formulation and definition. Complex policy problems can be approached from a number of different angles. The manner with which decisions are framed at the outset, then, can dictate how an analysis is undertaken, what evaluation criteria will be generated and the alternatives to be considered. In order to be assessed appropriately, problems need to be stated carefully and clearly, acknowledging their complexities and avoiding unwarranted assumptions and option-limiting prejudices (Hammond et al., 1999). The problem definition, then, should be merely a description of the issue at hand (Bardach, 1996). Under the value-focused thinking paradigm, it is often the input and role of the public and existing policy frameworks and political ideologies that may determine how a problem is structured.

The second step in the process is to establish a set of evaluation criteria. These criteria will help analysts know when problems become addressed or how several policies or program alternatives will contribute to attaining a desired end state (Patton and Sawicki, 1993). Developing a set of objectives is an important aspect of this step. Objectives will articulate what a policy initiative or program should aim to achieve in order to be viewed as an appropriate solution to the defined problem (Hammond et al., 1999). Objectives will, subsequently, aid in directing resources toward what information is needed and what alternatives should be considered. Good or fundamental objectives are succinct and appropriate to derive performance measures or criteria for assessing different alternatives – they tell you *what* you need to achieve not *how* to achieve it (Hammond et al., 1999). Structuring objectives in this manner will avoid limiting or constraining potential alternatives.

The third step is to identify alternative policies, programs or initiatives that may be implemented in order to achieve the objectives of the policy issue. Knowing what is sought and having identified the criteria to be used to evaluate alternatives helps

the analyst generate possible alternatives. Ideally, one should consider all possible alternatives. Considering limited or constrained resources, however, we seek to generate enough alternatives so that there will be a choice among several good ones but not to evaluate in detail many marginal alternatives (Patton and Sawicki, 1993). Good alternatives should, among other things be flexible (serve more than one purpose), have merit (address the problem), and be compatible and consistent (with other norms and procedures) (Bardach, 1996).

The fourth and, arguably, the principle activity in policy analysis is predicting and assessing the outcomes of defined alternative policies and programs. To do so, the expected impact of each alternative must be known and to what extent the policy initiative satisfies the objectives and evaluation criteria (Bardach, 1996). This activity is, certainly, a difficult one and requires forecasting the effects of proposed actions (Patton and Sawicki, 1993). What defines successfully, then, is quite dynamic depending on the situation and problem context. Aside from quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods, Patton and Sawicki (1993) are quick to point out that assessing the success of a given policy or program should explore aspects like equity or political desirability as levels of success. For instance, although a policy may meet cost objectives, is the project technically or politically desirable? Well-developed consequences-by-alternatives matrices can illustrate the pros and cons of each alternative in relation to the stated objectives.

The fifth step in policy analysis is choosing an appropriate policy alternative to address the defined issue or problem. Oftentimes, an assessment of the policy alternatives does not yield a preferred solution (Hammond et al., 1999). For instance, the best technical solution may be the most politically unacceptable. Policy alternatives, then, must be displayed, presented and compared in ways that allow decision-makers to decide which alternative is superior (Patton and Sawicki, 1993). Finally, the sixth phase of policy analysis requires that constant monitoring and evaluating procedures be put in place to assess the on-going capacity of the decided action to fulfill goals and objectives. As situations, contexts and environments are always changing, it is important that monitoring methods be flexible and iterative, allowing for changes to be made easily and readily, when required (Bardach, 1996).

There are a number of important themes that emerge from this recount of basic policy analysis. The first is that policy analysis revolves around choice. This is not to say that an exhaustive list of alternatives should be considered. Problems must be approached and defined in ways that allow for a practical variety of alternatives to be considered recognizing potential limitations in resources or time. Policy analysis also begs for clarity and the avoidance of ambiguity. Because problems need to be addressed in highly complex environments, issue definitions, objectives and alternatives need to be well defined and presented in a manner that promotes efficient and unbiased decision-making. Finally, policy analysis encourages problems to be addressed at the core rather than seeking band-aid solutions. The impetus on value-focused thinking is important in this regard. Drawing on your values and preferences (be they in the form of existing policies or political ideologies or public opinion, for instance) can help the analyst and decision-maker get to the root of the problem from a familiar and comfortable perspective. For instance, if a municipality

or region wants to maintain a healthy shoreline, ideally, it would not allow the development on polluting industrial facilities to be sited in close proximity.

POLICY ANALYSIS AND THE GATEWAY PROGRAM

Metro Vancouver and the Lower Mainland have been subject to some of the worst traffic congestion problems in Canada and North America (Government of British Columbia, 2007a). High levels of congestion lead to unreliable travel times for vehicles and transit, uncertain driving conditions that may lead to a certain amount of driver stress and contribute to a growing number of vehicle collisions (Government of British Columbia, 2006). Environmentally, congestion-related idling is a leading cause of local greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to poor regional air quality of climate change (Stead, 2000).

In response to increasing congestion, the Government of British Columbia unveiled the Gateway Program in early 2006. The Gateway Program is a multi-billion dollar expansion of the arterial road and highway network in the Lower Mainland (Government of British Columbia, 2007a). According to provincial documents, the Gateway Program proposes substantial new bridge and roadway construction to improve the flow of vehicle and commercial traffic in order to alleviate congestion and related emissions on major commercial transportation and commuter routes (Government of British Columbia, 2006, Government of British Columbia, 2007a).

The results and description of the policy analysis undertaken for the Gateway Program are outlined in a document entitled *Gateway Program Definition Report* (PDR) dated 31 January 2006. This document provided a detailed account of the considerations undertaken by the provincial government in order to reach its conclusions that new highway and bridge development would be the best alternative toward addressing increasing congestion and travel emissions in the region.

The problem to be addressed under the Gateway Program, as identified in the PDR, is traffic congestion and related emissions in the Lower Mainland. The PDR, however, goes into more detail and describes three major geographic areas of concern where traffic congestion is the worst and requires the most attention. These areas are the Highway 1 corridor from Vancouver to Langley including the Port Mann Bridge, transportation corridors along the south shore of the Fraser River and major transportation routes along the north shore of the Fraser River. The PDR outlines the potential impacts of congestion and related emissions on urban sustainability, public health and economic development. The problem definition also outlines a variety of factors that have likely contributed to increasing traffic congestion in the region over the past 10 years. These include increasing vehicle volumes, population and employment growth, expanding trade and tourism, and limited investment in transportation infrastructure in the 1990s. The problem definition makes explicit reference to the regions poor transportation network being a key cause of congestion and that only "significant investment in the transportation network is required not only to address these needs but also to accommodate future growth" (Government of British Columbia, 2006, pp.11).

The PDR outlines a set of stated objectives that are “based on the [problem definition] (Government of British Columbia, 2006, pp. 23).” These are:

- to address congestion;
- to improve the movement of people and good in and through the region;
- to improve access to key economic gateways (ports, airports, etc);
- to improve safety and reliability;
- to improve the region's road network;
- to improve the quality of life in communities by keeping regional traffic on regional roads instead of local roads
- to reduce vehicle emissions by reducing congestion-related idling
- to facilitate better connections to buses and SkyTrain, cycling and pedestrian networks; and
- to reduce travel times along and across the Fraser River during peak periods.

The alternatives identified and assessed under the Gateway Program are limited to two “scenarios”, a build (highway and bridge construction) or no-build (business-as-usual with continued investment in existing transportation programs) option. The build option includes the following infrastructure investments:

- Highway 1 corridor: widening of the highway and construction of a new Port Mann Bridge;
- South Fraser Corridor: a new, four lane 80 km/h route along the south side of the Fraser River between Deltaport Way in southwest Delta to the Golden Ears Bridge connector road in Surrey/Langley; and
- North Fraser Corridor: various intersection and interchange improvements to provide a continuous route from New Westminster to Maple Ridge.

Forecasting and modeling techniques are utilized to determine the potential impacts of each scenario. It is determined that without taking action in the form of increased highway and bridge investment, the region will be subject to increasing congestion, longer travel times and a reduction in trade and economic opportunities (Government of British Columbia, 2006, pp. 13). There are a number of “strategic considerations” that are included in the PDR however these receive no formal or explicit analysis as potential policy alternatives and are disregarded as infeasible or harmful to the economic vitality of the region. These considerations include a rapid rail transit line along the Highway 1 corridor and demand management options like a full system-wide tolling (Government of British Columbia, 2006, pp. 21-22). As such, investment in highway and bridge infrastructure is pegged from the onset as the sole alternative toward alleviating existing and projected congestion issues in the Lower Mainland.

The cost-benefit analysis undertaken for the Gateway Program is summarized in the PDR. The listed benefits from the proposed infrastructure investments included reduced travel time and increased driver safety. Costs include a small loss of productive agriculture land for roadway realignment and expansions, the potential for sprawl-type development to result from increased highway investment and an actual increase in greenhouse gas emissions and poor air quality as a result of traffic that will utilize the increased roadway capacity. This latter cost explicitly does not meet a key objective of the Gateway Program and will not contribute to the

overarching goal of the British Columbia government to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. The PDR acknowledges that positive air quality and greenhouse gas benefits will only become realized with the introduction of proper demand management measures like tolling and better transit options (Government of British Columbia, 2006, pp.56).

CRITIQUE AND ANALYSIS

Comparing the Gateway Program policy analysis to the normative framework prescribed in the literature, a number of flaws and shortcomings become apparent.

The manner with which a policy problem is framed and defined will dictate how objectives are deduced and alternatives are considered. In order to provide for an appropriate consideration of potential alternatives, a problem statement should be merely descriptive. The PDR, however, defines a potential solution to congestion into the problem definition statement when it laments that limited highway infrastructure investment is a leading cause of congestion and increased emissions in Metro Vancouver and the Lower Mainland. Herein, I believe, lies a fundamental fault that plagues the remainder of the Gateway Program policy analysis. This approach fails to attain maximum effectiveness because it restricts the focus of other viable alternatives that may be available. Restricting the structure of the policy issue impedes the inclusion of criteria that could express important values of the decision-maker (Leon, 1999). Recent announcements and decisions made by the provincial government, for instance, indicate a strong stance toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing the availability of alternative transportation options (Government of British Columbia, 2007b). Public opinion, too, appears in favour of alternative transportation options and better land use decisions over increased highway and roadway development (SPEC, 2007). By stating that poorly developed highway infrastructure is a cause of congestion and that only new highways will solve the issue effectively impedes the inclusion of these values and preferences into the policy analysis framework. Approaching the problem with a preconceived notion of the ideal solution, then, makes the Gateway Program an example of alternative-focused thinking. The result is a process that may be deemed non transparent and biased.

Other aspects of the policy analysis reinforce this alternative-focused approach. Many of the stated objectives, for instance, are tailored toward alternatives that aim to increase the highway and roadway capacity (i.e. "to improve the region's road network"). Many objectives are also means objectives that do not inform the analysts of what the desired end state should be but rather dictate how to achieve it (i.e. again "improve the region's road network" or "to improve the quality of life in communities by keeping regional traffic on regional roads instead of local roads" or "to reduce vehicle emissions by reducing congestion-related idling"). Comparing a more diverse set of alternatives like improved public transit or demand management to such objectives would likely result in their dismissal as poor options. A more appropriate set of objectives would refine and reinterpret these means objectives to reach more fundamental goals (Hammond et al., 1999). For instance, if one were to ask "why do we want improve the region's road network?" or "why do we want to reduce vehicle emissions by reducing congestion-related idling?" more fundamental

objectives like “to reduce congestion” or “reduce overall emissions and greenhouse emissions” may be realized. Many of the objectives geared toward roadway and highway development in the PDR can be reinterpreted into these more fundamental objectives. In doing so, a greater variety of alternatives can be generated and assessed as potential solutions to achieve a desired end state.

With only one proposed alternative in the Gateway Program PDR, its flexibility and compatibility with other initiatives being put forth in the region should be questioned. For instance, the Province of British Columbia has promised to reduce overall provincial greenhouse gas emissions by 33% by 2020 (Government of British Columbia, 2007b). Also, Metro Vancouver is attempting to focus growth and development into existing urban areas and create mixed use opportunities centered around alternative transportation options that limit the need to take a vehicle to shop or go to work (Metro Vancouver, 2007). The Livable Region Strategic Plan, too, calls for increased investment in alternative transportation options (Greater Vancouver Regional District, 1999). Increased highway development has the potential to induce more sprawl-type development and encourage people to continue to use their vehicles for travel (Baum-Snow, 2005). The literature also points out that increased highway development to reduce congestion-related idling rarely leads to reduced greenhouse gas emissions as more people take advantage of the new infrastructure and drive more (Ewing et al., 2007). By providing only one alternative the PDR neglects alternatives that could achieve a reduction in congestion and be flexible and compatible enough with other provincial and regional goals and objective (i.e. public transit or demand management). This situation may have negative implications for these ongoing initiatives. A good set of alternatives should not be an exhaustive list of every possible option, however, it should be a well-developed and diverse group of options that provide a variety of practical and feasible choices in how to achieve a desired end state.

The PDR offers an assessment of the chosen alternative against a no-build (business-as-usual) scenario. The strategic considerations like increased public transit and demand management are afforded no inclusion or assessment and are dismissed as simply being “infeasible.” This lack of choice and diversity in the alternatives available to reduce congestion is a key shortcoming of this policy analysis and reinforces the alternative-focused thinking identified earlier.

The cost-benefit analysis of the proposed alternative, too, reveals some interesting issues with the policy analysis. The PDR maintains the proposed alternative of increase highway and roadway infrastructure is the best alternative despite explicitly acknowledging in the cost-benefit analysis that greenhouse gas emissions will not be reduced as a result of the proposed projects due to an “increased number of vehicles on the road” (Government of British Columbia, 2006, pp. 56). Although the ambiguous objective “to reduce vehicle emissions by reducing congestion-related idling” may be achieved, the program does nothing to reduce overall levels of greenhouse gas emissions. This situation, again, highlights how poorly structured objectives based on alternative-focused thinking can create a policy situation that undermines other core issues.

DISCUSSION

Arguably, the Gateway Program's policy initiative of increased roadway and highway infrastructure appears to be a prepackaged proposal that simply waited for a window of opportunity with which to unveil itself as the ideal and most appropriate solution to the issue of congestion and increasing greenhouse gas emissions in Metro Vancouver and the Lower Mainland. The program offers no choice and diversity in potential alternatives and its objectives and evaluation criteria are ambiguous and biased towards increased highway and roadway investment. The policy analysis undertaken for the Gateway Program does not attempt to address the core of the issue, that is congestion is the result of too many people driving too much and too far. As Bardach (1996) explains, missing potential underlying problems by putting forth band-aid type solutions is, in itself, a problem. Given the perceived progressive and sustainable nature of planning and decision-making in the Lower Mainland, it surprises me that a more accountable analysis was not undertaken that offered a variety of potential alternatives to reduce congestion by getting people out of their cars. For instance, many municipalities are in favour of increasing land use densities and concentrating new growth and development and Metro Vancouver wants to increase the modal share of alternative modes of transportation. Increased highway developed is not a conducive means toward achieving these results (Baum-Snow, 2005).

This situation brings up the issue of scale in public policy analysis. Clearly the proposed Gateway Program, a provincial initiative, is in conflict with numerous provincial and region programs already in place. Many municipalities in the Lower Mainland and member of the public have spoke out in opposition of the project (SPEC, 2007). This conflict perhaps implies a lack of coordination and communication between levels of government. Perhaps a better consultation or communication process would have produced a more appropriate problem definition, objectives and set of alternatives that would be proactive and complement existing initiatives. Arguably, however, this situation also evokes the idea that underlying and unaccountable political interests were a driving force in the Gateway Program and, as a result, skewed the policy analysis undertaken for the project.

CONCLUSION

Policy analysis attempts to make addressing contemporary public policy issues more manageable and accountable. This paper has demonstrated, however, that despite its potential for positive contributions to policy development and decision-making, the policy analysis framework and methodology is more often that not usurped by nagging underlying political agendas that may result in biased and unaccountable decisions being made on key policy issues. The Gateway Program policy analysis offers no choice of alternatives, provides very ambiguous objectives, and does not make an attempt to address the underlying core issues of congestion in the region. The fact that the roadway and highway projects being proposed under the Gateway program are approved and slated for construction in the near future represents a totally disregard for accountable, transparent and just policy analysis and decision making on the part of the British Columbia provincial government.

WORKS CITED

- Bardach, E. (1996). The Eight Step Path: A Handbook for Practice. Berkeley: Berkeley Academic Press.
- Baum-Snow, N. (2005). The effects of changes in the transportation infrastructure on suburbanization: Evidence from the construction of the interstate highway system. PhD Manuscript. University of Chicago. Retrieved from the World Wide Web: <http://www.nber.org/~confer/2005/UEs05/baumsnow.pdf>
- Ewing, R., Bartholomew, K., Winkleman, S., Walters, J., & Chen, D. (2007). Growing cooler: The evidence on urban development and climate change. Urban Land Institute. Retrieved from the World Wide Web: <http://www.uli.org/>
- Government of British Columbia (2006). Gateway Program: Program Definition Report. Access from the World Wide Web: http://www.th.gov.bc.ca/gateway/reports/Gateway_PDR_13106.pdf
- Government of British Columbia (2007a). Gateway Program. Accessed from the World Wide Web: <http://www.th.gov.bc.ca/gateway/>
- Government of British Columbia (2007b). Speech From the Throne [Online textfile]. Victoria: Author. Accessed from the World Wide Web: <http://www.leg.bc.ca/38th3rd/4-8-38-3.htm>
- Greater Vancouver Regional District. (1999). Livable Region Strategic Plan [Online textfile]. Retrieved from the World Wide Web: <http://www.gvrd.bc.ca/growth/lrsp/LRSP.pdf>
- Leon, O.G. (1999). Value-focused thinking versus alternative-focused thinking: Effects on generation of objectives. Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes, 80 (3). 213-227.
- McDaniels, T. (2007). RMES 500J Lectures. Vancouver: The University of British Columbia.
- Metro Vancouver. (2007). Choosing a Sustainable Future for Metro Vancouver: Options for Metro Vancouver's Growth Management Strategy. Retrieved from the World Wide Web: http://www.gvrd.bc.ca/growth/pdfs/RGSIssues_Options2007.pdf
- Hammond, J.S., Keeney, R.L., & Raiffa, H. (1999). Smart choices: a practical guide to making better life decisions. New York: Broadway Books.
- Keeney, R.L. (1982). Decision analysis: an overview. Operations Research, 30 (5). 803-838.
- Patton, C.V., & Sawicki, D.S. (1993). Basic methods of policy analysis and

planning. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc.

SPEC. (2007). Stop highway 1 expansion. Accessed from the World Wide Web:
<http://www.spec.bc.ca/project/focusarea.php?focusID=25>

Stead, D. (2000). Relationships between transport emissions and travel patterns in Britain. Transport Policy, 6 (1999). 247-258.