

Summary

The national government decided to assume a direct role in some transport hubs, arguing that it is in the national interest to do so. But what exactly constitutes the national interest is seldom clearly defined. There are many different ways in which the national government can assume responsibility for transport hubs, including, for example, by investing in infrastructure, by taking a directorial role if conflict of interest issues arise or by communicating the (supra-regional) interests of a transport hub. The more concrete the national government can be when indicating which objectives it aims to achieve with the development of a hub, the greater the chance of achieving good results.

How transport hubs, such as train stations and airports, function is important for achieving the national government's objectives in areas of accessibility, spatial planning, economic growth and residential environments. In practice, the national government is limited in the possibilities it has at its disposal for influencing how transport hubs function. It is often the case that lower levels of government or private parties are responsible for hub development.

The Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment is currently developing a strategic framework for the transport hubs, called the 'Perspective on Transport Chains and Hubs' (*Perspectief op Ketens en Knooppunten*), which will establish what contributions the national government will make toward the development of transport hubs. The Ministry asked the KiM Netherlands Institute for Transport Policy Analysis to provide an overview of the possibilities the national government has for providing direction to the development of hubs, including in cases in which governmental policy is decentralized. The aim is to identify and exploit opportunities for hub development that can contribute to national accessibility policy objectives.

KiM answered the Ministry's request by creating a review of previous hub policies based on analysis of available literature, by applying theories about government roles and instruments to hubs, and by mapping the role of government in developing seven specific passenger or freight transport hubs.

Why are transport hubs important for the national government?

The national government wants to provide direction to transport hub development in order to serve national interests. Analyses of previous transport hub policies revealed that the national government expected hub development to contribute to a more effective use of infrastructure and to urban vitality. This, moreover, would support government objectives in areas pertaining to sustainability, traffic safety, accessibility, and economic development. Literature analysis and case studies did not provide a clear answer to the question of exactly what contributions transport hub development has made toward these policy objectives.

When we review the general Dutch transport hub policy and the national government's involvement in transport hubs since the late 1980s, we see that older policy reports stress the importance of transport hubs for the development of spatial planning functions. Transport hubs are regarded as the places to invest in spatial

planning, the economy, and traffic and transport. Recent reports place proportionally more emphasis on the organization of transport, smart information management, and the optimization of collaboration between relevant parties.

In all policy reports, the Rotterdam and Schiphol mainports maintain a central position in policy interests as essential 'engines' of the national economy. The national government is (with varying emphasis per time period) actively engaged in developing the Port of Rotterdam and Amsterdam Airport Schiphol. However, this has not led to a policy preference for the land-side accessibility of the mainports in relation to the rest of the Netherlands.

Comparisons of case studies reveal that the national government is often inexplicit when defining a project's intended objectives, with the supporting argumentation in most cases remaining largely abstract. Consequently, 'providing a contribution to accessibility' leaves much room for interpretation. It is therefore vital for the government to state explicitly what the intended aims are of a given project. The more concrete this stated vision, the greater the chance of achieving – in collaboration with other parties – good results.

What is the appropriate role for the national government?

The role of the government, in theory, is divided into the so-called system responsibility and the policy responsibility. For system responsibility, the national government determines and maintains the rules, allocates the responsibilities and ensures that the required provisions are available. System responsibility therefore does not mean that the national government does all this by itself, but rather that it determines if a public interest is involved and if the government has a role to play in protecting that public interest.

The national government assumes policy responsibility for (aspects of) transport hubs that represent a national interest and in which government involvement is required in order to protect those interests. In order to properly fulfil these responsibilities, a clear vision is required in order to state precisely what the national government will and can achieve through the stimulation of transport hubs. It is therefore crucial to first examine the reasons for and the context of a problem in which transport hub development (ultimately) can offer a solution. Only then will it be productive to develop the required actions.

The review of the government's role in transport hubs revealed that transport hub policies underwent a change in the mid 1990s, with the policy shifting from a top down, to a bottom up approach. Responsibilities were as decentralized as possible. The elaboration of transport hub development case studies and types of transport hubs has, in addition, offered insights into the standard role of government and arrived at arguments in support of a certain interpretation of responsibilities. In the development of mainports, there are no questions raised as to whether national interests are involved; consequently, it is assumed that the national government always has a role to play in mainport development. Smaller transport hubs are, in principle, not of national importance, but they can, owing to their supplying role for mainports, have a derivative national interest. We call this trickling down to smaller transport hubs the 'cascade-effect'. Due to the 'cascade-effect', it is not always immediately clear in which transport hubs the national government must invest.

What instruments does the government have for fulfilling transport hub policy?

The government can fulfil its system responsibility and policy responsibility through four roles: realization, facilitation, regulations and communication. In transport hub policy, for example, the focus is on investing in infrastructure, assuming a directorial role if there is a question of conflict of interest, and communicating the (supra-regional) importance of a transport hub. Within these four main roles, there is a wide-range of possible instruments to choose from. These instruments, in turn, also comprise a range of design choices that can be implemented in various ways.

The various case studies reveal that the national government is involved in the development of transport hubs in many ways, but not as a hub manager. The management of hubs is in the hands of lower level governments or private parties. The national government is involved due to its responsibility for the management of the overall line infrastructure (roads, waterways and railways) or owing to national interests in areas pertaining to the economy, spatial planning, accessibility and the environment. The national government's role appears to be not so much about providing direction *within* the hubs, but rather in providing direction *about* the various hubs in a network. Consequently, a coordinating role is appropriate if it appears that provinces or municipalities are too unfocused in their stimulation of transport hubs, thus creating a state of over-competition. A coordinating role is also beneficial if real estate development has caused the location function to conflict with the transport hub function.

The government's role must be to determine in which hubs there is a national interest at stake. Only then will the national government actively substantiate its role and want to eventually participate financially in a transport hub, in addition to this being solely based on the national government's management function in line infrastructure. Here, too, the national government has a role to play if a revenue model is possible involving private sector entities. The national government must then decide between assuming a risk-bearing participation or non-risk-bearing participation via government funding.