

Summary

This report describes the steps to be taken to make regional agendas 'adaptive'. By 'adaptive' we mean that uncertainties, opportunities and unexpected developments are deliberately included in the ambitions and strategic objectives of the regional agenda. The step-by-step plan is derived from a study by the Netherlands Institute for Transport Policy Analysis (KiM) for the department responsible for the Multi-Annual Programme for Infrastructure, Spatial Development and Transport at the Directorate-General for Spatial Development and Water Affairs of the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment.

Regional agendas: strategic objectives as the pivotal link

Regional agendas describe national, regional and shared ambitions, strategic objectives and projects/ measures for the spatial development of the various regions of the Netherlands. The *ambitions* in a regional agenda are strategic in nature; they link national and regional visions and interests, and give direction to future developments over the next few decades. Ambitions are translated into *strategic objectives*, which in effect reflect the difference between the ambition and the current situation. These strategic objectives are then worked up into construction and other development projects for the short and medium term.

Ideally, in an adaptive regional agenda projects flow logically from the predefined ambitions. However, this is not always the case: there may be a large implementation gap between regional development ambitions and delivery. In such cases the *strategic objectives* in the regional agenda must be a pivotal link.

Figure 1 Conceptual representation of the preparation of regional agendas

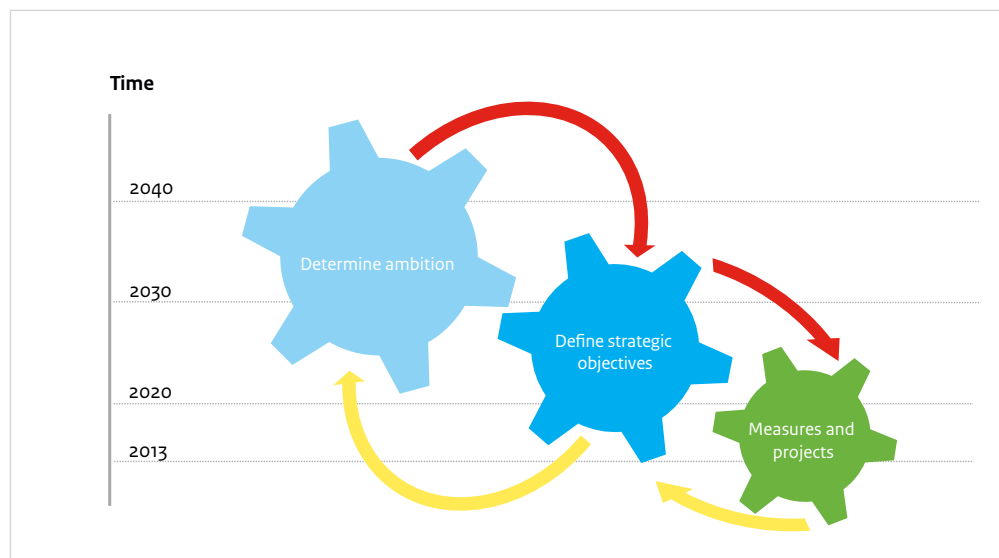


Figure 1 illustrates the process of preparing a regional agenda in the form of three sprockets, which stand for the three components of a regional agenda: ambitions, strategic objectives and measures/projects. These components form a coherent whole, are interconnected and transmit action to each other.

The model is structured in the form of a cascade, in which a sprocket higher up has a longer time horizon and is more strategic than the sprocket lower down. A selected ambition ‘flows’ down to the objectives sprocket,² after which the selected strategic objectives in turn ‘flow’ to the projects sprocket.

Step-by-step plan: scanning and selecting strategic objectives

Within each of the three sprockets – ambitions, objectives and measures/projects – there is a process of scanning and selection. In this report we concentrate on the pivotal link between ambition and projects: the strategic objectives. This level consists of four steps: scan, select/refine, make agreements and monitor.

Step 1: Scan The first step is to generate strategic objectives which can contribute to achieving the ambition. This step also consists of a global scan of possible uncertainties.

Step 2: Select/refine The objectives from Step 1 are weighed against various criteria, such as effectiveness and synergy (for example, between spatial development, mobility and water management). Based on this, concrete objectives are selected and arranged in sequence (in time and by physical area). In addition, the main uncertainties are determined and linked to the selected objectives.

Step 3: Make agreements In the third step all parties involved make clear agreements about the division of tasks, responsibilities and roles. These agreements are set down in a *commitment package*. For instance, there must be agreement about the selection criteria in Step 2 and the indicators to be used to measure policy performance and associated decision points. Specific agreements on these aspects could be made during the executive meetings.

Step 4: Monitoring The fourth and last step is concerned with monitoring the defined decision points and performance. This may be on a periodic basis, for example once every four years. At the same time, it can also be established whether any strategic objectives should be amended or moved to another target date. This is in effect the beginning of a new cycle of scanning and selection. The cyclical nature of this process is characteristic of the adaptive approach to regional agendas.

Different approach

Earlier studies on adaptive approaches in general and regional agendas in particular have been concerned mainly with the project or programme level, when all the ambitions and objectives have already been formulated. The KiM study which formed the basis for this report took a different approach and focused specifically on the strategic objectives.

The step-by-step plan has not yet been tested in practice; KiM recommends first carrying out a ‘test run’. This requires an out-of-the-ordinary approach: the parties involved should not think so much in terms of concrete projects, but primarily in terms of possibilities to make binding *objectives* adaptive.

² In a mechanical model, the middle sprocket would turn to the left, but conceptually the process turns to the right.