Comments on TransForum’s work on the Fitness for purpose of definitions and indicators - as summarised in the discussion paper (v 19 Oct 2006)

My apologies, I’m on a parallel project meeting. But I’ll be happy to respond or expand when I’ve arrived.

Dr. Jens Borken
DLR - German Aerospace Centre, Transportation Research
Berlin/DE
Jens.Borken@dlr.de
These comments shall challenge WP3

- I would like to challenge the outcome of WP3 by a few claims.

- These claims are of principle nature and also discussed among the participants of e.g. the on-going COST 356 action “Towards the definition of a measurable environmentally sustainable transport”

- Notably I’ve benefitted from discussions with Henrik Gudmundsson, DTF.

- I also draw on own work about indicators e.g.
  - for the environmental impact of transport,
  - for sustainable transport (both for the German Federal Environment Agency),
  - for the Mid-term review of the EU Transport White Paper (ASSESS).
  and from attending TransForum 1 and 2 meetings.

- There are a few technical remarks on the indicators in the second part.
Claim 1: Indicators are subjective elements

Indicators represent the agreement of a group on important issues!

- e.g. on a sustainable transport policy in Europe.

as…

a) …indicators shall capture a few aspects only (not map everything),
b) …judgements on importance are always subjective
   (you cannot avoid subjectivity, but make it transparent),
c) … judgements depend on the actors (the group),

If this is true =>
indicators will always need convincing!
TransForum WP3

a) OK, WP3 tried to be selective in the number of indicators.

b) The selection in favour or against some indicator is not well documented.

c) There is not sufficient evidence and argumentation given to convince non-participants (=outside the group of TransForum participants).

Proposal:

Argue the pros and cons of each indicator.
Claim 2: There is not one, but many purposes for indicators

- Indicators shall be **useful** for policy making
  (not just interesting information)

- Hence they have to respond to the needs of the user(s).

- The purposes in policy making depend e.g. on
  - policy stage: preparation, assessment, implementation, evaluation afterwards;
  - policy level: from single measure to comprehensive strategy?

- There are diverse – and diffuse – users!

If this is true =>

one set of indicators can never cater all purposes – and maybe not all users!
The purpose (i.e. the intended or imagined application) of the indicators is not well defined. How can then „the fitness for purpose“ be assessed?

Alternatively: It is not argued how one set can cater for all purposes.

Who is the user?

How shall the indicators be used?

Proposal:

Define / describe the purpose of the indicators here.

E.g. describe different classes of indicators for different purposes / user groups / policy phases?
Claim 3: Process as important as product

If indicators represent the agreement of a group on important issues, then **use indicators as tools for discussion** – don’t consider them as their end.

If the discussion, i.e. the clarification, common understanding and mutual agreement is so important, **then concentrate on the process as much as on the product!**

**Recommendations:**

- Analyse the process of (transport) policy making better – and the potential place of scientific information, and the place of indicators.
- Maintain fora for discussing – analysing – understanding European transport policy and transport research.
More technical remarks on the WP3 indicators

Good:
- Linked to objectives
- Limited in number ⇔ reduction of complexity / overview.

Problematic:
- Has TransForum proven that these indicators are
  - complete, comprehensive, fully operational, without mutual overlap and unambiguously linked to an objective?
  - Is accessibility really equal to travel time? From where to where? Does accessibility not relate to options in space?

- Why have you selected PM emissions, why not NOx?
  - By the way: PM$_1$, PM$_{2.5}$, PM$_{10}$??? Soot???
    Exhaust emissions only or including the fuel/electricity provision?
  - Including or without secondary aerosols???
  - If yes, then you cannot mean emissions, but concentrations?
    If you mean concentrations, how do you determine the transport share only?
Technical remarks on the WP3 indicators (cont.)

Problematic:

- What is the **objective** for passenger / freight / vehicle kilometers? More, equal or less?
  - Without an unambiguous link, the indicator cannot be interpreted.

- Why is there no indicator for the **fragmentation of land**?
  - Unfragmented land is a scarce resource and transport is the biggest pressure.

- Why no indicator on **total energy consumption** or energy efficiency of transport?
  - Energy conversation (not only fuel substitution) is an explicit policy target.

- Why only indicators for motorised transport?
  - This gives a hidden - and therefore particularly dangerous – bias.

**Technically, there are many open questions.**

That these indicators are the key transport indicators is not convincing.
Commented further reading

Discussing the role and place of (environmental) indicators for transport:

**COST 356** – „Towards the definition of a measurable environmentally sustainable transport“


For a comprehensive indicator set for the assessment of European transport policy:


For a proposal of environmental indicators for transport:


[http://elib.dlr.de/44171/01/Borken_TERM_CoreSet.pdf](http://elib.dlr.de/44171/01/Borken_TERM_CoreSet.pdf)