Building a Metaframework for Sustainable Transport Indicators: Review of selected Contributions

Several recent papers presented at TRB and elsewhere seek to make sustainability manageable by suggesting indicators and performance measures as key tools to help conceptualize and operationalize sustainability for various levels of transportation-related planning and decision-making. These studies often prescribe frameworks that will allow sustainability indicators and measures to be selected and included in, for example, agency strategies and practices. Moreover, some suggest criteria for selection of individual indicators and performance measures. The studies do however not always agree on what is really meant by a framework or how to use it for making sustainability-based decisions, and they seem to underline partly different aspects and concerns. This paper will address the issue of frameworks more generically and explore what the authors term a 'meta-framework' with a set of associated criteria to guide the framing of indicators for sustainable transportation. The meta-framework is primarily intended as a basis for undertaking empirical analysis and evaluation of actual existing practice frameworks with regards to how strong a support for sustainability they are likely to provide. The approach of the paper is first to provide a theoretical elaboration of the underlying notion of ‘frameworks’, and then to conduct a review of the selected recent key scientific studies on sustainable transportation indicator frameworks in terms of what they propose for building the meta-framework and for identifying possible criteria at the framework level. A framework criterion on ‘sustainability explicitness’ is used to illustrate a deeper level of analysis that can be supported.

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