

Transport Diplomacy

Planning Narratives and Mobility Cooperation

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4 Fine-tuning the rhetoric and response

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4.1 Values, seduction, and justifications behind transport responses

In Chapter 2, we considered how transport initiatives are built like stories, that is, from the perspective of a hero narrative driven by transport stakeholders engaging in a quest to fill various transport-related objectives deemed as beneficial for them or other beneficiaries. These objectives vary between stakeholders, individuals, and institutions. As the objects of stakeholders' quests, they correspond to multiple needs and desires: a new infrastructure, the improvement of an existing one, an increase in the frequency of transport service, the reduction of local parking cost, the interdiction of helicopter rides over the city during the weekend, etc. We learned that no matter the type of transport, the geographical space, and the radius of action where this quest takes place, regardless of the type of actors concerned with the implementation or impediment of transport initiatives (in the past, the present, or projected in the future), these stories can be analysed using the limited number of elements that the actantial model provides.

In Chapter 3, we examined the manifold horizons from where the multiple stakeholders come from and provided the reader with an approach to quickly map their presence (or their absence) within the transport governance constellation. This constellation, which can be adapted to different geographical and time contexts, helps position transport actors according to various levels of governance or scope of action (local, regional, national, supranational), to their vocational relationship to transport (transport focused, non-transport focused, non-transport focused with transport responsibilities); according to different forms of influence, whether jurisdictional and governmental (actors who can dictate the regulations, i.e. authorisation, interdiction—within their polity) or through socioeconomic representation (actors who may orient the acceptability of rules and norms, or can incite or discourage specific decisions from the ruling institutions despite not being in charge of public policies).

Thus, what happens when social and political actors from the transport constellation want to persuade others that their quest is appropriate and

legitimate? This is the very question that the present chapter aims to answer. Justification, argumentation, and seduction play a key role in transport diplomacy. These persuasive strategies largely contribute to increasing or decreasing distance between transport stakeholders.

While very powerful actors may not always need to justify their actions, they usually commit to validating them. Conversely, detractors substantiate their critiques when decrying transport initiatives or the deficiency of a given action in the field of transport by explaining why they protest or campaign for something better. In short, transport is a place of justifications or, put more simply, an arena of rhetoric, where actors try to persuade others that their response to a transport-related problem is the most appropriate one. But what are the workings of this rhetorical sparring in the transport arena? And how does it affect the transport diplomacy of its stakeholders?

Before answering these two capital questions, it is worth remembering that transport by itself is rarely a value per se. A transport initiative is mostly envisaged as a response to a transport problem or one that concerns another aspect of life. In short, an initiative in transport is usually defended as an appropriate response because it improves something valued by the transport beneficiaries or denounced as an inappropriate response because it negatively collides with something prized by transport stakeholders.

There are eight core values that provide a justification for or against a transport response. Four of them are related to the mobility of people and goods (mobility costs, efficiency, comfort, and convenience and transport safety) and four are not related directly to transport but to aspects of life which are impacted by transport (civil security and protection of transport bystanders; community well-being; community spatial and land value, and social cost/benefit of transport). Table 4.1 presents these eight core values and provides some examples of related arguments used to support or oppose a transport initiative.¹

The readers quickly understand that actors supporting or denouncing a transport initiative rarely limit their argument to one justification under one underlying value. Transport initiatives usually mobilise supporters and detractors to play on all possible axiological grounds. Let us take, for instance, the dilemma that may represent the willingness to asphalt a local gravel road in a rural area or to maintain the road in its current condition. While there are other options (like using a non-bitumen geosynthetic material), supporters of this transport response might argue that their option is the best one for improving the users' security, the mobility cost, and the well-being of the households along the road.

Finally, the readers should note that while most of the convincing effort to support or denounce an initiative finds ground in the eight axiological bases described earlier, reasons to support or oppose a transport initiative can always be connected to other intentions. Here are three of them:

- Political gain. One cannot exclude the possibility that the support of a transport initiative aims to benefit certain groups. This might be the case

Table 4.1 Core values of transport responses and examples of justifications

| <i>Para-mobility values</i> | |
|--|--|
| <p>1. The mobility cost for transport users and beneficiaries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This transport initiative is more affordable for the users. • The transporters will save in terms of operational costs. • In the long term, the maintenance expenditure for the infrastructure will be exorbitant. | <p>5. Civil Security and protection of transport bystanders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new measures aim to increase the security of hunters and small animals on the remote roadsides. • The new low-altitude airdrop method facilitates the delivery of medicine • The proliferation of cones increases the number of road rage cases that put road workers at risk. |
| <p>2. The mobility efficiency for transport users and beneficiaries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanks to this adjustment, commuters will spend less time in traffic. • This new direct flight allows travellers from City K to avoid a long and painful transit in City P. • This initiative increases the level of delay and errors in the distribution of parcels. | <p>6. Community well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The surfacing of the remote community runway will limit the impact of dust on the respiratory systems of inhabitants and malfunctioning of household appliances. • The new railway noise mitigation walls make a difference to the lives of residents. • Allowing hydroplanes to land on this lake affects the residents' main drinking water source. |
| <p>3. The comfort or convenience for users and beneficiaries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new policy will make it possible for one parent to accompany younger children during medevac (air medical evacuation). • The pet-friendly cabin will reduce the anxiety of animals during the long journey. • The excessive billboard advertisements completely ruin the enjoyment of the landscape along this road. | <p>7. Community spatial and Land-use value</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointing archaeologists to the advisory committee could help prevent the destruction of historical sites during infrastructure development. • By changing the road's location, this neighbourhood's land value can increase and attract new residents. • The dilapidated nature of this marina is a real disgrace to the reputation of our coastal town. |
| <p>4. The safety of transport users</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The avalanche detection systems will increase the safety of drivers. • The deployment of undercover air marshals was a necessity for these flights. • With all those incidents, why don't they increase the driver background checks for ATVs? | <p>8. The social costs of mobility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subsidising railway infrastructure will generate substantial economic returns. • The increase in active mobility commuters has helped cut healthcare costs. • Why don't they accelerate telemedicine implementation? It would save substantial costs for both healthcare providers and patients. |

for political candidates wishing to win an election by making certain promises. The promise of better road maintenance or the opening of new train services for commuters—regardless of whether they are justified—has been used as a strategic card by political parties for a long time to win elections. There is no reason to believe that this initiative within a specific group aims to offer better transport systems and acquire or maintain an influential position. Of course, politicians do not say transparently that an initiative is just a way to convince an audience of voters, and the real objective behind such a transport quest may always rely on hidden motivations which are far from the common good.

- Political manipulation and scheming. Observers of transport policies cannot rule out the possibility that some initiatives may create social diversion and even dissension among various opposite groups. This may be done to increase the branding and visibility of some individuals, groups, or institutions or to detach the attention from other hot issues.
- Self-interest, prestige, and promotion. Finally, transport initiatives can be promoted and undertaken to impress and leave a social mark. More opportunistically, it can also hide some individual benefits that the promoters will perceive through the development of a transport network (wealth, future social opportunities and cronyism, dodging external threats and blackmail).

Such cases are often difficult to assess since they shed light on the ethos of the transport stakeholders behind the transport narratives. Do they have a secret agenda? Are they sincere? On the other hand, detractors can also misleadingly play on an audience's emotion, accusing the real or potential transport decision-makers of manipulation for their own benefit, regardless of whether the good intentions were primarily genuine and the benefits for the better good defensible.

That is to say, a significant part of transport diplomacy relates to the way actors defend, question, or disqualify transport initiatives and, at the same time, their capacity to solve transport problems or the incompetence of others to bring appropriate solutions to these problems. This rhetorical dimension in transport is complex and strongly oft-overlook. Drawing on Michel Meyer's problematology, the following sections of this chapter provide the reader with a closer look at how this rhetoric is structured, acting as a grammar for diplomatic relationships in transport and how it shaped the distance and rapprochement between transport stakeholders.

4.2 Rhetorical distance between transport stakeholders

On rhetoric

Before exploring the role of rhetoric in the context of transport diplomacy more comprehensively, it is appropriate to introduce what rhetoric is briefly.

The word rhetoric comes from ancient Greek *rhētorikós* and referred originally to the object of ‘public speaking’.² The art of communicating persuasively, through speaking and writing, has been an important constituent of formal or informal education not only during Greek and Roman periods but also before and beyond them (Lipson & Binkley, 2004). The history of rhetoric is multifaceted, with numerous and often contradictory definitions. Meticulously discussed and taught in Ancient Greece and Rome, where it was the subject of treatises (Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian) that are still read today, rhetoric has aroused renewed interest in recent decades, both academically and in the use of the term in popular media. It must be said that its evolution, or rather the angle from which rhetoric has maintained its presence over the centuries, is marked by the temporal upheavals of its reception that is sometimes positive, sometimes sceptical, sometimes disapproving, or even sometimes absent for a long period from the intellectual curriculum (Perelman & Sloane, 2025).

Throughout historical periods, intellectual currents and cultures, rhetoric has sometimes been assimilated into logic itself, sometimes placed under the same umbrella of the art of argumentation and sometimes conceived as a branch of literary aesthetics and the production of emotions. Not surprisingly, rhetoric has often been limited to the art of seducing an audience through fine words to gain its consent—it has also been seen as an opposition to logic—the discipline of reason linked to the formal articulation of chained, consistent, and validated demonstrative propositions. Finally, over the last century, the advent of the theoretical, critical deconstruction of scientific rationality in particular and human rationality in general has opened up new interest in the forms of power relations and the actors behind the discourses. The emergence of new university programmes, even faculties, international conferences, and the interest in various disciplines examining rhetorical schemes have given rise to important works, papers, and case studies defending the relevance of the rhetorical or argumentative turns in society or simply admitting their advent (Fischer & Gottweis, 2012; Hansson & Hirsch Hadorn, 2016; Simons, 1990). Some scholars have also urged us to consider how rhetoric is at play in planning practices (Fischer & Forester, 1993). In this horizon of the omnipresence of rhetoric or what Chaim Perelman termed *the rhetorical realm* [*l’empire rhétorique*](Perelman, 1982), the work of Michel Meyer is unique in that it allows us to lay the foundations of a holistic theory of rhetoric, argumentation, and the art of convincing. Meyer’s articulation of the essence of rhetoric may provide some conceptual tools to better understand the implications of diplomatic relations between transport actors for a given intervention. But what are the premises of this approach?

On Michel Meyer and problematology

A philosopher, economist, professor at the Université libre de Bruxelles and the University of Mons, and the author of numerous works, Michel Meyer

(1950–2022) devoted a significant part of his work to what would become the field of problematology, a discipline devoted to reflections questioning the questions themselves, or more appropriately how questions and their problematicity shape our social lives and relation to the world. The heir to Chaim Perelman and the Brussels School of Rhetoric, Michel Meyer grasped rhetoric's multiple trajectories, definitions, developments, and receptions down through the ages (from Plato to Frans H. van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst).³ This led him to a series of reflections that could be summarised in these three step-reasoning sequences.

First, like other theorists of rhetoric, Meyer believed in the persistent occurrence of three dimensions of rhetoric that had been at the centre of the theory of argumentation for a long time: ethos, logos, and pathos. A quick reminder of the scope of these three dimensions may prove useful for further discussion on transport diplomacy or illustrate how they emerge in the context of transport conflicts.

- a. The logos. This dimension relates to the rational effort to convince the audience as the interlocutors provide conclusive demonstrations based on validated facts, empirical proofs, faultless calculations, and solid reasoning built through the sequential chain of premises towards conclusions that naturally follow from them.
- b. The pathos. This rhetorical dimension appeals to the audience's emotions, making it reflect on what should be loved, liked, or disliked; what should rejoice members of this audience or make them sad, so they understand, remember, and reckon what is humanly and intuitively right or wrong for them.
- c. The ethos. This third dimension focuses on the legitimacy of the communicators. It brings the audience to consider the valued experience, knowledge, and historically appropriate behaviours of the individual (or group of individuals) that engage to persuade audience members.

Then, while conceding about the co-existence of these three rhetorical dimensions, Meyer observes in his analysis of the history of argumentation theory and rhetoric that most theorists have usually privileged one rhetorical dimension over the two others, preventing them from seeing what unit these three dimensions. He goes on to write:

The rhetorical relationship is based on three components, each as indispensable as the others, and there is no reason to privilege one and subordinate the other two. When this is done, we end up with definitions of rhetoric that are often different but always partial, giving the impression of a total lack of unity and even opposition between various conceptions, whereas the discipline is the same. Therefore, the only way to correctly

define rhetoric is to integrate these three basic elements by placing them on an equal footing.⁴

(Meyer, 2010a, p. 21)

But where can one find the unity within these three focused dimensions of rhetoric? For Meyer, the unity of the rhetoric can be found in the problematization of the ‘questions’ which formed the core of its problematology.⁵ This unity can be explained by the fact that actions that involve convincing, moving, influencing, or asserting our understanding of a situation are possible because individuals position themselves on given questions. In short, our daily life and world are marked by questions and, consequently, by attempts to answer these questions. Meyer argues that humans are, by definition, ‘questioning beings’ or beings in a ‘quest’ for answers. Even when questions are not explicit in our discourse, our assertions are always somehow answers to unasked but implied questions. Of course, these assertions, answers, or responses are not satisfying for everyone. They become questionable or can quickly be put into question. This makes our answers, the situations within which these assertions are formulated, and even sometimes the relationship between individuals ‘problematic’. Here again, Meyer (2010a, p. 21):

If someone speaks or writes, it is because they have a question in mind. This question either divides or unites the individuals who discuss it. . . . [The question] brings the protagonists closer together or drives them apart. Rhetoric is the negotiation of the distance created by a problem.

This notion of ‘distance’ becomes the key definitional element of Meyer’s approach to rhetoric. Embracing the sphere of public speaking, argumentation and rhetoric in their historical, theoretical, and practical dimensions, Meyer delivers a useful conception of rhetoric, which he defines as

the negotiation of a distance between individuals on a given question.
(idem)

The reader will recognise in this clever characterisation of Meyer’s that there is a clear and influential connection to the definition initially provided earlier in this book about ‘transport diplomacy’, which has been defined as ‘the negotiation of a geopolitical ‘distance’ between social actors about transport systems or about a transport initiative’ (Ampleman, 2021, p. 181).

In considering the whole area of transport diplomacy as such, it is clear that this entire field of negotiations between social actors not only extends far beyond the discourses on transport but also touches upon the pragmatic actions of transport stakeholders: the initiatives of transporters, the construction or deconstruction of transport systems through the verdicts of decision-makers,

the voluntarily or involuntarily ignorance of other transport stakeholders positions on a transport questions by other stakeholders, etc. Nevertheless, it must be recognised that most of these actions find their way through communication and statements that can be put into question. At certain points, transport stakeholders are led or even forced to position themselves through their discourse on transport initiatives. Because transport stakeholders continuously enunciate their understanding of the transport systems, advocate for a transport initiative, or ventilate against other stakeholders' actions, rhetoric is a fundamental part of negotiating distance(s) between individuals and groups of individuals. Negotiations of distances between stakeholders on transport initiatives not only concern mega-projects but also sometimes grab the public's attention on what, at first glance, are simple issues. Box 4 presents the case of such a mundane problem: road cones.

Box 4 The New Zealand Road Cone Controversy

Road cones are practical devices to prevent accidents on construction sites, roads, streets, and other areas where people circulate. Their catchy semiotic red-orange presence and installation on targeted sites generally follow regulations and institutional practices that may differ from place to place. Their practicality comes mainly from the fact that they can be deployed (and dismantled) quickly and temporarily in the process of 'temporary traffic control' (TTC) or 'temporary traffic management' (TTM)—occurring during roadwork periods, following any road misfortunes (accidents, incidents) or other reasons for traffic diversion—by technical public works agencies or their contractors. Nowadays, the distribution of road cones is widespread. While their *raison-d'être* aims primordially to ensure the safety of workers, pedestrians, cyclists, transports, and other road users, their omnipresence may be felt as exasperating by some transport stakeholders.

It is such exasperation that burst into the open in the media in Auckland, New Zealand, in 2023 and 2024. While criticism of an overabundance of road cones in New Zealand roads is not new, the problem appears to have reached fever pitch in the spring and summer of that year in a journalistic *feuilleton* widely covered by the country's media. Critics of the mobile security equipment in question have found the hoped-for channel in the mayor of Auckland to carry the message about the excessive proliferation of road cones (Orsman, 2023). In its vocal reaction, the city of Auckland somehow opposes an initial transport response carried out by the New Zealand government and, more

specifically, some of its institutions, namely the Ministry of Transport and the New Zealand Transport Authority (NZTA). In short, the message from ‘Auckland’s authorities’ through the voice of its mayor is simple: ‘There are too many road cones’. The main line of argumentation of the city mayor in what has been termed the ‘Road Cone Controversy’ appeals to a series of core values revealed through a series of sharp statements:

- The social cost of mobility through the argument of the negative impact that the situation has on the financial burden and impact on productivity: ‘The loss in productivity to Auckland businesses and households is taking a massive toll on our city financially, but it also causes undue stress’ (Ingoe, 2024).
- The safety of transport users through the argument of the negative impact that the situation has on road behaviours and safety: ‘It’s not just a waste of money, it’s not saving any lives, it’s annoying everybody, and it forces people to behave badly anyway’ (Williams, 2024). Interestingly, the argument here works as an addition or a new audience on the mode ‘Yes—it is bad for public finance, and even more, it is bad for road safety’.
- The land value or, more precisely, the spatial value through the argument of the situation’s negative impact on the city’s reputation: ‘It’s embarrassing, and not what you’d expect from a world-class city’ (1News, 2024).

Besides the axiological register, the line of argumentation of the Auckland authorities, as reported by the media, also plays on the three rhetorical dimensions, namely

- On the dimension of *logos* through the reference to a documented ‘independent report’ from a consultant firm ‘Ernst and Young Global Limited’ confirming the negative economic impact of the road cone mismanagements leading to the overcharge of costs by the contractors through ‘[A] model [that] allows for temporary traffic management providers to “overkill” temporary traffic management solutions relevant to the size and scope of the worksite, as they profit from having staff and equipment deployed for as long as possible’. The report adds, ‘It is ultimately residents who fund the “overkill” of temporary traffic management services’ (Ernst & Young, 2024, p. 10). One should notice here that the *logos* character of the report (rational documented work) and argument are

supported here by the ethos of the organisation (an expert firm) having prepared it as an ‘independent’.

- On the dimension of pathos through the suggestion that the situation constitutes a ‘disturbing lack of understanding of commercial drivers’ (Williams, 2024). In short, the argument implied here is that normal humans would understand commercial drivers. To obtain public endorsement, the Auckland authorities and the city traffic managers also use derogatory metaphors framing the presence of cones as excessive: ‘road cone mania’, ‘sea of red cones’, ‘infestation of road cones’, and ‘New Zealand’s orange cone culture’ (1News, 2024; Cotterill, 2024; Radio New Zealand, 2024; Trevett, 2024).
- On the dimension of ethos through the suggestion of the incompetencies of the central government, here designated through a metonymy (Wellington): ‘It’s another case of Wellington passing rules and regulations without understanding the economic impact’ (Williams, 2024).

On transport rhetoric and problematology

As transport stakeholders express justifications and concerns, the narratives about the mobility of people and goods and the systems that support them quickly fall on the radar of interest groups and under the spotlights of media and academics, who look at how these narratives succeed to unite, convince, divide, manipulate, fall short when persuading, or are just simply being ignored. This critical relationship between rhetoric and transport, or how rhetoric transpires through transport narratives, can be approached from three angles.

1. As an umbrella under which ideological views about transport are disseminated. The first angle under which transport rhetoric is brought to our attention is through the condemnation or expression of scepticism—by certain actors—of the antagonistic positions taken by transport stakeholders with which the detractors disagree. Since transport is a field of conflict, one can expect that initiatives defended by certain groups will be framed by opponents as misleading narratives. For instance, several citizen groups over the years have voiced their suspicions and criticisms of the discourse articulated by dominant, powerful actors behind transport decisions—and not entirely without justification. Conversely, decision-makers denounce how certain interest groups or organisations formulate their perceptions, positions, or griefs about transport initiatives. This dynamic follows a situation

where specific transport clusters reprove the opposite group's 'rhetoric'. Unsurprisingly, the term rhetoric often has a pejorative meaning.

In many cases, the rhetoric behind the transport position of an organisation is outlined as a dishonest strategy used by a group of people to present their perspective. This is why we often read or read in the media that 'someone is denouncing a specific rhetoric', which is normally viewed as toxic, hateful, violent, and unproductive by the denunciators. In the same way, the reference to the term 'rhetoric' in transport can be found in how certain users frame themselves as the victims of a negative campaign. No one needs to search long, for instance, to find through various media, campaigners, and protesters' discourses the denunciation of the 'anti-car' rhetoric by car users and the car industry or the 'anti-bike' discourse by those championing bicycles as a sustainable means of transport.

One illustrative case of the critique of certain rhetoric in transport is provided by the headline of the New Zealander media Newsroom., which titled one of its reports on the Road Cones Controversy (Box 4): 'The "War on cones" rhetoric makes for unwinnable contest' (F. Meyer, 2024). The news article report follows up on the criticism addressed to the road safety authorities in the country about what some see as an excess of orange cones on the roads but as others see an issue that has escalated to a rhetoric of 'war against road cones' that could affect the security.

In other cases, one would talk about 'empty rhetoric' that aims to be persuasive but lacks substance or sincerity when it comes to action. This may also occur when certain groups denounce transport positions based on specific sustainable and ecological narratives as having an opposite effect.⁶ Finally, we sometimes hear that one particular group is 'buying the rhetoric' or 'agreeing with the terms of someone's rhetoric', but we rarely hear something like 'people have all agreed on the positive, beautiful, sensitive and constructive rhetoric of some other actors'. In all these perspectives, rhetoric is conceived as the result of a deceptive discourse frame by certain actors and rejected by detractors expecting a change of discourse and claiming new adapted actions.

2. As a critical field of study about how transport narratives are produced and play in given planning processes. The second angle from which the relationships between transport and rhetoric are scrutinised occurs when the discourses of transport planners or the narratives behind transport policies become the object of analysis. Discourse analysis has not been applied extensively in transport planning, but such engagement has gained interest among scholars (Hickman & Hannigan, 2023). There are sufficient discourses produced in and around the mobility of people and goods to undertake a critical examination of semio-narrative instruments in that field, including transport plans, technical studies, press releases, ministerial announcements, preambles to bills, comments made during a city assembly, or reports following public hearings. Such an examination may

help uncover how articulated the figures of discourse behind transport interventions are through the production of justifications by the actors who carry these discourses. This also allows us to compare mainstream versus emerging alternative mobility narratives and the conditions for developing competing discourses (Brömmelstroet et al., 2022). Scholars offer two avenues to address the production of transport justifications.

- One direction consists of analysing ‘rhetorical strategies’ by institutional actors to persuade the public about the merit of their approach and problem formulation. In a recommendable paper written many years ago and titled ‘The Rhetorical Side of Transport Planning’, Langmyhr (2000) identifies a series of such four rhetorical strategies used by transport planners (in the context of the debate provoked by the Nordtangenten project in Trondheim, Norway) to convince the public about their conception of the problem and the direction to take. These rhetorical strategies include persuading the public about (i) the need to cope with uncertainty, (ii) the necessity to adhere to a package solution without which the results for the better good won’t be achieved, the opportunity to neutralise two opposing camps by offering the best compromise; the promotion of a transport initiative option (road pricing) as the ultimate solution to impede the financial crisis, improve the environment, and foster the community solidarity through a ‘modern’ solution.⁷
 - Another direction consists of clarifying how transport actors translate in their own language—behind official documents and channels—the reason behind their transport practices and their perceptions of what triggers actions or inactions from them or other transport actors. For instance, Hanna Varvne’s (2025) study has worked to uncover the discrepancies between policy expectations and practices from transporters. She does so by looking at the just-in-time (JIT) management strategy ‘as a potential solution to cut fuel consumption’ to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and meet global sustainability expectations in the shipping industry. Through a series of interviews conducted with important actors from the shipping industry, the researcher uncovers four arguments advanced in the industry against the JIT management strategy and two more conciliant with this practice, raising the attention on the gap to be filled if the industry wishes to move better from policies and practices.
3. From a problematological perspective. Embracing the first two angles, the entanglement of rhetoric and the political sphere of transport can finally be observed from a meta-theoretical point of view. That is to say that whether we look at the positions of actors on a transport initiative from the heat of the action in a mundane context or through the lens of methodical discourse analysis, any proposition in transport is structured within a certain

frame or if we prefer within a certain number of possibilities. Any position in transport is an answer to a question (explicitly formulated or not) and, therefore:

- Within the constellation of transport governance of a given polity, any intervention (or non-intervention) proposal in transport can mobilise actors who favour such an action against other actors who oppose it (partially or thoroughly). Such a condition *de facto* causes a certain distance between these actors.
- This situation generally (but not always) leads each of these actors to justify their respective positions to convince an audience that the transport initiative favoured by them (as Sender and the Subject of the action) is the right or the wrong thing to do for the benefits of the targeted Receivers (or some of them).⁸ An interlocutor and defender of a position can conversely work to convince an audience that, on the contrary, the proposition on the table is inappropriate for the recipients (the community, a particular group within this community, the environment, or any other entity filling the role of the Receivers) and will lead to negative retribution.

From a problematological perspective, each transport initiative that responds to a transport problem or question generates a distance between individuals and groups who agree with this response to the ‘problem’ and those who do not. This leaves us with different types of audience responses. The next section explains how the variability of the transport audience responses helps structure the distance or rapprochement between transport stakeholders.

4.3 The audience responses to transport planning and intervention narratives

In their masterpiece on the New Rhetoric, Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca (1971) define the term ‘audience’ [*auditoire*] as ‘the ensemble of those whom the speaker wishes to influence by [their] argumentation’. They note that an audience does not necessarily refer to the direct interlocutor(s) whom a speaker addresses but rather refers to who the message is directed to. To borrow some examples from Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, one can think of a transport minister addressing the president of the Assembly about a new road tunnel safety measure while not aiming to convince the president of the Assembly but instead aiming to inform and persuade all members of parliament, and indirectly all road users for whom road tunnel safety may represent an issue. An audience and, in that case, a transport audience can be envisaged as a constructed ensemble of stakeholders for whom the answer to a transport problem is of interest. Therefore, in the context of the mobility of people and goods, a transport audience is also not necessarily limited to the transport users or transporters. It may refer to all stakeholders for whom

a transport initiative may have an impact. By adapting this definition of the audience to the field of transport, one may define it as follows:

Transport audience: the ensemble of those concerned by a transport initiative whom the speaker/stakeholder wishes to influence by their argumentation and action.

But what are the possible responses of an audience to a transport problem? To understand the grammar articulating the possibility of these responses, one should take a closer look at the modalities behind transport problems (questions) and the responses given to these questions.

Transport problems and questions

As one can put it, problems are everywhere, and we can always find them in an unlimited manner. We will always find something that does not work well or could be improved regarding ensuring the mobility of people and goods. Also, it is certainly impossible to continuously question every transport initiative or every aspect of a transport initiative. Based on Meyer's considerations about audience responses, one may affirm that two important features characterise questions on a transport initiative: (i) the explicitness or implicitness of its formulation and (ii) the interest or disinterest of its reception by the audience.

1. The explicitness or implicitness of the question. As soon as a transport behaviour, situation, or initiative occurs, one may see how this behaviour, situation, or initiative is a response to a problem that could be formulated as a question. The latter may be made explicit (formulated explicitly) or remain discreet, that is, undiscussed as a question and not formulated by transport actors. The explicitness of a transport question usually indicates clearly that a response is needed to resolve the problematicity of a situation. The relative questionability of the behaviours, situations, or initiatives becomes noticeable:
 - Should jaywalkers be disciplined?
 - Should we favour JIT as a management strategy for limiting gas emissions in the shipping industry sector?
 - Should we go ahead with the road pricing approach to solve the economic-environmental conundrum related to increasing car traffic in an agglomeration?
 - Should we limit the number of road cones in New Zealand?

Of course, an initiative in transport may generate more than one question, revealing the problematic nature of the question and forcing the

audience or part of it to take a position on many issues. For instance, on the position that there are too many road cones on the road in New Zealand, one can also take position on the following related questions:

- Is the proliferation of road cones in New Zealand too costly for the population?
- Is the proliferation of road cones in New Zealand creating a false sense of security (by increasing the chances that motorists irritated by the number of cones will not respect the regulations and adopt risky behaviours)?

The problematicity of transport initiatives is not always put into question constantly, while questions putting a transport response or initiative under the spotlight are not always formulated. A question about transport systems that has not been formulated or made explicit can be considered as a way of hiding the problematicity of a transport initiative or simply as a question hiding behind other more important questions. This may only mean that a question is waiting to be discussed or debated, or it could simply be a question whose problematicity is so trivial that it does not appear under the radar of any transport audience.

2. The interest or disinterest of a transport question by the audience or part of it. Suppose the answer to the question or the question itself about the transport problem to be solved is explicit. In that case, the provided answer or question will either capture the interest of the transport audience or result in disinterest. For instance, it is very likely that if one is told that the cost of shipping mail to a remote island in the Atlantic Ocean will increase, many of us may react by saying, 'Oh!' or 'I did not know about that'. If the audience does not live on this island, does not know anyone living there or is not a campaigner for global accessible courier services, the interest might be strongly limited. The problematicity of the initiative that can be formulated into a concrete question (e.g. should one increase the shipping mail cost to Saint Helena?) may not mobilise a specific audience. Sometimes, the problematicity of a transport issue can be seen as so far from the concerns of transport stakeholders simply because the problem occurs geographically far from them or does not affect them. In the same way, a transport issue can sometimes be so technical that the answer to this issue will not attract the attention of most transport stakeholders.

Transport responses (answers and solutions)

From the moment one individual or a group of transport stakeholders devotes their interest to a transport problem and a response to this problem is provided,

a series of options follows. There are four modalities under which transport responses (answers and solutions) to a transport problem (or a question) are manifested.

1. There is agreement or disagreement about the response. Once a response to a transport problem is on the table, the transport audience can agree or disagree with it.
2. The explicitness or implicitness of the answer. The audience's agreement or disagreement with the response offered by initial stakeholders can be explicitly expressed or remain tacit. The tacitness of a response may always be problematic, that is, ambivalent, as members of an audience may interpret this silent position as a confirmation of an initial position by a stakeholder's response or some form of disinterest in the problem itself.
3. The identical or differential character of the response. An audience that agrees or disagrees with a transport response may agree simply by maintaining the same position as the proposed response. The audience can also agree or disagree by adapting or modifying this answer.
4. The type of modification to the answer. There are two ways in which a transport audience can modify a response to a transport problem when they agree or disagree with it: by adding something to the position that reinforces it (yes, I agree and even more; no, I disagree, and I even would add) or amending the response (Yes, but; No, but).

Six types of audience responses can be distinguished when looking at all possible formal transport response to a problematic situation.

- [Y] The audience agrees (implicitly or explicitly) with the transport initiative proposed as an answer to a problematic question without adding anything to the position (Yes, the answer to the transport question or problem is deemed appropriate)
- [Y+] The audience explicitly agrees with the proposed transport initiative as an answer to a problematic issue and adds to it (Yes and even more . . .) Y+
- [T-] The audience agrees implicitly with the transport initiative proposed as an answer to a problematic question but nuances the position (Yes, but . . .) Y-
- [N] The audience disagrees implicitly with the transport initiative proposed as an answer to a problematic question or signals its disagreement without disclosing any other argument (No, the answer to the transport problem is wrong or inappropriate)
- [N-] The audience disagrees explicitly with the transport initiative proposed as an answer to a problematic question but concedes on some aspects of the proposed answer (No, but . . .)

- [N+] The audience disagrees explicitly with the proposed transport initiative to answer a problematic question (No, and moreover . . .)

Besides these six types of formal audience responses related to a transport problem, one may also always consider three types of reactions that rely more on the problematic character of the transport issue or initiative than on the answer(s) that ensue.

- [Q+] We can postulate, for instance, that someone may admit the explicit problematicity of a transport problem to be solved without having any response to provide, at least at the moment.
- [Q-] We can also postulate, for instance, that the transport issue remains completely in the blind spot of an audience or that the question does not appear in its problematicity because it is not understood by a person or group or person. The question remains undisclosed, and silence around this question reigns.
- [-Q] Finally, as explained earlier, an audience may have no interest in the transport initiative, problem, or proposal and the response (to be) provided to this problem.

The reader will note that the articulation of the audience responses (numbering and schema) applied to transport cases and presented here differs slightly from Meyer’s schema.⁹ Figure 4.1 illustrates all of the possible formal

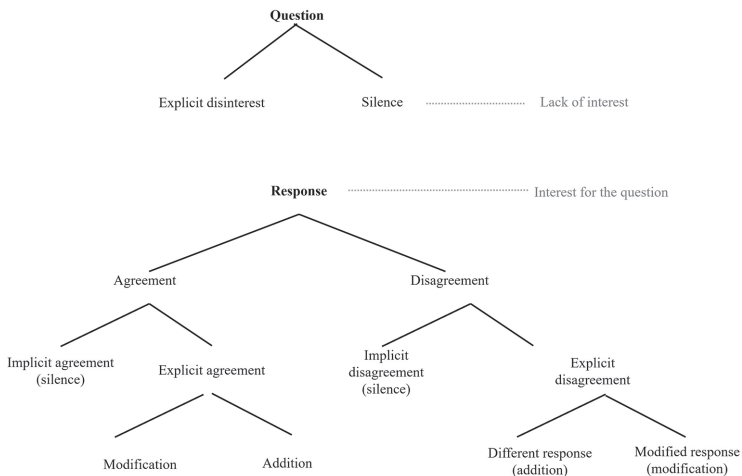


Figure 4.1 Types of audience responses according to Michel Meyer.

Source: Michel Meyer, *Principia Rhetorica. Une théorie générale de l’argumentation* © Presses Universitaires de France/Humensis, 2010.

responses according to Meyer’s problematology. Figure 4.2 illustrates the same possibilities through a thought experiment using the example from the Road Cones Controversy (Box 4). Before presenting the potential responses to the initial position, it is worth noting that in this case, the central government’s reaction to Auckland’s position was relatively nuanced as the government recognised the issue.¹⁰

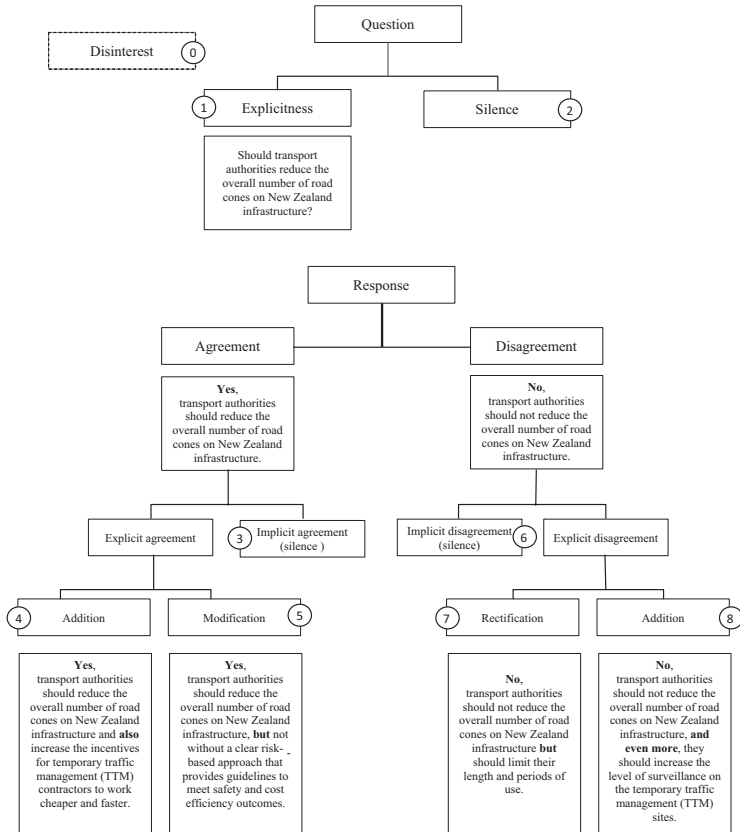


Figure 4.2 Potential audience responses to the Road Cones Controversy in New Zealand.

Source: Conceptualisation adapted by the author from Michel Meyer, *Principia Rhetorica. Une théorie générale de l’argumentation* © Presses Universitaires de France/Humensis, 2010.

4.4 Rhetorical rapprochements and distancing in the transport arena

Before concluding this chapter, a few statements deserve to be made about how the rhetoric of transport stakeholders and their efforts to persuade other actors come to play in the transport arena. It sometimes plays out successfully, at others there is a backlash. Here are five key considerations when analysing the rhetorical tug of war and its arena.

1. The implication of the transport problem. In general, the more transport touches upon various axiological grounds (transport costs, mobility efficiency, the safety of travellers and operators, the security of bystanders, the preservation of the environment, the impact on local residents, etc.), the more likely it is that there will be distance between stakeholders. Large-scale transport projects, for instance, that impact the landscape and the ecology of natural systems and need to go through important expropriation are generally good candidates for long and tumultuous debates. Transport response that touches upon several values and impacts multiple dimensions of the mobility, social life, and environment of people prompt a multiplication of counter-responses, that is to say, a multiplication of transport audience responses ('we agree, but'; 'we disagree but'; 'we totally disagree, and here is a better plan'). In such a context, each addition or modification to the initial response may become a new response that escalates the number of audience responses and relaunches the confrontation between factions in a long rhetorical marathon. The construction of new mega-airports or pipelines is usually a good example of such a divisive transport response that pitches several actors against each other. Sometimes, the implication may touch upon only one or two issues (e.g. on safety and security) but prove very divisive because of the uncertainty of their implication. Here, it suffices to mention the intense debate that has surrounded the approval of autonomous vehicles.
2. The demographic and institutional scope of a transport response. While a response to a question may not always be complex, simply maintaining the debate around a few audience responses, and their preferences around a few alternative responses, the number of actors impacted by the response(s) may render the rapprochement between parties difficult. This is true in terms of the population affected by a transport response, the number of institutions that have a say in the matter, and who must decide on the appropriateness of the response. The price increase of public transport tickets in a large urban agglomeration will easily mobilise several groups. It might provoke more noise than suspending one weekly flight to a remote community. Some issues are simple at first glance and succeed in rapidly mobilising the population and the media. The Road Cones Controversy

offers a good illustration of this, as many people all over the country may feel concerned about the issue. On the other hand, a transport response may target a smaller distant community, but the number of actors involved in the decision may be surprising. Coastal interventions aimed at improving maritime transport logistics may request the positioning of the community authorities, the regional authorities, the national authorities acting as funders, the energy agencies, several environmental offices and departments, organisations, and units from land and maritime transport.

3. The technicality of the transport response. Some problems in transport may be considered wicked problems. Through their nature, wicked problems are difficult to resolve as their potential responses do not follow a specific algorithm. How can one improve transport justice? What would be the best transport investment to facilitate the mobility of people and goods between two areas 500 km apart in the long term? While these questions might generate responses (transport initiative options) that request a high level of technical knowledge, a large part of the population usually feels at ease in engaging with a proposed response and the problem itself. The idea of self-flying planes (another example of an autonomous transport response) may provide a good example. On the other hand, the question of 'how to reduce empty mileage in freight transport by 15% through inter-company collaboration?' might not grab the attention of most of the population. This is true for many technical issues, ranging from materials engineering to the information to include in the mandatory electronic database tracking livestock vessel certification, with the result that many transport responses rarely reach a large audience, keeping the debate out of the public sphere.
4. The political forms of control around transport response. It is certainly a truism to signal that the level of control exerted by political authorities largely impacts the amplitude and intensity of debate and dialogue in one's transport arena. An autocratic government will tend to limit the nature and scope of these debates, arguing that transport diplomacy works well since the divergence between the government response and its detractor remains quite low. More open, democratic, and transparent governance will certainly favour a multiplication of options and transport responses, allowing for the multiplication of media coverage and extending the transport problem to responses from an audience which is larger and has varied actors. The limit of authorised discussion and thus the disclosed rhetorical distances between transport stakeholders on a specific transport problem does not signify that the distance between actors on transport solution does not exist or is not problematic. The question of the political form of control on transport and their discourse also poses a significant challenge for transport diplomacy exercised on a greater scale, notably at the supranational level between more transparent and more hermetic governance systems. Ultimately, this rhetorical parameter also indicates a more significant question: what is the appropriate level of control to exercise on transport actors

to ensure the emergence of appropriate transport responses (and social dialogue)? The questions of the mechanisms of cooperation and confrontation strategies are discussed in the next chapter. Nevertheless, political forms of control also point towards a fifth consideration, the ethos of transport response initiators.

5. The ethos of transport response initiators. Can we trust transport interlocutors to be competent and sincere? Are their arguments well-founded and humanely justified? Is the information provided complete? Do the benefits produced target the greatest number without harming the most vulnerable? Or do they serve the interests of a restricted and privileged group to the detriment of other onlookers waiting for a more appropriate response? Do the actors putting forward an initiative have a hidden agenda? Do they have a roadmap proving their good faith or tarnishing their reputation? Even with the best intentions or a change of heart offering their best compromise for all, the existing mistrust towards a stakeholder or two potential partners of a transport initiative can largely create diplomatic pitfalls in implementing an intervention.

These five considerations indicate how difficult it might be to facilitate a rapprochement or between several stakeholders looking at negotiating a transport solution. An important part of transport diplomacy involves moving the audience from one position to another. These movements of rapprochement may come from four directions.

1. **Moving an audience from an agreement to a disagreement** (and vice versa) on a specific transport response. For instance, convincing stakeholders to believe that ‘autonomous vehicles are dangerous for people’s safety’ to a new perspective according to which ‘autonomous vehicles are safer for people than standard vehicles’ (or vice versa).
2. **Moving an audience that agrees or disagrees with a response to a modified or identical response.** Like in other spheres of politics and life, rapprochements on transport initiatives are made when interlocutors are ready to make some concessions. Using the same case as earlier would be moving the audience from supporting the idea that ‘autonomous vehicles are dangerous for people’s safety’ to the audience admitting that ‘autonomous vehicles are dangerous for people’s safety, but in certain conditions, they can help prevent accidents’. Conversely, one may look to persuade the audience that ‘autonomous vehicles are safer for people than standard vehicles’ to the audience that ‘autonomous vehicles are safer for people than standard vehicles, but under certain conditions’. Any move from a position with a ‘yes’ to a ‘yes, but’, from a ‘no’ to a ‘no, but’ or the other way round constitutes a concession to a form of agreement and affiliation.
3. **Moving an uninterested audience to an interested audience.** This is especially relevant when certain groups of transport users or transport

bystanders are underrepresented. Convincing an urban audience about the negative or positive impact of the construction of a pipeline in a remote part of the country and how it might impact their own mobility or quality of life in the long term may be planned as a turning point in the discussion between dialoguing parties.

4. **Moving the argument from one rhetorical emphasis to another.** Using logical arguments based on rules, sequential reasoning and facts (logos), appealing to the sensibility of stakeholders (pathos), or bringing to one's attention the reputation of the transport stakeholder involved in a transport response are all points of focus used by parties negotiating for a rapprochement. Moving the audience through the different dimensions of the argumentation in favour of or against a transport response remains an unavoidable practice. While this approach is more of a strategy that serves the three previous directions of a transport negotiation, it is still a delicate exercise that not only can serve the supporters or the opponents of a transport initiative but can also cause a backlash.

Finally, not all efforts by transport stakeholders towards or against a transport initiative aim to facilitate a rapprochement between parties. Transport diplomacy may also create more distance with others to enable rapprochement or obtain support from other actors envisaged as potential allies. Insults, hostile remarks about a transport initiative and its advocates, passive-aggressive silence, or ignorance of another negotiating party are all behaviours (or tactics?) that do not help to move the negotiation of the distance between transport stakeholders in any form of rapprochement. Furthermore, such conduct may extend the distance between transport stakeholders to all other transport and non-transport issues to be discussed, far beyond the initial simple disagreement on one specific issue.

Tactics contributing to maintaining the distance or impeding the participation of stakeholders may take different forms. They include the following:

1. Increasing the technicality of the debate or playing extensively on the technical complexity of an issue (see earlier) disqualifies the discussion from other potential parties or public voices.
2. The opposite is also true, playing purely on the public sentimental alignment (pathos) to disqualify the informed voices and argument (logos)—'as an expert, you may be right, but we have to listen to the people'—may also be a questionable practice.
3. Tactics like overloading other parties with excessive data and information or requesting them to go through arduous processes to obtain the information are not unheard of. They also have strategies to maintain a transport response which is far from problematic, that is, questionable in nature. Analogously, as mentioned earlier, camouflaging a transport

response to a problem in a compound package to dissipate the audience's concern about the transport problem being solved may also seem like a practical tactic. Such a smoke screen may ultimately be done by presenting the package as 'this is it or nothing'. Once again, on the other hand, the package itself may represent an optimal solution for the rapprochement between various stakeholders on the issues. The urgent nature of the intervention and the time scope to negotiate a response are significant factors.

4. The false alternatives tactic consists of presenting multiple scenarios as possible responses to a transport problem with the intention of manipulating an audience's perception and guiding them towards a pre-determined option that seems more attractive. Scenario planning is a complex issue since it can be practised genuinely but falsely falls under the attack of intentional bias, moving the debate to the dimension of ethos. However, the decoy effect in transport planning (occurring with the introduction of unattractive modified responses or counter-responses to transport planning to misguide an audience) must nevertheless be critically monitored.

Within the scope of this chapter, it is impossible to detail all strategies and tactics used by transport stakeholders to persuade, disqualify, or exclude other stakeholders from transport debates and the co-production of transport narratives. It suffices to say, however, that such stratagems to remove potential transport audience responses move the problematicity of a transport question to the broader problematicity of governance in general.

Throughout this chapter, an effort was made to demonstrate that this rhetorical dimension is not only a game of the strongest but works, in fact, as a universal grammar. How rhetoric in transport initiatives plays out in different regions of the world, in different governance contexts, in various types of transport networks (air, maritime, land transport) according to the nature of the transport initiative (mega-projects; public policies, change of regulations; funding of infrastructure; local interventions, etc.) still remains largely understudied.

Nevertheless, as one can imagine, transport responses are not only presented through narratives. Behind the discourse with an argumentative nature, there is a series of other signals: transport rules, transport norms, transport equipment, and travellers' behaviours also act as a form of response. The pragmatics of transport goes further than simple narratives. The next chapter examines how the pragmatic conflictual and cooperative strategies shape transport diplomacy.

Useful resources and further reading

Fischer, F., & Forester, J. (Eds.). (1993). *The argument turn in policy analysis and planning*. Duke University Press.

This seminal work collects various perspectives on how our language is used to shape public policies and produce consent in the field of planning. The 12 chapters examine the rhetorical strategies that planners, policy-makers, and other commentators use to persuade their audience, provide some tools to critically assess what one can find behind the discourses, and put into question practices that have a major impact on our lives. A second work produced under the editing collaboration of F. Fischer and Gottweis (2012) also offers an instructive, deeper look at discourse practices in the field of public policies and planning.

Hickman, R., & Hannigan, C. (2023). *Using discourse analysis in transport and urban development research*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

More recently, this edited book aims to provide a series of tools to better understand transport development under different narratives using various discourse analysis approaches. The 16 chapters offer a fascinating and useful corpus to scholars and practitioners to decipher the messages behind transport narratives through different transport modes and issues (transport mega-projects, cycling, car advertising, rail transport, highways, bus transport) in multiple geographical and political contexts.

Meyer, M. (2010b). The Brussels school of rhetoric: From the new rhetoric to problematology. *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 43(4), 403–429. <https://doi.org/10.1353/par.2010.0007>

This article certainly offers the best way to become acquainted with the concept of problematology and a general overview of rhetoric in a holistic manner to negotiate the distance between social actors. The article also provides some background about the development of rhetoric from its various conceptions to the new approach under Perelman's revisiting approach to rhetoric and later. The article offers an insightful synthetic view of what the reader can find in Meyer's work 'Principia Rhetorica'.

Notes

- 1 I have already explored the typology of transport values in more depth in a chapter of a previous work (cf. Ampleman, 2021, Chapter 5).
- 2 In this respect, anyone performing as a 'public speaker' (rhētōr) would welcome the competence of mastering the art of public speaking (rhētorikḗ tékhḗnē).
- 3 For more on the Brussels School of Rhetoric and the conceptualisation of the problematology, see Meyer (2010b).
- 4 All translations from French are by the book's author.
- 5 Meyer defines (2010b, p. 429) 'problematology' as 'new philosophy, in which thinking is conceived of as questions and answers, requiring that the difference between the two be articulated'.

- 6 For an illustration about the denunciation of the ‘empty rhetoric’, see an article from the Guardian about the difficulty of the UK government to follow up on the project of rail electrification in the northern part of England (Pidd, 2015). On the potential mismatch between the ecological narrative behind a transport initiative and its potential opposite outcomes, see the column of Josiah Mortimer (2023) which exposes the divergence of views between the London Mayor on the benefit of Silvertown Tunnel and the Campaign group Stop *the Silvertown Tunnel* who denounce the project potential effect on one of London’s poorest boroughs arguing that the persuasive narrative of the project does not translate into reality for certain groups.
- 7 Critical discourse analysis in the transport is conducted not only towards planning institutions but also sometimes towards powerful private corporations. See, for instance, the article of Supran and Oreskes (2021), who analyse (and denounce) how the fossil fuel industry has replicated the rhetorical strategies of the tobacco sector using ‘subtle micro-politics of language to downplay its role in the climate crisis and to continue to undermine climate litigation, regulation, and activism’.
- 8 On the actantial role of the transport interlocutors (Sender, Subject, Receiver, etc.), please refer to Chapter 2 of this book.
- 9 I consider the formulation of a question of interest (explicitly formulated as a problem (0+) or implicitly recognised (0–)) as well as the potential disinterest in a transport question or problem (–0) separately from the six audience responses to a transport problem or question. Meyer considers both the question and answers as rhetorical responses from an audience and considers eight responses in total. I consider nine potential responses as I separate the tacitness and explicitness of the question as shaping the negotiation between transport stakeholders differently.
- 10 Interestingly, while the counter position to the New Zealand authorities (Ministry of Transport and NZTA) and their contractors to the Auckland authorities’ main claim could simply be ‘no, there are not too many road cones’, the reaction has been more nuanced, considering the claim as a legitimate statement (agreement), while amending the position (agreement with modification: ‘Yes, but’). Through its minister, the Ministry of Transport announced its position during the summer of 2024: ‘So we actually just have to take a safety at a reasonable cost approach, rather than a safety at any cost approach’ (Radio New Zealand, 2024). The admission has led to a ‘new risk-based approach to how TTM is implemented’ and released a press release arguing that the Ministry now ‘seeks to balance the need to ensure road workers are kept safe while keeping costs under control’ (New Zealand Government, 2024).
Finally, it is relevant to signal that some TTM contractors have pushed their own position, contradicting the claim of the detractors of excessive road cone use by affirming a misunderstanding of the situation (‘The number of cones could be hypothetically reduced, but it won’t save any-one any money’ . . . ‘The fact that the mayor, and even the minister of transport, continue to publish commentary around the number of cones correlates to the cost of TTM implies that they are either misinformed or completely ignorant of even the most basic factors surrounding the

subject’). Before adding that proviso, the message from the media about the proliferation of cones had led to the abuse of TTM staff (Orsman, 2023).

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