

**The effect and modification of the Traffic Circulation Plan (VCP)  
– traffic planning in Groningen in the 1980s (1) –**

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## **Abstract**

While the focus of traffic planning in Groningen was in the 1970s how to keep out the through traffic from the inner city, that in the 1980s was how to keep out the through traffic from residential neighbourhoods around the inner city and how to connect the inner city to surrounding areas, including the region. However, the municipality had to, first of all, wind up the dispute around the Traffic Circulation Plan (*Verkeerscirculatieplan*, VCP), which dragged on even in the 1980s, with investigating its effect and, if necessary, modifying the plan. This paper focuses on this process of modifying the VCP, which had proceeded through demands for its deregulation from the business community and been completed in 1982. After evaluating the effect of the VCP based on various investigations, it will analyse how the VCP had been modified, particularly in terms of its principle, which simultaneously constituted a part of the party frameworks of the Labour Party. The VCP had clearly positive effects on traffic and environment in the inner city, while the effect on economy turned out to be, at least, not so bad as insisted by the business community. Relying on these facts, political leaders of the Labour Party kept the modification to a minimum, maintaining their party frameworks, and, as a result, could integrate public sentiments in the modification, although the opportunities for public participation were limited.

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## List of abbreviation

(political parties)

- CDA:** *Christian-democratisch Appel* (Christian Democratic Appeal)  
**CPN:** *Communistische Partij van Nederland* (Communist Party of the Netherlands)  
**D'66:** *Democraten '66* (Democrats '66)  
**GPV:** *Gereformeerd Politiek Verbond* (Reformed Political Association)  
**PPR:** *Politieke Partij Radicalen* (Political Party Radicals)  
**PSP:** *Pacifistisch-Socialistische Partij* (Pacifistic Socialist Party)  
**PvdA:** *Partij van de Arbeid* (Labour Party)  
**VVD:** *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy)

(citizens' organisations)

- ENFB:** *Enige Echte Nederlandse Fietsers Bond* (Dutch Cyclists' Union)  
**ROVER:** *Vereniging Reizigers Openbaar Vervoer* (Association of Public Transport Passengers)

(business organisations)

- KNOV:** *Koninklijk Nederlands Ondernemers Verbond* (Royal Dutch Businesspeople Association)  
**KvK:** *Kamer van Koophandel en Fabrieken* (Chamber of Commerce)  
**NCW:** *Nederlands Christelijk Werkgeversverbond* (Dutch Christian Employers Association)  
**OVG:** *Ondernemers Vereniging Groningen* (Businesspeople Association Groningen)

(others)

- B&W:** *college van burgemeester en wethouders*  
**VCP:** *Verkeerscirculatieplan* (Traffic Circulation Plan)  
**VROV:** *werkgroep Volkshuisvesting, Ruimtelijke Ordening en Verkeer* (working group Housing, Urban Planning and Traffic)

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## 1. Introduction

The upheaval within the PvdA (labour party) of Groningen, which broke out late in the 1960s, culminated in 1972 in the birth of the B&W (*college van burgemeester en wethouders*, political executive office<sup>1</sup>) that consisted of only left wing parties. It was the first left wing "*programcollege*" among big cities in the Netherlands. This B&W immediately proposed to the municipal council the pending new principle of urban planning for the inner city<sup>2</sup>, the Objective Inner City Groningen<sup>3</sup>, generally called the Objectives Document, and had it approved with support of only left wing parties<sup>4</sup>. With the ultimate goal of strengthening the "encounter function"<sup>5</sup> of the inner city, this document stated the following principles for traffic policy:

7.4.1. It was already pointed out that the behaviour of the visitor as pedestrian is decisive for the traffic relations within the city centre. In this centre, and perhaps also elsewhere in the inner city, the pedestrian must in principle have priority over car traffic. In these areas, measures must be taken with which no through traffic is possible.<sup>6</sup>

7.4.5. The traffic in the inner city must be settled within the street spaces currently available for it. In order to use the space available for traffic as efficiently as possible, priorities must be granted to public transport and cyclists. (...) <sup>7</sup>

The Traffic Circulation Plan (*Verkeerscirculatieplan*, VCP), which was proposed by PvdA *wethouder* (political executive) Max van den Berg and decided by the municipal council in 1975, naturally stated the similar objectives for the inner city:

- the inner city must be made car-limited, but still remain accessible for the car.
- in the inner city, more space must be offered to the pedestrian, public transport and the cyclist.<sup>8</sup>

As a principle of strategy for these objectives, it argued for "keeping out the through traffic from the inner city"<sup>9</sup>. To realise this, it proposed dividing the inner city into four sectors for cars through enforcing one-way traffic restrictions overall (Figure 1). Against this VCP, shopkeepers or business organisations strongly opposed, and criticised the B&W particularly for hardly providing the opportunity for public participation.<sup>10</sup> However, because the VCP was completely consistent with the party frameworks of the biggest political party in Groningen, PvdA, it reflected the desire of the party members and even the public.<sup>11</sup>

Immediately after or even before the VCP was actually introduced in 1977 under Jacques Wallage (PvdA), who succeeded the *wethouder* of traffic from Van den Berg in 1976, the municipality started an attempt to modify it. This paper will focus on this process of modifying the VCP, which had been completed in 1982, and examine how the VCP had been modified and, particularly, whether its basic character, as mentioned earlier, had been maintained. Through such an analysis, this paper will confirm whether the resulting modification, like the VCP itself, could reflect the public opinion through the party frameworks of the PvdA, for which the VCP constituted an essential part. In addition, this paper would also try to evaluate the effect of the VCP on the inner city, which must have influenced its modification.

The research is mainly based on investigating written materials. The author interviewed some PvdA members who were involved in planning in the 1970s and 80s.

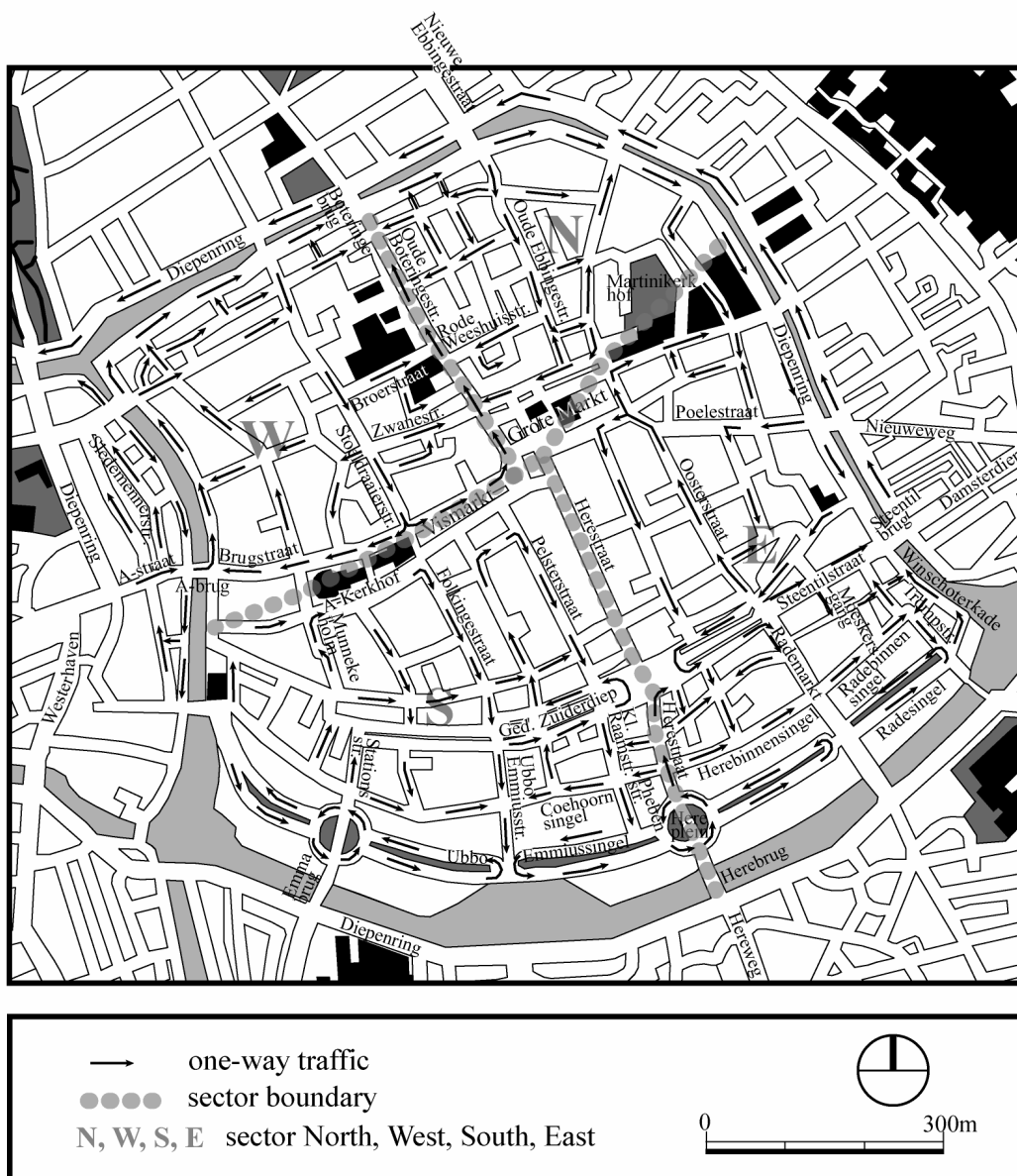


Figure 1: The Inner City and Traffic Circulation Plan



## **2. Demand for deregulation**

### **2.1 "A ridiculous sector-plan"**

Although shopkeepers or business organisations were engaged in intensive opposition movements when the VCP was decided by the municipal council, they became more or less cooperative in 1977 in introducing it, considering that the VCP was inevitable. They delegated their members to the municipal guiding committee, whose role was to help the municipality to introduce the VCP smoothly. A group of businesspeople organised the Council Activities Inner City in Groningen<sup>12</sup>, which was devoted to "the introduction that was as acceptable as possible for inner city businesspeople"<sup>13</sup>, and, for example, published a map showing new traffic regime for inner city visitors.

However, immediately after the VCP was introduced in September 19th, shopkeepers or business organisations restarted to criticise the VCP harshly. They demanded to deregulate the VCP, and published reports in rapid succession, which showed its harmful influence on the inner city economy. First, in the middle of October, that is, just before the deadline to file a lawsuit, 30 days after introduction, passed, about 80 shopkeepers on seven streets appealed to the Crown (king and ministers) asking to nullify a part of regulations of the VCP. Those seven streets were Vismarkt, A-Kerkhof, Brugstraat, Stoeldraaijerstraat, Steentilstraat, Gedempte Zuiderdiep and Herestraat between Zuiderdiep and Hereplein. Because decision by the Crown takes several years, they simultaneously lodged a suspension request against these regulations with the *Raad van State*<sup>14</sup>. The following had consistently been main demands of inner city shopkeepers since then.

A. resuming two-way traffic on A-straat, A-brug, Brugstraat and A-Kerkhof northern side, where the VCP enforced one-way traffic. This measure meant to reopen the route A-straat→Vismarkt→Oude Boteringestraat→Boteringebrug.

B. resuming two-way traffic on A-Kerkhof western side, which the VCP banned private cars from entering, Munnekeholm and Stationsstraat, where the VCP enforced one-way traffic. This measure meant to reopen the route A-straat↔Munnekeholm↔Emmabrug, lifting the boundary between sector West and South on this route.

C. lifting the boundary between sector South and East, running along Herestraat, on Zuiderdiep.

D. resuming two-way traffic on Herestraat between Zuiderdiep and Hereplein, where the VCP enforced one-way traffic. This measure meant to reopen the route Zuiderdiep→Herestraat→Herebrug.

The *Raad van State* overruled their suspension request in December, because "businesspeople have not made it clear enough that the Traffic Circulation Plan has caused a decrease in sales in large scale"<sup>15</sup>.

The VVD (liberal party), which had opposed the VCP, raised criticism also in October, advocating interests for businesspeople. Councillor of the party, J. Kamminga, presented the result of a survey that "he conducted personally under several tens of businesses". According to this, particularly "small businesses" suffered from "a decrease in sales of 25 to 40 percent", and particularly businesses on streets away from the city centre, such as Folkingestraat or Zuiderdiep, "take a hard blow". In addition, he saw "the regional function of the city threatened".<sup>16</sup>

A few days later, the local newspaper, Nieuwsblad van het Noorden, reported a survey of the influence of the VCP that the Groningen division of the KNOV was conducting under the small and medium-sized businesses in the inner city. The division was "shocked" with "the first tens of reactions", which showed the trend of "decreasing number of visitors and decreasing figure of sales".<sup>17</sup>

In November, the result of a survey by the OVG was published, which was intended to see the situation of small and medium-sized businesses one and a half months after the VCP was introduced. The most important conclusion was that the inner city was losing "its regional function". That is, in this survey, to which "about 80 to 85 percent of the inner city businesspeople responded" according to the estimate by the OVG, "more than 67 percent" answered that "considerably less people" came to their shops from outside the city than before. Concerning sales, the OVG estimated the decrease at 30 percent just after the VCP was introduced, and, based on this survey, it remarked that "The decrease still continues". Moreover, the responses indicated that "there are shopkeepers who want to close down their business".<sup>18</sup>

In April 1978, the KvK published the result of its survey. It investigated sales at shops in the inner city for the first three months of the VCP. 653 questionnaires were sent, and 212 shops responded. According to the result, the half of the responding shops experienced the decrease in sales, and, among the rest of the half, one third had the increase in sales below the inflation rate. Based on this, the KvK concluded that "the syndrome of the inner city, which had been caused by nice shopping centres outside the city and lack of parking spaces in the city, has not been improved, rather worsened by the Traffic Circulation Plan", and pressed the municipality for "some adjustment".<sup>19</sup>

On May 30th, that is, the day before the local election day, the "Group of Duped Businesspeople City of Groningen"<sup>20</sup> posted an "Open Letter" addressed to the B&W on the Nieuwsblad. This group was established at a meeting with 280 participants in January, and supported by the OVG. In the Open Letter, it criticises not only the VCP but also the Broad Local Land Use Plan for the Inner City of Groningen, which was approved by the municipal council in February. It argues, first of all, that they, "a large group of businesspeople, mainly from the inner city", are "seriously duped" by the VCP and Broad Local Land Use Plan, and "they are not alone!". Particularly concerning the VCP, "because of the lack of participation by true experts and the

interested, this Plan not only works poorly, but also seriously undermines the employment and viability of our city". According to this group, "Our inner city is too beautiful and too small for a ridiculous sector plan". It harshly criticises the current B&W for being "so one-sidedly constituted" or completely ignoring "the interests of those who must keep the pot boiling in this city". Finally, it demands to revise the VCP and Broad Local Land Use Plan quickly, referring to the survey by the KvK:

In this period of declining economy, you must improve climate for employment and not, like now (see the figures of the KvK), drive consumers and businesses out of the city and jeopardise employment.

In sum, in our view, we can demand that both the local land use plan and particularly the VCP should be revised in the short term in such a way that a considerably better situation is created than it is the case now for every group and specifically that group that provides employment and income for the city.

The anonymous spokesman of the group said, concerning the number of people who were dismissed as a result of the VCP, that "Figures are already mentioned of more than two hundred"<sup>21</sup>.

## **2.2 Keep its way**

Although these various "facts" showed serious effects of the VCP, the B&W responded with suspicion about the credibility of these surveys. They had been conducted in "the habituating period"<sup>22</sup> and therefore did not show the long term effect of the VCP, the B&W refuted, or those shops that suffered from a decrease in sales disproportionately responded to these surveys, undermining the representativeness of samples.

On the other hand, the B&W itself planned from the beginning to investigate comprehensively the effect of the VCP. Based on the principles of the Objectives Document or the VCP, it should investigate the effect on not only economy but also traffic and environment, and environment was to include the "perception value"<sup>23</sup> of the public spaces, which had been regarded as contributing to the encounter function. In order to compare the situation before and after the VCP, the municipality had already investigated the situation in 1976 and 77 before the VCP was introduced, in cooperation with the national government<sup>24</sup> and research institutes. In 1978, after the VCP was introduced, it was conducting the investigations about the same subjects.

Concerning the demand to deregulate the VCP, the B&W argued that substantial adjustment must be based on the result of these comprehensive investigations, and that the adjustment, even if necessary, must be consistent with the principle of the VCP. For example, the Municipal Program 78-82, which the PvdA of Groningen published for the 1978 local election, states that "The traffic policy for the inner city will have to be based on the VCP" and that "any necessary adjustments must not be inconsistent with the objectives of the plan"<sup>25</sup>. In addition, perhaps based on the temporary result of the investigations and on-site observation, it already confirms that the VCP has realised its basic principle, saying, "The Traffic Circulation Plan, with the main objective of keeping out the through traffic from the inner city, has been effective in dealing with

traffic in the inner city"<sup>26</sup>. In "an election debate" at De Oosterpoort on May 25th, CDA leader E.G. IJspeert and VVD leader J.R. Remkes argued, criticising such an attitude taken by the PvdA, "the left wing *college* rigidly holds on to political principles and is blind to the problems of shopkeepers". Wallage, who also attended as PvdA leader, responded, "The current left wing municipal executive is substantially engaged in studying the adjustment of the Traffic Circulation Plan", but cautioned, "those who want to make the through traffic within Diepenring possible don't have to expect cooperation". The B&W did not intend to attract more cars into the inner city, creating a through route, he said, and those who called this approach as "a harmless adjustment" were "in fact engaged in undermining the essence of the plan".<sup>27</sup>

The B&W actually implemented some adjustments at this stage, which it regarded as urgent. However, all those were consistent with principles of the VCP or Objectives Document. For example, because there were many drivers who ran from Stoeldraaierstraat to Folkingestraat, ignoring the boundary between sector West and South, the municipality narrowed the street in front of Korenbeurs. The one-way traffic restrictions all over the inner city, which were introduced in the VCP, had also been applied to cyclists. In response to their complaints, particularly those from the cyclists' union, ENFB<sup>28</sup>, the municipality exempted cyclists from the one-way traffic restriction on Broerstraat, which Academiegebouw and the university library face. Or again for cyclists, it improved the intersection between Zuiderdiep, Rademarkt and Steentilstraat, which had been dangerous for them.

In addition, the B&W carried out projects that would facilitate goals of the VCP or Objectives Document. First, the municipality refurbished the southern side of Grote Markt and Poelestraat, changing the pavement, both of which the VCP had made car-free. It brought back the market, which had been driven out from the inner city to Westerhaven in the 1960s, completely to Vismarkt and Grote Markt on April 15th, 1978. In addition, it kept on planting trees in and around the city centre, amounting to about 300 trees planted in 1981 since the VCP was introduced. Responding to that Open Letter presented the day before the election, Wallage justified the VCP based on these projects:

I will not give way to those who feel that they must support the VVD-campaign anonymously. Moreover, I am of the opinion that the sum of the market, trees and the reaction of the shopping public withstands best against this sort of advertisements.<sup>29</sup>

At the local election in 1978, the PvdA of Groningen lost two seats, resulting in 16 seats. Other two parties in the B&W, the CPN and PPR, also reduced seats from three to two and from two to one, respectively. However, the D'66, which lost seats in the municipal council at the last election, gained three seats, and the PSP, which also lost seats at the last election, regained a seat. As a result, total seats of the left wing parties were not changed, that is, 23 of 39 in total. The PvdA chose to form the left wing B&W with the CPN and D'66, which consisted of four PvdA *wethouders*, one CPN *wethouder* and one D'66 *wethouder*. The left wing parties outside the B&W, that is, the PPR and PSP, endorsed the *college* programme on which those three parties agreed.

### **3. The effect of the VCP**

#### **3.1 The survey by Bout**

At the end of January 1979, one of the investigations by the municipality was published for the first time. This was the result of the questionnaire survey on the economic effect of the VCP, which was conducted by Vakgroep Planologie, Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, led by J. Bout. In order to see the influence on businesses in the inner city four months after the VCP was introduced, this survey was carried out in February and March 1978. Therefore, this was not the comparative survey conducted before and after the VCP, like other municipal surveys. Although the size of the sample was small, with about 200 businesses questioned of 1,400 businesses in the inner city, various businesses were sampled in terms of the type of business or the extent of change in traffic situation caused by the VCP. The result of this survey is summarised in the following.

Concerning the development of sales, 25% of responding businesses reported a decrease in sales attributed to the VCP, while only five businesses reported an increase thanks to the VCP. The amount of the decrease in sales attributed to the VCP was estimated on average at about 13% on an annual basis. On the other hand, the result did not show a substantial difference dependent on the location of streets or the size of businesses, as pointed out by VVD councillor Kamminga. However, there was a significant difference between the types of business, and particularly damaged were those shops that sold large commodities, like do-it-yourself articles. Concerning the number of visitors, 26% reported a decrease in visitors attributed to the VCP, while only eight businesses reported an increase. It was estimated that visitors to all businesses decreased, because of the VCP, by 2.2% on an annual basis. This survey also inquired into the increased cost, resulting from the loss of time for freight transport. It revealed that 20 businesses complained of "longer time to look and wait for a parking space for loading as a result of decreased parking spaces", and that as many as 61 businesses complained of "the increase of time for making a detour as a result of the sector division and related increased congestion on the ring road around the inner city (Diepenring, by the author)". Furthermore, there were twelve businesses that planned to move out of the inner city within two years, with the VCP "the decisive factor", and four that planned to close down their business.

That is why, the investigation by the municipality itself also showed the negative influence on the inner city economy, although not so negative as shopkeepers or business organisations insisted. As a result, these organisations intensified their demand to deregulate the VCP. In April, the businesspeople association Zuiderdiep<sup>30</sup> sent a letter to the B&W and municipal council, asking to lift the sector boundary on Zuiderdiep or allow two-way traffic on a part of Herestraat, Stationsstraat and Munnekeholm. The KvK in May and the KNOV in June asked the B&W for "a

considerable relaxation"<sup>31</sup> or "drastic adjustment"<sup>32</sup> of the VCP. Their demands included not only those from shopkeepers (demand A-D, p3) but also removing the "cuts"<sup>33</sup> on singels such as Ubbo Emmiusingel, which were enforced by the VCP, or introducing the "green wave"<sup>34</sup> of traffic signals on Diepenring. Urged by these demands, CDA councillor W. Bakker pressed Wallage to answer if the B&W was prepared to realise "sector-breakthrough" at the council committee Traffic and Transport in June. Wallage answered that the B&W did not intend to "isolate cash register data".<sup>35</sup> The investigations were still under way into the effect on traffic and environment, and, as planned in the beginning, "All those investigations will be finally combined into one analysis. The B&W will base its proposals for changes on that analysis"<sup>36</sup>.

### 3.2 The result of the municipal investigations

In autumn 1979, the results of the rest of the municipal investigations were published one after another. Table 1 shows the overview of these investigations. In addition, the municipality conducted the measurement of noise and vibration in the inner city in spring 1977 and spring 1978, that is, before and after the VCP. In the following, the effect of the VCP would be analysed based on these investigations, in the order of the effect on traffic, environment and economy.

title of investigation	area and object	time of investigation		size of sample	investigator
		before VCP	after VCP		
1. <i>Binnenstadsbezoek, etc.</i>	whole inner city/ those travelling	Sept.-Oct. 1976	Sept.-Oct. 1978	counting	municipality
2. <i>Onderweg</i>	whole inner city/ those travelling	Sept.-Oct. 1976	Sept.-Oct. 1978	counting	municipality
3. <i>Aard binnenstadsbezoek</i>	whole inner city/ those travelling	Nov. 1976	Oct. 1978	approx.2800 in '76, approx.3500 in '78	adviesburo Hofstra
4. <i>Passantenenquête</i>	core of inner city/ passers-by	Sept. 1977	Sept. 1978	approx.1900 in '77, approx.2300 in '78	municipality
5. <i>Enquête binnenstadsbewoners</i>	whole inner city/ inner city residents	Sept. 1977	Sept. 1978	152 in '77, 83 in '78	DHV Raadgevend Ingenieursbureau
6. <i>Regio-enquête</i>	whole region/ residents of city of Groningen (excl.inner city) and regional residents	Sept. 1977	Sept. 1978	approx.1400 in '77, approx.1400 in '78	DHV Raadgevend Ingenieursbureau

**Table 1: Investigations on the effect of the VCP**  
(Source: HURENKAMP, H.G. & VAN DER LEE, J.J. (1981))

#### 3.2.1 The effect on traffic

When the municipality measured noise at 29 locations in the inner city, it

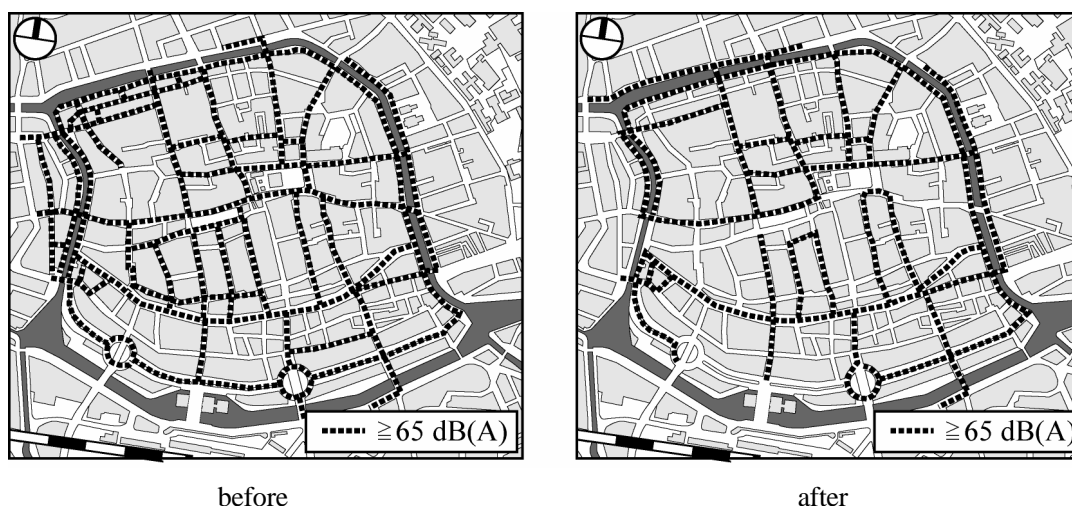
simultaneously counted passing traffic. The result showed that the hourly traffic intensity of private cars had reduced by 47% on average before and after the VCP. On the other hand, according to the investigation 3 in Table 1, the share of car of all traffic modes to the inner city had decreased slightly from 36% to 34%. This means that the dramatic decrease in the hourly intensity had resulted from achieving the objective of the VCP, that is, keeping out the through traffic from the inner city. The division of the inner city into four sectors turned out to work as planners expected.

Another remarkable effect on traffic was the sharp increase of bus passengers to the inner city. The investigation 3 confirmed 12% increase on weekdays and 17% increase on Saturday. The share of bus/train of all traffic modes had increased from 17% to 21%. One plausible factor for this increase is that the regional busses could go, deeply into the inner city, to Grote Markt, as a result of the VCP. Director K. Jongkind of the Drentse Transport Company witnessed, "Thanks to the VCP, we can drive directly to Grote Markt in Groningen. That has brought in many extra passengers."<sup>37</sup> In response, this regional bus company increased bus drivers by 15, it was reported. Another factor is that busses could run on schedule in the inner city after the VCP, because private cars decreased dramatically and bus lanes were introduced on some streets, such as Zuiderdiep. In fact, director J.P. Bamberg of the Municipal Transport Company remarked that busses could run within Diepenring more easily than before, and concluded, "the VCP was positive for the regularity of the service"<sup>38</sup>.

It was also confirmed that the public impression about traffic had been improved. According to the investigation 4 in Table 1, which focused on visitors to "the core"<sup>39</sup>, that is, Grote Markt and Vismarkt, those who regarded the accessibility to the inner city as "very good", "good" or "moderate" had increased from 64% to 72%. Objectively, traffic accidents had decreased within Diepenring, increased on it, and lightly decreased as a whole. However, the subjective safety for pedestrians and cyclists had been substantially improved. The investigation 6, dealing with citizens outside the inner city and residents in the region, showed that those who completely agreed with the safety being sufficient had increased from 35% to 45% in walking and from 19% to 30% in cycling.

### **3.2.2 The effect on environment**

The measurement of noise at 29 locations in the inner city established that the average level of noise had decreased from 67.0 dB(A) to 64.1 dB(A). According to investigators, the decrease of 3 dB(A) is almost equal to the reduction of noise intensity by half. As can be seen in Figure 2, streets with noise of 65 dB(A) or higher had also considerably decreased. This objective improvement influenced favourably on the impression among visitors to the inner city. According to the investigation 6 in Table 1, those who experienced "serious nuisance of noise" from traffic had decreased from 10% to 5%.



**Figure 2: The change of noise before and after the VCP**  
(Source: VAN DER LEE, J.J. & SHOONDERBEEK, W. (1980))

The impression of the air had also been improved. The investigation 5, whose objects were residents of the inner city, showed that those who sensed odour from traffic had decreased from 37% to 27% in walking and from 57% to 38% in cycling. Also among visitors from the region, those who sensed odour had decreased from 43% to 24%.

The so-called perception value, that is, the impression of the public spaces among the public, had changed favourably, particularly for those streets that were made car-free or refurbished as a result of the VCP. In the investigation 4, passers-by were asked to grade the atmosphere of streets from "very bad"=1 to "very good"=5. According to the result, the score had gone up from 2.89 to 3.42 for the inner city on average, and from 3.29 to 3.96 for pedestrianised Poelestraat. The investigation 6 also provided related data, based on which those who found it "pleasant" to walk there had increased by 10 to 30 % on refurbished squares and streets, such as Grote Markt or Zuiderdiep. Specifically for Grote Markt, they had increased from 60% to 79%.



**Figure 3: Grote Markt**  
(southern side)



### **3.2.3 The effect on economy**

Besides the survey by Bout, the investigations in Table 1 and other investigations, which the municipality or private organisations had conducted independent of the VCP, also provided data related to the effect on the inner city economy. Because these data did not necessarily show consistent trends, it was, and still is, much more difficult to establish the effect on economy than that on traffic or environment.

First, concerning the number of visitors to the whole inner city, the investigation 3 in Table 1 revealed the decrease of as much as 9%, from 509,000 to 462,000 per week. The survey by Bout estimated, as mentioned earlier, that visitors to all businesses had decreased by 2.2% per year. However, the investigation was conducted of the frequency to visit the inner city shops from the city outside the inner city and from the region. Based on this, there had been "no evidently demonstrable differences"<sup>40</sup> in the frequency per week before and after the VCP. In addition, the municipality had investigated the number of visitors to 80 businesses in the inner city every half year. Although the survey by Bout confirmed the decrease on balance, this investigation showed a large increase of 7% in visitors from 1977 to 1978, and also an increase of 4% even if we focus on retail.

That is why, it is difficult to say something with certainty about the trend of the number of visitors to the whole inner city. On the other hand, there was an apparent trend concerning the visit to the core. The investigation 4 revealed a huge increase of 22% in visitors there, from 357,500 to 436,300 per week, and the investigation of the frequency to visit also confirmed that the frequency to visit the core had become "significantly higher"<sup>41</sup> after the VCP. In addition, according to the investigation 4, among visitors to the core, those who visited only shops had decreased from 73% to 62%, while those who visited the market, the market plus shops, or cafes had "significantly increased"<sup>42</sup>.

The business organisations had pointed out the regional function of the city being lost. However, as far as the number of visitors is concerned, any investigations confirmed "no significant difference"<sup>43</sup> in the ratio of visitors from the city to visitors from the region before and after the VCP. On the other hand, concerning expenditure, the investigation 6 confirmed the decrease of 10% in the share of the inner city in the total expenditure. In consistent with this trend, the per capita expenditure in the inner city had decreased by 20%. Furthermore, the investigation 4 revealed the decrease of as much as 30% in the per capita expenditure at the inner city shops, not including at the market. However, investigators do not mention factors that explain this drastic drop in per capita expenditure, and it is indeed difficult to specify them. For example, concerning the make-up of visitors in ages, the survey by Bout, the investigation 3 and 7, combined, established that the make-up of visitors to the whole inner city had "not changed appreciably"<sup>44</sup>. As far as visitors to the core are concerned, those younger than 30 had increased by 2%. Or the share of car of all traffic modes to the inner city, as far

as the visit to shops is concerned, had decreased from 28% to 24%, while the share of bus/train had increased from 18% to 22%. These changes might have influenced negatively on per capita expenditure, but it is doubtful whether they had brought about such a huge drop. Furthermore, there were data that indicated that the inner city was more thriving than the rest of the region even after the VCP. They were from the nationwide survey<sup>45</sup> conducted by the KvK every year. According to this, while 19% of businesses in the Province of Groningen had increased their net profit from 1977 to 1978, 24% in the inner city of Groningen had increased it. Or, it were 16% of businesses in the Province that had made more profit than the inflation rate in 1978, and 24% in the inner city.

Indeed, according to the survey by Bout, the inner city businesses seemed to suffer from serious economic damage by the VCP. But this survey was, after all, a questionnaire survey, that is, based on the opinions from businesses. It revealed that more than half, 51%, of businesses regarded the VCP as "more or less negative". Those businesses could emphasise the negative effect of the VCP regardless of the facts.

To sum up, it was, and still is, difficult to say with certainty how the inner city economy had changed before and after the VCP, and, furthermore, almost impossible to establish to what extent the VCP had contributed to that change. On the other hand, there was an evident effect of the VCP or related projects such as the return of the market. That is, passers-by had substantially increased in the core and necessarily on the shopping streets around it, and they had become to enjoy activities other than shopping. In addition, taking into account the fact that particularly shopkeepers from sector West complained of a decrease in sales, the municipality conducted an investigation separately for that sector in autumn 1978. The result was that "no negative relation can be established between the economic development of businesses concerned and the introduction of traffic measures as part of the Traffic Circulation Plan"<sup>46</sup>.

It can be concluded that the VCP had achieved its original objective "to a considerable extent"<sup>47</sup>, as these investigations repeatedly pointed out, and that it had also contributed greatly to substantiating the Objectives Document, whose central theme was to strengthen the encounter function. Therefore, as long as the B&W held on to these objectives, it did not have to modify the VCP so much. The Midterm Review<sup>48</sup>, which the B&W published in February 1980, took precisely this line.

## **4. The Midterm Review**

### **4.1 Increase the attractiveness of the inner city**

After summarising "the most important results" of various investigations, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the Midterm Review made eight remarks in "Comment on the results of the investigation". Among them, the first three remarks confirm the achievements in traffic and environment:

1. The VCP has met the most important objectives of traffic: the car traffic, particularly the through traffic, has been drastically restrained, public transport acquired strongly improved accessibility and the bicycle traffic was improved.
2. With this, the traffic concept of the Broad Local Land Use Plan for the inner city was at the same time implemented, although the completion and elaboration of the pedestrian priority areas and of the pedestrian co-existence areas needs still closer attention (we still return to this in the following of this short list).
3. The environment-circumstances in the inner city have been substantially improved, not only objectively but also in the judgement of visitors and residents.

Concerning the effect on economy, the Review refers to the investigation that showed the decrease in visitors to the whole inner city, and, saying "difficult to fathom", indicates a margin of error caused by the late night shopping, which was introduced after the VCP. On the other hand, the seventh remark regards the development of the number of visitors as "disappointing", and advocates strengthening "the competitive position" of the inner city through "a specific package of measures". The following eighth remark, referring to the survey by Bout, argues that this survey is "too temporary" to know "persistent sales-effects". According to this remark, the municipality agrees with Bout on the necessity of "a second phase of the survey".

After these remarks, before turning to concrete measures to modify the VCP, "we want to examine deeply some themes that seem to be of great importance for the inner city policy and thus for the VCP-policy", says the Review. Here, it emphasises the necessity of urban design adapted to the VCP, as indicated in the second remark. First, it mentions the fact that there are some businesses that plan to leave the inner city "based on VCP-reasons", which the survey by Bout revealed. While it notes, "We do not take these signals lightly", the Review cautions, "more cars in our inner city, that is, the reversal of the main approach of the VCP, would have unacceptable results for other elements of the inner city environment." Successively, it refers to the Objectives Document and Broad Local Land Use Plan. Their foundation was that "what characterises our inner city, such as the markets or the canal, had to be used as the clue for the further development", that is, to "maintain and develop the characteristic identity of the heart of the city". In addition, the Review confirms that "an important place was allocated to the design of the open space as an encounter place" in these documents. It argues, in the following, that the B&W would continue this policy. The characteristic identity of the inner city is "Diversity, atmosphere, cheerfulness and so on", or "what is called, in urban design jargon, quality of the space". This identity is "in

our judgement - also from an economic viewpoint - the strongest cornerstone for a healthy inner city". Taking into account demands from the business community, it says that "we do not argue away the accessibility problem" with this policy. However, the Review makes it clear that the accessibility problem "must be placed within the framework of the attractiveness of the inner city", which originates from its identity.

Then, it illustrates concretely "measures that further increase the attractiveness". First, it argues that, although "The reduced car traffic in the inner city has offered the possibility for clearly renovating the use of the open space", "the question is whether the design of some areas has been adapted sufficiently to the car limited situation". And it particularly refers to the route Brugstraat↔A-Kerkhof northern side in sector West, on which the design of the street and sidewalks must be improved so that "a more interesting strolling and shopping route emerges". Second, it argues, concerning some approach routes to the inner city, that "the reduced car traffic of the city centre would have to have consequences for the design there", and puts forward Nieuwe Ebbingestraat and Nieuweweg as candidates for renovation. Finally, in addition to these streets, there are still some other streets, where, "now that the traffic pattern through these streets has significantly changed, the design of the space must be adapted". The Review mentions, as examples, Zwanestraat, Oosterstraat, Steentilstraat and Folkingestraat.

After arguing for the necessity and measures to adapt to or use the VCP, the Review turns to measures to modify the VCP, in "Traffic policy" and "Proposed concrete measures".

#### **4.2 How to modify**

First of all, it again states clearly the original standpoint of the B&W that the principle of the VCP must be kept intact, saying, "there is no reason to adjust the VCP fundamentally". Then, first, it deals with measures for bicycles. The municipality will try to expand parking spaces for bicycles, and "At first, about 500 extra parking possibilities for bicycles will be created on various places in the inner city". It also refers to the experiment with "a protected, roofed bicycle shed" in the city centre, which was announced in the Policy Plan for 1980. The one-way traffic restriction had been lifted for cyclists only on Broerstraat, as mentioned earlier. The Review states, "we try to exempt cyclists from this one-way traffic where this is possible."

Next, the Review mentions measures for busses. It announces that "a package of measures for busses" has been proposed to the municipal council committee, such as bus lanes on Damsterdiep and Westerhaven, and that the bus traffic will be facilitated also in other ways, like the adjustment of the traffic signals. On the other hand, shopping streets, such as Oosterstraat or Nieuwe Ebbingestraat, had repeatedly complained about busses there, which had increased since the VCP and, in their view, run too fast, causing noise and odour. The Review promises, "we will take measures to

ease the negative results of the bus traffic!", although it mentions only "sound-proofing facilities" as concrete measures.

Measures for pedestrians, which are already mentioned in "some themes", are again explained in "Improving quality of the space". The B&W will encourage "some appropriate streets" to "acquire larger attractiveness through arcades<sup>49</sup> or other facilities in the short term". In addition, because many cars that avoided Diepenring penetrated into narrow streets between Radesingel and Steentilstraat, the Review announces to make these streets unattractive for the through traffic by changing the direction of their one-way traffic.

So, the Review first deals with pedestrians, cyclists, busses and measures against the through traffic, and then starts to talk about measures to facilitate the circulation of cars in the inner city. First of all, concerning Diepenring, it proposes adding an extra lane on Steentilbrug to ease congestion on Winschoterkade and Radesingel. The business organisations had asked for the green wave of traffic signals on Diepenring. However, the Review argues that the municipality has already tried to adjust traffic signals each other there, and rejects "a complete coupling" as impossible and even undesirable. Because it means "a longer wait for the traffic that must cross Diepenring", and "many busses must also make this movement".

Shopkeepers in sector West, among others, had demanded to improve the accessibility for cars, pressing for measures such as demand *A* and *B* (p3). However, concrete measures in the Review for this sector were at most the faster development of the parking garage on Sledemenerstraat, which had already been adopted in the Broad Local Land Use Plan, and the improvement of the pedestrian route to the city centre, as mentioned earlier. For the rest, it just says, "In consultation with businesses concerned, we will see if the accessibility (for the car traffic), circulation and (short) parking capacity can be improved." Furthermore, although the Review accepts that *A*-brug and Munnekeholm would be subjects of this consultation, where shopkeepers had wanted to resume two-way traffic, it immediately imposes a condition, that is, "if additional measures prevent the car traffic without destination in the inner city from being attracted to run through the inner city."

Concerning demands for Zuiderdiep, such as demand *C* and *D*, the Review does not refer to the demand to lift the sector boundary there, and considers only how to connect Zuiderdiep and the parking garage on Kleine Raamstraat, which had opened the previous year, in 1979, to Diepenring. It concedes that the current route via "an illogical swing"<sup>50</sup> on Ubbo Emmiusingel is "a very complicated route", and proposes opening either of two routes for drivers, that is, the route Kleine Raamstraat→Phebenstraat→Hereplein or the route Kleine Raamstraat→Coehoornsingel→Herestraat→Hereplein. In exchange for this improvement of accessibility, the crossing on Zuiderdiep, connecting two parts of

Herestraat, should be renovated so that "the character of pedestrian priority" is emphasised and, simultaneously, "an extra obstruction" emerges against many drivers who ignore the sector boundary here, says the Review.

The business organisations had also demanded to remove the "cuts" on singels. The Review expresses the willingness to examine only the place of those cuts to prevent an unnecessary detour, on condition that singels should not have "an inner ring character". The survey by Bout revealed that, as a result of the sector division, many businesses had suffered from a delay of freight transport, resulting in the increase of the operating cost. The Review, first of all, dismisses the idea of granting exemption to all trucks from sector boundaries, in terms of the difficulty to maintain such a system or the negative influence on the bus traffic. Instead, it proposes a system, in which freight is gathered into a vehicle that "is adapted to the - small-scale - character of the inner city", and only this vehicle is allowed to cross sector boundaries. "We intend to elaborate such a scheme in close consultation with transporters' organisations", concludes the Review.

We can see that the Midterm Review, as a whole, put emphasis on substantiating furthermore the principles of the VCP or Objectives Document. Concerning measures to facilitate the circulation of cars, for which the business community had pressed, its proposals were rather modest or vague, relegated to further examination.

## **5. The polarised reaction**

### **5.1 The reaction from citizens**

At the end of the Midterm Review, the B&W explains the "Further procedure" succinctly, but it refers to only the procedure within the municipal council. In fact, the B&W arranged four public hearings in total, of which two of the latter half were specifically intended for businesspeople and their organisations respectively.

As soon as the Review was published, residents around Sledemenerstraat, where the faster development of a parking garage was proposed, launched an opposition movement. They feared its negative influence on residential environment, and published a counterproposal of a swimming pool or sent a letter to the municipal council. They also attended the first public hearing, which was held on March 25th, 1980, and raised an objection to the plan by turns. However, more importantly, this hearing was attended only by 15 in total, including businesspeople. That is why, Wallage, who attended this meeting as representative of the municipality, concluded, "The disturbance around the Traffic Circulation Plan under citizens turns out to be obviously less than expected"<sup>51</sup>. At the second hearing on April 2nd, residents between Radesingel and Steentilstraat, who had been annoyed with the through traffic since the VCP, proposed concrete measures for this problem, such as reversing one-way traffic on Radebinnensingel between Moeskersgang and Trompstraat. However, again, this hearing was poorly attended by 19, including businesspeople and members of the ENFB and the association of public transport passengers, ROVER. In addition, the public could, as always, submit written opinions concerning the Review to the B&W, but those from individuals, including businesspeople, turned out to be only 12 in total. That is why, we can conclude, as Wallage mentioned, that the public as a whole at least did not recognise the VCP or the Review, which was written in consistence with the principle of the VCP, as a serious problem.

Furthermore, residents' groups in the inner city, six in total, submitted written opinions. According to those opinions, except for the group around Sledemenerstraat, which opposed that parking garage, all of them were afraid of deregulating the VCP for cars, or asked for a "green street", a "residential street", measures against the through traffic and so on. In other words, their demands were consistent with the Objectives Document, VCP or Review, and no group asked for lifting sector boundaries, while shopkeepers had persistently done.

Among citizens' organisations, the ENFB responded. Two months after the VCP was introduced, the Nieuwsblad carried the view of the ENFB on the VCP. It was "not a thorough plan" for the ENFB, but, because "it is almost for the first time that a choice is really made in favour of other traffic modes than the car", the ENFB regarded the VCP as "a step on the right track"<sup>52</sup>. That is why, in response to the Review at the public hearing or in a written opinion, the ENFB asked for adhering to the principle of

the VCP, criticising the attempt to modify it as "too early", raised an objection to allowing two-way traffic on Munnekeholm and A-brug, and opposed the parking garage on Sledemenerstraat. In addition, it demanded to extend the exemption for cyclists from one-way traffic restrictions. On the other hand, the ROVER presented an idea, at the public hearing, of introducing "trolley busses" into busy streets, taking into account the repeated complaints against busses from shopkeepers.

## **5.2 The reaction from the business community**

The reaction from the business community was utterly different from that from citizens, as residents, or their organisations. It criticised the Review, saying, "the Midterm Review meets too little the complaints from the business community and the results of the investigations"<sup>53</sup>. It asked Wallage whether there was at all "some room" to accommodate its demands in the standpoint of the municipality, and cancelled those two hearings that were arranged for it. Five business organisations, such as the KvK, submitted written opinions, each of which complained, "the wishes were ignored or the proposals were not concretely worked out"<sup>54</sup>, and made demands or complaints in turns that had been voiced repeatedly so far, like reopening the route A-straat→Boteringbrug, lifting the sector boundary on Zuiderdiep, or nuisance caused by busses on shopping streets. In addition, the KvK regarded the proposal in the Review to connect Zuiderdiep to Diepenring as "too complicated", and the idea of allowing only specially-designed trucks to cross sector boundaries "can offer no total solution", according to the Working Group Transport Organisations<sup>55</sup>. The Consultative Body Small and Medium-sized Businesses<sup>56</sup> also submitted a letter. This body was established in 1979 on the initiative of the KNOV to facilitate mutual understanding between the municipality and the business community. Expressing its approval for the opinion of the KvK, the Body pressed for quickly putting the adjustment of the VCP into effect.

## **5.3 The second survey by Bout**

When it published the Midterm Review, the B&W announced that it would propose to the municipal council "a definitive package of proposals", with submitted opinions taken into consideration, before the summer vacation the same year. However, even after the summer vacation had passed, the definitive proposal did not emerge. Because other traffic plans<sup>57</sup>, which were being prepared at the same time, were also considerably behind the schedule, Wallage was criticised by councillors of various political parties, including his own, at the council committee Traffic and Transport on October 27th. He responded that the municipality had "worked hard on the evaluation of the VCP" and the work had been "almost completed"<sup>58</sup>. However, after all, the B&W did not present the definitive proposal within the year.

In January 1981, the chairman of the KvK, U.G.H. van der Werff, criticised in his new year speech severely Wallage concerning the VCP. According to him, while there were "excellent contacts" with the wethouder of economy, Bert Barmantloo, who had also



served as chairman of the Consultative Body, the consultation with Wallage did not proceed over "any adjustment of the Traffic Circulation Plan that is unfriendly for the business community"<sup>59</sup>. Without completing the modification of the VCP, Wallage resigned wethouder to advance into national politics in April, and the wethouder of traffic was succeeded by Rein Zunderdorp (PvdA).

The second survey by Bout, which was mentioned in the Review, was conducted of the same businesses as investigated in the first survey in February and March 1980, that is, to see the situation two years and four months after the VCP was introduced. This result was gradually coming out before and after the summer vacation in 1981. The following is the summary of this result.

First, businesses reporting a decrease in sales had dwindled from 25% two years before to 14% this time, and the amount of the decrease had also diminished from 13% to less than 8%. The number of visitors had also improved. Businesses reporting its decrease had dwindled from 26% to 11%, and visitors was estimated to have decreased by 1.15% on annual basis, against 2.2% last time. The delay of freight transport, however, had not improved. While the first survey revealed that there were 16 businesses that planned to move out the inner city or close down their business within two years, it turned out that only four among these businesses put their plans into practice. On the other hand, concerning the investment by businesses in maintaining or rebuilding their properties, there was hardly any change that could be attributed to the VCP. Furthermore, there emerged data that showed rather the improvement of the inner city, before and after the VCP, as location for business. That is, in 1978 and 79, compared to preceding two years, more businesses were located in the inner city, the number of vacancies decreased, and the term of being vacant became shorter.

On June 10th, new wethouder Zunderdorp attended a symposium of traffic experts. Keeping in mind these data, he said in his speech, "The total balance of the traffic plan for the inner city of Groningen is positive". According to him, "The plan is not seriously controversial any more". Concerning the delay of its adjustment, he said:

even small adjustments of the plan often have disturbing side effects. Therefore, every change must be checked very carefully, and that takes more time than expected<sup>60</sup>

In November, the second survey by Bout was officially published, and at the end of the year, finally, the B&W published the draft of the proposal to the municipal council, Inner City Traffic Examined<sup>61</sup>.

## **6. The Inner City Traffic Examined**

### **6.1 "Further forward"**

While the Midterm Review has at most 17 pages, this draft has nearly 80 pages, except for appendices, and elaborates on not only principles for the modification but also concrete measures, with precise plan maps.

In the introduction, "1. General", it explains the general policy and following procedure for the modification. In "1.1. Further forward", which deals with the former, it declares that "the first undertone" of this draft is "to use optimally the possibilities that are offered by the Traffic Circulation Plan" or "to develop further these potential possibilities in the framework of the Local Land Use Plan for the Inner City". Successively, referring to the fact that, according to the second survey by Bout, more than half (53%) of businesses still regarded the VCP as negative, it introduces "the second undertone" that the Traffic Circulation Plan must be adjusted so that, while "the advantages" of the VCP are maintained, "the disadvantages" are removed. However, it immediately cautions that "the margins are small" to remove the disadvantages, while maintaining the advantages. Because, "Maintaining the advantages means holding on to the principle of keeping out the through auto traffic", and, in order to keep out the through traffic, "a sector division remains the most appropriate way". That is why, "the first precondition" in evaluating measures to modify the VCP was, says the draft, to retain the sector division, except for three cases, touched upon later, in which "limited possibilities" were found. And as "the third precondition", it again indicates that the modification could not help being modest:

We have always guarded against too optimistic expectations with regard to the effect of particular proposals for modification. We wanted to completely maintain what was achieved for the quality of the inner city by keeping out the through auto traffic, because otherwise the Traffic Circulation Plan could degenerate into a poor compromise.

It concludes, "We regard the introduction of the Traffic Circulation Plan as a successful measure and want to go further forward with it. This document is the means for that."

In "1.2. Procedure", the draft first refers to the public participation after the Review was published. According to it, "During the extensive participation round (...), many written and spoken reactions have come." In fact, the opportunities provided for participation were at most, as mentioned earlier, four public hearings, of which two were cancelled. Two were indeed held, but both of them did not attract so many people. The number of written opinions submitted was not so many, either. However, because "participation has already thoroughly taken place", the B&W regards "a second extensive participation round" as not only unnecessary but also "undesirable", considering the delay resulting from it. The only provision for participation at this stage was to publish and make available this draft before the relevant council committee dealt with this, so that "those who wish it can still inform the municipal executive of their feelings about this".

From chapter 2, the draft takes almost the same structure as the Review, that is, summarising the result of the investigations, commenting on it, with eight remarks, considering "some themes" and proposing concrete measures. Its content is also almost the same until "some themes". However, as a matter of course, it refers to the second survey by Bout, summarising the investigations. Based on this survey, the eighth remark in "Comment" declares that the B&W does not have to consider any longer the negative influence of the VCP on economy:

we do not regard those data as worrying any longer, which are related to the development of sales at the investigated businesses in the inner city. We, with investigators, expect that these negative effects will still further decrease.

The Review introduced the fact, based on the first survey by Bout, that there were some businesses that planned to leave "based on VCP-reasons", and promised not to "take these signals lightly". While the draft succeeds those sentences as they were, it adds that "it is remarkable" that, according to his second survey, "only a very limited number has also actually realised those plans two years later". On the other hand, the seventh remark, which deals with the "disappointing" development of the number of visitors, urges, more clearly than in the Review, the necessity of urban design adapted to the VCP:

we find the development of the number of visitors disappointing, certainly considering the various positive effects of the VCP. We, however, expect that this can be improved in the longer term through a better use of the possibilities that are potentially present as a result of the Traffic Circulation Plan, particularly in those areas that lie within Diepenring, but do not belong to the genuine city centre.

## **6.2 Measures**

In "The measures", the draft starts with measures for bicycles, like the Review. It confirms that about 700 parking spaces for bicycles have been created in the inner city, and that the B&W has designated two locations, on Martinikerkhof and Pelsterstraat, for the experiment with a protected bicycle shed. Concerning the exemption of bicycles from one-way traffic restrictions, it proposes a new principle "that cyclists are also subject to one-way traffic, only where that is strictly necessary in terms of traffic safety". And it names 21 streets in total, where two-way traffic for cyclists can be allowed at this moment. In addition, as a solution for "an illogical swing" on Ubbo Emmiussingel for cyclists, it puts forward a plan to create "a bicycle shortcut" through the green belt on the extension of Phebenstraat (Figure 4).

Concerning measures for busses, the draft examines, first of all, nuisance caused by busses in shopping streets. While expressing the willingness to restrict their maximum speed to 30 to 40 km/h within Diepenring, it confesses that "there are no legal possibilities to impose such a speed limit", and that the B&W cannot help relying on "service stipulations" of transport companies. It also makes it clear that the B&W wants to avoid using physical measures, such as speed bumps, as much as possible,



**Figure 4:** A shortcut for bicycles

particularly because they can undermine the comfort of bus passengers. Based on the same reason, the B&W gives up renovating the crossing on Zuiderdiep, as proposed in the Review. Instead, the draft expects that urban design for pedestrians, which is urged repeatedly in this document, can have "a calming effect".

On A-Kerkhof northern side and Vismarkt, as a result of the return of the market, a "chaotic situation" had emerged, with busses steering in two-way directions through vehicles parked by market vendors. The municipality examined an idea, says the draft, of letting busses toward Grote Markt in a one-way direction, and returning them via Zuiderdiep. However, this idea could lead to too much loss of time for busses. After all, the draft dismisses this idea, saying, "we find it dubious, also in terms of principles, to "improve" the circulation of the bus traffic in this way", and mentions the planned renovation of Vismarkt, through which market vendors might not have to park their vehicles there any more. On the other hand, shopkeepers on Oosterstraat, among others, had persistently complained about busses. The VCP designated Oosterstraat as a main route for busses from the south to the city centre, resulting in 720 busses per day passing through that street. The draft aims at cutting back regional busses, which accounted for 240 per day there. That is, "it seems us a right starting point to bring back a substantial part of the terminuses of regional busses from Grote Markt to Zuiderdiep".

As for the measures to facilitate the bus traffic, the draft confirms that a bus lane will be soon introduced on Westerhaven, or that the municipality has applied for subsidies for bus lanes on Damsterdiep and Hereweg. In addition, it pronounces to install, "wherever it is good for the bus traffic", traffic signals that bus drivers can influence.

For pedestrians, it argues that, in some streets, the loss of "an important traffic

function" through the VCP is not immediately followed with the increased attractiveness, and promises that "We will pay more attention to the development of these streets", such as Brugstraat↔A-Kerkhof northern side or Folkingerstraat, which were mentioned also in the Review. For the area between Radesingel and Steentilstraat, the draft presents a concrete plan to keep out the through traffic, which integrates opinions of residents (Figure 5).

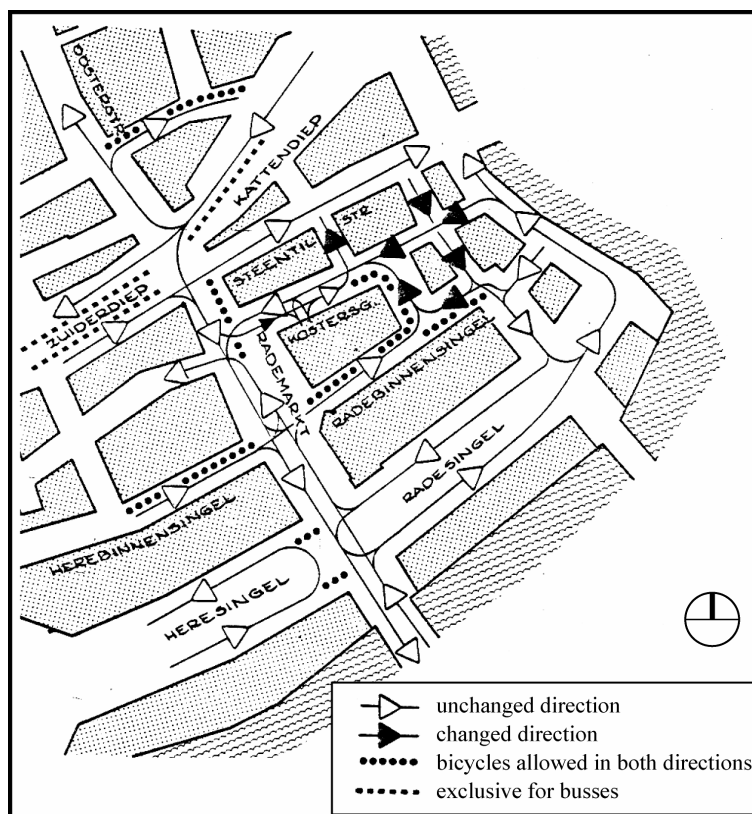


Figure 5: Keep out the through traffic

Then, what kind of measures were included in the draft to improve the circulation of cars? Particularly, how were those issues settled, which had been relegated to further examination in the Review? First, it again clearly rejects "a complete coupling" of traffic signals on Diepenring, referring to the negative effect on not only buses but also cyclists, who have already complained about a longer wait at intersections.

Among demands from sector West, demand A and B are after all firmly denied, because "The principle has been that no route must not emerge that could be attractive for the car traffic without destination in the inner city." The only measure to improve the accessibility of sector West, which the B&W adopted in the draft, was to reverse one-way traffic on Broerstraat or make it two-way. With this, argues the draft, drivers can proceed into sector West via Oude Ebbingstraat and Rode Weeshuisstraat. Moreover, against demand B, it rather puts forward a measure to strengthen the sector boundary here, based on the fact that drivers had continuously ignored the car-free

zone on A-Kerkhof western side. It presents a plan to reconstruct the intersection between A-Kerkhof northern side and western side so that cars from the east physically cannot turn left here (Figure 6). The trespass toward the north will disappear automatically, because regional busses running in the opposite direction will increase in the future, anticipates the draft. In addition, although the Review advocated the faster development of the parking garage on Sledemennerstraat, taking into account demands from shopkeepers, the draft has turned to a more cautious attitude, saying, "we want to have a good insight into the occupancy rate of the current parking opportunity" before taking a decision on this garage.

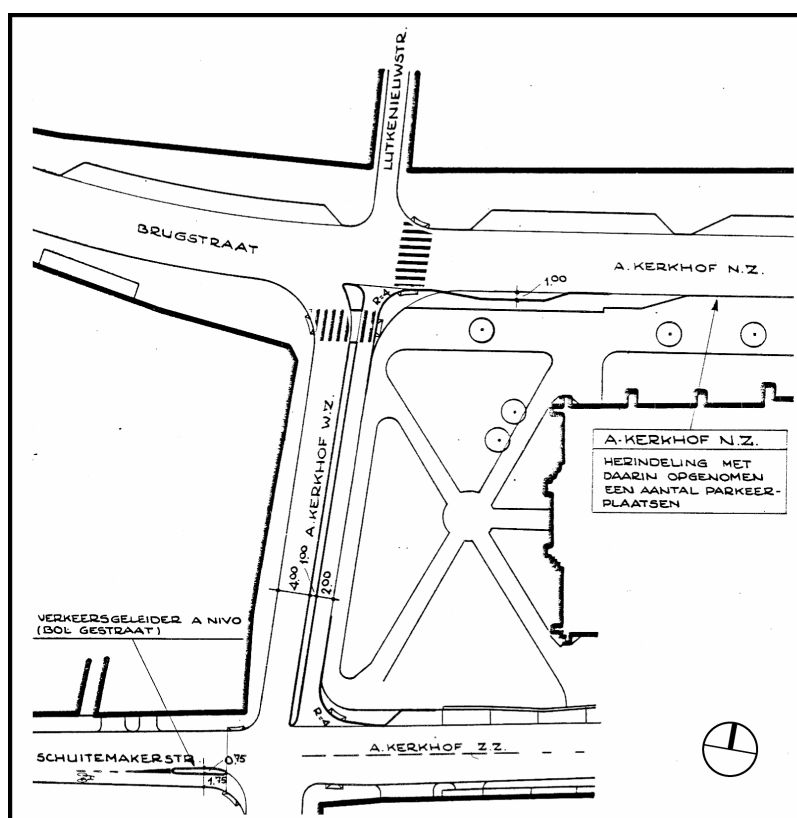


Figure 6: Strengthen the sector boundary

Shopkeepers on Zuiderdiep or Herestraat had demanded to allow drivers to turn directly from Zuiderdiep to Herestraat (demand D). The draft denies this, "because then it is not avoidable that a through west-east connection emerges over whole Gedempte Zuiderdiep". Necessarily, it also "can give no result" to the demand to lift the sector boundary on Zuiderdiep (demand C). Between two routes, which the Review proposed to improve the connection of Zuiderdiep to Diepenring, the draft has chosen the route via Coehoorsingel (Figure 7). According to it, with this measure, the B&W has simultaneously created a "hole"<sup>62</sup> intentionally on the boundary between sector South and East, leading to Herebinnensingel. The B&W expects that this hole will enable particularly freight transport, which has consistently suffered from a delay, to move "in

a rather simpler way" between sectors. The draft adds that, although the B&W examined whether it was still possible to create "such small holes" for freight transport on other sector boundaries, it turned out that there were no possibilities other than the above mentioned hole through Broerstraat.

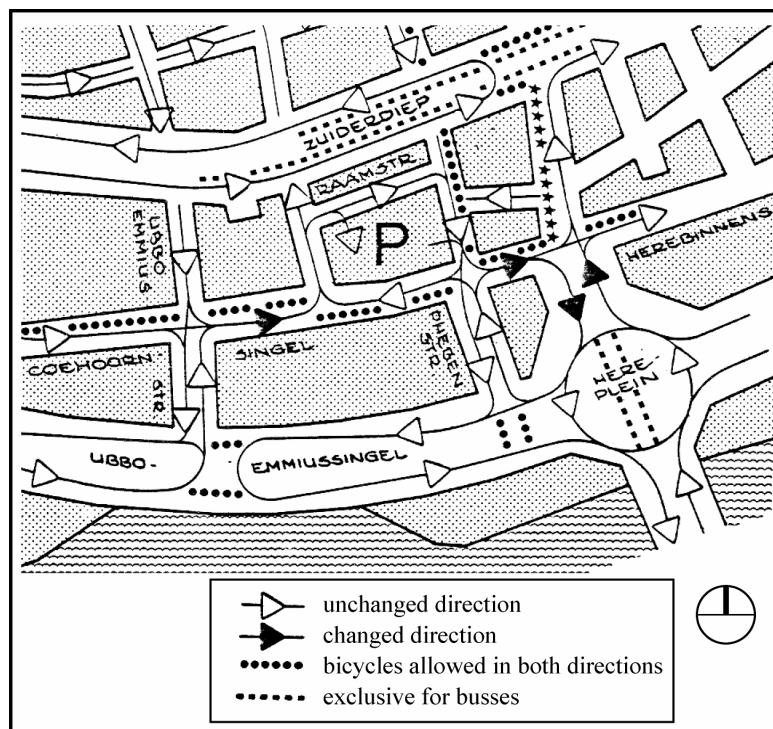


Figure 7: A hole on the sector boundary

The demand to remove the cuts on singels is clearly rejected this time. Also concerning their place, although the suggestion to move "the barrier" at Ubbo Emmiusstraat was thoroughly studied, it was after all "not found meaningful", according to the draft. The B&W has again conducted "a thorough study" on granting exemption to freight transport from sector boundaries. As its conclusion, the draft rejects, more completely than the Review, general exemption to all trucks:

According to our opinion, the conclusion of this policy document must be that it is not possible on practical reasons, not meaningful in terms of urban planning and not strictly necessary in terms of business economy to grant all sorts of freight transport provisions that enable them to cross sector boundaries.

As an alternative, "the regulated freight transport, which orients itself specially toward the inner city, can perhaps take an exceptional position", it says and, therefore, there are still reasons "to continue the discussion with these transporters". However, it is frankly "not so hopeful" of this discussion, because, as seen earlier, the Working Group Transport Organisations has already made it clear that it opposes a system in which only a particular vehicle is exempted.

The draft, more clearly than the Review, opts for holding on to the principle of the VCP, and, far from deregulating it, developing its possibilities. Those three cases mentioned in the introduction are in fact two holes on Broerstraat and Coehoornsingel, and exemption of a particular type of freight transport from sector boundaries. Indeed, compared to demands made by shopkeepers or business organisations, these can be called "limited possibilities", being so modest or still uncertain.



## **7. Decision on the modification**

Although the opportunities were limited to respond to the draft, some organisations submitted written opinions to the B&W. The ROVER raised a strong objection, saying "Unacceptable", against the idea of bringing back the terminuses of regional busses from Grote Markt to Zuiderdiep. It argued that this idea was contrary to "an essential objective of the VCP, that is, to improve the accessibility of the city centre for public transport and the slow traffic".<sup>63</sup> The *Gedeputeerde Staten* (political executive office at the provincial level) also opposed this idea based on the fact that many regional bus passengers were actually using the terminuses on Grote Markt, and again pointed out the contradiction with the VCP. On the other hand, the ENFB supported this idea from the standpoint of cyclists. Instead, it expressed anxiety about the two holes proposed in the draft. The hole on Broerstraat would cause danger to cyclists, it feared, and that on Coehoornsingel would increase traffic on the route Radesingel-Winschoterkade, which constituted a part of Diepenring and was already congested. Among business organisations, the KvK criticised the draft as a whole, saying that it could hardly mean "a true contribution to better accessibility for the business community", and demanded "an extensive relaxation of the sector policy"<sup>64</sup>. Businesspeople in sector West, the KNOV, businesspeople association Inner City South<sup>65</sup> and so on also asked for further deregulation of the VCP.

The definitive proposal to the municipal council was announced in the *Nieuwsblad* dated April 10th, 1982. This turned out to be almost the same as the draft. It did not accept any further relaxation of sector boundaries. However, it withdrew the idea of moving the terminuses of regional busses, and hoped that the renovation of Oosterstraat, which had already been proposed in the draft, would simultaneously solve nuisance of busses. The same month, the representatives of the business community, who had participated in the Consultative Body, decided to withdraw from the body, because "those businesspeople, after three years of consultation, do not have the impression that their input is really taken into account". The modification of the VCP was, according to them, "the best proof for this".<sup>66</sup>

The municipal council conducted the first round of discussion on the proposal on May 3rd. While nongovernment parties (CDA, VVD, GPV) regarded proposed holes as insufficient in improving the accessibility for cars, these holes were "already very questionable adjustment" for left wing parties outside the B&W (PSP, PPR). Zunderdorp responded that these holes were "sufficient improvement" for freight transport, and at the same time included "too many bends" to attract the through traffic. Although business organisations or the VVD had demanded to exempt all trucks from sector boundaries to the last, he firmly rejected, because "the whole plan is undermined" with it.<sup>67</sup> The second round of discussion was conducted on May 14th. A motion was made, which asked for completely scrapping the plan of the parking garage

on Sledemenerstraat, and adopted, with only the CDA opposing. In addition, 21 motions in total were made, among which one made by the PPR and PSP opposed the hole on Broerstraat and got a support from one PvdA councillor<sup>68</sup>. However, after all, all were rejected. The proposal to modify the VCP was approved without change except for the above parking garage.

## **8. Conclusion**

The VCP had drastically reduced cars in the inner city, as a result, improved the environment there, and substantially contributed to facilitating the bustle and so-called encounter function in the city centre. These effects could be recognised directly in the field, and had been confirmed by various investigations. On the other hand, the effect on economy was difficult to specify. Also taking into account the result of the second survey by Bout, we can say, at least, that its economic effect turned out to be not so serious as shopkeepers or business organisations had insisted. While the VCP was being modified, there had been no outstanding citizens' movements that tried to protect the VCP. However, by relying on the above evident facts, the B&W, particularly political leaders of the PvdA, could hold on to the principle of the VCP, despite persistent demands for deregulation from the business community. Indeed, two holes were opened, but these would not have attracted so much through traffic, as Zunderdorp explained and we can see now.

In the whole process of the modification, from the Review, through the draft and the definitive proposal, and to the final decision, while demands from the business community had been hardly accepted, those from residents' or citizens' organisations had been at least partly integrated. The resulting changes had also been consistent with the principle of the VCP, and there were even changes that rectified the deviation from the VCP, such as the withdrawal of the plan to move terminuses of regional busses. Interesting is the fact that both the ENFB and ROVER were not necessarily politically neutral organisations. Maarten Schalijs, who was one of leaders of the ENFB in those days, and raised a strong objection against relaxing sector boundaries at the public hearing, was PvdA member and had gotten active in the working group VROV of the Groningen division of the PvdA in the middle of the 1980s<sup>69</sup>. The then central figure of the ROVER, Frank Aakster, was also PvdA member and "contact person" of the working group Traffic of the Groningen division in those days.

Leaders of the PvdA maintained the principle of the VCP, and rather opted for further substantiating and developing what the VCP or Objectives Document strived for. The CDA or VVD criticised such an attitude as rigidly holding on to political principles, as mentioned earlier. However, exactly through holding on to political frameworks, like when the VCP was decided, political leaders of the PvdA could integrate public opinions or sentiments, although there were very limited opportunities for public participation, again like when the VCP was decided. This is indicated in the response to the Review from the public.

The NCW-North finds, in its written opinion about the draft, "the results of the municipal policy" serious, and mentions, as examples of such results, not only the decrease in sales and the high unemployment rate but also "a frustrated and poor relationship between the municipal executive and business community". However, it

adds, "this poor relationship is mainly limited to the discussion over the adjustment of the VCP".<sup>70</sup> While modifying the VCP, the municipality was also making traffic plans for the whole city area and the northern part of the city, with the objective of keeping out the through traffic from residential neighbourhoods. It will be analysed in another paper what kind of plans resulted from the process in which not poor relations had been kept between the B&W and business community.

## Notes

- 1 This is a characteristic Dutch municipal organisation. Roughly speaking, it is the cabinet at the municipal level. See TSUBOHARA, S. (2003), URSI-rapport 302, 2
- 2 In this paper, the "inner city" means the area within the canals (*diepen*), and the "city centre" means Grote Markt, Vismarkt and the area next to these squares. The definition in the Objectives Document means larger areas than these.
- 3 *Doelstelling Binnenstad Groningen*, generally called *Doelstellingennota*
- 4 About these events, see TSUBOHARA, S. (2003), URSI-rapport 302
- 5 *ontmoetingsfunctie*
- 6 Doelstellingennota, 31-32
- 7 *ibid.*, 33
- 8 Beleidsstuk Verkeerscirculatieplan, 1
- 9 *ibid.*
- 10 About the VCP in terms of public participation, see TSUBOHARA, S. (2003), URSI-rapport 302
- 11 About the VCP in terms of party frameworks, see TSUBOHARA, S. (2005)
- 12 *Stichting Activiteiten Binnenstad in Groningen*
- 13 Nieuwsblad van het Noorden, October 24th, 1977
- 14 The highest court of administrative litigation in the Netherlands
- 15 Nieuwsblad, December 9th, 1977
- 16 *ibid.*, October 24th, 1977
- 17 *ibid.*, October 26th, 1977
- 18 *ibid.*, November 3rd, 1977
- 19 *ibid.*, April 11th, 1978
- 20 *Groep Gedupeerde Ondernemers Stad Groningen*
- 21 Nieuwsblad, May 30th, 1978
- 22 *gewinningsperiode*, *ibid.*, May 3rd, 1978
- 23 *belevingswaarde*
- 24 Ministry of Transport and Public Works, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Health and Environment
- 25 Gemeenteprogramma 78-82, 8
- 26 *ibid.*, 11
- 27 Nieuwsblad, May 26th, 1978
- 28 In these days, its name was ENWB (*Eerste, Enige, Echte Wielrijders Bond*).
- 29 Nieuwsblad, May 30th, 1978
- 30 *ondernemersvereniging Zuiderdiep*
- 31 Nieuwsblad, June 1st, 1979
- 32 *ibid.*, June 8th, 1979
- 33 *knippen*
- 34 *groene golf*
- 35 Nieuwsblad, June 6th, 1979
- 36 *ibid.*, January 31st, 1979
- 37 *ibid.*, June 15th, 1982
- 38 *ibid.*, June 2nd, 1979
- 39 *kern*
- 40 HURENKAMP, H.G. & VAN DER LEE, J.J. (1981), *Verkeerskunde*, 32, NR.5, 240
- 41 *ibid.*
- 42 *ibid.*, 241

- 43 *ibid.*, 240
- 44 *ibid.*
- 45 *Enquête Regionale Bedrijfsontwikkeling*
- 46 VCP tussenbalans, 7
- 47 HURENKAMP, H.G. & VAN DER LEE, J.J. (1981), *Verkeerskunde*, 32, NR.5, 242
- 48 *VCP tussenbalans*
- 49 *luifelplannen*
- 50 *een onlogische slinger*
- 51 *Nieuwsblad*, March 26th, 1980
- 52 *ibid.*, November 23rd, 1977
- 53 *ibid.*, April 8th, 1980
- 54 Quotation from the written opinion submitted by the KvK. VCP tussenbalans, Bijlage I
- 55 *Werkgroep Transportorganisaties*
- 56 *Overlegorgaan Midden- en Kleinbedrijf*
- 57 Such as *Nota Verkeer en Vervoer* or *Plan 8*. The former was a traffic plan for the whole city area, and the latter was a new bus line scheme that tried to connect surrounding residential neighbourhoods each other.
- 58 *Nieuwsblad*, October 28th, 1980
- 59 *ibid.*, January 20th, 1981
- 60 *ibid.*, June 10th, 1981
- 61 *Binnenstadsverkeer Bezien*
- 62 *lek*
- 63 *Nieuwsblad*, February 17th, 1982
- 64 *ibid.*, February 27th, 1982
- 65 *ondernemersvereniging Binnenstad Zuid*
- 66 *Nieuwsblad*, April 30th, 1982
- 67 *ibid.*, May 4th, 1982
- 68 Edzard Domela Nieuwenhuis
- 69 About how this working group worked, see TSUBOHARA, S. (2006)
- 70 *Nieuwsblad*, February 27th, 1982

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