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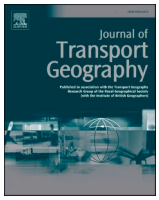

Who benefits from sustainable mobility transitions? Social inclusion, populist resistance and elite capture in Bergen, Norway

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ABSTRACT

Transitioning to sustainable mobility systems is generally thought to require three approaches: avoid, shift and improve. We examine a combination of these in a city at the forefront of implementing transition policies, focusing on how the approaches interact and impact social inclusion. The Norwegian city of Bergen has pursued ambitious targets to reduce car use and promote walking, cycling and public transportation (avoid and shift). National subsidies have achieved more electric vehicles per capita than any other country (improve). Tensions between policies to avoid and displace automobility, and to accelerate electric automobility, center on the relationship between mobility transitions and social inclusion. Based on an in-depth qualitative study during 2020–2021, we analyze key examples of avoid, shift and improve approaches. We show that urban electric automobility risks undermining, not complementing, avoid and shift goals. We further demonstrate how populist politics mobilized around automobility reinforce elite narratives and pose a challenge to the legitimacy of transition planners and policy makers. We recognize different forms of depoliticization and argue that if socially inclusive mobility systems require overcoming the strong vested interests embedded in cultural attitudes around automobility, then depoliticizing an agenda to reduce car *dependence* – not just cars – can be progressive.

1. Sustainable and inclusive mobility transitions

As localized climate mitigation efforts advance, urban mobility systems are primary arenas for decarbonization. However, critical scholars contend that a narrow focus on emissions reduction through technological innovation obscures possibilities to address structural asymmetries of power that degrade environments and produce social inequalities (Sheller, 2018; Chatterton, 2016; Swilling and Annecke, 2012; Nikolaeva et al., 2019; Wågsæther et al., 2022). For example, the diffusion of electric cars as the apparent 'winners of the future' (Henderson, 2020, see also Kotilainen et al., 2019 Holden et al., 2020; Sovacool et al., 2019) threatens to marginalize post-automobility visions.

Without complete consensus on defining sustainable mobility, it reasonably pertains to less travel in motorized vehicles (avoid), more fuel-efficient modes (shift), and using cleaner fuels (improve) (Holden et al., 2020; Berger et al., 2014). Combining these three approaches is key for rapid decarbonization through policy mixes that maximize complementarity.[1] However, appropriate combinations for specific regions remain unclear. This paper speaks to this gap by analyzing an urban-scale mix in a wealthy European country proactively promoting sustainable mobility policies. We study Bergen, a Norwegian city with ambitious car reduction goals, rising car fleet turnover and hotly debated sustainable mobility politics. Based on expert interviews, resident focus groups, discourse analysis and a co-production workshop, we aim to demonstrate how avoid, shift, and improve interventions interact in ways that shape the material and discursive conditions for urban social inclusion.

In Norway, the country with the highest electric vehicle (EV) adoption per capita, research has largely neglected the unintended social consequences of electric automobility (Lis, 2018). In Europe, policies that promote EVs risk reinforcing cultural and consumptive patterns of automobility that disproportionately benefit male, middle-aged and above-average income groups (Peters and Dütschke, 2014). Moreover, struggles over urban space (Creutzig et al., 2020; Cervero and Radisch, 1996) and the uneven distributive effects of transportation

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[1] We understand 'policy mixes' after Rogge and Reichardt's (2016) conceptualisation for innovation in sustainability transitions, as comprising policy processes, elements (strategies and instruments), and characteristics that play out over dimensions of policy fields, governance levels, geography and time.

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infrastructure investments (Levinson, 2010) relate closely with urban automobility, although rail transport has also raised concerns (Enright, 2019; Olesen, 2020). Despite growing interest in de-centering automobility, including EVs, through compact city development and prioritization of alternative modes, there are no silver bullets for socially inclusive, sustainable urban mobility systems.

Norway's 2019 elections for city and regional councils featured unprecedented electoral gains for a new party called '*The People's Action - No to More Road Tolls*" (hereafter FNB). FNB was premised on claims that urban mobility interventions like congestion tolls produce social exclusion and harm those who have the least (Wanvik and Haarstad, 2021). The party sought alliances with established right-wing parties (the Conservative party and the Progress party) while labeling left-wing parties 'elitist' and out of touch with real people, whom FNB claims to represent. However, as a party established to promote the interests of car drivers, on the premise that road tolls limit the freedom of movement in society, their claim to represent the people discursively excludes those who choose not to drive, can't drive or cannot afford to drive from the category of regular, or real people.

The phenomenon shares similarities with the yellow vest protests in France (Kinniburgh, 2019) and the election of Rob Ford in Toronto, who campaigned on the promise to 'end the war on the motor car' (Walks, 2015). Our findings contribute to sustainable mobility transitions scholarship, wherein attention to social dynamics remains subservient to techno-economic studies (Gallo and Marinelli, 2020; Karjalainen and Juhola, 2019; Kohler et al., 2020). We seek to correct this bias and thereby reveal a growing risk to the legitimacy of urban transport planners and researchers who sideline social dynamics.

We first review literature on how to achieve sustainable mobility systems, focusing on complementarity, social inclusion and legitimacy. Second, we analyze three interventions in Bergen's mobility system that represent avoid, shift and improve policy approaches. Third, we deepen understanding of how policies interact in ways that may generate or entrench social exclusion.

2. Sustainable mobility transitions and socio-spatial development

2.1. Sustainable mobility

A fundamental question for sustainable mobility agendas concerns the role of automobility. The improve approach links tightly with fossil fuel phase-out by incentivizing EVs. Several countries, including France, Norway and the UK, target phase-outs for fossil fuel vehicles (Dimsdale, 2019). The shift and avoid approaches typically seek to overcome car dependence (Mattioli, 2014; Manderscheid, 2014) and hegemonic 'systems' (Urry, 2004) or 'regimes' (Geels and Kemp, 2012) of automobility through planning and policy (Banister, 2008; Buehler et al., 2017). Earlier notions of automobile dependence focused on the built environment and influenced compact city agendas (Newman and Kenworthy, 1999). More recent contributions consider wider systems of provision, including industrial structures, political-economic relations, and cultural feedback loops (Sovacool, 2017; Mattioli et al., 2020). Holden et al. (2020) prioritize avoid and shift goals, prescribing electric automobility only where other alternatives remain unviable, e.g. in low-density areas.

While politically contentious, car-lite/car-free policies are gaining traction in, e.g., Hamburg, Helsinki, Oslo, Paris, and Madrid (Cathkart-Keays, 2015), and Barcelona's superblocks have demonstrated success (Nieuwenhuijsen et al., 2019). The gap between planning visions and lived realities of car-free zones (CFZs) is shrinking (Selzer, 2021) and parking regulations have demonstrated net positive impacts in 'everyday lives' (Antonson et al., 2017). CFZs exemplify the blurriness between the avoid and shift approaches. CFZs neither advance 'avoidance' without corresponding changes in land use and design for local service provision (Levine et al., 2019), nor 'shifting' without access to public transportation or cycling infrastructure (Leibling, 2014). Rather, such interventions require complementary policy mixes (De Gruyter et al., 2020; Ruhrort, 2020; Mingardo et al., 2015). Examples include improving bicycle infrastructure alongside reducing car parking and using one-ways in city centers like Copenhagen and Amsterdam, or more recently Paris' pro-active transport interventions as pandemic measures that are becoming durable.

Implementing an avoid, shift and improve policy mix involves multiple tensions. Transit oriented compact city development can reinforce gentrification (Jones, 2020), leading to displacement and increased travel (Solá et al., 2018) and emotionally charged debates on restricting car use (Hansen and Askeland, 2021). Disagreements about goals and thus policy pathways concern both the socio-spatial distribution of resources and conflicting interpretations of social inclusion (Solá et al., 2018). Critiques flag a tendency to present solutions as politically neutral technological fixes, e.g. EVs, trams and light rails, digitally-mediated shared mobility, and quantified target-setting on carbon emissions, energy use, and traffic congestion (Kębłowski and Bassens, 2018; Enright, 2019; Olesen, 2020). Critical scholars have argued that this depoliticization neglects contemporary problems and the potential of innovative institutional approaches (Henderson, 2020; Timms et al., 2014).

2.2. Social inclusion

Social inclusion entails the capacity to participate in the dynamic structures and socio-spatial practices of collective life (Stewart and Askonas, 2000). This dynamism is crucial during efforts to intentionally change social-ecological relationships with a normative orientation, i.e. sustainability transitions. There is considerable work on procedural inclusion, e.g., the post-political character of participatory transport planning and citizen engagement (Legacy, 2018). However, we focus on substantive inclusion in society related to the ability to move within a city. Urban mobility systems shape social inclusion through the allocation of funding, space, and infrastructure, conditioning urban subjectivities and relations (Lucas, 2012, Lucas, 2019; Enright, 2019; Jensen, 2011).

The Transport-Related Social Exclusion (TRSE) framework has been championed within the *Journal of Transport Geography* since the 2000s (Lucas, 2019), and is popularly defined by Kenyon et al., (2003: p.209) as:

"The process by which people are prevented from participating in the economic, political and social life of the community because of reduced accessibility to opportunities, services and social networks, due in whole or in part to insufficient mobility in a society and environment built around the assumption of high mobility."

TRSE research recognizes factors at the individual, local, national and global scales (Lucas, 2012) and has explored a wide range of dimensions such as age (Shergold and Parkhurst, 2012), class (Mattioli, 2014), ability (Bjerkan and Øvstedal, 2018), gender (Schwanen, 2011) and ethnicity (Priya Uteng, 2009). The impact of mobility interventions on social inclusion are measured through proxies like participation in activities linked to travel expenses, which are imperfect, as households may compensate by underspending in other essential areas (Taylor et al., 2009).

A primary focus of this research has been the consequences of carlessness and uneven access to public transportation (Lucas, 2012; 2019). The term 'forced car ownership' highlights the economic stress of owning, maintaining and running a vehicle and the related potential for social exclusion in low-income groups in areas with few mobility alternatives (Currie and Delbosc, 2011; Mattioli, 2014). Research on forced car ownership has focused on low-density areas with affordable housing, where families unable to afford city-center living struggle to cover associated travel costs (Mattioli, 2014; Currie and Delbosc, 2011; Motte-Baumvol et al., 2010). The increased travel cost can be construed as a 'rational' choice, but also links to structural pressures. Similarly,

social exclusions that result from choosing not to drive for reasons other than cost, such as concern for the environment, may be considered the responsibility of the individual. However, achieving societal goals to avoid and shift within mobility systems necessitates structural support to include those who choose less resource intense transport modes.

As TRSE scholarship has demonstrated, exclusion is relational and stems from dynamic processes. The relational aspect of TRSE means that "disadvantage is seen in direct comparison to the normal relationships and activities of the rest of the population (Lucas, 2012:106). Thus, inclusion must be dynamic too, particularly during transitions when norms, practices and provision evolve. Specifically, creating inclusive, sustainable mobility systems requires expanding the focus beyond people that are at risk of exclusion in the current system to address the escalating dynamic of *hypermobility* (Urry, 2004; Lucas, 2012). The problem of wealthy residents 'opting out' from using public services such as collective transport has been flagged as a barrier to inclusive mobility policy, including parallel infrastructure for private vehicles and EV subsidies (Wågsæther et al., 2022).

Finally, both material and discursive aspects of inclusion and exclusion are important for the success of sustainable mobility transitions. Materially, making space for low- carbon activities sometimes entails restricting resource- intensive ones: e.g., removing street parking to expand inclusive urban space necessarily excludes publics who expect society to facilitate automobility. The expectation however is influenced by discourse. What is considered 'normal' is crucial for inclusion. Rhetoric that discursively excludes people, for example people who do not drive, from the category of 'real' or 'regular' people influence perceptions of TRSE regardless of material alternatives to driving.

2.3. Populism and elite capture

Previous scholarship has identified pitfalls of depoliticization that produces a moralizing discourse of "good" and "bad" citizens (Green et al., 2012), based on assumptions that where people live, work, and how they move stems from individual 'rational' choices (Kębłowski and Bassens, 2018). Structural issues and relational rationality in mobility decision-making are thereby overlooked (Manderscheid, 2014). The consequent reluctance to "address issues of power or social position of individual travelers" (Levy, 2013: p.4), and to discuss the distribution of burdens generated by transitions, is regarded as endemic to the post-political era (Swyngedouw, 2010). Wanvik and Haarstad (2021) argue that populist ruptures in urban politics can represent repoliticization of mobility transitions. However, here we argue that repoliticization is not inherently progressive.

Policies that target reducing car dependence are not always moralistic or inattentive to power asymmetries and socio-economic differences but they are necessarily premised on conceptually separating automobility as a transport mode from political concepts of freedom and identity. This separation can be interpreted as a form of depoliticization. Through reviving the automobile subject fostered by the auto-industrial complex in the 20th century (Urry, 2004) as a group identity, populist political entrepreneurs repoliticize automobility by equating agendas to deprioritize cars with deprioritizing freedom and democracy. This sets the stage for an archetypal element of right-wing populist movements – challenging the legitimacy of professional planners and policy makers. As Walks (2015: p. 407) puts it, "because any restriction on the car is seen as an attack on individual preferences and liberties, political movements that oppose automobility, regardless of origin (even if from low-income households that cannot afford a car), are typically accused of being elitist and against the interests of the majority."

The definition of populism is subject to debate; here we focus on two well-established features. First, populist movements emphasize an adversarial relationship between 'real people' and 'elites' (Temelkuran, 2019). Under right-wing populism, 'elite' connotes the political establishment, academia or state apparatus rather than economically wealthy, which is more common in left-wing populism (Berman, 2021). Second, populist rhetoric channels emotive logic, using strategic polemics of victimization over rational discourse. Thus, moralism is characteristic of populist group identity formation (Javier and Osuna, 2020).

The academic notion of 'elite' usually means a relatively small interest group with 'superior social status' and the term 'elite capture' signifies corruption whereby public resources are co-opted by one or more of these groups to the detriment of the larger population (Wong, 2010). The discussion of 'elite capture' in this paper does not pertain to directly fraudulent conduct by those in power but to diffused processes whereby norms and perspectives that benefit the elite become hegemonic in the policy regime. As Wong (2010: p.3) states, "What makes elite capture so powerful is that elites exert their influence less often by coercion, and more by moral claims and symbolic power [whereas] … Lay people often follow their leadership in a less-than-conscious way". This quote indicates that elite capture may engender populist movements that reinforce elite group narratives while denouncing 'elites' as the source of their problems, a trait that characterizes neoliberal politics.

Thus, automobility debates foreground links between populist and neoliberal politics, "with particular strains invested in protecting and masking the irrationalities of the auto-industrial complex" (Walks, 2015: p.403). Repoliticization in this mode is arguably regressive in terms of socially inclusive, sustainable mobility goals. Some suggest that low public participation and consensus-building on low-carbon mobility transition policies galvanizes populist movements (Wanvik and Haarstad, 2021; Tønnesen et al., 2019). However, Sager (2020) warns that communicative planning practices and rationalities may be incompatible with populist ideology and political practice, thus limiting the efficacy of programmes for societal change premised on deliberative democratic lines. Our empirical analysis is mindful of these tensions and investigates the constraints for mobility transitions with respect to populist and neoliberal politics.

3. Methodology and data collection

3.1. Methodological approach and case selection rationale

Within Bergen's transitioning mobility system, we focus on three subunits of analysis. Each represents one of the sustainability strategies – avoid, shift and improve – to understand how policies interact and condition social inclusion dynamics. This relational approach guards against inadvertently creating or entrenching injustices in one area by addressing an issue in another area (Lucas, 2012; Berger et al., 2014). The subunits are car-free zones, light rail expansion, and EV incentives. These interventions have been debated in local media reports and industry events that feature various interpretations of social inclusion and exclusion; awareness of this discourse also infuses our analysis. By contrast, mainstream media and transport policy debates hardly address bus provision, and for reasons discussed later, buses remain loosely linked to Bergen's spatial planning and compact development.

Our choice of three interventions brings urban-suburban dynamics into analysis. While the city has well-worked-out walking and cycling strategies, and short-lease electric scooters were introduced in mid-2020, these modes remain primarily limited to the city center. For cycling to play a bigger role in the suburbs would require a currently absent multi-modal approach that warrants further research.

3.2. Data collection methods

Multiple qualitative methods provide primary empirical material, supplemented by secondary data in the form of mixed methods reports commissioned by the municipality. 20 semi-structured interviews, each about an hour, were conducted by the lead author in early 2021 with expert and stakeholder respondents to gather diverse perspectives on the systemic parameters of social inclusion related to mobility. These parameters are shaped by regulations and economic issues that the

respondents were especially knowledgeable about. Questions aimed to understand what respondents associated with the concept of social inclusion and what constraints apply in their domain. Respondents included representatives of three political parties, planning departments for zoning, building, mobility, climate change and environment in Bergen and planners for two adjacent municipalities, the state house bank, the regional bus provider, the chamber of commerce, the business council, and a private developer.

Prior to this, in autumn 2020, two authors conducted three focus groups with 17 residents representing a wide range of ages, income levels and neighborhoods. All three authors participated in a co-production workshop with 10 municipal planners working on CFZs. Finally, the authors conducted a half-day public seminar on just urban mobility transitions with sectoral experts as speakers and a broadly interested set of 40–50 participants including residents. Insights from data collection and close attention to evolving public discourse informed the expert interview phase. The discourse is expressed in local media articles, demonstration signs and stickers on the streets, and speeches at the national mobility conference in 2021, which gathered transport economists, private sector actors and top policymakers.

This multi-pronged approach to data collection ensured reflexivity through triangulation, cross-validation of analyses across authors, and richness of data from diverse sources, thus enabling deep insight into novel aspects of mobility transition politics.

4. Case background and results

4.1. Case background

Norway has an almost entirely renewables-powered electric grid, making transport electrification attractive for emissions reduction. Moreover, Norwegian cities feature relatively low inequality and socio-economic spatial segregation, alongside a historically strong social contract and welfare state (Rusten et al., 2013). EVs made up nearly two-thirds of new car sales in 2021, and reached 80% in 2022, showing progress towards the national deadline to end fossil fuel car sales by 2025 (Kletsy, 2022). EVs are a major element in Norway's mobility agenda, supported by government incentives including subsidies, toll exemptions, bus lane access and waived parking fees (Bjerkan et al., 2016). In 2018, the government subsidized EV owners by 7.2 billion NOK (>$763 million) in fee and tax exemptions, *excluding* lost income from free parking and toll exemptions (ibid). In 2020, combined EV fee and tax benefits cost 19.2 billion NOK (>$2 billion) (Rothe, 2021). These incentives have disproportionately benefitted the wealthiest households.

In 2019, the top 10% of households by income bought 37% of the new EVs, whereas the lower 50% bought 10% of EVs in Norway (Fjørtoft and Pilskog, 2019). Less than 0.5% of the lowest 10% owned an EV. In Bergen, 5% of the top quartile does not own a car, compared to 67% of the bottom quartile of households (Urbanet, 2020). The largest concentration of people without cars (24%) is in the central districts (ibid), coincident with four of Bergen's five lowest average household income neighborhoods (Bergen Municipality, 2016a). The fifth neighborhood is just outside the center, with university student housing. The five wealthiest neighborhoods are in suburbs adjacent to the city center (ibid).

Nationally, 64% of EV households also own a fossil fuel car – 78% in the top income quartile. Wealthier households prefer EV use in the city, using fossil fuel cars for longer trips, e.g. to second homes (Fjørtoft and Pilskog, 2019; Anfinsen, 2021). Households with both car types drive far more kilometers with fossil fuel cars. In total, EVs contributed only 7% of all car kilometers driven in 2019 (Fjørtoft and Pilskog, 2019).

Bergen, Norway's second largest city, was the first to introduce an urban investment package partly financed by congestion road tolls in 1986. Today, Norway's five largest urban regions have multilateral agreements tied to a target for zero growth in private vehicles (Haarstad, 2020). Bergen aims to transcend the zero growth objective and reduce car use (Bergen Municipality, 2016b). Expanding the light rail, partially funded through tolls, is the centerpiece of its car traffic reduction plan (ibid).

The 2019 city council elections revealed strong urban-suburban divergence on mobility policies. FNB, a new populist political party, mobilized opposition to road tolls that partially fund public transportation investments (Wanvik and Haarstad, 2021) and, more broadly, "fees that inhibit free trade and freedom of movement" such as the wealth tax and property taxes (FNB, 2019). Despite being formed just months before the election, it became the third largest party in the City Council with 17% of the vote. It received high vote shares in suburban boroughs, and low shares in the city centre. The party also ran at the national level in 2021 but won too few votes for parliamentary representation.

4.2. Empirical analysis

The case findings are structured by the three sustainable mobility approaches – avoid, shift, and improve – and presented in order of priority in line with the literature on sustainable mobility (Banister, 2008; Holden et al., 2020). The narrative of 'avoidance' manifests through two primary elements that both shape Bergen's built environment: CFZs (section 4.2.1) and compact city development. The latter is linked with a modal 'shift' to collective transport (section 4.2.2 on light rail development). Finally, section 4.2.3 examines the 'improve' approach, by addressing social inclusion aspects and changes in land use in relation to EV incentives. The analysis is guided by the following questions:

a) How is social inclusion interpreted by different actors?
b) How do interacting policies and interventions shape structures of inclusion and exclusion?

4.2.1. Avoid – CFZs

The first CFZ in Bergen established as part of the sustainability agenda was a 2020 pilot in the central neighborhood of Møhlenpris. This comprised a car-free section of roads several blocks long and wide, landscaped for pedestrian use, cycling and socializing. This neighborhood's layout from a century ago predates the advent of ubiquitous automobility, which planners explained was advantageous for CFZ design and implementation, alongside strong existing citizen engagement. Two community groups had called for the intervention and other groups could be consulted on how to make the zone inclusive.

According to a city council member, the success of the pilot supported an agenda to establish more CFZs, one in each of Bergen's six suburbs. In contrast with Møhlenpris, the suburban CFZs are top-down, with little public participation in site selection. Our co-production workshop with municipal planners across relevant units revealed that they do not expect the zones to reduce car use, as drivers will simply park further away. For them, CFZs are about people-centric urban development, and signifying low-carbon modes of an inclusive, good life through spatial planning. The planners see it as their role to manifest the democratic mandate of the city council to prioritize soft mobility (meaning human powered mobility, see La Rocca, 2009), create safe places for children to play, and protect the street as a commons against private enclosures embodied by parked cars.

These goals are reflected in the official project description; however, the council member for the Green party – which advocated for the suburban CFZs – articulated an additional ambition when interviewed. Not only did they hope the zones would reduce local car trips, but also that creating desirable built environments would reduce longer-distance leisure travel by car and airplane. By contrast, FNB rejected that CFZs are inclusive and people-centric. A party representative termed the project "political abuse. People perceive this as completely meaningless and provocative, and they want a factual justification."

Six months after the workshop, the scope of the suburban CFZ project had greatly diminished. CFZ development in the center had been allocated a large budget and required all the capacity of the implementation unit, thus anything requiring construction was unavailable for the suburban team. The project planner creatively aligned the project with another initiative called 'heart zones', aimed at displacing cars in the vicinity of schools. Parents at the school in question rejected proposals to restrict driving and instead demanded a roundabout. The planner pivoted towards designing an attractive walking path from the school to a bus stop as an alternative to driving to the school entrance. The suburban CFZ project began in September 2020, but a follow-up interview with the municipality's project leaders in mid-2022 revealed that it had not yet moved into pilot phase.

While CFZs are entering the public discourse more often and political support appears to be growing, implementation in suburban areas is challenging. Instead of making space for low-carbon logics by producing common, multifunctional spaces, the suburban CFZ project in Bergen was reduced to a parallel option. Those that choose to continue driving to and from school put those who rely on soft mobility at risk. Indeed, a long-running catch-22 in the school zone debate is that parents drive their children because high car usage in the area makes it unsafe for them to walk or cycle.

4.2.2. *Shift – Light rail expansion*

In 2010, Bergen's first light rail line – Bybanen – opened with 15 stations. Three years later, a travel survey revealed that Bybanen had changed transport modal distribution in its corridor, with a decrease in car trip share for the first time in several decades in Bergen (Urbanet, 2020a). From 2021 onwards, the central government increased its portion of project finance from 50% to 66%, with a portion of toll revenue covering most of the remainder.

Several interviewees described the last two city council elections as 'light rail elections'. In 2019, FNB led demonstrations against tolls and Bybanen. Opposition to the light rail featured heavily in its political platform, which speculated on corruption:

"The toll ring has become a major source of income. The 'goods' are concentrated around the light rail and the mantra is that all problems will be solved if we build the light rail. The enormous income from tolls and development around the light rail has created the possibility for a large conspiracy between developers of the light rail, property developers and the municipality's building and planning bureaucrats" (FNB, 2019).

The light rail is the foundation for the compact city agenda articulated in Bergen's 2019 master zoning plan (Bergen Municipality, 2019). A 2017 report projected this plan would reduce future *growth* in transport by 40–45% compared to its predecessor, the 2010 zoning plan (Rambøll, 2017). A city council member described the spatial plan as a shift in development paths from a "city of chance driven by lobbyism" towards "knowledge based, long-term planning". An architect working for a property developer stated that as a lobbyist one "used to be able to ring up politicians, get a meeting and explain why your project is important to get it reviewed. That's not possible anymore after the new spatial plan was adopted, concessions are way harder to get." He added that today politicians rely on technical expertise within the municipality to navigate the complexities of planning dilemmas on the case list of city council meetings. The head of business policy for the Bergen Chamber of Commerce was even more emphatic, stating that "Bergen is run technocratically by bureaucrats."

Planners explained the tight link between the light rail and the zoning plan as a result of administrative arrangements. The municipality regulates the light rail but has no control over the bus routes, which are operated through public-private partnership for Vestland, by a regional transport service operator based on a tender. If municipal planners controlled bus routes, they could zone new housing areas serviced by buses with confidence that routes would not change. Therefore, shift and avoid goals are concentrated around the light rail. The anti-toll party is silent on bus provision, strategically claiming the car is the only option for those who live at a distance from the light rail.

Additionally, spatial planners expressed concerns about the impact of compact city development on housing justice. Within a highly liberalized housing market, there are few effective policy instruments available to ensure that developers build housing for everyone. Therefore, the municipality aims to secure mixed income housing through its owned residential building stock, and through financial support structures. However, financial support, provided through the public housing bank, is only available to especially disadvantaged people, for example people fresh out of prison, refugees, and those with severe disabilities. A house bank representative opined that the role of planners has changed over the past four decades with power shifting from municipal planning departments to the private sector. This sentiment, referring to *longue durée* trends, contradicts statements from private sector actors about the shift of power from the private sector to bureaucrats.

4.2.3. *Improve – Electric automobility*

The potential negative impacts of electric vehicle promotion have been ignored in official Norwegian policy documents which state the domestic renewable energy supply together with the EU emissions trading scheme will ensure that EV policies will deliver major reductions in GHG emissions (Lis, 2018) despite research demonstrating the policies may be increasing household car ownership and use (Fridstrøm and Østli, 2016a, 2016b; Anfinsen, 2021). The rapid increase of EVs has been used by a private sector 'expert panel on technology and transport infrastructure' to argue for replacing the zero *growth* target for cars – the central unifying factor for mobility policies in Norwegian cities – with a zero *emissions* goal. Interviews with three spatial planners in charge of compact city zoning in Bergen revealed strong opposition to this proposal, which they were certain would undermine the basis for spatial planning described above.

The most recent national transport plan (2018–29) set aside 536 billion NOK (>$60 billion) from 2018 to 2029 for road building and improvements (Norwegian Ministry of Transport, 2016). The Public Roads Administration has argued at public events that compact city development around the light rail puts too much pressure on the housing market and pushes out middle class families. Their solution is to build four-lane, high-speed highways to enable people to live outside the city and commute to the center. The director of the Roads Administration explicitly claimed at the national mobility conference that these projects will "improve social inclusion" (…) "unless we want to make everyone live in cities". The roads are to be partially funded through tolls, with congestion fees into Bergen expected to increase to meet the zero growth target.

Urban planners expressed frustration with the roads administration's approach. As one planner put it, "They sign the agreements and then smash the targets." The Green Party and FNB, who disagree on most matters, were in rare agreement about the planned mega road projects – they both opposed them. Anti-toll party rhetoric refers heavily to social justice and exclusion with their top priority listed as "to oppose financing transportation infrastructure with tolls or road pricing. Tolls are an anti-social fee which unfairly impacts those who have the least" (FNB, 2019). The party's platform and media communications often refer to 'urban elites' who unfairly punish 'regular people' for driving cars.

A transport policy advisor acknowledged there are individual cases in which people struggling to make ends meet and tolls add pressure to such stretched budgets. However, they emphasized that most low-income people (65% of the lowest quartile) do not own cars. The city council commissioned two comprehensive reports on the social impacts of road tolls (Urbanet, 2020b). Both reports found no decrease of participation in activities and concluded that tolls function in line with their guiding intent, i.e. they impact those who drive a lot rather than those who have the least. One of the reports also concludes that replacing the toll system with taxpayer financing, as advocated for by

the anti-toll party, would benefit the highest income bracket the most, while primarily hurting people with low incomes.

5. Complementarity and legitimacy for inclusive sustainable mobility transitions

The city of Bergen generally follows the best advice available in urban sustainable mobility literature but faces challenges that lead to a lack of complementarity in the mobility policy mix, resulting in negative impacts on social inclusion. National policies that encourage EVs to reduce emissions are at odds with goals to avoid travel through spatial planning and modal shifts to public transportation. Regional control over bus routes has led city planners to rely on the light rail to deliver modal shifts. The result is a policy mix that exhibits tendencies towards elite capture of transport transition benefits.

Ostensibly, the project of populism is to resist elite capture, but it can easily cut the other way to become pro-incumbency. The resistance to toll roads exemplifies this complexity. FNB portrays itself as the real representative for 'the people'. The leader professed that he was not a politician but a 'people's representative' and one of the party's taglines is 'A city for all of us', suggesting commitment to social inclusion. However, its political priorities are strongly in favor of wealthy households (abolishing the wealth tax and property taxes), and suburban car drivers (abolish road tolls), while arguing that currently the city is only for 'elites', i.e. people who live in the city center.

Data from the comprehensive 'living standards survey' (Bergen Municipality., 2016a) shows that four of the five poorest neighborhoods are in the city center but FNB's rhetoric excludes those who can't afford cars from 'those who have the least' and people who choose not to drive from being 'regular people'. A framework or worldview in which only a portion of the population constitutes authentic people is inherently anti-pluralist and socially exclusive. At the same time, the dichotomous regular people/elite distinction is likely exacerbated by the construction of parallel mobility systems which includes the possibility for, and even subsidizes, high income households to buy their way out of avoid and shift agendas. While electrification solves direct emissions problems related to air pollution and climate change, other problems of urban automobility persist, such as congestion, the need for multifunctional recreational spaces, lack of built environments that support soft mobility, and the potential vicious spiral of low public transport service provision correlated with low usage. Thus, congestion tolls manifest weak spots of the improve approach regarding social inclusion.

EV incentives that support massive new road projects risk reinforcing patterns of exclusion along socio-economic divisions. Road building and maintenance constitute huge national budget expenses that unduly benefit automobility users over those using less resource intensive modes. Thus, wealth transfers to elite buyers of EVs extend the dominance of car-centric planning modes at the cost of societal investment in collective and active forms of transport, and revenues to support public transport services through congestion tolls and ticket sales. This finding directly contradicts the Public Roads Authority's claim that new highways improve social inclusion by providing people in surrounding areas better access to the city. Rather, low-income local commuters and those who move further from the city to take advantage of lower housing costs are likely to be at risk of TRSE due to the increasing economic stresses of car dependence. Following insights from Mattioli (2014) on how households cope with economic stress, measuring participation in activities as Bergen municipality does, may obscure whether they forego other expenses in order to meet the rising costs of car dependence. We also interpret the low observable exclusions to reflect relatively low socioeconomic inequality expressed spatially in Bergen. It is reasonable to expect the exclusion effect to be worse in cities with higher spatial segregation along socioeconomic lines.

Considering the strong correlation between wealth and EV ownership, we propose shifting EV subsidies to public transport investment. This recommendation is borne out of the recognition that economic incentives for purchasing EVs in Norway have constituted a subsidy for continued automobility and luxury consumption, with excessive benefits for the elites. Other countries looking to emulate Norway's success with EV adoption should note that without a more targeted or differentiated subsidy policy, the Norwegian approach constitutes a wealth transfer from the entire tax base to those wealthy enough to purchase new EVs and who live in places with adequate charging infrastructure. In light of this, we further recommend investing in a common mobility system in which public space and collective transportation, especially buses, are prioritized over private enclosure instantiated by the car (Nikolaeva et al., 2019). Substantial investment in infrastructure and policy for multi-modal trips would improve inclusion for the suburbs, for example providing secure parking for electric bikes at bus stops and regulatory environments that support responsible e-scooter rental schemes outside the center (Sareen et al., 2021).

Support for the new highways is galvanized by the strict compact city plan based on the light rail to the exclusion of bus routes. The new zoning plan signals shifting constellations of power between planners, elected officials and developers with less power available for lobbyists to obtain concessions. In the shorter term, the new zoning plan shifts power from private developers to bureaucrats and planners. However, on a longer time horizon, market logic still dictates the inclusivity of the light-rail-driven developments. Due to a lack of regulatory tools to ensure affordable housing, the densification strategy has counteracted inclusion in housing, leading to substantial concerns about gentrification. This mechanism of exclusion has been exploited by the anti-toll party to challenge the legitimacy of urban planners as elites who are 'out of touch with regular people and possibly corrupt'.

The light rail is a driver for urban rent, which supports populist rhetoric of city elites and regular people. Municipal planners and policymakers are aware of these challenges, but while local governments can use zoning to strategically shape property development in ways that reduce car dependence, they cannot similarly regulate property prices to ensure that convenient locations in this new system are accessible to all. The mandate for social housing planning and programs to focus only on the most disadvantaged people is a barrier to addressing the structural drivers of uneven socio-spatial development and linked TRSE.

The moralism that characterizes populist movements may be a response to the discourse on sustainable mobility that has downplayed the conflicts and exclusions within the green agenda. Thus, moralism may be a relational response to the unfolding dynamics in Bergen, rather than an endogenous characteristic of such movements; or it may be a recursively constitutive element of the dynamics of populist backlash in transitions. However, beyond moralism, the premise that driving a car is not who a person *is,* but simply how they get around, can be interpreted as a progressive depoliticization that undermines the vested interests of the auto-industrial complex. Progressive, because tolls are used to partially fund expanding public transportation to serve and include more people. Thus, the claim that 'tolls are an anti-social fee' obscures the deeply anti-social impacts, especially on poor communities, of cities built around a societal expectation of automobility.

Ultimately, the social inclusion impacts of an urban mobility transition are contingent on national policies. A progressive city may wish to ensure housing and mobility options as a public good but neoliberal ideology at the national scale will undermine these efforts and, ironically, may lead to a populist resistance to the city government rather than the national one creating the conditions for social exclusion.

6. Conclusion

The overarching goal for sustainable mobility transitions is to achieve socially inclusive cities where mobility relies as little as possible on non-renewable resources. To understand the relationship between transition policies and social inclusion, we analyzed key interventions in Bergen's mobility system that represent three primary approaches; car-free zones (*avoid)*, light rail expansion (*shift)* and electric vehicles

(*improve)*. The categorized interventions are conceived of as part of a policy mix that constitutes the systemic parameters of social inclusion in a city at the forefront of implementing sustainable mobility policies. We argue that a lack of complementarity between policies, together with increasing inequality driven by depoliticized neoliberal agendas, creates the conditions for elite capture and related challenges to the legitimacy of transition decision-makers.

In our case, the challenge came from a new, right wing populist party. Rather than address economic policy and systemic inequality, they used longstanding conceptual links between automobility, freedom and democracy to repoliticize the policy of financing new public transportation through road tolls as an anti-social fee. Our findings confirm the literature on how populisms that mobilize around automobility reinforce elite narratives by promoting neoliberal economic policies and protecting the auto-industrial complex.

We therefore discussed the multiple ways social inclusion is interpreted and invoked to support non-complementary agendas for sustainable mobility. Highlights include the combination of compact city planning and a neoliberal housing market; public subsidies for EVs that regressively benefit wealthier citizens; and investing in massive intercity road projects that cater to elite consumption while burdening low-income, local commuters in cars. We found that while the claims to social exclusion made by the new populist, anti-toll party are inaccurate at best, since they prioritize the interests of an overall well-off group – suburban drivers. But they may be right in their more general argument that socio-economic effects are downplayed in the sustainable mobility transition in ways that support elite capture, although the party misidentifies anyone who isn't car dependent as 'elite'. Certainly, the perception of exclusion and unfair treatment presents a risk to the legitimacy of urban transition planning.

The picture that emerges from analyzing the interaction between policies is of fragmented and parallel mobility regimes which undermine social inclusion goals by providing an opportunity for wealthy households to opt-out. We hold that it is necessary to reconfigure cultures of mobility towards common, low resource systems, prioritizing *avoid* and *shift*. Our findings reveal how even in a country with relatively low socioeconomic inequality, a policy mix that fails to appropriately prioritize a combination of avoid-shift-improve is subject to elite capture and associated reversal of gains through populist resistance during rapid decarbonization.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Devyn Remme: Writing – original draft, Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis. **Siddharth Sareen:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization, Project administration, Resources, Supervision. **Håvard Haarstad:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Resources.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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