

*Are transportation policies a matter of stakeholders or citizens? The case study of a regional council  
“searching for” its public  
Guillaume Gourgues, Ingrid Tafere*

## **ARE TRANSPORTATION POLICIES A STAKEHOLDERS OR A CITIZENS MATTER? THE CASE STUDY OF A REGIONAL COUNCIL “LOOKING FOR” ITS PUBLIC**

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Abstract :

From 2006 to 2007, regional authorities of the *Rhône-Alpes* region (France) renewed its Regional Transport Plan (RTP). They organised public meetings and a deliberative device, inherited from the consensus conference. The selection of publics, by the two administrations in charge of these processes, is in the heart of an institutional struggle. The citizen as “stakeholder” is opposed to the citizen as a “layman”, the consultation of concerned groups is opposed to the political idea of the use of random drawing, participation is opposed to deliberation. This struggle and the lack of attention to the device’s specificity, about its deliberative dimension, blur the impact of each participatory process and the involvement of publics in the reviewing of the RTP.

## **INTRODUCTION: REGIONAL TRANSPORT POLICIES AND PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY**

In Europe, transport policies, like environment or landplanning policies, are an auspicious policy sector for social movements, and protests. They are also a field of substantive changes and renewed experimental democratic practices for public debate. Historically, we could identify a causality link between these two elements (protest and change).

In the UK, for instance, the management of the devolution within this sector tries to adjust its tools and process of agenda-setting, following major social protest against highways (Dudley and Richardson 1998). Bickerstaff, Tolley and Walker (2002) have studied how governmental pressure<sup>1</sup> has opened opportunities for more public participation for the English highways authorities. However, studying the participatory process settled in the provisional step of the Local Transport Plan (LTP) by local authorities, these authors observe that the notion of “public” of the public participation is an object of pragmatic definition. The participatory institutional settings are not devoted to opponents.

Bickerstaff, Tolley and Walker argue that “for most authorities ‘the public’ (as reflected in the survey results) has been interpreted initially in terms of representatives and specific organisations” (Bickerstaff *et al. op. cit.*, p. 67). Then, the “type” of the participants seems to be a crucial point of the inclusiveness of the process. Most of the time the “general public” is only integrated as a future actor of the RTP, but it is absent from its provisional conception. Conversely, the disabled groups and organisations that represent “special interests” are systematically integrated in an early RTP conception. In other words, it seems that the so-called participatory process within LTP is actually limited to a small number of qualified actors, as is the case for other sectors (Prachnet 1998). According to these authors, some highways authorities have implemented some “advanced” participatory devices:

“So although traditional modes of information provision and ‘user’ involvement dominated, more *interactive* approaches to consultation were being applied, with some authorities exploring more innovative deliberative techniques to facilitate ‘public’ debate of transportation policy options or planning issues” (Bickerstaff *et al.* 2002, p. 71)

Contrary to the UK case, the French “décentralisation” does not seem concerned with this participatory “turn”. The French state doesn’t really pressure the local authorities<sup>2</sup>, because it concentrates on its own problems (Blatrix 2000). However, since the beginning of the 2000’s, participatory processes have been implemented by several regional authorities within the provisional step of their RTP for a decade. Indeed, the passenger railroad public transport

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<sup>1</sup> The White Paper, and the guidance on provisional local transport plans published by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR).

<sup>2</sup> The settlement of the Regional Transport Plan (RTP) is not used as a participatory reform by the State. There is no specific consultative obligation in the Internal Transport Orientation Law (LOTI) voted in 1982, a legal text allowing the regional authorities to define the Regional Transport Planning (Law n°82-1153, 1982 December 30th, article 14). Successive revisions of the law, in 1999 and 2004, did not increase that sense of consultative obligation. Contrary to public participation, issues such as sustainable development, priorities on railroad or alternative transportation are imposed to regional authorities (Zembri 1999).

policies, which were decentralised from state to regions in 2002, gave the opportunity to the regional councils to practice some participatory devices. But which kind of public was called to participation? Are the regional authorities “innovative” or “classical”? And what are the aim and the impact of these participative institutional-settings?

In the article, we propose to focus on a single “participatory” experiment in order to enlighten the process of public selection. In order to develop this study, we will focus on participatory devices used during the renewal process of the RTP in the Rhône-Alpes region (2004-2006). We will present the complex interrelation between the selection of the “public”, transport issues, and the substantial policy change. According to Bickerstaff, Tolley and Walker (2002), two main categories of public could be called in, under the provisional LTP: stakeholders<sup>3</sup> and citizens<sup>4</sup>. Yet, the participatory process of the RTP in Rhône-Alpes combines these two types of public within the same participatory process: Stakeholders and Citizens were called in under certain sub-processes.

Our argument is therefore divided in two main points. The first point is to understand how many different kinds of public are called together within the same participatory process, and how the coexistence of these publics could be analysed as the testimony of a political struggle over the definition of the very aim of participation. The second point is to argue that the confusion of the decision-makers about the “type” of public that they call to participate is a cause for the lack of substantive impact of public participation.

Our demonstration is divided in three steps. First, we will describe the sub-process of mobilisation of the stakeholders, led by the decision-makers in charge of the transport policy and the whole RTP (1). Then, we will describe the sub-process (a mini-public deliberative experience) led by other regional decision-makers, in charge of participatory democracy (2), within which citizens are mobilised. For each sub-process, we will analyse the concrete tools of mobilisation of the searched “public”. Lastly, we will see how the two types of public do not only coexist: they struggle rather, and we will get into details by describing the conflict between the two groups, administrative and political, about the relevant public and the aim of the participatory process, and the impact of this conflict on the deficiency of the process outputs (3).

### **The added-value of an ethnographic methodology**

The choice of the Rhône-Alpes region’s case study is motivated by three main elements. Firstly, Rhône-Alpes belongs to the seven regions which have tested out the French decentralisation of the transport policies between 1997 and 2000. The regional council could be considered as a one of the most experienced regional authorities for transport policy. Secondly, the first version of the RTP in Rhône-Alpes, which was written in 1997, introduced significant changes in the regional transport policies. By focusing on passengers (and not on merchandises) and on service (and not on infrastructures) (Debizet Faure Gourgues 2006), this document reshuffles the region’s priorities, which were

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<sup>3</sup> “Organised ‘special interest’ groups with a particular focus and responsibility such as transport user groups” (Bickerstaff et al. op. cit., p. 66)

<sup>4</sup> “The ‘general public’ and ordinary citizens within a diversity of sectors of the population (different age or ethnic sectors)” (Idem.)

previously defined by the state. Consequently, the renewal of this document is a substantive issue for the whole regional policy. Thirdly, in 2004, the Rhône-Alpes region has introduced new modes of participatory democracy in several policies. Yet, the participatory process of the RTP is correlated with a general orientation toward participatory democracy (Gourgues, 2010). As a consequence, Rhône-Alpes can be considered as a heuristic case study.

Beside this monographic approach, the originality of our study lies in its ethnographical methodology, which was used in two different ways. Firstly, the second sub-process, a mini-public deliberative experience (called ‘Citizen’s workshop’) was ethnographically studied, and deliberative activity was directly observed during each working session, private and public meetings (after the process) thanks to our integration within the consultant team which organised and animated this type of event<sup>5</sup>. Secondly, the daily routine of the regional administration was also ethnographically observed. Thanks to our nine-month internship within a regional department in charge of participatory democracy innovations (named DPERC)<sup>6</sup>, we were able to follow the administrative and political disagreements between the regional involved actors – namely the administration in charge of participatory democracy (the DPERC) and the administration in charge of transports (named DTCl) – over the conception of the participatory process. Hence, this article is the combined result of two ethnographical approaches and empirical databases. In addition to these ethnographic tools we have relied on other qualitative data, namely interviews, content analysis of the different versions of the RTP (1997, 2004), the document produced by citizens’ deliberation, official reports and presentation documents issued at public meetings.

## **THE TECHNICAL ENLIGHTENMENTS OF THE “STAKEHOLDERS”**

The whole consultative process is led and conceived by those administrative managers and political decision-makers who are in charge of the transportation policy. A specific civil-servant, who belongs to the direction of transport policies and communication (DTCl), is in charge of these conception and management. Because she is also the chief editor of the renewed RTP, her mission is to coordinate the technical work and the consultative process.

The consultation (launched in January 2007) is not the first step of the RTP reviewing process. During the year 2006, the DTCl undertook a first writing process of the document. This hierarchy between technical work and consultation is the guideline of the whole consultative process led by the DTCl. As we will demonstrate, the selection of the relevant public (1), of the organisation (2), as well as of the outputs (3) of the consultation are consistent with the decision-makers’ operational aim. “Stakeholders” are central to this process: the participants are considered as people who hold interests and could help the regional councils to make a decision about some specific issues, but bring them in their ability to shape decision-making.

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<sup>5</sup> Report of evaluation, citizens workshop “Which mobility and which transports in Rhône-Alpes within 10/15 years?”, Ingrid Tafere, Arènes, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> This observation was led during our PhD thesis. Guillaume Gourgues, *The participatory Consensus, the politics of democracy in four French regional council*, PhD thesis, forthcoming.

## **The selection of the “public”: the rise of stakeholders**

The consultative process holds a specific purpose for the regional administration in charge of transportation: it serves as preliminary and complementary exercise for the technical work of the regional engineers. Also, the administration wants to shake the public debate off from its own technical dilemmas. It aims at addressing specific problems identified by the regional engineers and at bringing them to the whole community of transport partners and users. As a consequence, the concrete organisation and management of the meetings is shaped by this conception of consultation, which is first a conception of the “public”.

For the regional transport policy’s decision-makers, the consultation must be operational. The invited public and the outputs must be defined according to the immediate utility of this type of process. The policy-makers want to gather within the transport sub-system their official and non official interlocutors, who were identified through various regional listings and the previous experience of a permanent consultation device (the railroad committees)<sup>7</sup>. Inasmuch as the document which is submitted to the public debate was absolutely central within the regional transport policy, the identification of the invited public follows a sectorial rule.

These sub-processes rely on a precise definition of “participatory democracy”. Participatory democracy is an exchange which aims to *listen* to the citizen’s expectations; it is also a way of *sharing* the constraints and demands on public authorities<sup>8</sup>. Consequently, the consultative process wants to catch a qualified “public opinion”, which is conceived as a pre-existent substance, in order to enlighten some technical dilemmas that were identified by the decision-makers. The combination of various processes, such as poll<sup>9</sup> and public meetings, should be an efficient way of reaching this opinion.

However, with regard to the concrete creation of the “public”, the DTCl had to rely on other regional administrations, which provided them with a long list of potential individual contacts. To guarantee the success of the meetings in terms of attendance, the DTCl called to participation a vast panel of territorial actors, thanks to the contacts provided by the whole regional administration<sup>10</sup>

It is precisely through this process of building public that another administrative actor interferes for the first time with the consultative process. In 2004, The Rhône-Alpes region created an administration, called the DPERC, specifically in charge of “participatory democracy”. Within the DPERC, two civil servants were recruited in order to promote the settlement of participatory devices for the making of regional policies. Logically, the

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<sup>7</sup> The railroad committees are regular participatory meetings open to transports users associations, unions and local representatives. Their aim is to manage each railroad line according to the expectations of the partners of the regional council. They are managed by other administrative agents of the DTCl. The latter are not involved in the RTP.

<sup>8</sup> “In order to encourage the participatory process, the Region settles three process [e.g. above]. The participation of citizens is both a strong social demand and a regional aim. We must take into account the citizen’s needs, but we must also share with them on the issues and orientations of the RTP”, in: Rhône-Alpes regional council, Les Assises de schéma Régional des Transports de Rhône-Alpes, official reports, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> “The polls give a better representativeness of the public opinion but are not adapted to complex questions. It could be combined with auto-administrated questionnaires or dialogues through Internet», idem.

<sup>10</sup> “The economic representatives, business and industry unions, trade-unions, all the professionals of tourism, all the mayors, the other regions, the members of parliament also, the directors of important infrastructures, such as universities, hospitals, and big companies who have some problems with transportation of their employees or their patients. Besides, the associations, all the Professional unions, parents...”: Interview, Charbonnières-les-bains, 2007

consultative process led by the DTCl is seen by the DPERC as a potential participatory exercise.

In order to reinforce the “participatory” nature of the process, the DPERC suggested that the DTCl add another 11000 persons to the participants’ contact list. This new directory (named the “11000 file”) was created by the DPERC and is considered as the official database of people ready to participate to regional participatory democracy processes. The first vice-president of the regional council, in charge of transports, accepted to integrate this list, according to the proposition of his colleague (the fourth vice-president in charge of participatory democracy) and the DPERC. However, this suggestion has been turned down by the DTCl, in opposition to the political agreement. The administrative leaders of the RTP argue that this widening of the invited public is impossible to handle, and that the assembly rooms will be too small, and that it would end up in ruining the process by the invasion of the public. Eventually, the two administrations found an agreement: some participants in the whole directory are to be invited if they expressed their interest for transports issues.

This demonstrates the link between the definition of public and the definition of the consultative process. The DTCl is searching for “stakeholders” who could immediately debate over transports issues, and who would not fit into any alternative definition of the “public”.

### **The substance of the stakeholders’ participation**

The process of 2007 could be qualified as “consultative” because of the innovations that were introduced compared with the process of the first RTP (1997). Even if the writing of the first RTP gave way to a “large consultation”, the regional council didn’t settle specific procedures of consultation. But in 2004, the rewriting act of the RTP was led by a more powerful authority: the regional council, which is officially the regulating body of regional transports since 2002<sup>11</sup>. Notwithstanding, the regional council argued that the rewriting process would be “participative”, contrary to the 1997 RTP<sup>12</sup>.

Three elements form this “participatory” process: “local consultation” meetings, a website, and a citizens’ workshop. Among them, only the first two are conceived and managed by the transport policy’s decision-makers. These two instruments are planned from the beginning of the process. The meetings are integrated within the general calendar of the technical elaboration of RTP.

The consultative meetings lie at the heart of the whole consultative process. Eleven public meetings were organised across the whole regional territory, between January and March 2007<sup>13</sup>. Again, the choice of the meetings’ number is correlated to a sectorial definition

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<sup>11</sup> Law n° 2000-1208, 2000 décembre 14th.

<sup>12</sup> “According to our aim to make participatory democracy the core element of the settlement of our policies, we lean on a large consultation with the transports partners and landplanning: thus 11 local meetings has gathered more than 2500 actors between January and April 2007. We also organised consultation through the Internet website dedicated to the RTP. This process was also strengthened by the settlement of a participatory citizens’ workshop”, in: Rhône-Alpes regional Council, *Schéma Régional des Services de Transports*, 2006, *Avant Propos*.

<sup>13</sup> January 29<sup>th</sup> 2007, Lyon (Rhône – 69) ; February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2007, Bourg-en-Bresse (Ain – 01) ; February 9<sup>th</sup> 2007, Chambéry (Haute Savoie - 74) ; February 12<sup>th</sup> 2007, Roanne (Loire – 42) ; February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2007, Valence (Drôme – 26) ; February 26<sup>th</sup> 2007, Saint-Étienne (Loire – 42) ; March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2007, Privas (Ardèche – 06) ; March 12<sup>th</sup> 2007, Grenoble (Isère – 38) ; March 14<sup>th</sup> 2007, Bourgoin-Jallieu (Isère – 38) ; March 21<sup>st</sup> 2007, Annecy (Savoie – 73) ; March 28<sup>th</sup> 2007, Annemasse (Haute-Savoie – 74)

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of them<sup>14</sup>. Each meeting follows the same process: (1) welcome of the participants by the first vice-president of the regional council and another regional councillor<sup>15</sup>, (2) voting session on approximately eleven questions, (3) presentation of the RTP by the DTCl, then debate with the audience, (4) second voting sessions about the most controversial questions, among the eleven, (5) conclusion by the first vice-president of the regional council.

These meetings have two main features. Firstly, they are monopolised by the first vice-president of the regional council<sup>16</sup>, like the official website. This website and meetings are a promotional platform, rather than a proper deliberative tool. Although (virtual) dialogues between the first vice-president and the public are organised<sup>17</sup>, these processes are mainly designed to introduce the various tools of the consultation process, in order to describe overtly the process as a participatory one<sup>18</sup>.

Secondly, the central methodology of the meetings is a two-voting session’s process. The first session (Step 2) consists in real-time voting; participants have to vote (yes/no) on several questions without prior information. The second sessions (Step 4) occurs before the general debates, but only on the most controversial questions (with no clear majority). The process was conceived by the DTCl according to the operational scope of the consultation: the 11 questions deal with well-known controversial issues about the management of transports (table 1).

**Table 1:** Questions asked to the participants (instantaneous vote)

Do you agree with the regional council who decided to dedicate more investments for railroad transports than road transports?
Would you be ready to pay more taxes in order to develop public transports?
Would you agree to pay a road-tax disk to use road, if it provides you a subscription to the public transports?
Are you agreeable to allow the regions to collect a part of the <i>Versement Transports</i> [VTA- French tax]?
Is it necessary to put road- tolls in order to access to the cities so in order to finance the public transports?
Is it necessary to adopt more restrictive laws in order to transfer transports of products from road toward less polluting means of transports, such as rivers or railroad?
Should public investments support the development of less polluting vehicles or of public transports?
Would you accept that the number of trains reduces if the trains provide more seats?
Dou you want more halts to the expense of fastness of trains or bus?
Do you perceive an improvement of the regional transports services’ quality?
Is the region role to coordinate the transport networks of the different authorities?

<sup>14</sup> “Eleven, because it fits with some areas where the transports issues were well identified” (Interview)

<sup>15</sup> The French regional councilors are elected on infra-regional electoral lists. As a consequence, they often represent their territory of election within the regional assembly (Nay 2000)

<sup>16</sup> First and last speaker, the elected representative personally answers to 109 questions among the 115 which were asked by the participants during the third steps of the whole public meetings. A PowerPoint picture announces: “Give your opinion!! Now... or later. Write to us at the following mailing address : M. BS, first vice-president in charge of transports, Region Rhône-Alpes, 78 route de Paris BP 19 69751 CHARBONNIERES LES BAINS CEDEX or on the website: [www.srt.rhonealpes.fr](http://www.srt.rhonealpes.fr)”

<sup>17</sup> On the Internet forum, a live dialogue with the Internet users was organized (April 5<sup>th</sup> 2007), from 18h to 19h30, on the RTP website’s forum. The theme of the debate was “The future of the regional transport policy”. This dialogue could be considered as the twelfth public meeting because of the use of the questions/answers formula.

<sup>18</sup> On the RTP website, the regional council argue that the “Rhône-Alpes region has gone into an ambitious approach of participatory democracy entitled “Building Rhône-Alpes together”, which aims at associating the citizens to the implementation of the regional choices.”

Decision-makers choose to readdress participants with the most controversial questions at the end of the debating process, arguing that these questions must be solved on the basis of a renewed public policy of transports<sup>19</sup>.

The questions could be divided into two groups. The first one deals with several alternative solutions: more or fewer taxes, railroad or cars, road tax disk or subscription, restrictive or flexible regulation. These questions are directly connected with the decision-makers' concerns, and they are presented as a choice to be done between two incompatible solutions. The second one consists in questions whose issues are rather surprising: the capacity of mobilisation that the participants could provide to the regional council within the sector of transports regulation (Is the region a potential leader?). As we will demonstrate, the ambiguity of the purpose of consultative meetings (to collect user's opinion or to legitimate the regional authorities) has direct consequences on the impact over the participatory process.

### **The stakeholders' consultation results**

Following this consultative process, an assessment of the project was made by the DTCl at the end<sup>20</sup>. The assessment document sets out two standing points about the “in-depth setting” of the process within the regional territory (a geographic map of the meetings' places shows that the whole regional territory was visited, and the fact that the consultation was a success is conveyed by striking figures, such as the number of participants). In addition to these rough descriptions and listings of the “stakeholders” who participated in the consultation, the aforementioned document differentiates between two types of contribution which were provided by this public: “novelties”<sup>21</sup> and “controversial issues”<sup>22</sup>.

These two types of contribution include a whole range of issues, from very technical to more general ones. As a conclusion, the results of the voting-sessions were published in the assessment document: for each question, a general overview of the meetings' votes was provided (table 2 – Annex)

The eleven tables displayed allow the DTCl to establish some strong trends which are considered as many outcomes of the consultative process<sup>23</sup>. Following such an assessment,

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<sup>19</sup> “We've got eleven questions, and with a remote control, people vote in real-time. We look at the opinions on several questions which are problematic issues and choices for us. And indeed, we searched the most controversial questions, those... [...] we finished with another session of votes about the same questions, except the questions with a large majority, often more than 70%, we didn't open the vote anymore. And those which were very controversial, we opened the votes another time, and we looked at the evolution, in order to see if the representation of the RTP or the debate had changed the opinions”; Interview, Charbonnières-les-bains, 2007

<sup>20</sup> These elements are communicated by a PowerPoint presentation, June 13th 2007, which is entitled “Assessment of the consultation Schéma Régional des Services de Transport”.

<sup>21</sup> E.g., “More explicit and strong recognition of the articulation between urbanism and transports”, “prospective studies about the territorial evolutions”, “new structures for peri-urban projects”, “adaptation of hourly frequency in rural areas with several studies about the re-opening of railroad lines”, “clarification of the trains stop policy”.

<sup>22</sup> E.g., “Management of airports”, “closing of train stations”, “unique ratemaking on the whole regional transportation network”, “wheelchair accessibility”, “structure of the transportation management organisms”, “inequality of travel frequency”.

<sup>23</sup> The DTCl defines two categories of questions: “Questions that systematically divide: urban road tolls (yes 48% - no 52%); more halts/fatness (yes 53% - no 47%); Tax disks/subscription (yes 67% - no 33%)”, and “consensual questions: more investments on railroad/road (yes 90% - no 10%); less polluted cars/public transports (yes 20% - no 80%)”

the RTP got re-written by the DTCl a second time, enabling us to conclude that it has been entirely conceived and managed by this direction, sketching out technical scopes and issues.

Yet, the independence of the process (consultative tools substantively impact the RTP) mainly concerns the selection and interpretation of the contributions. But the competition between both definitions of “public” is not over. As we quoted earlier, another regional administration (the DPERC) wants to enlarge the scope of the public concerned by the participatory process. Consequently, The DPERC has settled and imposed an additional device on the DTCl: the citizen’s workshop. As we will see, this participatory and deliberative process creates another type of “public”, and another type of “results”, that the DTCl must (in principle) integrate to the RTP rewriting process.

## **THE POLITICAL VISION OF THE “CITIZENS”**

At the same time as this consultation, the DPERC set a participatory device inherited from the Danish consensus conference: the “Which mobility and which travels in Rhône-Alpes for the next 10/15 years?” citizen’s workshop (that we will call “transport citizen’s workshop”). It is thought as an experimentation, an adjustment of the model to the local context. The sessions took place between the 26<sup>th</sup> of January and the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 2007, and produced a “citizen’s opinion” aiming to contribute to the working out of the RTP.

As we will demonstrate, the selection of the public (1) and the organization of the device (2) correspond to a political vision of the implementation of citizenship in the decision process, with the idea of random drawing. So, the device is thought within the larger process of participative policy of the DPERC with the picture of the layman as citizen.

But the calendar of this workshop (not early enough in the procedure) questions the effectiveness of the participation in the RTP reviewing. In this context, the link with the output (3) of the device - a document and a discussion on its contents - and the planning document is not clear.

### **The selection of the public: A deliberation of lay “citizens”**

The vice-president in charge of participative democracy was the main support of the idea of the creation of a “regional citizen arena” during the 2004 electoral campaign. His first ambition was the institutionalisation of a structure including citizens and members of “civil society” in decision-making . He wished to highlight the principle of participation: by valorising the notion of “citizens”, by having a “collaborative decision making process”, by registering the principle of participation in the law, in the constitution. So, the aim was not only to consult stakeholders, but also to complete the decision making process of elected representatives through the participation of citizens “without qualities”.

This initiative didn’t work out because of the local political context: the Regional Social and Economic Council saw it as a possible rival institution, creating a legitimacy conflict. In 2005, the framework of deliberation on participative democracy planned a cycle of citizen’s workshops between 2006 and 2008 in order to follow the public involvement after the public meetings. Whereas usually the consensus conferences are chosen to light up decisions about controversial issues in science and technology, the democratic mechanism here is set

up previously to the themes' definition. But the process builds a conception of the citizenship, with the picture of the layman.

The design of the process selects “lay people”, out of “non-specialists” on the issue. In this case, a panel of 50 “citizens” was selected<sup>24</sup> (usually it is between 15 and 20). The representativity and therefore the legitimacy of the former organised panel had been contested many times because of the use of the “11000” listing in the selection process. The “Transport” citizens' workshop uses a more classical method of selection with reference to random drawing, in order to produce a representative panel of the diversity<sup>25</sup> of the region according to the socio-professional categories of INSEE<sup>26</sup>.

### **A citizen's deliberation to participate to the SRT elaboration.**

The design of the process offers the conditions for the deliberation of a minipublic. Firstly, some experts come to bring a “neutral” information. Then, the panel chooses and hears some stakeholders (It is usually a public hearing but not in this case). The sessions are divided into times of group discussion, times of sub-group discussion, exercises aiming at opening arguments like by the production of short scenes, and *In situ* visits. At the end, the panel deliberates so to produce a collective opinion<sup>27</sup>. This construction of the opinion by an objectivation of the information received through the debate is opposed to constructing the opinion through the aggregation of polled points of view<sup>28</sup>. The publicity of this opinion is essential<sup>29</sup>, one of the objectives generally assigned to the device is the fact of resulting in a greater debate.

Devices such as the “consensus conference” are originally set in so to deal with controversial topics related to science and technology, and not with local issues<sup>30</sup>. The use of such devices is, however justified when you consider high controversial environmental issues (as global warming or pollution). This global thinking about our society has to take place soon enough in the decision-making process for the participation to be effective (Rowe and Frewer, 2000).

In the case study, two aspects seem to have oriented the discussion group. First, a temporary version of the RTP was dispatched while the first session, pushing the participants

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<sup>24</sup> The first day, 46 persons are present. 42 have stayed for the whole procedure.

<sup>25</sup> “We use the word “representativeness” because it is easier to use, but in fact it is more about providing the diversity of the panel rather than its representativeness in the statistical meaning of the word. The size of the panel allows us to illustrate at the best the diversity of the inhabitants of the Rhône-Alpes region, but not to produce a representative sample”, Cessa (centre d'études en sciences sociales appliqués), in charge of the selection.

<sup>26</sup> In the end, the recruitment offers a panel including a too important average of people having done higher studies, and including neither enough old, nor enough young people, nor enough blue-collar workers.

<sup>27</sup> In this device, the participants themselves write the paper. During the first workshop the organisers had first listened the debate. Thus, they had written the final “opinion”, as being the outcome of the deliberation, proposing then the document to the panel for validation.

<sup>28</sup> It is also a different matter to collect the individual further to this discussion, as it is for example the case for “deliberative opinion poll” (created by James S Fishkin, 1988), and to establish a consensual collective opinion (even if this consensus is not absolute, because of the possibility of minority opinions) as in the consensus conferences. In the first case each deliberates after a collective discussion and then votes, while in the second case it is the collective deliberation which builds the final opinion.

<sup>29</sup> Usually, a press conference is organized, but not in this case. The DEPERC justifies this fact by the lack of interest and of investment of the local press for this kind of events.

<sup>30</sup> A precedent had however been organised as a modality of the debate of general policy organised by the CNDP (National committee of public debate), in the south of France, in 2006 (in the valley of the Rhône and the arc from the Languedoc, VRAL), (Fourniau Tafere, 2007).

to be more interested in considering measures developed in the text. So they sometimes disqualified some of the arguments because these were "out of the topics", too universal (general): the technical and territorialized dimension of the planning document is opposed to the more global and political orientations required by the deliberation in the citizens' workshop. Furthermore, the calendar gap between the citizens' workshop and the beginning of the RTP making-of was noticed by the panel's members: they questioned how their "opinion" could be taken into account when the citizens' workshop is not set early enough for participation to be effective:

"At a moment, about RTP, we have been told it was already written, before the "citizens opinion", there was something about agenda. We were a lot to ask ourselves "But then, what is the use of all this? How will it be used?" (...) We don't want to prevent elected politicians to decide but just that citizens' workshops had begun earlier, for example before the writing of the RTP. It's just that. To be involved much earlier, and for long time, on these issues, I don't know".

Secondly, they can have a guess about the anticipation of the receiving context of the "citizens' opinion", namely after they have watched the picture about the first citizens' workshop, in which you can see the panel's legitimacy questioned by regional elected members. Some arguments, mobilised during the debates, are not chosen at last because the panel's members fear to loose credit (as for example with the idea of de-growth). At the opposite, the panel's members are watchful about the principle of reality (Freud, 1911), about economical arguments and about taking into account the different interests at stake. Finally, they pay a particular attention to the precision and the accuracy of the words used, on their technicality, in spite of the difficulty of a collective writing with 42 persons in a limited amount of time.

### **The Citizen panel's outputs.**

The citizen's opinion expresses, since its beginning, a "vision" of transportation carried out by the panel. It presents transport as a right, to which the public authorities have to assure the access. At the same time, it asserts the priority to be given to the environment<sup>31</sup>. Some participants do regret however, *a posteriori*, that this point was not more developed. Its structure in 5 points (environment, lifestyles, ways of mobility, social aspects, coordination of organisers), subdivided into three categories: reports / stakes / recommendations. The financial and organisational constraints, which are discussed within the group, are finally left aside, considered as pertaining to the decision-makers responsibility. In fact, when they had considered this point, it was too difficult to value because of several aspects : the absence of

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<sup>31</sup> " The mobility, as well as the transports – the means of transport necessary to enable this mobility- must be studied by making the environment THE priority. Indeed, transports – those of the persons, those of the goods- cannot be disconnected from the question of town and country planning, the question of the local, national, European, and world level. Their eminently negative impact on the environment is universally recognized. For this reason, the consideration of the ecological footprint of transports is, for us, the stake n°1 ", opinion of the citizens workshop " Which mobility and which transports in Rhônes-Alpes within 10/15 years? Contribution to the reviewing of RTP", p. 3

precise information about this subject, the various decision-making bodies, and the explosion of the decision-making spheres. Minority opinions are also expressed in the document.

After the time of the workshop, the paper<sup>32</sup> was sent to the different services of the Region, to the " 11 000 " listing, to the CESR. It was also given during some other public events and published on the Internet<sup>33</sup>. Besides, some appointments were organised: with the vice-president of the Region, in charge of transport policy, with the elected representatives (in two local Committees, about participative democracy and about transport). In November 19th 2007, in the opening of the general meeting of the RTP, the members of the workshop presented some points of the document and exchanged with the room. Finally, the opinion expressed by the paper was presented and discussed during the plenary session of the Region, on April 10th, 2008.<sup>34</sup>

## **THE STRUGGLE AND THE CONFUSION INHERENT TO THE PARTICIPATORY PROCESS**

Yet, at the end of the whole consultative process, composed of two sub-processes, the regional council is confronted with two types of available outputs: the votes and contributions (public meetings) on the one side, and the citizens' opinion (Workshop) on the other side.

These two outputs are produced simultaneously but separately, by two different departments of regional administration and political actors. Taking into account these two sub-processes in the renewal of the RTP suggests considering specificities, (aims, design, ways of making opinions) of both. But, as it happens, this is not the case.

First, outputs are seen, on a same plane, as general public opinion, without recognition of their specificities. Second, two opposite conceptions of participation are confronted. As a consequence, the integration of each of these substantive consultative data within the RTP does not follow the same way.

However, the obvious conflict between the DPERC and the DTCl about the recognition of the workshop, within the consultative process (1), effectively reveals a more fundamental ambiguity about the objectives of the RTP consultation. Each administration is more focused on the promotion of its own sub-process and "public" than really interested in the issue of the finalities of this consultation (2). The remaining confusion about public (and the struggle about the optimal public) prevents us from understanding the impact of consultation on the substance of the RTP.

### **Public, processes and administrative struggles**

The conflict is firstly an administrative one. As quoted earlier, the DTCl never really accepts that the "citizens" could be invited within their "own" participatory process. From the

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<sup>32</sup> Report of the opinion of the citizens workshop "Which mobility and which transports in Rhône-Alpes within 10/15 years? Contribution to the reviewing of SRT", p.19

<sup>33</sup> The local vice-president, in participative democracy would have wished to go farther and to annex it to the RTP.

<sup>34</sup> The presentation of a citizens opinion during this deliberation cannot become integrated as such in the institutional system, because it plans the presence of public but not its participation. In answer to this objection, the decision maker suggests the interruption of the session during the time of the presentation of the intervention of the group. The intervention of the citizens thus followed this modality.

beginning of the process, the integration of the “11000” participants, reduced to 1500, is regarded by the DTCl as a dangerous initiative. But beyond official arrangements (the size of the meetings rooms, the management of invitations), the DPERC, in charge of participatory democracy within the whole regional council, argues that their colleagues strictly object to the idea that a “citizen” could participate in the definition of the most important document of the transportation policy<sup>35</sup>.

In the mind of the DPERC agents, their sub-processes and listing of participants are tools which can change the consultative process of the DTCl into a real participatory exercise, that is to say a process opened to the “large public”, and not only to the well-known stakeholders. Yet, the integration of the 1500 “citizens” and the sub-process gathering other randomly-selected citizens as well, are negotiated procedural gains which result from the internal struggle between two groups of actors who define differently the aim and methods also public participation. These procedural gains in themselves do not prove that the regional actors agree on a common definition of participation, and do not prove either that the DTCl agents are genuinely opposed to the citizen’s contribution.

But the analysis of the relationship between the DTCl, in charge of managing the whole consultative process, and the DPERC, which supervises the citizen’s workshop during the process itself shows that an analysis of the DPERC agents is completely relevant. Even if the DTCl accepts the settlement of different tools managed by the DPERC, the agents keep a critical point of view, and are highly sceptical about citizens’ abilities to participate in the re-writing of RTP. Such a latent opposition allows us to draw the following conclusions.

Firstly, the DTCl does not adapt the process to the citizen’s workshop. The agents in charge of the RTP do not modify the schedule of the consultation, and do not follow the sub-process, which takes place at the same time as the public meetings (January-March 2007). The DTCl only attends the workshop’s introductory session (26<sup>th</sup> January 2007). Secondly, the DTCl describes ironically the methodology of the sub-process and makes it look ridiculous. For the Head of the department in charge of Analysis and Prospective and the civil-servant in charge of the RTP, this exercise is not serious<sup>36</sup>. The citizen’s workshop is regarded as a process in which participants are treated as children. The first session of the workshop- the only one the DTCl really followed- reinforced the DTCl’s defiance towards the “laymen”.

Confronted with a such reaction, the DPERC agents tried to produce a great deal of sequences of direct interactions between the “citizens” (as quoted earlier) the DTCl and the regional vice-president in charge of transport policy, in order to establish the existence of their “public” as a relevant element of the consultative process. The plenary session of the regional council, during which the RTP was finally voted (10<sup>th</sup> April 2008), could be considered as the apex of this strategy<sup>37</sup>. All along the decision-making process (January

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<sup>35</sup> “They didn’t want the citizens’ workshop, and they didn’t want to invite the citizens to the public meetings either. They said no, but the consultation takes place with trade unions, the SNCF, the mayors, the federation of transports’ users association, and that’s all! Ok, but hang on a second, users, there are citizens eventually, the ... They are represented in the railroad committees? How many are they? ”: Interview, Charbonnières-les bians, 2007

<sup>36</sup> “I was dubbed up during the introductive session of the citizens’ workshop. Basically, the ideas that you are the hero of a movie in order to inspire motivation to the participants, I say, I never dared. I never dared. The consultant turns up, and shows false opening credits for a movie, with the name of each participant in the workshop, and now, we are going to make you a movie hero... Well... smile”: Idem

<sup>37</sup> After intense negotiation, the DPERC obtained that two citizens came on the proscenium of the regional assembly to introduce the citizens’ panel opinion to the regional councillors. This presentation was followed by a

2007-April 2008) which has produced the RTP, the DPERC has tried to trigger this type of interactions, in order to introduce the results of its sub-process to the whole process.

We must mention that this strategy has been explicitly explained by the DPERC to the members of the citizen's workshop. When citizens ask some questions about the lack of information on the impact of their opinion, or about how long they are allowed to express themselves in the plenary sessions, the agents in charge of participatory democracy argued that they were currently struggling against their own colleagues. But this strategy questioned the overall disqualification of the citizens' workshop by the administrative and political agents in charge of the RTP.

On the one side, the DTCl and the first vice-president do not consider the public mini-deliberation as a relevant tool within the frame of their mission (the writing of the RTP). On the other side, the DPERC and the fourth vice-president (in charge of participatory democracy) mainly try to publicise the public mini-experiment in order to promote the participatory practices within and/or without the regional council. However, the status of the citizen's opinion within the RTP is not only a matter of administrative struggle. The citizens' workshop seems to be catching out between two administrative attitudes that do not define the same objective. Indeed, the experiment seems to be more valued for itself (the democratic experiment) than it is regarded as a relevant tool for RTP (a substantive renewed type of opinion). The impact of the citizens' opinion is delineated along these parallel issues, and along the various confusions about the nature of the "public".

### **Confused publics, confused outputs**

The very type of the "public" called in the consultative process of the RTP remains confusing, for several reasons. Firstly, the DTCl and the first vice-president refuse to deal with the "citizens" and their works differently than with "stakeholders". The transport administration expects technical enlightenments from the citizens (like stakeholders), without any consideration for a specific deliberative experience which cannot provide this type of opinion. The managers of the RTP are also sceptic about citizens' abilities to efficiently contribute to the transport debate. Engineers do not believe that the opinion of these "citizens" could fit relevantly in a highly technical frame such as RTP. For instance, the DTCl considers that the members of the workshop are totally unable to understand the ideological background of the transport experts who intervened in the workshop sessions. Metaphorically, we could say that the "citizens" of the workshop are not only considered as *children*: they are also *parrots*, repeating each other's saying<sup>38</sup>

The sub-process settled by the DPERC is defined by the DTCl as some sort of perversion of the nature of citizens (laymen, non-professionals). Contrary to this denaturalization, the consultative process opened to the stakeholders is defined as the one "good" way to introduce the "good" public within the transportation planning. Consequently,

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general debate between the elected representatives and the citizens about the content of their opinion, just before the official political debate and votes took place.

<sup>38</sup> "What do we expect from participation? I'm convinced that a consultation about a general policy is inoperative. It is inoperative if we say, "come on, what do you think about that?" And clearly, we have a panel which is a group of parrots who repeat what the experts have said, using classical ready-made phrases. I'm sure that the consultation must be led in some other way. It is a matter of philosophy and deontology, really.": Interview, Charbonnières-les-bains, 2007

the impact of the consultation outputs of the sub-process are not considered as equal opinions by the managers of the RTP review. The DTCl argues that the document produced by the citizens cannot be used to reform the RTP<sup>39</sup>, as well as argued the first vice-president<sup>40</sup>.

As a matter of fact, the DTCl acknowledges reception of the opinion without any guarantee about the use that will be made of it. As a consequence, the whole regional institution seems to ignore (more or less consciously) the specificity of the citizens' opinion, which cannot be considered as the same type of opinion than the stakeholders' contributions.

But more surprisingly, this apparent misunderstanding is shared by the DPERC or by the fourth vice-president, that is to say by the political and administrative support of the mini-public deliberation. For instance, during the plenary session (April 11<sup>th</sup> of 2008), instead of contesting the main interpretation of the citizens' opinion and of standing for its specificity compared with other types of opinion, the fourth vice-president used it to promote its own action in support of participatory democracy:

“Finally, you propose [*in the citizens' opinion*] to generalise the participatory democracy. I agree with that [...] We must bear in mind that the Rhône-Alpes region has contributed to a territorial dynamic toward participatory democracy, mostly in town council [...] Today, I can inform you that there are a lot of deputy mayors in charge of participatory democracy within the regional territory and the whole country [...] Personally, I favour the creation of a new republic, that would be more social and democratic but also participatory, and that would give a large place to participatory democracy in the law-making process”<sup>41</sup>

The speeches of the vice-president, as well as the DPERC's strategy, consisting in multiplying the public manifestations of the workshop, indicate that the confusion about the nature of the “public” is a shared difficulty. For administrations and elected representatives in charge of participatory democracy, their sub-process is not really different from the public meetings, in terms of results and potential substantial contribution to the RTP. They never try to defend neither the originality of deliberation compared to aggregation (votes), nor the consensus building process. They do not cope with the critics about citizens' inaccurate or statements. They interpret these criticisms as evidence of political resistance led by opponents to the participatory project. The paradoxical character of a workshop invited to deliberate about a very general question, despite the fact that it was a temporary version of

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<sup>39</sup> “ I will tell you exactly what I think of it... This document [*the citizens opinion*]... it is incantatory compared to the substance of the RTP. These are general ideas... And it is normal, I'm not judging them. [...] their approach is very environmental; it is not intuitional enough either, contrary to what the consultant says. And it is not much prioritised, that is to say, it is a list of small and big projects, things that the region cannot manage, maybe the state or Europe, or other things which deal with lifestyles or social evolution”: Idem

<sup>40</sup> For instance, during the informal meeting (September, 19<sup>th</sup> 2007 – We assisted to this meeting as an administrative intern), the vice-president in charge of transport asks two main questions to the citizens: “What are the points of disagreement between them? Have they read the final version of the RTP?” In other words, the decision-maker imposed his own definition of consultation, which was addressed to stakeholders, to another type of public, that is to say citizens.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.133. The vice-president in charge of participatory democracy congratulates himself for the progresses of participatory democracy within the regional political assembly: “A lot of water has flowed under the bridge since 2004. The participatory democracy has found its niche, it has demonstrated its effectiveness, a lot of vice-president have settled it within their own political action”, Ibid., p. 118

the RTP that was used as the starting point for their discussion, is never collectively questioned.

That explains why they frequently inform the citizens about their own situation. Throughout the whole process, the DPERC assures the citizens that the DTCl is suspicious and must be convinced to integrate the workshop within the technical writing of the RTP. In other words, the DPERC argues that its “public” (deliberative citizens) is like any other one, no different than ‘stakeholders’. Citizens are called to support their administrative advocates as they claim their need for more meetings.

According to this confusion about the selected “public” and the nature its contribution, it is very hard to point out the concrete influence of consultation on the final RTP document<sup>42</sup>, published in May 2008. Let us mention that the document is fully written by the DTCl, and controlled by its first vice-president. Yet, the title of the document has progressively changed during the whole writing process (May 2006-May 2008): the original *Schéma Régional des Transports* became *Schéma Régional des Services de Transports*. This change reflects the qualitative choice of the RTP, and exacerbates an orientation toward services of the 1997 RTP. Did the consultation process play a role in this change?

It seems hard to claim for a definite answer to this question. On one hand, the RTP document argues in its 4<sup>th</sup> chapter that both the citizens’ workshop and the consultative process of public meetings have resulted in the elaboration of RTP (p. 133). In addition, the president of the regional council argues in a public speech that “all these elements [*from the consultation*] have usefully contributed to improve the projects by bringing new aims and innovative reforms”, and that “that methodology has probably contributed to a better general understanding of the regional transportation policy”<sup>43</sup>. On another hand, the whole process of writing must moderate the official speeches, for three reasons. Firstly, the consultation is only a little part in the global consultation. A more formal dialogue between the regional council and its traditional partners, as the regional consultative assembly (CESR)<sup>44</sup> or the classical political negotiations within the regional assembly, has been maintained. Secondly, neither the type of public and the administrative expectations, nor the breathing space for changes and adjustments are objects of internal agreements. The “selective hearing” technique used by the DTCl created a battlefield for other administrative and political agents who try to defend their participatory process. Thirdly, the policies and administrative agents who settled the deliberative experiences focus on issues other than the impact of participation on decision-making. The very existence of the mini-public seems as important as its substantive impact<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> Regional Act n° 08.06.243, April 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> 2008.

<sup>43</sup> Public discourse of the president of the regional council, November 19<sup>th</sup> 2007

<sup>44</sup> CESR Rhône-Alpes, Contribution du CESR à l’élaboration du Schéma régional de transports, June 19<sup>th</sup> 2007,

<sup>45</sup> For instance, the fourth vice-president values the fact that such experiments concretely changed the political behaviour of the participants: “ I just want to mention that one of the results of this citizens’ workshop is that it generated interest for politics, insomuch that 10% of the participants have been running for office during the last municipal elections, which they would never have done if they had not participated to the workshop in the first place. It’s a very important political issue that may lead to a great transformation of our political life. Let’s imagine that all political authorities act like in the Rhône-Alpes regions. I have the right to have a dream” : Ibid., pp. 117-118. A member of the citizens’ panel confirm this view: « As a conclusion, I want to say to you that this experience has been for the most of us a personal and civic improvement, and I will be more precise than the vice-president. The proof is that 10% of the panel is not only running for office but was also elected” Ibid., p. 118

As a result, the regional council never found its “public”: deliberative citizens, consulted stakeholders, territorial institutions, regional councillors are considered on a similar ground, without any clear distinction. Yet, without a given public that would be defined under a normative goal, it is hard to pass judgement on consultative goals. Then remains a question: would the RTP be very different without consultation?

## **CONCLUSION**

This example of local planning transport review by the Rhône-Alpes region highlights two main elements, which correspond to two main issues raised by the study of a participatory process within the transport planning, namely the administrative struggles and the lack of consideration for the specificity of deliberation.

Firstly, the administrative oppositions blur the effects of the implication of publics in the process of decision-making. The DTIC criticises the argumentation relative to the production of the citizens’ workshop and stresses the fact that it comes too late in the calendar. It also questions the qualifications of these citizens, only able to repeat the experts’ words. At the other side, neither the vice-president in charge of “participatory democracy” nor the DPERC do resolve the way in which this opinion might be associated to the rewriting of the RTP. The administrative and political struggles progressively erase the fact that the difference between a deliberative opinion (citizens) and an aggregated opinion (stakeholders) was never seriously considered. A substantial definition of publics (as opposed to a procedural one) leads the two administrative services to oppose stakeholders to citizens, citizens being identified as laymen.

Secondly, the difference between deliberation and participation (Cohen Fung 2004), was never taken into account by the decision-makers. The lack of attention given to each device’s specificity (design, opinion construction) leads to consider both devices on the same level and to compare their outcomes. Yet ranking values, priorities, political orientations (mini-public’s output) cannot be compared to answers given by users to precise and technical questions asked by the transport service (the stake-holders’ outputs). This confusion leads to oppose publics, but also to make complete participatory processes with administration’s work. Yet to articulate both devices one needs to anticipate the outputs and also an agenda to respect each other’s development.

In any case, the real effects of these devices on the elaboration of the RTP, as well as on the democratisation of the decision-making and on the “politicisation” of the participants, remain unclear. The only clear thing is that these stakes are inscribed at the very heart of some political games and representation conflicts characteristic of a political institution. This leads us to argue that an efficient participatory institutional-setting must be thought and designed according to a clear definition of the public selection and the purpose of participation. In other words, each participatory device which aims to enhance decision-making process experiences must give clear answers to the three following questions: who participate? How? To what? These three questions cannot be thought separately, and must be explicitly announced and formalised, upstream of the whole process.

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Are transportation policies a matter of stakeholders or citizens? The case study of a regional council  
 “searching for” its public

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## ANNEX

**Table 2: Votes on the question «Dou you want more halts to the expense of fastness of trains or bus?»**

	Lyon	Lyon 2	Bourg	Bourg 2	Chambery	Chambery 2	Roanne	Valence	Valence 2	St Etienne	St Etienne 2	Privas	Privas 2	Grenoble	Grenoble 2	Bourgoin	Bourgoin 2	Annecy	Annecy 2	Annemasse	Annemasse 2	
NSPP : ne se prononce pas																						
<b>Votants</b>	189	189	70	70	73	71	72	97	63	68	66	102	76	136	103	99	75	70	70	76	77	
<b>9. Voulez-vous plus d'arrêts au détriment de la rapidité des trains ou des autocars ?</b>																						
OUI	48%	58%	39%	40%	61%	57%	28%	49%	37%	37%	38%	57%	54%	50%	44%	54%	49%	39%	29%	48%	49%	
NON	52%	42%	61%	60%	39%	43%	68%	33%	50%	40%	52%	33%	41%	30%	33%	35%	25%	44%	59%	42%	39%	
NSPP	-	-	-	-	-	-	4%	18%	13%	23%	11%	10%	5%	20%	23%	11%	25%	17%	12%	10%	12%	

Source: RTP assesment document, p. 16