



Association of
Netherlands Municipalities

VNG Position Paper

EU COMMUNICATION "A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR TRANSPORT: TOWARDS
AN INTEGRATED, TECHNOLOGY-LED AND USER FRIENDLY SYSTEM"

SEPTEMBER 2009



Summary

On 17 June 2009, the European Commission presented the communication 'A sustainable future for transport: Towards an integrated, technology-led and user-friendly system'. This Communication announces a future white paper on this subject.

In this position paper, we present our position.

We agree with the European Commission that major challenges await us in the near future. There are many problems that we need to cope with jointly. We believe there are three important challenges for the future: an ambitious source based policy, urbanisation, and less mobile target groups.

We see an important role for the EU on the following subjects:

- The development of an ambitious EU source based policy
- the reduction and prohibition of polluting means of transport.
- knowledge innovation and knowledge dissemination at a European scale

We would like to emphasise that tailor-made projects will be necessary to achieve many of the targets. Flexibility is essential. Therefore, we are against any EU legislation when it comes to local mobility plans.

VNG position on the communication "A sustainable future for transport: Towards an integrated, technology-led and user-friendly system" (COM (2009) 279)

Introduction

On 17 June 2009, the European Commission presented the communication 'A sustainable future for transport: Towards an integrated, technology-led and user-friendly system'. This Communication announces a future white paper on this subject. The Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) is the representative of the 441 local authorities in the Netherlands. In this position paper, we shall discuss the subjects raised by the European Commission in the announcement of the White Paper.

The VNG appreciates that the European Commission has initiated a consultation period, and is pleased to take up the invitation to present its vision on a new White Paper. In February 2009, the VNG adopted a position on the 'Draft Report on an Action Plan for Urban Mobility' ¹. In February 2008, we also reacted to the Green Paper on the New Urban Mobility Culture ². In this regard, we would also like to refer to our position paper "European Approach Wanted to Air Quality" of September 2005 ³ and our position paper on the Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution and the Air Quality Directive of November 2005 ⁴.

In general we are positive about the announced White Paper. In terms of content, the European Commission's ideas are largely in line with the Dutch overall policy in the field of traffic and transport, the environment and public space. Therefore, in broad terms, we can relate to the way in which the European Commission describes the topics for discussion.

Coordinated action between the different administrative levels in the EU

Municipalities and regions have significant competences in terms of spatial planning and mobility management, as well as economic development and social and territorial cohesion. They understand the impact of transport on the quality of life of their citizens and the competitiveness of their territory. The issue is particularly accurate in urban areas, which are the starting point and end of traffic flows and where the EU population and economic activities concentrate.

The contribution of local and regional government is decisive to the future of the EU transport policy and we stress that many municipalities and regions are already taking action for a more sustainable mobility. Policy in the field of mobility in the Netherlands is laid down in the Mobility Report and the Mobility Approach, regional and provincial traffic and transport plans and policy initiated by local authorities. All of these different policies interact. Dutch local authorities interpret this principle based on the Plan Law on Traffic and Transport. On this basis, local authorities are bound to run a visibly coherent and workable policy that corresponds to the essential components of the Mobility Report and the provincial and regional plans. In addition, local authorities run an active policy on their own initiative in the field of mobility and the environment. Dutch local authorities cooperate on this basis to achieve sustainable mobility in urban areas by means of a reduction of negative effects of mobility, such as congestion, air pollution, noise, smell and (lack of) road safety. We need Europe to reach agreements at macro level that have the consequence of tightening up source control policy to promote sustainable mobility.

1 http://www.vng.nl/Documenten/Extranet/Mobiliteit/20090119_EP_Actieplan_stedelijke%20mobiliteit.pdf

2 http://www.vng.nl/Documenten/Extranet/Internationaal/Paper_groenboek_stedelijk_vervoer.pdf

3 http://www.vng.nl/Documenten/Extranet/Internationaal/VNG_IPO_Position_Paper_Luchtkwaliteit_NL.pdf

4 <http://www.vng.nl/Documenten/Extranet/Internationaal/VNG-IPO%20Luchtkwaliteit%20NL.PDF>

Local and regional decision-makers know best the local conditions and needs, and what suit their citizens. Thus, it is essential that the future White paper fully respects the principles of subsidiarity and local self-government. Therefore, we emphasise once again that tailor-made projects will be necessary to achieve many of the targets. Flexibility is essential. Therefore, we are against any EU legislation when it comes to local mobility plans.

At the same time, we believe that the EU has a key role to play to empower municipalities and regions to develop sustainable mobility policies, not only through the support to the exchange of experiences and best practices, but also through the development of a legislative, regulatory and financial framework that will help them to implement climate-proof, integrated, technology-led and user-friendly transport systems.

Key issues

We agree with the European Commission that major challenges await us in the near future. There are many problems that we need to cope with jointly, not just by implementing the policy of recent years, but by daring to take steps forward towards a sustainable, carefully-considered future.

In approaching these challenges, a clear tension can be perceived between on the one hand the conditions that we impose on the environment and our surroundings, and on the other hand our demand for good mobility. This tension must be avoided, because the requirement of mobility is not going to diminish, and the pressure on our surroundings will become disproportionately great unless policy changes. Moreover, transport is essential for the European - and especially the Dutch - economy. Reduced mobility will lead to fewer jobs in this sector, as well as a reduced competitiveness.

Challenge 1: Effective source based policies and measures

To achieve sustainable mobility at local and regional level, source based policy is by far the most effective instrument. Actually, it works three ways. First of all, source based policy leads to cleaner, quieter and more economical vehicles. For many local authorities, this will increase the liveability of their territory, since air quality will improve and there will be less noise nuisance. Furthermore, an ambitious source based policy will be cheaper for the European Union in the long run.

A second advantage is that at a time of increasing scarcity of fuel, source based policy will contribute to a reduced demand for fossil fuels, and transport becomes more sustainable.

Pricing is a local matter, which can deter consumers and the economically important transport industry. Therefore, a final advantage is that if source based policy is effective, the difficult matter of pricing environmentally-unfriendly behaviour can be avoided. This means that it will not be necessary to introduce a complicated system to internalise externalities. The result is that local and national authorities will not have to take any unpopular measures of which the effect on the environment and mobility is low and that affects transport users disproportionately hard.

A great deal of attention in the White Paper is paid to the quality of the living environment, particularly to local aspects that are being negatively affected. It often concerns forms of air pollution and other health-related factors. We believe that the noise nuisance factor is not sufficiently reflected and we ask for it to be given greater emphasis, because noise nuisance due to traffic and transport in inner cities and close to airports has a large negative impact on human health.

Challenge 2: Urbanisation in relation to regions

We agree with the European Commission that future policy measures should aim the development of interoperable and integrated transport networks. In this respect, we are pleased that the specific role of urban areas is recognised. Solutions developed in cooperation between public and private actors at different levels

such as “tram-train” in cities or the development of transshipment intermodal terminals for freight could be further supported. Regarding freight, we recommend greater efforts to be put on the development of rail, fluvial and maritime networks in order to make them competitive with the road, while exploiting the synergies between these transport modes. In particular, we would encourage the pursuit of the development of combined transport and mass freight transport such as the motorways of the sea.

Growing urbanisation requires actions at local and (cross-border) regional level to tackle these developments. Nowadays, old ideas about urban regions no longer apply. Regions no longer stop inside national borders, but are increasingly straddling them. The cross-border dimension of interoperability has still to be improved. For instance, cross-border public transport is rather problematic in the EU, with important differences in the organisation, financing methods, technologies, tariffs and information systems between the two sides of the borders. Particularly in that area, investment is required to achieve better accessible regions that operate internationally. Future policy measures could target an improvement of local and regional transport connections in border areas.

Challenge 3: Sociale cohesion and target groups policy

Transport is essential to improve access to remote or rural areas and to keep the economic attractiveness of secondary centres (e.g. towns in rural areas). At urban level, transport is also an essential tool to ensure the coherence of the city and that suburbs or urban districts are not isolated.

The announced White Paper unfortunately takes too little account of less-mobile target groups. At present, the ageing population is taking on major proportions. It is important to understand that people will become older than is currently the case. The baby boom generation is reaching retirement, and will enjoy their leisure time and wealth by taking more holidays and by making use of forms of mobility. Such issues don't only apply to older people. People with disabilities also need to be mobile. This entails specific mobility needs. These needs consist of transport suitable for all distances.

Therefore, we would like to suggest that the social and territorial cohesion dimension is better reflected in the objectives of the future EU transport policy.

Role of Europe

The proposed document will cover the period up to 2020. In this period, the European Commission declares that it wants to improve mobility in every respect. At the same time, the Commission wants to play a world-leading role in stimulating more environment-friendly transport and makes interesting proposals to move to a sustainable mobility.

VNG is strongly convinced that measures at sources remain crucial to improve the environmental dimension of transport and directly act on the causes of air pollution, noise, health problems and global warming. An important obstacle facing Dutch cities when it comes to the local living conditions is the limited possibility for running a local source based policies and measures. Even after applying all possible measures currently at the disposal of local and national authorities, there are still bottlenecks in the major urban areas of the Netherlands. For this reason, it would be highly beneficial for an ambitious European source based policy in combination with measures for local authorities to implement.

Therefore, we support strong EU-wide measures on vehicles emissions. Implementation of targets to make mobility sustainable is a typical European matter. It could involve ambitious emission targets for all traffic and transport, the necessary new infrastructure for electric vehicles or the reduction and prohibition of polluting means of transport. The current economic crisis should not serve as an excuse to lower the level of ambition of EU legislation.

Investing in clean vehicles, building and maintaining infrastructure and developing good-quality public transport at affordable price imply strong financial efforts for local and regional authorities. The latter cover the major part of the costs of public transport since the investment and operating costs are only partially covered by the income (fees paid by users). In this context, we appreciate that “sending the right price signal” is one of the policy objectives outlined by the Commission and we fully adhere to the implementation of the principles of “polluter pays” and “user pays” in the transport policy. The choice of introducing urban road pricing should be the responsibility of the local and regional authorities, which have to assess its benefits and impacts. The EU can help the local decision-makers in organising the exchange of information and experiences on urban road charging.

Spatial planning and mobility management, both for passengers and goods, are two interlinked issues where local and regional government have key competences. Their decisions on the location of economic and recreational activities, housing and public services are closely related to decisions on transport organisation. We believe that a wide room for manoeuvre should be left to local and regional authorities to favour a balanced modal split, whilst at the same time planning for the interoperability between different transport modes. The EU has a role to play in helping financially municipalities and regions and supporting the development of necessary technologies.

We also believe there is a prime role for the European Commission when it comes to knowledge innovation and knowledge dissemination at a European scale. There is a need for best practices from other Member States, so that Member States can adopt this knowledge and benefit from it.

Environmental zoning is another example of an environmental measure in the field of mobility which should be tackled in a decentralised way. Where it is a matter of making environmental zoning uniform, we ask the European Commission to work with local authorities to define a joint system of categories. As far as we are concerned, a standard traffic sign could be a first step towards uniform categorisation for traffic.

We also want to point out that the trans-European rail high speed network is a fine achievement that must be able to compete properly with air transport for short and medium-distance journeys. However, this must not be at the expense of shorter inter-city lines which are also cross-border, linking smaller cities together. Deciding these matters individually in the Member States is a difficult task. We request the European Commission to make funds available to support and reinforce this (inter) regional traffic. As underlined in the communication, the Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T) policy has reinforced the coordination in the planning of infrastructures projects by the Member States. Next policy measures should ensure the extension of TEN-T to the new Member States, taking into account the impacts on territorial cohesion and urbanisation, and the access for EU regions to the TEN-T network via secondary links, at national and European planning and financing stages of TEN-T deployment

Finally we call on the European Commission to develop a proper target group policy. From our youngest to our oldest citizens and whether or not they have disabilities, everyone must have access to public transport. Rural areas in particular have problems keeping their public transport up to standard. In areas with a sparse and relatively old population, public transport needs to be supported with European funding and an interchange of knowledge needs to occur.

VNG

The Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) is the umbrella organisation of the Dutch municipalities. VNG represents and supports the local politicians and all persons employed by the Dutch municipalities. Together with its members, VNG stands for empowerment and quality of local government. VNG has a front office in the European House of Cities, Municipalities and Regions in Brussels and cooperates with many other organisations. It is a member of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR, the European umbrella organisation of local and regional authorities) and of the worldwide organisation United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG).

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