

MARCH 2009

RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION ON "THE FUTURE OF TRANSPORT":

Passenger transport in urban areas

UITP (Union Internationale des Transports Publics) is the international organisation of public transport, it is based in Brussels and covers all urban, suburban and regional public transport modes (bus, metro, light rail, regional rail and waterborne public transport). It gathers over 3.100 members worldwide, public transport operators, their authorities and suppliers. In the European Union, the UITP EU Committee (EUC) represents the views of the public transport undertakings of the 27 member countries. It is closely following and participating in the elaboration of the different European policies and initiatives that have an impact on urban, suburban and regional public passenger transport.

TOWARDS DYNAMIC, COMMUNITY-FOCUSED URBAN GROWTH THAT IS MORE SPACE AND ENERGY EFFICIENT

Urban areas represent the economic motors of Europe. They play a crucial role for economic recovery and more generally for delivering the Lisbon objectives:

More than 70% of the economic wealth in Europe is created in urban areas. Cities are the places where business is done and investments are made. At the same time they face high congestion and pollution levels and approximately 7% of this wealth is wasted on the external costs of accidents, congestion, health and environmental damage linked to transport.

However, the current development model of cities is not viable and the severity of climate change, the looming prospect of "peak oil" and the heightening of social tensions mean that we can procrastinate no longer.

In the last decades, the majority of European cities expanded and lost inhabitants from their central and inner-city areas. Between 1995 and 2001 average population density fell in European cities by 5% and the proportion of journeys made by car rose by just over 4%. The effects of urban sprawl are well-known: longer journeys, more time spent travelling, higher energy consumption and an intensification of the greenhouse effect, severance of neighbourhood social ties, and the marginalisation of the "car-deprived" in the absence of efficient public transport serving less densely populated zones.

The situation of urban transport (congested cities, high GHG emissions, dependency on fossil fuels and accidents) must be addressed specifically.

Congestion is a scourge affecting the vast majority of our cities. Time wasted in traffic jams is money down the drain economically speaking and a source of frustration and stress. Excessive car use in towns harms the health of inhabitants through pollution and noise and contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and the depletion of non-renewable energy sources. Over and above the need to service more sparsely populated peripheral areas, the solution does not involve building more motorways, but implementing a rational policy for existing road space that gives priority to public transport, cyclists and pedestrians - transport modes that are more efficient in terms of space consumption (traffic and parking).

Technology alone can not deliver the required change within an appropriate time frame without other measures and changes in the mobility behaviour of citizens.

New engine technology, better fuels and other improvements have not had the required significant overall impact on reducing Green House Gases (GHG) as these gains are offset by the sheer growth in traffic, particularly in urban areas. Higher comfort levels in many vehicle specifications such as air conditioning and GPS also increase energy consumption and therefore increase emissions as well.

UITP is fully aware that the car is an essential factor in economic activity and remains one of the favourite consumer goods of our fellow citizens. Nevertheless "too many cars kill the car and kill the city".

Sustainable urban transport patterns are vital
for higher quality of life, including reduction of congestion,
pollution and accidents in European cities.

RECOMMANDATIONS

The UITP EU-Committee welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the definition of the future orientations of the European transport policy. As far as urban transport is concerned we strongly believe that many of issues faced by European cities have not been properly addressed yet. Strong action is therefore needed at all levels of responsibility: local, regional, national and European to address urban sprawl and all related transport problems (congestion, GHG emissions, pollution, non-renewable energy consumption, accidents).

Within this context, the UITP EU-Committee has contributed to the consultation process of the Green paper on urban transport. Unfortunately – and in contradiction with previous announcements - the expected “Action plan on urban transport” has not been published yet.

The UITP EU-Committee is convinced that

“The European Union must play a facilitating role in helping to bring about this change, but without imposing top-down solutions which may not necessarily be appropriate for the diverse local situations¹.”

For this reason, the EUC wishes to recall some of its recommendations:

Priority n°1: Coherence of all European policies & initiatives: For the overall impact of its strategic initiatives, it is essential that the EU-Commission makes sure that all its policies and its financial instruments (including regional funds) support those strategic objectives. For example, there must be doubts about the compatibility of the strategic objective to “tackle climate change” with the clear preference for the investment of structural funds into road network development rather than into urban public transport and/or rail networks.

Priority n°2: Binding requirement to regularly measure CO₂ emissions in agglomerations (job-catchments areas): Such a measure would contribute to the urgently needed “better information of the local decision making process”. Many political choices done at local level, in particular those concerning housing and/or transport have lasting consequences on the performance of agglomerations in terms of CO₂ emission levels, congestion, accidents, pollution, etc... Reliable statistical data on CO₂ emissions would enable local politicians to make better informed choices.

Priority n°3: Binding requirement to develop long-term sustainable urban transport plans. Such planning tools are still too often missing in urban areas in the European Union. A European framework for such plans should be established while avoiding duplication with existing national legislation and leaving cities the freedom to adapt the plans to their unique local circumstances.

Priority n°4: Support communication campaigns for modal shift towards more sustainable transport modes. No single “easy to introduce” policy measure will solve the problem in an appropriate time frame. Achieving greater awareness of all citizens about the impact of their mobility choices is an essential element towards the new culture for urban mobility.

Priority n°5: Develop a European observatory for urban mobility to gather on a voluntary basis statistical data based on the same methodology

¹ Green paper on urban transport