LONG-TERM POLICY PLANNING FOR THE MOBILITY TRANSITION

CO-CREATING KNOWLEDGE, POLICIES AND COLLABORATIVE ACTION FOR SUSTAINABLE, LOW-CARBON URBAN TRANSPORT

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2020, a year of historic change and disruption, has shown us the extent to which access to transport and mobility in our cities determines access to livelihoods, jobs, essential goods and socio-economic opportunities in general. We have also experienced how the resilience of passenger and freight transport systems is essential in times of global and local shock.

I. Transport systems underpin equitable and sustainable societies

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have appreciated living with better air quality and less noise. Movement restrictions have shown us the extent to which our neighbourhood streets and public spaces are essential to community cohesion. With our sudden plunge into a "new normality", we have learnt the hard way that mobility behavioural change at community and individual levels can happen at a much faster pace than we had thought. We have also seen that governments can affect radical change to public mobility policies and expenditure overnight, if they want to.

But more fundamentally, the pandemic has brought to the surface the interconnected social, economic and environmental issues our societies must urgently address to resolve prevailing equality and climate action challenges. Ambitious, transformative action in transport and mobility paradigms is essential to tackling these interconnected challenges. Sustainable, low-carbon transport is the engine of the global economy and increases equitable access to jobs and other socio-economic opportunities for people of all ages and abilities: it powers a just transition to green jobs in a circular economy; reduces climate impacts, congestion, fuel imports and infrastructure costs; improves air quality and benefits public health; and fosters livelihoods in urban and rural areas within the carrying capacity of Earth's ecosystems.

II. Action was due yesterday. Today is the best second chance we've got

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Like in many other areas, the pandemic is putting a magnifying glass on the good, the bad and the ugly of urban transport and mobility systems as they interface with social equality, economic prosperity, climate action and public health. Foundational notions of the sustainable low-carbon transport movement, as well as key principles of sound transport planning and policymaking have become more relevant than ever.

At the same time, the climate crisis has not disappeared with the outbreak of the pandemic. Growing evidence by multilateral and research entities confirms that carbon emissions are returning to normal far quicker than our societies. Transport contributes roughly a quarter of global energy-related greenhouse gas emissions and is therefore a vital part of the solution to the puzzle of a net zero-emission economy. Without urgent intervention, transport emissions are projected to double by 2050, becoming the fastest growing emissions sector, while in a below 2°C scenario, they should decrease by over two-thirds.

It is imperative that the transport sector significantly reduces its emissions. The good news is that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) underlines that a 1.5°C pathway for transport is possible. Yet, for such transformations to occur, mobility and transport systems must be prioritised in policy, regulatory, financing and fiscal frameworks. Further, because mobility is ultimately a story of access to socio-economic opportunities, it is imperative to improve the resilience of transport systems.

III. The Avoid-Shift-Improve transport framework at the centre of an equitable and green socio-economic recovery

The post-pandemic recovery must be one of bold and courageous equity and climate action, and must not derail us from the goal of achieving transport for a 1.5°C planet. To realise the full potential of transport's contribution to recovery, coordinating public policies that *avoid, shift* and *improve* transport will be vital.

First, this is about putting emphasis on *avoiding* and *reducing* the need for motorised travel in our cities. The high urban motorisation trends that marked the 20th century worldwide continue to come at high costs in terms of inequality, poor air quality, deaths and injuries in road crashes, carbon emissions, chronic congestion and loss of productivity. Establishing urban transport policy frameworks that disincentivise car use, while making alternative choices affordable, efficient, safe and attractive is vital to improving the quality of life in cities. Second, *avoiding* and *reducing* motorisation also involves *preserving* walking and cycling where it already exists. Third, transit-oriented development, as well as integrated transport demand management have proven to be impactful *avoid* and *reduce* approaches. Finally, sustainable urban transport planning – both for passengers and freight, circular economy approaches (e.g. reduction, re-use and recycling of raw materials along supply chains), and the digitalisation of services (e.g. home deliveries, at-home administrative or care services) are key.

Once measures to *avoid* and *reduce* motorised travel have been rolled out, the next step is to *shift* to more sustainable, less carbon-intensive modes of transport. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, many cities are witnessing the resurgence of the private vehicle due to fears of infection. More than ever, it is essential that we proactively take care of public transport because it is the backbone of any equitable, low-carbon urban mobility system. Allowing public transport systems to collapse would only exacerbate social inequality as well as air pollution and emissions.

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Further, efforts to *shift* urban mobility should not neglect so-called informal or paratransit transport services. In many cities, they remain critical to providing access to mobility – especially to those living in the most vulnerable situations, including on the outskirts of cities. Walking and cycling must be given a prominent role in the *shift* stage. While in many Global South contexts it has long been the day-to-day for the majority of the population, a new enthusiasm for walking and cycling has emerged in European cities with the pandemic. Over the past year, many cities worldwide have been thrust into the greatest street experiment since public space was turned over to the private car in the 20th century. Cost-efficient tactical urbanism – including temporary sidewalk extensions and pop-up cycling lanes, for instance – has boomed, with Global South cities often taking the lead. The task ahead is to harness these innovations for long-lasting *shifts* to sustainable low-carbon urban mobility.

Shifting to less emitting modes of transport must also include urban freight. With skyrocketing demand for freight transport (due to e.g. online shopping and home deliveries), ageing populations, highly polluting and disparate freight fleets, cities need to turn towards new solutions where possible. Here, introducing new ways of delivering goods, for example by rail or by using electric tricycles, and working with land use planners to optimise routes, stocking, drop-off and pick-up points will be very important.

Once *avoiding* and *shifting* measures are implemented, the challenge is to *improve* transport modes. This is where electric mobility comes into play. To unleash the true potential of electrification, two things need to occur. On the one hand, policies should combine urban transport electrification with the use of clean renewable energies. In this manner, a profound transformation of national economic systems can be achieved, while creating local employment and technical capacities. On the other hand, electrification must contribute to zero-carbon integrated and inter-modal transport systems. The shift towards electric cars is a positive development. However, it should not come at the expense of support for e-scooters, e-bikes, e-cargo bikes, e-trucks and e-buses, as well as other established modes of public electric transport such as trams and railways. Cities should focus on maximising the *shift* potential of e-mobility in general. For example, electric two-wheelers are offering a very significant contribution to tackling local challenges across access to mobility, congestion, air quality and emissions. It is e-bikes that are already transforming cities, mobility and energy demand across many European countries. Public–private alliances are also important for the shift to e-mobility. Many private sector companies are committing to "Net Zero by 2050" pledges. This represents a great opportunity for enhancing electric road freight, as well as for boosting combined electrified railroad freight services for long distances.

IV. Wanted! Integrated and inter-modal metropolitan transport plans

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While significant progress has been achieved in the last decade in many cities across Europe, integration and inter-modality in urban mobility remain underdeveloped. Turning the tide requires further increasing the number of countries and cities with National Urban Mobility Plans (so-called NUMPs) and Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs) that address both passenger and freight transport. It is not a question of a single measure but of packages of integrated and intermodal measures at the metropolitan scale that present mobility as a service to citizens.

The quest for sound planning and policymaking also requires increased political and technical support to locally elected representatives and policymakers. Such support is particularly needed in the use of regulation and participatory planning to, among other things, set local climate targets, establish low-emission zones for both passenger and freight vehicles, and introduce congestion charges and parking policies. These measures are also supported by a majority of European city dwellers. A recent online survey across 15 large European cities in eight countries by Transport & Environment (2021) shows that almost two-thirds of their urban residents are in favour of the idea that after 2030 only emission-free cars should be on sale in Europe.

Further, integrated and inter-modal metropolitan transport planning and policymaking calls for better integration between spatial planning, urban development and transport planning. The renewed and growing interest in proximity-based placemaking (e.g. the "15-minute city" model) offers great momentum to build upon.

V. Reminder: Transport is an induced demand

Urban transport planners and policymakers should not lose sight of the fact that the demand for transport is induced, and that it is shaped by a multiplicity of factors and policies beyond transport. Thus, any urban transport policy needs to be accompanied by enabling measures in areas such as fiscality and pricing. Crucially, only a more cross-cutting and holistic transport policy approach can ensure that all transport modes progressively internalise their broader impacts on society – from impacts on climate and air quality to the shared use of public space. Such an approach also requires governments to work, not only with actors on the transport supply side (e.g. public transport operators, logistics companies, shared mobility companies and captive fleet owners) but also with urban stakeholders who can help modulate transport demand (e.g. administrators, real estate agents, and employers managing industrial parks, office buildings, universities and hospitals).

VI. Re-interpreting "value for money" in urban transport investment

Over the past decade, urban and transport planners, cities and civil society have increased awareness about the socio-economic, health and environmental benefits of low-carbon urban transport. Today, however,

adequate investment beyond pilot phases and piecemeal approaches remains at best limited.

As we witness the biggest ever mobilisation of public funds in history, it is vital that some of the Next Generation EU and other recovery funds are channelled towards removing the prevailing barriers to scaling equitable, healthy, green and resilient urban mobility solutions. The choices made today will determine the urban transformations possible over the next decade and whether the EU will be able to meet its 2030 climate target of reducing emissions by 55%. To create a more enabling environment for sustainable, low carbon transport policies they must be framed as expenditure and investment frameworks, sending clear messages on what type of investments will deliver the best value for money. Governments, international financing institutions and financiers must interrogate which urban transport investments will give us the greatest improvement across three impact areas: equitable access to mobility options, employment generation and reduced carbon emissions.

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VII. Never forget that it is always about people

Rejuvenating urban life in the aftermath of the pandemic will greatly depend on prioritising equitable, healthy, green and resilient mobility solutions that serve the majority and not only car-driving citizens. Key to more equitable solutions will be multi-stakeholder governance processes that place mobility at the centre of social justice and healthier, low-carbon lifestyles; cross-sectoral collaboration between transport, energy, health and land use professionals and municipal departments; IT solutions at the service of open data, transparency and fact-based policymaking; private innovation and public–private partnerships that respond to public urban mobility goals; and localised solutions with community engagement. These and other processes will be critical to enabling the contribution of transport and mobility to a better quality of life for all in our cities.

References

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