

RETHINKING URBAN MOBILITY

REPORT

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Rapid urban growth has generated contrasting and hotly debated visions of the future. Cities risk becoming increasingly polluted and gridlocked, damaging inhabitants' health and making it hard for them to get around. Or they could be cleaner and smarter, offering people a variety of options for moving rapidly and in a sustainable way to their destinations.

Panellists at a Friends of Europe conference "Rethinking Urban Mobility" debated a variety of ways to make cities liveable and mobile, ranging from an optimised use of infrastructure and intelligent transportation systems to a mass shift towards bikes, walking, public transport and clean cars. The questions are: what's the optimum mix and how will it be paid for?

THE SECRET BEHIND THE SUCCESS STORIES

Copenhagen, the 2014 European Green Capital, is often cited as a model city. The population has grown by a fifth in the past two decades and trips have risen by a quarter. Despite that massive growth, the traffic still flows smoothly. That's because of investment in public transport and that most of the extra trips are on foot or by bicycle: 41% of commuter trips by the latter, and the city is targeting a rise to 50% over the next few years.

"A city has a finite space, and we can't just tear down blocks," said Mayor **Morten Kabell** of Copenhagen of Technical and Environmental Affairs. "You have to tell people: 'No, you can't bring your car. That was the era of the fifties and sixties.' However, public transport in some cities is so inadequate that people find driving can be a quicker way to get around, said Simon Godwin from the European Council for Automotive R&D. "Why there are so many cars on the road? Because the car offers something that people want: safe, comfortable and relatively inexpensive mobility. We need to make sure that we are giving people the opportunity to have that those benefits as well as offering the benefits of public transport."

“ *It's not because Copenhageners are especially environmentalist, or that they think greener than anybody else, [...] It's because the transport structures in Copenhagen have made green choices easier.”*

Kabell disagreed. It is essential to prioritise, he said: "The car is the least efficient form of transport in the whole world. Therefore, we need to bring down the use of cars and bring up cycling, walking and public transport."

Copenhagen's bike culture did not happen because the city's people are different, but because the city created a cycling infrastructure – with bicycle lanes separated from car traffic, rather than just painted lanes at the side of the road. This led parents to allow their children to cycle to school from an early age.

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Gothenburg is another example. The southern Swedish port city and transport hub is preparing for strong population growth over the next 20 years. It forecasts 150,000 more residents and 80,000 more jobs by 2035, putting the city at heart of a region with 1.7 million people. To keep the population moving, the city wants at least 55% of motorized journeys by public transport by that year.

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Lena Malm, Lord Mayor of Gothenburg, says that sometimes you just have to face down complaints from car users. “We have had a congestion tax for two years, and there are lot of people who are very angry about it,” she said. “But there are also people who are very satisfied that we made these changes.” Everything that limits people’s freedom causes debate – and all these questions involve how to limit freedom to combat climate change. So I don’t think it is possible to have a plan that everybody can agree on. But you have to talk about it, and that’s what we have done in our city.”

FUELS GETTING CLEANER – BUT CLEAN ENOUGH?

Paris recently decided to ban diesel cars in order to improve the city’s air quality. But automakers say they have cleaned up their engines, and new vehicles now account for just 10% of emissions. So the focus should be on the cars that emit the other 90%, said **Erik Jonnaert**, Secretary General



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of the European Automobile Manufacturers Association (ACEA). “The focus in Paris should be on this old diesel technology,” he said. “Extreme responses will not help us.”

Low-emissions alternatives to gasoline are still expensive, said Chris Beddoes, Director General of Fuels Europe. “Oil has fuelled the global transport system for a hundred years, it isn’t going to be disappearing in three or five years because policymakers wish it,” he said. “We need a transition plan which is economically and environmentally sustainable. And we need to recognise that there is going to be a transition, which is going to depend on the technology being affordable.”



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But critics say the auto industry is dragging its feet. **Ismail Ertug**, an S&D Member of the European Parliament on the Committee on Transport and Tourism, said the industry had managed to obtain easier targets for increasing the use of alternative fuel sources, such as hydrogen, electricity and liquid natural gas.

“There is absolutely a need for a legal framework, but this can be successful only if member states are willing to implement this,” he said “I know how

hard the industry lobbies, in Berlin, in Brussels and in the European Commission. So when the European Commission came out with quantitative targets, these were watered down by the Council. Every one of us knows where the influence on the Council comes from. It comes from the manufacturers.”



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Beyond targets, the EU has been trying various methods to reduce emissions. Some are controversial.

In future, there will be new testing procedures to produce a realistic picture of a car’s emission performance, said **Carlo Pettinelli**, Director for Sustainable Growth and EU 2020 at the European Commission Directorate General for Enterprise and Industry. “There will be a sample of cars, and vehicles’ emissions will be measured in different conditions.” he said.

The EU’s Emissions Trading System does not include emissions from transport, though automakers’ manufacturing operations are subject to the scheme. But it has been faulted for over-

allocation of emissions permits, which made it ineffective as a tool to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

That means the scheme should not be extended to transport, said **Jos Dings**, Director of the NGO Transport & Environment. Instead, higher fuel taxes would be more effective: “The ETS is the wrong

instrument to price carbon and transport,” he said. “The fuel tax is the single most important reason why we in Europe only use half the fuel of our North American friends per head.”

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There is more agreement on the importance of electrically powered transport. Electric cars are still only a niche market. However, Ding says while they're expensive to buy, they're cheap to drive,

making them perfect for sharing. It's a form of car use that's becoming increasingly popular, particularly with younger people. “I think this transition to electro-mobility is absolutely key, and the Commission needs to make it a top-line strategy,” he said.

Potential customers worry about electric cars' relatively low range – often just 150 km on a single charge. More fast-charging points would reassure drivers that they'll be able to recharge easily. “We don't see enough of them,” said Jonnaert. “It's really important for consumer confidence that people see out in the streets more of this recharging infrastructure. Why would they otherwise make the extra effort and buy an electric vehicle?”

The EU could play a big role in future transport systems through standardisation. For example, there is not yet a harmonized plug for charging electric vehicles – but this will soon be realised, enabling people to charge their cars all over Europe.

The auto industry also thinks there is still hope for second-generation biofuels, which can be made from a range of agricultural waste, rather than just sugars and vegetable oils, like the first generation. “I agree, there are some issues, especially when it comes to first generation biofuels,” said Jonnaert of ACEA. “But second-generation biofuels have potential, and we should continue exploring them.”

WHERE SHOULD THE MONEY COME FROM?

Announcing a €315bn investment plan in late November, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said he had a vision of commuters charging electric cars along a motorway, in the same way we fill up with petrol. But there are limits to what can be done at an EU level. “You cannot force the member states to have X percent electric infrastructure, because the differences between them are really high,” said MEP Ertug.

The EU's roles go beyond gathering funds to invest. The European Investment Bank (EIB) provides technical assistance to help cities prepare investment plans and bundle projects. In London, businesses located along the Crossrail route – a high-capacity railway under construction across the UK capital – are contributing because they see benefits from an increased passage of consumers and workers, said **Max Jensen**, the EIB's Head of Public Transport.

“Obviously for public transport, the ticket revenues often do not cover even the operational cost of projects, so you have to look at capital investments,” said Jensen. “Are there other measures where we can create structures that then can bring longer term financing, as well for institutional investors? By creating role models, we make something visible that other cities can replicate.”

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And businesses' own transport needs must not be forgotten while cities focus on how to move people around, said **Magda Kopczynska**, Director of Innovative and Sustainable Mobility at the European Commission Directorate General for

Mobility and Transport. “It is very often the question of city logistics that has the decisive impact on how a city is being organised and how the city transportation system is functioning,” she said.

SMART TRANSPORT SYSTEMS

Beyond infrastructure, increasing efforts are being made to integrate transport systems with new technology in order to make mobility smarter.

Continental, once known only for its tyres, now makes 60% of its sales from automotive electronics. In December it founded a new company called Intelligent Transportation Systems, which will work on general traffic guidance, using data contributed by drivers on where they want to go. It will also provide support systems for car-sharing – for example replacing keys with mobile phones. And it is working on so-called multi-modal transportation, so that people can easily use a car, train and bus as part of a single journey.

“ *We talk about systems, we talk about the city, we talk about how to regulate more traffic, [...] but we should not forget the individual who wants to be mobile.”*

The key to much of this work is the “connected car”, which will feed data into intelligent transportation systems. “We talk about systems, we talk about the city, we talk about how to regulate more traffic,” said **Werner Koestler**, Senior Vice President of the Continental Automotive Interior Division. “But we should not

forget the individual who wants to be mobile.”

Copenhagen is using intelligent transport systems to speed up the city's fluidity, said Mayor Kabell. “In some streets and on some lines, intelligent solutions have increased the speed of public transport by up to 40%,” he said. “That makes it much more accessible to people, which means it's easier for us to expand bicycle lanes and get more public spaces.”

The auto industry is keen to work with local authorities through public-private partnerships to try out new technology. For example, Gothenburg will in 2017 launch “Drive me”, the world's largest pilot project for autonomous driving, a joint initiative of the Volvo Car Group, the Swedish Transport Administration, Transport Agency, Lindholmen Science Park and Gothenburg city. “This project focuses on how autonomous vehicles can provide social and economic benefits in terms of improvements in traffic flow, safety and environment,” said Lord Mayor Malm.

LEARNING FROM GOOD AND BAD PRACTICES

“We need European legislation to make sure that there is a market created that will allow for a proper business case – so that the solutions are sufficiently interoperable and do not create barriers between cities,” said Kopczynska.

Indeed, many cities could learn from model cities, indicating the need for a forum where solutions can be exchanged between operators, cities and regulators, said Lord Mayor Malm.

“We strongly believe that in order to push a European urban mobility agenda, it is vital to establish

knowledge in an innovation community,” she said. “Gothenburg believes that it needs a holistic approach, addressing innovation across geographic, disciplinary and stakeholder boundaries.”

That said, systems which work in one city might not be successful in another, because of an array of factors from geography to politics. “You can't take solutions from one city, and cut and paste

them onto another city,” said Kopczynska. “You have so many elements that build on how a city is run and how city can succeed in its transportation policies. What does work is to look at specific solutions and to let cities learn from those solutions. We have many networks of cities in the EU, and I think there is a huge scope for cities to



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learn from good and bad examples.”

Even Copenhagen introduced some policies that failed, noted Kabell. One of his predecessors eliminated trams in favour of buses. But these ran on diesel, and are now one of the city's larger sources of pollution. “I can't think of a worse mistake in the public transport system in Copenhagen,” he said. “We are now fighting to get light rail and trams back on to the streets of Copenhagen. That mistake has cost us quite a lot of money.”

Another example of bad policy is Belgium's system of company cars, said Pierre Laconte, who is President of the Foundation for Urban Environment. This gives tax breaks to employers that provide staff with a car, and amounts to a €4bn tax subsidy, he said. “This could of course used to alleviate the kind of problems we are having at the moment,” he said.

The Belgian tax advantage encourages car ownership, meaning roads and on-road parking take up a lot of space that could otherwise be used for public transport. “The problem of space consumption is a very key point for public transport,” he said.

VISION OF THE FUTURE

Thus the argument to take the longer view in policymaking as opposed to achieving shorter-term gains at the cost of sustainability. What is needed is a future transport vision that goes beyond the current configuration of sectors that now provide mobility. “We need a vision of where the European Union should be in 2050,” said Ertug. “Then we will be able to see the costs and the different problems that need to be overcome.”

European policy should be based on facts and evidence, with scenarios and impact assessments, in order to lead to informed and coherent policymaking, concluded both Ertug and Jonnaert.

You can find the photo-gallery of this debate on Friends of Europe's [Flickr channel](#)

Retrinking urban mobility

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