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Green Paper on Urban Transport

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

Participation of Vice-President Jacques Barrot in the informal ministerial meeting on urban development and territorial cohesion

Leipzig, 24th may 2007

Mr Tiefensee, Ministers, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to be with you today. Thank you Wolfgang for allowing me to share with you some thoughts on urban transport.

Ministers in charge of urban affairs and territorial development, have an important responsibility. 80% of our European citizens live in an urban environment. Europe's cities must remain places where it is great to go, and where it is great to live. Cities should flourish economically. Efficient transport connections are a prerequisite. It is here where your responsibilities meet mine.

Ladies and gentlemen, the problems of cities are complex. We need to look at them in an integrated way. There can be no urban planning and housing policy without a good transport policy. Urban transport serves passenger and freight mobility. It links cities with their surrounding areas and with the long distance transport networks, the Trans European Networks.

European cities have proven that change for the better is possible. Let me quote for illustration a few examples, out of many:

The city of Bristol's TravelSmart initiative encourages people to use their cars less. The scheme targets households, offers tailor-made information on how to walk, cycle and use public transport more often. The scheme has so far achieved significant changes in travel behaviour and led to reduction in car trips up to 12%.

Eight trucks have participated in a pilot scheme in the city of Göteborg that aimed at increasing the efficiency of goods-ordering and freight distribution in Göteborg. As suppliers are now coordinating their deliveries and purchasers the ordering of their goods, the number of freight trips in the city centre have been reduced with 41%.

Thanks to a new demand responsive bus service in Krakow, citizens that live in the sub urban areas are able to reach the city centre quicker and more comfortably. Public transport can be ordered simply by calling a dedicated telephone number.

To encourage the use of bicycles, the city of Burgos has built new bicycle lanes connecting the sub urban and central parts of the city, supported by extensive marketing and promotion campaigns. A smart card based cycle rental scheme is under development.

In all these examples, change was led by determined local politicians and facilitated by their central and regional governments.

Certainly, Europe's cities are different from each other. They are themselves in the best position to select and implement the right mix of transport measures.

The question arises whether European policies, and transport policy in particular, can contribute to cities making the best choices for their situation.

My services are currently preparing a Green Paper on urban transport. Let me give you some background on the work that we have undertaken so far and where we intend to go.

I launched the idea of a Green Paper in the mid-term review of the Transport White Paper in 2006. The European Commission identified the Green Paper on Urban Transport as one of its 21 strategic priorities for the year 2007.

Demographic changes and new technologies such as Galileo will have a major impact on citizens' mobility patterns and on the design of our urban transport systems.

Moreover, urban transport is an important consumer of energy and source of greenhouse gas emissions in transport. How could we respond effectively to the new demands to fight climate change, without including urban transport in our policy focus?

Urban transport is not only important in the context of the European transport policy, but also in a wider context of other European policies. We must look for synergies and for win-win situations. We have to ensure that urban transport is not hindered by EU policies, but can, instead, benefit from policy options also at European level. Urban transport should have its own place in the broader European transport policy agenda.

The need for a European reflection on the Urban Transport was strongly confirmed in the ongoing stakeholder consultations which were launched by a conference on 31 January 2007.

Ladies and gentlemen, I want to share some thoughts with you that have emerged from this consultation so far.

Let me first stress that the consultation proves very lively and dynamic – a true reflection of European cities dynamism! The purpose of our consultation is to fully understand the reality of Europe's cities. I want to prepare a Green Paper that can take the debate forward by asking the right questions.

Many cities want to move forward fast and address issues such as climate change. Modal shift policies, demand management measures, alternative fuels and the promotion of clean vehicles can offer solutions. Of course, information exchange is important. There are already a number of very useful European initiatives to facilitate information exchange. But also money is a key issue.

I want to stress the importance of the EU's Cohesion Policy. I am happy that, when I was Commissioner for Regional Policy, I significantly strengthened the urban dimension of the different EU funding mechanisms. The structural funds, the cohesion fund and other, innovative, instruments are essential for the future of many urban transport systems, especially in the new Member States. The European Investment Bank also helps, with money, special instruments and knowledge.

Stakeholders across Europe have suggested that a new stable urban transport programme or investment instrument could be developed, as a follow up to CIVITAS. There is also a demand to further open up the funding possibilities under our Regional Policy funding mechanisms, to cover also public transport vehicles.

But let me stress that citizens also are ready to contribute for cleaner transport. A recent Eurobarometre poll indicates that 54% of citizens are prepared to pay more for cleaner transport – with 9% even ready to pay more than a 10% increase.

Green propulsion has an important role to play in urban transport. We will reflect, for instance, on how to limit the impact of the older vehicles that still pollute our cities. Ambitious standards for fuels and new vehicles have allowed us to make real progress during the past years, and we need to continue on this path. Public procurement rules can help to create markets for new, clean vehicle technologies.

The Green Paper will have to address the role of the private car in cities. We will also cover urban freight transport and logistics, and the two most healthy transport modes – walking and cycling. When recently asked how to save fuel, 56% of regular car drivers indicated walking and cycling as their preferred options to avoid using the car.

Good public transport is a key element of cities' competitiveness. Cities with well performing public transport systems attract employment and facilitate growth. Citizens expect that public transport meets their needs for mobility. Cities are ideally placed to develop collective transport. A recent Eurobarometre poll reveals that 49% of our citizens consider that well developed public transport system is the best way to improve the traffic situation.

It has been suggested that the European Union should make sure that all European citizens have some basic rights when they use public transport. One could consider a European passenger rights charter, as we have done in aviation?

Let me emphasise that it is certainly not our intention to start regulating urban transport at the EU level. European cities themselves are in the best position to select and implement the right policies and measures. The subsidiarity principle should be seen as an opportunity, not as a barrier. Our role as EU can be to identify, in partnership with all parties, whether obstacles to successful urban transport policies exist and, how to remove them.

The added value of action at European level can be to promote the sharing of good practices. But it can also involve, better co-ordination and co-operation, financial support, simplification of existing legislation, or, in certain cases, the removal or the introduction of legislation. The basic idea is, not to impose solutions, but to enable them.

Ladies and gentlemen, I will propose the Green Paper on urban transport for adoption in September of this year. I am certain that with all the input that we have received we will be able to present a well-balanced paper. The Green Paper will generate a further debate, to which I am already looking forward. In 2008 we plan to present an action plan proposing concrete measures for further consideration. All this will frame a possible future "European policy for urban mobility".

I conclude by inviting you to share your ideas, insights and expectations from the Green Paper in an open way. Good urban transport is important for sustainable urban development and for territorial cohesion. It is this spirit that I am looking forward to our discussion.

Thank you for your attention.