

The European Green Paper on Urban Mobility

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The 2006 mid-term review of the European Transport White Paper heralded plans for a new European Green Paper on Urban Transport in order to “*identify potential European added value to action at local level*” (CEC, 2006: p14).¹ After a 5-month consultation process between January and June 2007 with European, national, regional and local stakeholders, the Green Paper on Urban Transport was published in September 2007 (CEC, 2007). The result is a document which sets out a series of questions and issues, rather than any new policy instruments or solutions. It provides little clarity about the precise future role of the European Union in urban mobility policy, and the potential European added value.

The rationale for the Green Paper can be found in the document’s introduction, where it states: “*local authorities cannot face all these issues [economic, social and environmental] on their own; there is a need for cooperation and coordination at [the] European level... [U]rban mobility needs to be addressed as part of a collective effort at all levels: local, regional, national and European. The European Union must play a leading role in order to focus attention on this issue*” (CEC, 2007: p3). The tensions with the concept of subsidiarity (i.e. taking decisions at the lowest appropriate level) and the EU’s competence in the issue of urban transport are acknowledged later in the document: “*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 situations*” (CEC, 2007: p5). Various examples are identified in which the European Union can (and does) play a facilitating role, including the exchange of good practice, harmonising technical standards for urban transport, providing research funding, and simplifying, repealing or adopting legislation.

Much of the Green Paper is structured around 5 main challenges for urban mobility:

1. *Free-flowing towns and cities.* Alternatives to private car use, such as collective transport, walking, cycling, should be made attractive and safe. Interchange between modes should be seamless.
2. *Greener towns and cities.* Measures are required to reduce the CO₂ emissions and other pollutants from transport, and to lower transport’s impacts on health.

¹ See also Stead (2006a).

3. *Smarter urban transport.* Innovative solutions are required to increase the efficiency of urban transport so that space is used more efficiently and environment is managed more effectively.
4. *Accessible urban transport.* Collective transport must be accessible and seamless. Transport infrastructure must be safe for walking and cycling, not just for private vehicles. More flexible solutions for both freight and passenger transport are needed.
5. *Safe and secure urban transport.* Measures are needed to improve the safety of urban transport systems and to increase the perceived sense of security for collective transport passengers.

A series of policy-related questions relating to each of these 5 challenges are set out in the Green Paper, together with a number of additional questions relating to monitoring and financing (table 1). Alongside these is a further question about the potential role of the EU in the process. The Commission would seem to be still searching for justification for their involvement in urban transport issues. The Green Paper's list of questions (25 in total) forms the basis of a further round of consultation on the European Commission's role and policy responses in the area of urban transport.

Responses to the launch of the Green Paper so far have been predictably mixed. The International Association of Public Transport (UITP) has given its support to the Green Paper, stating that the European Commission "*has a major role to play to foster sustainable urban mobility for all, providing frameworks that can empower our cities and regions to take appropriate actions, while fully respecting the subsidiarity principle*" (UITP, 2007). Eurocities, a European network of large cities, has welcomed the Green Paper, arguing that there is a need for "*European cities to develop joint solutions in the area of urban mobility*" and that "*local authorities can benefit from support and coordination at the European level*" (Eurocities, 2007). The European Federation for Transport and Environment has been more critical, arguing for more attention to the internalisation of transport's external costs in European transport policy and less emphasis on transport infrastructure mega-projects under the Cohesion Funds (T&E, 2007). Michael Cramer, German Green MEP, has underlined the contradiction between the way in which the EU's co-financing is currently spent in urban areas (the vast majority goes into roads) and the objectives of the Green Paper such as 'co-mobility' between different modes of collective transport. At least 50% of this co-financing should be invested in alternative forms of transport he argued during the debate on the Green Paper in the European Parliament (European Parliament, 2007).

The exchange of knowledge and experience, one of the possible roles identified by the Green Paper for the European Union to tackle urban mobility issues, was also highlighted during the debate on the Green Paper in the European Parliament. Saïd El Khadraoui, Belgian Socialist MEP, asked how good ideas on urban mobility might be best shared between cities and lessons learnt. This raises a crucial issue for the European Commission, which has neither been fully nor satisfactorily answered to date. Numerous examples of best practice (or good practice) on urban mobility can be found, many of which are the direct result of European cooperation or research projects. However, issues such as learning and the transferability of lessons and practice have been given very limited attention. A common assumption behind best practices is that they are equally applicable and effective in another setting. However, given the wide diversity of EU member states and the great variation in types and sizes of cities, such an assumption is not always valid (see for example Stead et al, 2008).

Table 1. Questions in the Green Paper on Urban Transport**Free-flowing towns and cities**

1. Should a "labelling" scheme be envisaged to recognise the efforts of pioneering cities to combat congestion and improve living conditions?
2. What measures could be taken to promote walking and cycling as real alternatives to car?
3. What could be done to promote a modal shift towards sustainable transport modes in cities?

Greener towns and cities

4. How could the use of clean and energy efficient technologies in urban transport be further increased?
5. How could joint green procurement be promoted?
6. Should criteria or guidance be set out for the definition of Green Zones and their restriction measures? What is the best way to ensure their compatibility with free circulation? Is there an issue of cross border enforcement of local rules governing Green Zones?
7. How could eco-driving be further promoted?

Smarter urban transport

8. Should better information services for travellers be developed and promoted?
9. Are further actions needed to ensure standardisation of interfaces and interoperability of ITS applications in towns and cities? Which applications should take priority when action is taken?
10. Regarding ITS, how could the exchange of information and best practices between all involved parties be improved?

Accessible urban transport

11. How can the quality of collective transport in European towns and cities be increased?
12. Should the development of dedicated lanes for collective transport be encouraged?
13. Is there a need to introduce a European Charter on rights and obligations for passengers using collective transport?
14. What measures could be undertaken to better integrate passenger and freight transport in research and in urban mobility planning?
15. How can better coordination between urban and interurban transport and land use planning be achieved? What type of organisational structure could be appropriate?

Safe and secure urban transport

16. What further actions should be undertaken to help cities and towns meet their road safety and personal security challenges in urban transport?
17. How can operators and citizens be better informed on the potential of advanced infrastructure management and vehicle technologies for safety?
18. Should automatic radar devices adapted to the urban environment be developed and should their use be promoted?
19. Is video surveillance a good tool for safety and security in urban transport?

Creating a new urban mobility culture

20. Should all stakeholders work together in developing a new mobility culture in Europe? Based on the model of the European Road Safety Observatory, could a European Observatory on Urban Mobility be a useful initiative to support this cooperation?

The financial resources

21. How could existing financial instruments such as structural and cohesion funds be better used in a coherent way to support integrated and sustainable urban transport?
22. How could economic instruments, in particular market-based instruments, support clean and energy efficient urban transport?
23. How could targeted research activities help more in integrating urban constraints and urban traffic development?
24. Should towns and cities be encouraged to use urban charging? Is there a need for a general framework and/or guidance for urban charging? Should the revenues be earmarked to improve collective urban transport? Should external costs be internalised?
25. What added value could, in the longer term, targeted European support for financing clean and energy efficient urban transport, bring?

Partly in connection with preparation of the Green Paper, a pan-European public opinion survey on attitudes and issues concerning transport policy was carried out earlier in 2007 on behalf of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Energy and Transport (European Commission, 2007). Curiously, no reference to this survey is made in the Green Paper, despite the fact that the survey contains some relevant findings. For example, the survey reveals that nearly half of the survey's respondents (49%) think that better public transport could significantly improve the traffic situation in the city closest to where they live. Just over 1 in 6 of the survey's respondents (17%) believes that access limitations in cities could significantly improve the traffic situation. A similar proportion of respondents (17%) are of the opinion that speed limits could significantly improve the traffic situation. Only 1 in 20 respondents (5%) consider that charging for road usage could improve the traffic situation in their urban area. The results of the 2007 survey appear to be very similar to a series of similar pan-European surveys carried out in the 1990s (for a review, see Stead, 2006b and 2008).

In summary, the new Green Paper sets out a series of rather predictable questions and issues on urban mobility. It marks a further round of consultation (closing on 15 March 2008) on urban mobility, and will provide an input to a European Action Plan on Urban Mobility to be published in the autumn of 2008. The Action Plan promises to '*identify a series of concrete actions and initiatives towards better and sustainable urban mobility*' and indicate '*a time line for [the] implementation and the allocation of responsibilities between the various actors*' for each proposed action (CEC, 2007, p4). Only then – another year down the line – will we discover the extent to which the European Union considers itself to have a role in tackling urban mobility issues, and the added value of European action in this area.

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