

Five sustainable urban mobility priorities for healthy and liveable cities

Briefing for the European Parliamentary Elections

Before Europeans head to the polls on 26 May 2019, Polis, the leading network of cities and regions working on urban transport innovation, would like to remind the candidates to the European Parliament of key issues that are at stake for citizens living in the cities and regions of the European Union.

City-level policy is becoming increasingly important, due in part to the fact that one sustainable urban mobility action can address multiple problems, like reducing CO₂, achieving much needed improvements in the field of air quality, reducing traffic jams and road safety risks, improving quality of life, and public health. We can expect a steady increase in urban transport demand with an ever-growing urban population and it is clear that dramatically different urban mobility systems are required.

It is clear by now that we have reached peak car¹. Historical legacy of car centric urban planning, car-friendly policies and urban sprawl have brought the personal car use to surge. Cities are now fighting to undo this by implementing measures to avoid and contain the demand for motorized transport. They are prioritising public transport and active travel, innovating and testing new mobility concepts and services, procuring cleaner fuels and rethinking urban space.

However, modal shift to less polluting transport modes also needs ambitious politicians that have the courage to go against the grain and take unpopular measures such as reducing car traffic capacity, regulating access, redesigning streets or removing parking spaces. Protecting pedestrians and cyclists also determines modal shift. Less cars also means safer streets, and as acute safety concerns are one of the main reasons for not cycling, attention at these inter-related policy areas is needed.

We would like to see the new members of the European Parliament bringing fresh ideas and stronger actions in the five areas we outline below.

¹ CIVITAS CREATE, Project Summary and Recommendations for Cities, 2017, Available from: Urban Mobility: Preparing for the Future, Learning from the Past

I Tackle air quality and noise pollution

Air pollution contributes to at least twice as many deaths as traffic accidents². The road transport sector is the largest contributor to total nitrogen dioxide emissions in the EU along with particulate matter in cities. The EU's air quality rules are still too weak to effectively protect citizen's health and most member states fail to properly comply with existing laws, with some monitoring stations recording exceedances even being taken offline³.

Some 40 million people in the 115 largest cities in the European Union (EU) are exposed to air exceeding WHO air quality guideline values for at least one pollutant. Children living near roads with heavy-duty vehicle traffic have twice the risk of respiratory problems as those living near less congested streets.

Noise pollution is merely an afterthought in policy-making both nationally and locally while exposure is a major problem specifically in cities. Estimates say that 40% of the EU population are exposed to road noise exceeding the safe health limit of 55dB(A)⁴. Economic costs of noise from traffic include devaluation of house prices (especially for housing next to busy roads), productivity losses (poor concentration, fatigue, hearing problems) as well as the cost related to premature death or morbidity (cardiovascular diseases).

Future MEPs should consider:

- Speed up the revision of the Ambient Air Quality Directive and include realistic limits that can protect the health of citizens living in urban areas.
- Investigate the level to which national emission reduction targets established in the National Emission Ceilings (NEC) Directive (EU, 2016), requiring Member States to develop National Air Pollution Control Programmes by 2019 to comply with their emission reduction commitments⁵ are being implemented.

² Gossling, S. et al, The Social Cost of Automobility, Cycling and Walking in the European Union, Ecological Economies, 2019

³ European Court of Auditors, Special report no 23/2018: Air pollution: Our health still insufficiently protected

⁴ World Health Organisation, 1999 in Gossling, S. et al, The Social Cost of Automobility, Cycling and Walking in the European Union, Ecological Economies, 2019

⁵ European Environmental Agency, 2018

- Support cities and regions in implementing transport measures that help them comply with European limits and targets, such urban vehicle access regulations

II A proper consideration of walking and cycling benefits in policy making

Studies show that walking is the first mode of transport in many cities⁶ and consistently prove that active travel offers clear economic and health benefits to society⁷. Each kilometre driven by a car incurs an external cost of €0.11, whereas cycling and walking bring benefits of €0.18 and €0.37 per kilometre, respectively. Using these figures, the total cost of automobility in the European Union amounts to €500 billion per year; on the other hand, due to their positive health effects, cycling and walking are associated with benefits worth €24 billion and €66 billion per year⁸. Thanks to e-bikes friendly policies and good infrastructure, cycle commuting has become the norm in cities across northern Europe for mid-distance as well as shorter city trips. Together with walking, they can replace the short car trips in cities (making out almost 90% of total trips) and which are, on average, under 5 km.

Investing in infrastructure and prioritising active modes of transport can contribute to meeting European targets and goals in terms of reduced congestion, improved air quality, less noise pollution and better road safety as well as better quality of life in urban areas. Regular commuting by active modes can also reduce fossil fuel dependency. Although the health benefits of active travel are clear, this is not translated into tangible actions at the EU level.

Future MEPs should support:

- A leader for the work on active travel and health should be clearly identified in the EU institutions. This would facilitate ownership and facilitate interactions with networks and stakeholders.
- Asking the European Commission to deliver a European Walking Strategy as a framework in which cities can plan walkable routes and incorporate the

⁶ Polis, 2016, Policy paper. Decarbonising Transport: the perspective of cities and regions

⁷ FLOW, 2018, [15](#) Quick Facts for Cities

⁸ Gossling, S. et al, The Social Cost of Automobility, Cycling and Walking in the European Union, Ecological Economies, 2019

principles of multimodality and equity among transport modes into the EU Cycling Strategy and into all EU transport strategies⁹.

- Asking the European Commission to establish guidelines for standardised data collection methods for walking and cycling as modes of transport, to bring this data into the EU statistics sphere.

III Cleaner, safer vehicles adapted for the urban environment

Innovation in the vehicles manufacturing industry is famously slow despite big leaps in technology. Knowing that it takes 20 years to renew most of the vehicle fleet, car manufacturers must start optimizing vehicle and powertrain design to reduce emissions from new ICEVs. It can be achieved by setting binding target dates for phasing out the use of fossil fuels. Substantially bigger investments should be made for the long term to expand routes and capacities for transporting freight by rail, inland waterways and maritime services. As recommended by the EASAC as well, the EU should strive to reverse the policy that curbing mobility is not an option as was clearly stated in the European Commission's White Paper on transport (EC 2011a). Containing growth in the demand for transport is needed in achieving the required emission reductions, and one that should be more actively addressed by prioritising financing in rail transport, its electrification and shifting freight and passenger transport from road to rail and inland waterways.

Future MEPs should support:

- Tougher regulations, in addition to taxation of fossil fuels to discourage demand for new oversized vehicles and oversized fossil-fuelled engines.
- Paving the way for a small urban vehicle framework in view of the period after 2030, building on the General Safety Regulation implementation which was a significant step forward for new in vehicle safety standards.
- Cities will need to provide infrastructure for clean, alternative fuels as well as make investments in cleaner fleets, as mandated by the Clean Vehicles Directive. As current cost of such vehicles remains a major barrier to wide take-up and clean fuels are expensive, Polis asks the European Parliament to consider and promote ways of accelerating the transition and incentivising the industry.

⁹ FLOW, 2018, Walking and Cycling: A Multimodal Approach to Congestion Management - FLOW project summary and recommendations

- Follow up on the conclusions of the EMIS committee and keep the Dieselgate discussion alive by monitoring the obligations of manufacturers regarding real driving emissions.

IV New governance models to regulate innovation

Digitalisation, new transport modes, new shared mobility service providers, new market players, new partnerships, and new business models, can potentially help transform mobility in a sustainable and inclusive way, provided they are introduced in the right context and steered towards reaching policy objectives. At the same time, we need to ensure that public transport and active travel remain the backbone of our mobility in cities.

As outlined since 2018 by Polis, vehicle automation discussions create expectations that self-driving cars will be here tomorrow, always operate perfectly, solve congestion and eliminate accidents¹⁰. While automated cars may bring some benefits, there is also the possibility widespread introduction in urban areas leads to increased congestion or negative environmental impacts (unless all AVs are electric and/or powered by renewables).

There is a pressing need to support the upgrade of local policies and regulatory frameworks to keep pace with and frame innovations, i.e. make them policy responsive. A need to make policies more data-driven has also emerged, requiring capacity building in city administrations for developing data-sharing protocols, mobility data collection and data driven policies. If new mobility services are to fill the gaps of mass transit, they need to be integrated in the transport offer of the city in an accessible and equitable way. Mobility as a Service therefore also needs public sector oversight and mediation of pricing, to ensure sustainable modes are being prioritised.

Future MEPs should consider:

- To challenge the automated vehicle community to develop products and services that fit the communities they will be used in.
- Anchor debates about vehicle automation, new mobility services, and Mobility as a Service in research and innovation governance of urban mobility.

¹⁰ Polis, 2018, Road vehicle automation and cities and regions. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2EeboU2>

- Enhance the dialogue started in the framework of the EU Urban Agenda in the context of ELTIS, CIVITAS and the European Innovation Partnership on Smart Cities and Communities by bringing the multi-level governance approach closer to policy making.

V Championing investments in quality public transport

Less than 20% of passenger transport today is carried by public transport (or privately-operated communal transport)¹¹. For the long term, major investments in modernizing existing infrastructure, optimization of schedule, real-time-traffic information, new train, tram and other public transport services are needed to increase ridership and extend the options for travelers. Commuting and the problems of the sub-urban areas have become city problems so dedicated investments – at least in the urban European nodes – as well as strong political leadership should be encouraged to achieve better integration and resource allocation.

Cities and regions is where change happens and will continue to happen. The local and regional level should therefore be recognized at the EU level as a major engine for bringing about the much-needed change in the transport sector, even also at times when the national level fails to act or moves too slowly.

Future MEPs should consider:

- Prioritise funding for sustainable transport infrastructure and vehicles projects, in urban nodes and beyond, under the CEF budget, as well as projects that have a clear component for clean transport, renewable and clean energy as well as electric mobility.

¹¹ European Academies Science Advisory Council, Decarbonisation of Transport: options and challenges, 2019

About Polis:

Polis is a network of European cities and regions working together to develop innovative technologies and policies for local transport.

Since 1989, European local and regional authorities have been working together within Polis to promote sustainable mobility through the deployment of innovative transport solutions.

Our aim is to improve local transport through integrated strategies that address the economic, social and environmental dimensions of transport. To this end, Polis supports the exchange of experiences and the transfer of knowledge between European local and regional authorities. It also facilitates the dialogue between local and regional authorities and other actors of the sector such as industry, research centres and universities, and NGOs.

Polis fosters cooperation and partnerships across Europe with the aim of making research and innovation in transport accessible to cities and regions. The network and its secretariat actively support the participation of Polis members in European projects. Polis participation in European projects allows us to create a framework which facilitates dialogue and exchange between local authorities and the transport research community.

In Polis, decision makers are provided with the necessary information and tools for making sustainable mobility a reality. Within the Political Group of Polis, they formulate recommendations to the European institutions.

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