

Green Paper "Towards a new culture for urban mobility"

In the European Union, over 60% of the population lives in urban areas. In Europe, a car runs 75% of its mileage in and around cities. Cars must share city streets with collective transport, freight services, pedestrians and cyclists. Cities must remain places where it is great to live, to work and to go for leisure. An efficient, safer and more environmentally friendly urban mobility is essential to guarantee our citizens a high quality of life. There is no single solution, but European cities and the European Commission can work together to make quality of life, economic growth and mobility compatible.

Cities are in the best position to select and implement the right mix of measures to achieve this objective. However, European transport policy can help cities make the best choices that are adapted to their situation. Europe's cities and towns are different from each other, but they all share similar challenges and look for common solutions. Challenges like climate change, congestion, air pollution, and road safety are some examples. It is without doubt that the negative impacts of urban mobility cross urban, regional and sometimes national borders.

To address these challenges and facilitate shared solutions, the Commission has decided to publish a Green Paper called "Towards a new culture for urban mobility". The aim is to stimulate discussion on urban mobility at European level, inviting all relevant parties to participate in a consultation process and debate on the best options to achieve a sustainable urban mobility.

The Green Paper looks at options to make European cities fluid and accessible for all, with a smart, safe and less polluting mobility.

Towards free-flowing towns and cities

According to a recent opinion poll, 90% of Europeans think that the traffic situation in their area should be improved. Throughout Europe, increasing traffic in the city centres is leading to permanent congestion. The delays and other damages caused by traffic jams cost the European Union 1% of its Gross Domestic Product. Experience shows that there is no single answer to reduce congestion. Alternatives to private car use, such as collective transport, walking and cycling, should be made attractive and safe.

Towards greener towns and cities

The domination of oil as a transport fuel generates CO₂ and air pollutant emissions in European cities. In fact, urban mobility accounts for 40% of all CO₂ emissions of road transport and up to 70% of other pollutants from road transport. These have a negative impact on citizens' health. New and clean technologies, like green propulsion, have an important role to play in achieving cleaner urban transport. Traffic restrictions in city centres and the creation of green zones and urban charging schemes can also be part of the solution.

Towards smarter urban transport

European cities also face a permanent increase of freight and passenger transport movements. Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) can help manage and control traffic efficiently.

Towards accessible urban transport

Society is changing, is getting older, and is expecting more intelligent and affordable mobility solutions. Citizens expect seamless and accessible collective transport and safe infrastructure for walking, cycling and private vehicle use. An efficient urban planning and a quality collective transport are essential to achieve this. The Green Paper also considers having a European passenger rights charter as the one that already exists in aviation.

Towards safe and secure urban transport

Safety and security are also key concerns in urban mobility. About two thirds of road accidents and one third of road fatalities are located in urban areas, with pedestrians and cyclists being the most vulnerable road users. If we want to save lives, we need to act on a safer behaviour, safer vehicles and safer infrastructure. Better enforcement of traffic rules throughout Europe should also be ensured.

These and other options form the basis of the Green Paper with which the Commission intends to launch a reflection motivated by the need to create a new urban mobility culture in Europe. Through education, and focused information and awareness campaigns, Europe and its cities can influence and improve the mobility behaviour of its citizens.

In order to make the necessary changes possible, all stakeholders at the local, regional, national and EU level, including the users, must contribute to a successful financing of urban mobility measures. At the EU level, the Commission intends to look at how to better use existing sources of financing, including loans, regional funds and targeted programmes.

The intention is not to impose solutions from the centre, but to enable and encourage them. The role of the EU is to identify, in partnership with all parties, what 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 Green Paper opens a consultation period until the 15 March 2008 to generate further debate on all these important issues. Once all opinions are gathered, the Commission will present concrete measures in the form of an Action Plan. This will be done during the early autumn of 2008.