

Pressure for municipal action on mobility, health and environmental protection

Summary of the Dessau conference “City of the Future: Mobile in Municipalities - scope for action on mobility - health - environment”¹ on 9 and 10 October 2006

National and international research findings reveal a close connection between health and transport. Earlier discussions centred on transport safety issues – and progress on this front has been achieved: there are less road fatalities and severe injuries per annum in Germany compared to a few decades ago, and this despite of an increase in traffic volumes. Nevertheless, numerous findings are available on the health hazards and economical damage caused by noise, air pollution and the lack of exercise, and on the long-term costs of urban sprawl. Children spend less time outdoors and are less physically active than in the past. This is not only true for children who grow up in inner city areas but also for those raised in the suburbs. In recent years the proportion of trips children make sitting on the back-seats of cars ("mum's taxi") has continued to rise while they make fewer and fewer independent journeys on foot, by bicycle or by public transport. This does not only result in a lack of physical exercise for children but also makes parents increasingly dependent upon cars in their function as "stand-by taxi services" for their children. The opportunities for children to play outdoors have become worse, more dangerous and fewer and they are spending more time indoors in front of televisions and computers.

Environmental protection issues are also putting great pressure on municipalities to act. Fossil fuels are finite resources, the climatic impacts of ozone and CO₂ emissions are detrimental, and dissecting areas and land consumption to accommodate traffic and transport routes impair the quality of life within cities (and in nature outside cities). The impacts of motorized road traffic on city residents' health and natural resources necessitate technological innovations and new concepts and instruments for transport route planning and municipal transport policy. Measures adopted to date have often proven ineffective, interventionist or weak. Municipalities are the entities most affected and are therefore under urgent pressure to act. On the one hand, budgetary restraints, changes pursuant to demographic developments and new legal provisions limit municipalities' options for action. On the other hand, modifications in the legal framework concerning new limits on fine particulate emission and noise mapping require municipalities to implement concrete measures.

Which success factors promote a sustainable transport policy?

More than 120 participants discussed the success factors for a sustainable mobility policy in Dessau on 9 and 10 October 2006 at the conference “City of the Future: Mobile in Municipalities - scope for action on mobility - health - environmental protection”¹ organized by the German Federal Environment Agency, the German Association of Cities and the German Institute of Urban Affairs. The following questions were the main focus of the conference:

- √ What constitutes sustainable infrastructure and transport planning? Which models and concrete action objectives should guide municipal transport planning in the future?
- √ Which measures are truly efficient? How can sustainable urban structures help avoid motorized transport, what potential effect can new urban planning concepts offer? How can non-motorized transport potentials be effectively utilised? How can local public transport efficiently contribute to reducing adverse environmental impact?
- √ What are the key factors for successfully achieving these measures politically? How can we encourage sustainable location planning? How can we convincingly communicate that cycling and walking are economically efficient? How can the main governmental and non-governmental mu-

¹ „Stadt der Zukunft: kommunal mobil – Handlungsspielräume für Mobilität – Gesundheit – Umweltschutz“

municipal players, for example retailers and transport associations, be persuaded to support essential changes to urban and transport policy?

The introductory speeches given by the Parliamentary State Secretary in the Federal Ministry for the Environment Astrid Klug, the Parliamentary State Secretary in the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs Ulrich Kasparick and the President of the Federal Environment Agency Andreas Troge underlined the importance of this topic. There was consensus that genuine space for action can be developed if the aims and measures pursued are credibly proposed by politicians and if federal, state and municipal players, as well as transport providers, cooperate more effectively.

Part I: Current municipal policy issues

The first section of the conference proceedings contains the revised speeches from the meeting on municipal policy issues (Prof. Dr.-Ing. Klaus J. Beckmann, German Institute of Urban Affairs), air pollution, the effects on health and municipal transport intervention strategies to date (Dr. Axel Friedrich, German Federal Environment Agency), on space, transport and land use (Prof. Dr.-Ing. Christian Holz-Rau, University of Dortmund) and on the international debate on health and transport (Dr. Günter Klein, German Federal Environment Agency). Christian Popp (Lärmkontor GmbH, Hamburg) and Axel C. Springsfeld (BSV Urban and Transport Planning Office, Aachen) contribute case studies on practical noise reduction planning and quality assurance in municipal transport development planning.

Part II: Best Practice

The second section of the proceedings includes "best practice" examples and identifies the factors which contribute to success in overcoming implementation barriers. Bocholt Urban Planning Councillor Ulrich Paßlick reports on land management and bicycle friendliness in his town. The Deputy Director of the Leipzig City Planning Office Reinhard Wölpert outlines Leipzig's transformation into a shopping and recreation hub and upgrading the city centre and neighbourhood areas. Munich's Transport Planning Unit Director Horst Mentz gives an account of the city's strategic approach to urban development management and transport planning, and Michael Glotz-Richter from the Ministry for Construction, Environment and Transport of Bremen describes how his city successfully used EU-supported projects to supplement scarce municipal resources in order to advance "From Car Sharing to Enhanced, Environmentally Friendly Buses".

In addition to the principal lectures, the proceedings also document presentations by conference participants in parallel workshops. The volume includes lectures by Volker Eichmann (KCW GmbH, Berlin/Hamburg) on "Local Transport Planning, the Berlin Model", Dr.-Ing. Ditmar Hunger (SVU Planning Agency, Dresden) on "Quality of Life through Speed Management" and Michael Volpert (Planungsgruppe Nord – PGN, Kassel) on "Integrating Environmental Objectives in Municipal Transport Planning (Kiel)".

Concluding discussion

In the course of the closing debate it became apparent that sustainability has yet to become a chief economic motivation for action because – as the tenor of the discussion suggested – it continues to lack the required credibility. While funds for new capital investments are available, existing infrastructure is being allowed to deteriorate due to a lack of resources earmarked for its maintenance. There is energetic public debate over costly projects like the Transrapid, yet demonstrably efficient and comparatively inexpensive cycling projects in municipalities cannot be implemented because no budgetary resources are available for such small-scale measures.

The need for a shift in urban and transport policy has been emphasized for years and documented in numerous studies by the Federal Environment Agency, the German Institute of Urban Affairs and vari-

ous German cities. Nevertheless, sweeping success with respect to traffic reduction and traffic transfer at the municipal, state or federal levels cannot be perceived.

Apart from the financial conditions which make project feasibility contingent upon funding resources, political campaigns to influence public opinion also play an important role. For example, politicians conspicuously advocate projects in their electoral wards (e.g. road bypasses) as avenues to re-election. Five-year terms of office are often far too short for politicians to observe the results of their decisions and learn from successes and failures. In many instances relevant target groups are not reached at all or at the right time: measures to educate children and their parents about mobility must be emphasized in preschool, and children must play a central role in municipal location planning ("Short Trips for Short Legs"). Too much of the existing information is available in a form only experts are familiar with. This makes access difficult for politicians and citizens.

"kommunal mobil" internet portal

The German Federal Environment Agency has long been aware of the necessity to present facts and research findings on municipal transport comprehensively and appealingly and was able to unveil "kommunal mobil" – its new online information resource – at the conference. The internet portal "kommunal mobil" (www.umweltbundesamt.de/verkehr/mobil/index.htm) addresses municipal decision makers and transport planners, Agenda 21 groups, non-governmental organizations and interested citizens. The portal aims to improve the flow of information on municipal transport issues and to provide an overview of the experiences and the conclusions of projects funded by the German Federal Environment Agency to promote environmentally friendly transport in cities and municipalities.

*Figure: "kommunal mobil" – a trademark for environmentally friendly transport**



**Source: German Federal Environment Agency.*