CARE-North

From the North Sea Region to a global perspective

The North Sea Region is very much affected by climate change and increasing sea level. Similar to most of its lowland neighbour, it is protected by dikes. As yet, the transport sector has not contributed significantly to a low-carbon economy.

But sustainable transport means more than "just" low-carbon transport – it also means providing people with access to activities. Ambitious and innovative projects in the North Sea Region show some new approaches and solutions.

It is twenty years since the Rio Summit called the world to act more sustainably.

It is four years since the European CARE-North project started its work. A number of ambitious cities and regions in the North Sea Region have worked together to develop more carbon-responsible transport strategies. The CARE-North project is happy to share its ideas and experience.

The partners of the European project CARE-North (Carbon-Responsible Transport Strategies for the North Sea Area: www.care-north.eu) have discussed priority areas on the subject of urban mobility. Their conclusions feed into the position papers that ICLEI will present during its next World Congress and in the lead-up to the UN conference, particularly in the context of the green economy.

Create a carbon-neutral, climate smart, resilient city...and generate green jobs

Citizens' choices of their mode of travel can be influenced through the greening and improvement of the services and assets offered by the city. Local governments and stakeholders can reduce the appeal of private vehicles and improve accessibility by improving the frequency, coverage areas, safety, environmental performance and appeal of public transport services.

Cities can also create policies to encourage smart mobility designs and decisions, including carbon offsetting of newly-built infrastructure and awareness-raising among citizens.

The overlap and complementarity of these priority areas are evidence of the importance of holistic solutions. Efforts in one area need to be aligned with efforts in others in order to exploit potential synergies. An integrated, holistic approach at the local level and harmonisation with the various levels of governance is crucial to success.

Win-win-win situations need to be created, whereby the citizen, the environment and the city (in the form of both the local government and stakeholders, including businesses) all benefit from the new set of "mobility conditions".

Increasing transport – heading towards more unsustainability

While the world deals with the effects of climate change, our traditional understanding of transport is leading to a continued high level in CO_2 emissions, undermining other climate protection efforts. Between 1970 and 2006, global GHG emissions from the transport sector increased by 130%. In 2006, transport accounted for 13% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

Although some parts of the North Sea Region have had success in levelling out their overall GHG emissions, transport-related CO_2 emissions in the North Sea region are significantly above 1990 levels.

Decoupling economic growth from transport growth

We face the impending exhaustion of world mineral oil supplies. Depleting mineral oil supplies and the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions combine to demand a re-thinking of the concept of “transport” (building more road infrastructure) to a broader notion of “accessibility” (the ability of citizens to meet their daily needs safely, comfortably and conveniently) while minimising the various negative environmental impacts associated with traditional fossil fuel-based transportation.

Transport problems – increasing as planned

Much of our dependence on the car is created by spatial planning. Urban sprawl and low density developments create the need for more transport which can’t be organised efficiently by collective or non-motorised means. The resulting transport problems are a direct result of planning without foresight.

Sustainable mobility practices must be supported through land-use decisions (e.g. mixed land use) that earmark available land for smarter future use rather than for short term benefit. Policies and plans should be holistic and provide for expected future conditions and limitations such as oil shortages and escalating oil prices.

The performance and efficiency of existing urban assets should be improved as much as possible (especially considering financial constraints and resource-efficiency considerations). Public space should be redistributed to enhance quality of life.
Mixed functions in urban areas and a concentration in corridors with collective transport in rural areas allow a reduction of dependence on the private car – giving non-motorised and collective modes better chances.

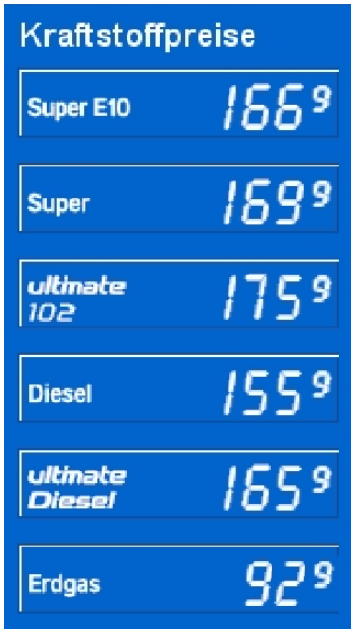
Don’t expect miracles from alternative fuels

Mineral oil supplies are limited and fuel prices are expected to continue increasing.

Bio-fuels can replace fossil fuels in some contexts, but using biomass for agri-fuel that otherwise could serve as food raises the fuel-versus-food dilemma. This clearly demonstrates that sustainable transport policies are more than a question of fuel types and propulsion technologies.

Electro-mobility is sometimes presented as the key to sustainable transport. The limitation of electric cars in terms of range, transport capacity and re-charging creates the risk of putting even more cars onto our streets as well-intentioned citizens buy electric cars for their short journeys and maintain fossil-fuel burning cars for longer journeys. Electric cars are also still more expensive – increasing the cost of car-borne mobility.

Electric or bio-fuel powered vehicles require the same road space as conventional cars and do nothing to address the costly problems of urban traffic congestion and space consumption in the urban environment.



Carbon costs

There are enormous costs related to climate change, but there is no functioning global mechanism in place to internalise the external costs of emitting greenhouse gases. The price for carbon-based energy does not reflect the external costs. It is important to raise awareness of all of the external costs of (road) transport – from noise to local and global pollution.

We know that economic instruments have a strong impact on consumer’s choice and behaviour. Such instruments could be used to encourage changes in transport habits.

Together and affordable: collective transport, shared modes, walking and cycling

Walking is the most underestimated mode of transport. Although it often accounts for around 20% of all urban journeys, it is frequently not even mentioned in transportation surveys. Walking and cycling also serve to supplement collective transport as part of inter-modal journeys, and are key components of low-carbon mobility.

Taking the social dimension into account, it is important to also consider the affordability of transport. With increasing prices for energy in general and oil in particular, motorised transport and car-ownership could become a luxury available only to the privileged few.

New mobility culture: use it – don't own it

Unfortunately, today's culture sees cars as more than simply a mode of transport but rather as a symbol of status in society. But while cars are a very useful tool in some circumstances, in others they are neither optimal nor sustainable.

Sharing is an important tool in sustainable transport strategies. Bike sharing, taxi sharing and car sharing are all good options for efficient use of transport vehicles that allow convenient and cost-efficient journeys from A to B.

Within the CARE-North project, the City of Bremen offers an impressive example of this new mobility culture. The (as of June 2012) 7500+ users of the local Car-Sharing system have removed more than 1,500 private cars from the streets of Bremen – an opportunity to reclaim valuable street space for better purposes than parking.

Encouraging behaviour change to optimise mobility patterns and reduce mobility needs

Communication and dialogue with citizens and stakeholders can facilitate a shift towards a more sustainable attitude to mobility by identifying new visions, needs and innovative ideas.

We can support this change in behaviour by applying the following criteria when considering investments in mobility/accessibility:

1. Design alternatives to travelling. Can the objective be achieved without travelling? (e.g. policies that support working from home, teleconferencing or mixed land-use)
2. Encourage travel by the most sustainable option by using technology to improve existing infrastructure (e.g. electronic indication of exact bus arrival time, handicap access to buses in more routes)
3. Make small but important infrastructure improvements (e.g. more platforms in central bus station)
4. Make new, larger infrastructure investments (e.g. enhance local energy generation to feed public transport network with renewable energy sources)

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