

**FOURTH UNECE REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION MEETING ON
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

GENEVA, 1-2 December 2009

Agenda item 5. Transport

Intervention by the British Council¹

We work with actors around the world on projects related to Climate Change. And from our work, we see that the impacts of climate change are already happening now, not at some far off date in the future. And not only in low lying islands in the Pacific but in the developed world - for example in Western Canada. Here, cold temperatures used to kill off a parasite which attacks the timber crop in the region; due to rising temperatures, the parasite is now surviving the winter and it is estimated that 50% of the timber crop will die in the next 2 years. So Climate Change is happening now with significant economic impacts.

When even World Leaders agree that 80% cuts in Carbon Dioxide are required by 2050, I fear that the proposals and measures discussed today will fall well short of this target. It is not enough to simply give consumers the information required to make the 'right choice'. Government policies and measures need to be credible. I was a little surprised to hear requests for building more motorways and airports today; if you make it quicker, easier and cheaper to take the car or the plane then it can be no surprise that car and plane use will increase. If you provide subsidies to buy new cars, can we be surprised that individuals buy and then use their new cars? The message from politicians to take the train or reduce plane use is hardly credible.

An example. From Geneva to London by train is perfectly possible and much more environmentally friendly than flying. It could be done directly in under 5 hours. But not only do you need to pass via Paris adding an hour on to the journey time but you need to book two separate tickets and probably pay at least twice as much. Is it any wonder people fly? Why can't Governments work with National Train Companies to at least get a booking system able to book the trip in one go?

Finally, I wanted to react to the comment that "we cannot stop economic growth" made by one of the delegates today. Our economic growth has been based on cheap and plentiful energy and this era is coming to an end. To quote Mark Twain in respect this time of oil - "they ain't making it anymore". There are simply not enough resources for decades more of uninterrupted economic growth. Solutions such as biofuels are not practical or desirable on a large scale either. The representative from the Road Transport association talked about second generation biofuels; but a recent report in Nature found that even these emit more Carbon Dioxide than burning oil. So even if you are not convinced of the importance of climate change, we need to move to an economy based on low carbon energy if we want to continue with similar standards of living that we have now.

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¹ The text is presented as received from the author.