

# FOURTH UNECE REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION MEETING ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

*GENEVA, 1-2 December 2009*

## **Agenda item 5. Transport**

Keynote address by the NGO Green Action / Friends of the Earth Croatia<sup>1</sup>



Transport is vital for economic and social life but unfortunately has many **negative effects** on sustainable development like air and noise pollution, urban congestion, greenhouse gas emissions, landscape degradation, traffic accidents and other harmful health effects.

These negative effects can be best observed when looking at **urban transport**. Some UNECE countries have advanced in their work towards a sustainable urban transportation through innovative transport policies that promote non-motorized transport (for example bicycles) and public transport. But majority of cities in UNECE region (especially in Eastern Europe and Central Asia) cope with increasing usage of individual motorised transport and continuing growth in number of cars. Zagreb for example now has more cars per capita than Vienna although average income is several times smaller in Zagreb. Some local governments in UNECE region unfortunately invest in infrastructure for this increasing number of cars in order to solve traffic congestion and lack of parking places while they should invest in infrastructure for non-motorised and collective transport. Cars are getting cheaper and income is getting higher in the region, so ironically traffic congestion is sometimes the only reason why we don't have even bigger number of cars on our city streets.

In many cities we see that transport and **spatial planning policies** are not well integrated. In many Eastern European cities because of higher land value in the city centre there is a trend to build additional commercial and residential buildings with new public garages in the city centre. This type of spatial planning policy is actually attracting even more cars into city centre which slows down public transport above ground because of increased traffic congestion. Higher land value in city centre is also one of the reasons why pedestrian or car – free zones are even decreasing in centres of some European cities.

In terms of **inter-city** passengers' transport, in big number of UNECE countries road transport is dominant and countries invest rather in motorways than in railways. In terms of inter-city cargo transport there is a good progress in EU countries with an increase of intermodal transport (when container is transported on one route by at least two modes of transportation). Several EU countries have already implemented taxes on trucks in cargo transport in order to encourage companies to maximize trains and ships when possible on the route. Using fewer trucks in cargo transport reduces environmental impact but in Eastern Europe and Central Asia intermodal transport is neglected due to lack of transshipment machinery and poor quality of railway infrastructure.

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<sup>1</sup> The text is presented as received from the author.

Transport sector is the second biggest contributor (after energy sector encompassing electricity and heating) to **climate change**. Almost three quarters of greenhouse gas (GHGs) emissions in transport sector are caused by road transport, mainly cars. Cars on agrofuels, hybrid plug-in cars, electric cars and hydrogen cars are hardly solutions to reduce CO2 emissions. Production of agrofuels (biofuels) can cause more CO2 emissions than combustion of fossil fuels if we calculate indirect land use change (ILUC). Those agrofuels that really save CO2 emissions and fulfil other sustainability criteria can't be solution either because their quantity is insufficient to satisfy even small part of fuel demand. Hybrid plug-in cars and electric cars in order to meet current demand would have to be run on electricity produced from non-renewable sources of energy so in overall they don't decrease CO2 emissions. Hydrogen cars are unlikely to be solution because production of hydrogen fuel remains non-efficient, expensive and dependant on fossil fuels. The only real solution for reducing GHGs emissions in transport sector, besides increasing fuel efficiency, is to use cars less.

**Aviation and shipping** are often forgotten in discussion on sustainable transport but together they account for almost a quarter of fuel use and greenhouse gas emissions from transport, and both modes are growing more quickly than other forms of transport. We need to have these two covered in a global agreement on reducing GHGs emissions and just recently EU environment ministers agreed to put forward a proposal to cut emissions from aviation by 10% and from shipping by 20% over the next 10 years (relative to 2005).

There has been no improvement in the **energy efficiency** of global passenger transport, despite all the technological innovation that has taken place in last 50 years. Firstly, because with growing income and lower cost of car and air travel, we have seen a huge modal shift towards less energy efficient modes of transport. Secondly, much of technological innovation in modes of transport has been used to increase power, speed and comfort, rather than to reduce fuel consumption. And thirdly, with increased vehicle ownership occupancy rates have fallen down.

To give you a better example we have compared **energy consumption** in average Croatian household with energy consumption in Croatian average car usage and concluded that if a household decides to save energy and reduces weekly electricity consumption by 30 %, all this saving is vanished with only one day of average car usage. We have seen many regulations on vehicles' energy efficiency but all this progress is questionable when total number of cars is constantly increasing in the region.

We have seen good progress over the years in terms of **clean vehicles** causing less air pollution with carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons, nitrogen oxides etc. Road vehicles have become significantly cleaner due to improved technology but again the number of cars has increased significantly which means that the level of fine particulates, very harmful for human health, remains very high in many European cities.

Governments have a huge influence on the **transport costs**, through taxation of fuel, vehicles, and the financial treatment of public transport and aviation. Danes have relatively small number of cars comparing with their income because of high car purchase taxes and of course excellent cycling and other alternative transport facilities. Fuel prices affect overall transport demand, mode choice, as well as fuel efficiency of vehicles. Often social arguments play a role in keeping fuel prices low but researches show that its' more effective to implement poverty relief schemes than to subsidise fuel for all consumers. Taxation of unsustainable transport modes can change behaviour and provide money needed for sustainable transport modes.

When we talk about behavioural change, **culture** plays important role. Often individual motorised transport, particularly cars, is seen as a key indicator of progress, and collective alternatives are less fashionable. This is especially the case in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

There is increasing number of good practices in Western Europe and North America to reduce car usage. These range from new urban planning instruments like ABC location policy, infrastructural solutions like high-occupancy vehicle lanes in USA and Canada or financial instruments like congestion charges in London and other European cities. In Eastern Europe there are less good practices in sustainable transport but my organisation (Green Action) is helping UNEP to collect such good practices for a clearing house mechanism and more than 300 cases can be found on <http://esteast.unep.ch/>

Governments have a **key role** to play because they have the tools to correct unsustainable behaviour through regulatory, pricing, planning and education measures. Negative effects of transport will not be solved by market forces because they are all typical external costs that require governmental intervention. Governments of course can not correct citizens' behaviour without partnerships with NGOs and all other major groups in order to raise public awareness and use opportunities such is UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

Thank you for your attention!

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