

A Delicate Balance: Mobility Rights, Needs, Expectations and Costs

SESSION SUMMARY

Wednesday, 25 May 2011

Mobility is sometimes perceived as a right, but defining a basic level of mobility provision is not easy. Transport demand is guided by people's needs and aspirations, which are diverse and depend on other choices, such as where people live and work. The cost of transport to individuals is an important factor, and this often differs from costs to society. Societal demands for broad access to transport services come at costs that must be accounted for. These issues converge in the policy debate on finding the right balance between mobility rights and the costs of providing safe, reliable and sustainable transport systems.

Chair

- José Manuel Viegas, President, Transportes, Inovação e Sistemas, Portugal

Panellists

- John Hanlon, Secretary General, European Low Fares Airline Association
- David Metz, Visiting Professor, University College London, UK
- Manfred Neun, President, European Cyclists' Federation
- Enrique Peñalosa, Director, Institute for Transportation and Development Policy
- Susan Pikrallidas, Secretary General for Automobile Mobility and Tourism, Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile
- Jan Scherp, Principal Administrator, European Commission

Adequate levels of mobility need to be sustained

Mobility is vital for the quality of life of citizens. Innovations, both technological and organisational, have enabled people to travel faster and greater distances. With rising incomes and growing population expectations for mobility continue to grow although there are some signs of change. Emerging data shows a plateauing of car travel in some developed economies sometimes taken to indicate the level of car mobility is enough to meet peoples' needs and expectations. There are reasons to expect a continued decline in the extent to which higher incomes mean more travel. However, given the heterogeneity in transport demand, determining adequate levels of mobility and sustaining them in the future remains a challenge.

Access to mobility is not equal

Some groups, especially the elderly and the disabled, find access to mobility difficult and protecting their mobility rights becomes more difficult. The disabled citizens may need parking closer to destination. Elderly may need to give up driving but not know how to use public transport. As a consequence, their mobility is reduced.

There are solutions to help ageing populations maintain their mobility. Better use of vehicle technology and training of elderly to use public transport can help. Infrastructure design should also take into account access issues. For example, green light extensions that are already in use for buses could be also used for pedestrians at crossings, making public transport accessible to all often resulting in higher quality services that better meet all passengers' needs. Legislation can also be used to implement minimum service levels for accessibility.

Distributing space fairly

Today, a large share of public space in cities is used for driving and parking cars. Transport networks are among the most valuable assets in cities. The question becomes how to allocate space between motorised and non-motorised transport. Urban design plays a major role and focusing on liveability and active mobility may change the layout of our cities. Increasing city density may also reduce the need for more travel and improve accessibility.

In developing countries, many households still do not own cars. Equitable transport policies therefore will focus more on cycling and pedestrians than is typical today.

Developing indicators for access and quality of travel

How to allocate funds between non-motorised and motorised modes? The traditional assessment methodology, cost-benefit analysis, measures benefits through travel time savings and highlights efficiency gains. There may be a need to include a focus on accessibility gains.

This does not imply abandoning cost-benefit analysis. Some countries have already developed indicators for accessibility that can be incorporated in cost benefit analysis. Developing good indicators for access and quality of travel will be an important tool for putting equity at the heart of decision making.