Overview of the ECMT/OECD Project on Sustainable Urban Travel and Sustainable Development

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INTRODUCTION

This workshop is part of a continuing effort to foster sustainable urban travel policies under the aegis of the European Conference of Ministers of Transport. The U.S. Department of Transportation has been an active participant in these activities.

The original study, Urban Travel and Sustainable Development published in early 1995, recommended a three-strand approach to achieving sustainable transport using operational, policy and pricing measures. This report was well received and there was much enthusiasm about making progress in sustainability.

However, during a retrospective held several years later, most countries that participated in the original study indicated that they had found difficulty in implementing the sustainability measures that were recommended in the report. This concern lead to the second phase of the work – to identify the obstacles to implementing sustainable urban travel policies and approaches to overcome these obstacles. This second phase resulted in the report - Implementing Sustainable Urban Travel Policies, as well as an Executive Summary for decision makers entitled Key Messages for Governments.

This workshop is the opening of the third phase of this project – to address specific regional aspects and approaches to implementing sustainable urban travel policies. What approaches are being used in the United States to implement sustainable urban travel policies? And, how do these approaches compare to the approaches used in other countries?

Phase 1 - Original Project

The original Project on Urban Travel and Sustainable Development was an ambitious undertaking carried out over a three years period by 18 participating countries. It focused on the concern about growing vehicular traffic in urban areas in member countries and the resultant impact on spreading development patterns, rising air pollution and noise, higher energy consumption, and reduced safety. The final report weaved together material from many sources including:

- National overviews of trends and policies from 18 participating countries;
- Twelve urban area case studies;
- Questionnaires on urban travel and development trends and policies completed by 132 urban area;
- Two specialty conferences: one on pricing of urban travel and a second on integrated transportation and land use strategies to limit vehicular traffic; and,
- Issue papers on various aspects of the problem.

The original report documented the growth of vehicle traffic in urban areas and the resulting loss of sustainability in terms of greater congestion, higher air pollution levels, increased noise, more energy consumption, decreased safety, and development patterns characterized by lower densities, dispersed travel patterns, and reduced use of alternative means of transportation. These environmental and social impacts also reduced the gross domestic product in the affected countries.

Based on the urban area surveys and case studies, the report enumerated the various actions and policies that had been taken to address growing vehicular usage. Measures to increase the supply of transportation had been used most frequently. Expansion and building new highway capacity and public transit services had been implemented on a wide scale. However, highway capacity was quickly overtaken by more
traffic. New public transit service had not prevented the growth of vehicular traffic. Expansion of high-occupancy vehicle use and ridesharing had some limited success.

Traffic management and car restraint measures also helped to address traffic growth. Some measures such as parking restraints, pricing, and cashing-out of parking subsidies, which had been tried in California, also had limited success. Traffic calming to reduce speed and casualties was used successfully in a number of European cities.

Land use planning measures had been used successfully in a number of cities such as Stockholm, Vienna, Toronto, and Portland, Oregon. They could be used more extensively to create development patterns that are less dependent on automobiles and to create more livable communities. In fact, there is little hope of reducing congestion and making more sustainable communities unless there is better integration of land development patterns and transportation.

Much of the progress that has been made in recent years in reducing air pollution, improving energy consumption, decreasing injuries and deaths and reducing noise has been due to technological improvements in the vehicles. Although, we can expect that some additional progress can be made on the technological front in the coming years, it is unlikely to be enough to offset the growth in traffic and the resulting environmental damage.

Looking to the future, an overall doubling of car and truck traffic was forecasted in the report for many member countries in the coming 30 to 40 years. In most countries, vehicle traffic had been increasing faster than public transit patronage. The growth in traffic had been and would continue to be in the suburban and rural areas which would be more difficult to serve with non car alternatives.

The report concluded that the result would be further deterioration in the environment. Air pollution levels which had begun to decline would rise as vehicle travel increases offset the gain in cleaner vehicles. This would also be true for energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions, a major greenhouse gas. Road casualties would likely continue to fall as a result of behavioral changes from anti drinking and driving campaigns. Decentralization of population and employment would continue at a slower rate. Central cities would be challenged to maintain their vitality by attracting financial institutions, specialty shopping, service activities, cultural and entertainment facilities and higher education institutions.

The report concluded that member nations would need to act within their own countries and in concert internationally to address this growing threat to sustainability in urban areas. The report recommended an approach having three strands. The three strands were designed to apply ever more aggressive strategies to attack these problems.

**Strand #1: Best Practices** - Strand Number 1 was designed to apply the best of current practice as identified in the report in the areas of traffic management, and land use planning, and transportation and land use policies. The strategies would slow the growth in traffic and arrest the deterioration in the environment.

**Strand #2: Policy Innovations** - Strand Number 2 would apply recent innovations in land use and transportation planning and policy in an integrated and concerted manner. Some of the actions would build upon those in Strand Number 1 but would be done so that they were not isolated actions but applied in a manner that reinforced each other. Land development would be planned so that higher density activities occur near public transit service. Living environments would be better integrated with employment and shopping in a manner that would encourage non-vehicular trips by walking and bicycle. Congestion pricing and telecommunications would be used so that traffic growth was slowed but alternatives would be
provided to handle the need for interaction. With these strategies, further progress could be made in slowing traffic growth and in abating environmental damage.

**Strand #3: Sustainable Development** - However, even the actions in Strand Number 2 would not be enough to achieve the reduction in traffic and environmental damage needed to achieve sustainability, especially the needed reduction in atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide. To achieve such reductions would require a further reduction in vehicle kilometers of travel.

The report concludes that a 7 percent real increase in fuel prices over the next 20 years would be required to achieve this reduction. This action in Strand #3, in conjunction with the strategies in Strands #1 and #2 would produce a reduction in vehicle kilometers of about 85 percent of current levels and about a 55 percent in fuel consumption by 2015. The reduction would come from shorter trip lengths, diversions to transit, walking and cycling, lower vehicle ownership, shifts to smaller, more fuel efficient vehicles, and improved engine designs.

However, since the publication of the report, our understanding of pricing has increased. It has become clear that other approaches to pricing, other than fuel tax increases, could be effective in reducing the growth in vehicle travel.

Overall, this report drew together the strands from many aspects of the sustainable travel issue and formulated an integrated strategy to address the problems. The report was well received and was adopted by the Council of Ministers of Transport.

**Progress Review**

Five years after publication of the original report, a two-day meeting was held in November 1997 to review the progress in implementing the recommendations from the original report, and determine if further work was needed to advance sustainable urban travel strategies.

Information from the participants was not encouraging. Implementation of policies and strategies to slow the growth in motor vehicle travel had proven to be much harder than anticipated. The result was that there had been little impact on slowing this growth. Reports of forecasted growth of motor vehicle travel for the next 20-30 years in the 50 percent range were common.

A new approach to limiting the growth in motor vehicle travel emerged from the discussions:

1. There must be a vision of the city for which the plan is being developed. This vision needed to cover not only the transportation components but the overall life style that is sought.
2. There must be a high level commitment to achieving that vision. Half hearted efforts would not be successful.
3. There needs to be a package of reinforcing policies and strategies; individual strategies would have limited success, at best.
4. There must be coordinated policies and implementation strategies at both the national and local levels and across local jurisdictions. Spotty compliance would have little success.
5. There needs to be a major public involvement process to explain the vision and the package of policies and strategies. This effort needs to be directed at both governmental officials and the general public. The vision needs to be explained in terms the users can relate to. What is the problem? What needs to be changed? How would it be changed? And, how would the changes effect life in the city?

6. There needs to be monitoring and evaluation of the package of strategies using a broad set of measures covering impacts on the environment, economic competitiveness, and equity among various population groups and geographic areas. There needs to be feedback to modify the objectives and strategies as necessary.

The Working Group agreed that the growth in urban motor vehicle travel and its impacts on urban areas required further evaluation particularly with regard to the difficulty in implementing control strategies.

**Phase Two - Implementing Sustainable Development Strategies**

Based on the Progress Review, the second phase of the work began with a three-year study that focused on the key issues in implementing sustainable travel strategies. In this phase, there was a survey of policies in 160 cities worldwide, a number of national policy reviews, and a series of workshops covering a broad spectrum of topics bearing on the issue of sustainable travel:

- Implementing Strategies to Improve Public Transport for Sustainable Urban Travel.
- Managing Car Use for Sustainable Urban Travel.
- Evaluation Methodologies for Infrastructure Investments and Urban Sprawl.
- Overcoming Institutional Barriers to Implementing Sustainable Urban Travel Policies

This study identified the key barriers to the implementation of integrated sustainable urban travel policies and strategies. First, there was poor policy integration and co-ordination. Strategies were implemented piecemeal with little coordination among strategies so that they would reinforce each other. Second, there were inefficient or counterproductive institutional roles and procedures, including inadequate or lack of co-ordination. Different jurisdiction between levels of government as well as within the same levels of government did not work together nor integrate their policies and strategies.

Third, there was incomplete or excessive decentralisation of responsibilities for urban travel resulting in uncoordinated approaches to sustainability. Fourth, there was an unsupportive legal or regulatory framework. Policies contained in legislation and regulations did not support the integrated sustainability strategies. Fifth, there were weaknesses in the pricing/fiscal framework. Decisions in these areas were often made with little regard to their affects on overall sustainability policies. Finally, poor data quality and quantity made it difficult to determine the nature and extent of the problems and progress in the implementation of sustainability strategies.

The result of this study was a number of recommendations to assist national governments in improving the success of implementing sustainable urban travel policies. First and foremost, national governments need to develop a national policy framework for sustainable urban travel. The framework should be “internally coherent,” incorporating all elements of the transportation system as well as land development, environmental and finance issues. These various elements need to reinforce each other in a consistent manner.
Second, is to coordinate national policy approaches on urban land-use, travel, health and the environment. These policies need to be coordinated horizontally across various functional areas and vertically between national, state and local levels of government. They need to encompass all modes of passenger and freight travel, both motorized and nonmotorized.

To achieve this level of coordination requires effective public participation, partnerships and communication. A sustainable urban travel strategy requires action by both the public and private sectors as well as the general public. All these parties need to be involved early in the process when the goals and strategy design is being developed and consistently throughout the development and implementation of the strategy.

A supportive legal and regulatory framework needs to be provided to assure that all of the actions in the sustainable strategy can be implemented. In addition, all of the parties that are involved in taking actions, both public and private, need to understand their roles in the overall strategy and understand the laws and regulations governing the strategy.

National governments need to ensure that there is a comprehensive pricing and fiscal structure. This structure needs to reinforce the other actions with fees and taxes that discourage sprawl development and promote more efficient means of transportation.

National governments need to rationalize financing and investment streams. They need to assure that investment decisions are made based on an assessment of economic, environmental, and social impacts of the various alternatives. These evaluations need to give priority to improving existing infrastructure over new construction and to give full consideration to travel demand measures. Revenues from pricing initiatives need to be distributed in a manner that reinforces other sustainability measures.

Further work needs to be carried out to improve data collection and monitoring of the planning and implementation of sustainability measures. Good data is key to sound policy making. In addition, more research is needed on potential solutions to promote sustainable urban travel and to exchange experience at the national, state and local levels of government.

**Phase 3 – Regional Approaches to Implementing Sustainable Urban Travel Policies**

The results of the second phase of this project led to a general set of recommendations for successfully implementing sustainable urban travel policies. At that time, it was recognized that these recommendations would need to be adapted to specific regions of the world with different governmental and policy structures. A first step to accomplish this objective is to hold a series of workshops in specific groups of countries to carry forward the recommendations, examining how they would apply or not apply to specific regional/national/local circumstances. The purpose of these workshops is to:

- Promote and disseminate the conclusions and recommendations of the work on implementation contained in the report *Key Messages for Governments*;
- Evaluate how the implementation findings are relevant and applicable in different “macro-regions,” government systems and structures when confronted with different urban travel situations and needs.
In addition to these workshops, the project will:

- Conduct a series of studies on specific urban travel policy topics that will further the understanding of policy and institutional barriers to implementation.
- Explore ways to improve consistency in urban data collection and monitoring;
- Develop a Guide to Good Practice for national governments on implementing sustainable urban travel policies.

This workshop in the United States is the beginning of this third phase of the work. The workshop will focus on how countries – in particular the United States with its federal system of government – are bridging the gap between the identification and implementation of effective sustainable urban travel options.

I would ask you to focus on the following questions over the next three days:

- First, what approaches are governments employing to foster successful implementation of sustainable urban travel policies? What approaches are most relevant in a federal government context? What approaches are most relevant in a central government context?
- Second, how are countries coordinating national policy approaches among all levels of government and among the transportation, land use, environment and health sectors?
- Third, what are successful ways to encourage effective public participation, partnerships and communication?
- Fourth, how are countries establishing supportive legal and regulatory frameworks and ensuring a comprehensive pricing and fiscal structure to support a sustainable transportation system.

REFERENCES


