Sustainable Urban Travel Steering Group

DRAFT CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SEMINAR ON PROBLEMS IN COLLECTING AND MONITORING URBAN TRAVEL DATA HELD ON 27 JUNE 2002 AND FOLLOW UP

Delegates are asked to provide their comments to these draft conclusions and recommendations as well as to possible follow-up activities for ECMT.
1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

As part of its three-year project on Implementing Sustainable Urban Transport Policies (1998-2001), the ECMT conducted a Survey of Travel in Cities, which collected information on travel behaviour, trends and policies in 168 cities.

Among the findings of the survey was confirmation of the well-known problems associated with the collection and monitoring of urban data. Indeed, as the final report of the project points out, urban travel and land use data remain sparse, inconsistent and often of overall poor quality. Data are not collected in a consistent way among cities, regions and at the national level, and collection methods are often subject to modification within a given city.

High quality, statistically relevant, timely and useful data are essential to decision-making regarding integrated, sustainable urban travel policies and their implementation. As it stands now, available urban travel data are by and large unable to provide this necessary grounding for sound policy development and effective implementation.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE SEMINAR

As a follow-up to its Survey of Travel in Cities, Ministers of Transport in 2001 asked that ECMT explore ways to improve consistency in urban data collection and monitoring. In response to this mandate, the ECMT organised an expert seminar on 27 June 2002 to examine problems related to the coherence and quality of urban travel, land use and environmental data (please see programme in annex).

The one-day seminar was designed as an initial exchange of experience among a small group of experts representing different levels of government, the private sector, and international organisations working with data collection and monitoring at an urban level. Discussions were to focus on the problems in coherence, availability, consistency and overall quality of data related to urban travel and the difficulties due to these weaknesses in their use.

The principal goal was to obtain guidance on how ECMT, in co-ordination with other international and national bodies, can contribute to the development of better approaches and methods for collecting and monitoring urban travel data.

The following sections highlight the key reflections that emerged from the expert debate, which culminated in proposals for how ECMT could carry forward work in this area.
3. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS OF THE EXPERT GROUP

- Data are tools for decision-making, not ends in themselves. Data collection and monitoring should be guided by and remain relevant to the policy process.
- Surveys are often conducted by entities interested in the data themselves, and not their use. Poor use of data is a key problem, so efforts to improve urban data should not focus exclusively on data collection, but also on their use.
- The way in which data are collected is an important factor, however. Information regarding the methodology used in the data collection exercise (meta-data) can be very helpful in identifying and addressing weaknesses within the data set.
- Presentation of the data is essential to maintain clarity and transparency.
- It is helpful to have a clear driver for the data collection/survey exercise, e.g., the monitoring process for a policy or strategy. This will provide a conceptual framework and focus for the exercise.
- Greater emphasis in surveys needs to be placed on what can be learned from the data – not just on accounting aspects. In this way, output/result indicators are essential. These indicators remain underused at this time.
- Respondents to surveys need to better understand the benefits they can gain from participation in the survey.
- Duplication in survey exercises should be avoided; using official statistical channels can be helpful here.

4. KEY URBAN DATA PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED BY THE EXPERTS

- Lack of harmonisation of definitions (particularly problematic are geographical regions); this can have a significant impact on results. There was some debate on this question. For instance, some countries already have harmonised data rules within the country. Without use of sound definitions, harmonisation is not entirely helpful.
- Incomplete data sets
- Inadequate scope and questionable relevance of data in a survey exercise
- Lack of data continuity due to insufficient time series data
- Lack of transparency and inaccuracy of information

5. ROLE OF THE NATIONAL LEVEL

- There is a considerable amount of urban data collection going on at a national level, though it is not always based on a co-ordinated approach among cities.
- Greater co-ordination of urban data collection at a national level would seem helpful, especially in terms of developing a common set of definitions, a common methodology and common monitoring practices.
  - However, where a national framework does not yet exist, national government may have some difficulty in promoting/imposing a singular set of definitions and a common methodology. Good co-operation and co-ordination with urban areas is necessary

6. WHAT CAN ECMT DO?

- Facilitate exchange of experience, apply a filter to this experience and frame it for international relevance.
Help address how national governments can define urban data needs based on policy questions.

Harmonise recommendations on urban data collection and monitoring handed down to countries from different international organisations.

Define a plan of action for improvement of data collection and monitoring, including developing guidelines on, among others:
- What data should be collected
- Identifying the right indicators
- Better monitoring: more observations over time

Identify the methodological differences among cities and their impact on survey results.

Develop a framework for meta-data (and especially methodological biases) and establish guidelines for their use.

Examine empirical methods for data collection that might produce harmonised data in different contexts.

Undertake work on the definitions themselves, focusing on e.g., geographic limits, subsidies for transport, congestion.

Undertake another survey exercise with a limited number of participants and a limited number of indicators to monitor implementation.

Find ways to generate political support for better understanding of the difficulties in urban data collection and monitoring.

Delegates of the Steering Group are asked to:
- Provide their comments and suggestions to these draft seminar conclusions;
- Reflect on the recommendations for ECMT and provide guidance on how this work could be taken forward.
ANNEX

SEMINAR PROGRAMME

10:00  Opening Remarks and Presentation of Objectives
       Jack Short, Secretary General of ECMT
       Werner Brög, Socialdata

10:30  Presentation of the Results of the ECMT Survey of Travel in Cities
       (1999-2000)
       Principal findings of survey
       Maxime Jean/Maurice Abeille, CERTU

       Data problems revealed
       Mary Crass, ECMT

10:50-11:00 Discussion

11:00-11:10 Urban travel data collection and monitoring at Eurostat: Objectives and constraints of the EU Urban Audit
       Torbjorn Carlquist, Eurostat

11:10-11:20 Discussion

11:20-11:40 Pause for coffee or tea

11:40-12:10 Tracking environmental data and indicators at the urban level
       Roel M. van Aalst, European Environment Agency

       Maria Berrini, Ambiente Italia and European Common Indicators project, European Sustainable Cities

       Myriam Linster, OECD Environment Directorate

12:10-12:20 Discussion

12:20-12:40 Collecting and monitoring urban land use data: challenges and perspectives
       Nadine Cattan, CNRS-France, European Spatial Planning Observatory Network (ESPON)

       Vincenzo Spiezia, OECD Territorial Development Service

12:40-13:00 Discussion

13:00-14:30 Lunch

14:30-14:40 Urban public transport data collection and monitoring: The Comet and Nova experiences
       Daniel Graham, Imperial College, London
14:40-14:50  **Urban data difficulties encountered in the U.K. Integrated Transport Study**  
*Jacqui Dunning, WS Atkins International Ltd., UK*

14:50-15:00  Discussion

15:00-15:10  **Co-ordinating urban data monitoring at the national level: How it works in the Netherlands**  
*Han van der Loop, AVV Transport Research Centre, Rotterdam*

15:10-15:20  Discussion

15:20-15:30  **Collecting and monitoring urban travel data in the Paris region**  
*Alain Meyère, Syndicat des Transports d’Ile de France (STIF) (TBC)*

15:30-16:00  Discussion on perspectives and constraints revealed in the debate

16:00-16:20  Pause for coffee or tea

16:20-17:00  **Summary of the Chairman and decisions regarding follow-up**

17:00  Close of meeting