

THE KEY ISSUE OF MOBILITY

Speech by Federal President Horst Köhler at the International Transport Forum in Leipzig on 27 May 2010

A few weeks ago half the world was looking spellbound towards Iceland. Everyone was talking about the ash cloud from the volcano with the unpronounceable name. It couldn't be seen or smelt in Europe, but its effects could be felt almost everywhere because it paralysed air traffic. Holidaymakers were stranded far from home, business travellers were grounded, fruit and vegetables rotted on the tarmac and many factories ran short of parts, first stopping deliveries, then halting production.

Our highly mobile society experienced what happens when just one form of transport fails because nature imposes limits on us. Was it a foretaste of what climate change and oil shortages hold in store for us? Fortunately not, because climate change and the depletion of oil reserves do not happen as suddenly as a volcanic eruption. We can prepare for them - and in my view better sooner than later. But it is a huge challenge all the same.

There are now nearly seven billion people on the planet. In 40 years' time, in 2050, that figure will probably have risen to well over nine billion. Many things separate these billions of people: seas and mountain ranges, national frontiers and language barriers. But many things also connect them, including the need for mobility and the wish to be part of the global economy. That is why transport is of vital significance to quality of life and cooperation between nations and why the worldwide movement of people and goods has increased by leaps and bounds over the last twenty or thirty years.

And that is just the beginning. Experts reckon that the number of motor vehicles could double between 2002 and 2030. Air transport in Asia and South America, which has hitherto accounted for only a small portion of the current volume, will expand rapidly. For almost all forms of transport, if you extrapolate transport levels in western industrial nations to other continents, the thought of so much movement can make you dizzy. But if that growth is accompanied by a corresponding increase in pollution and depletion of resources, the prospect becomes not so much dizzying as frightening. Already, 13 to 14% of global greenhouse gas emissions are caused by travel and transport and many estimates put the figure much higher. We cannot and must not simply let the situation continue. This much is clear: the world does not just need more mobility. For the sake of our ecosphere, and for our own sakes, it needs better mobility.

I know, ladies and gentlemen, that you are aware of that. That is why you are working to make the worldwide travel and transport sector more efficient and more environment friendly. You are engaged in a race against the expansion of transport demand and the impacts that are already piling up at existing levels of mobility. Your success is important for everyone. It depends on many factors: astute political decisions, technological progress and the awareness that all those involved have a responsibility. The International Transport Forum can bring all those factors together. That is why it is a key place for dialogue about sustainable mobility and why I was very pleased to accept the invitation extended to me by Mr. Ramsauer, the Federal Transport Minister.

I am delighted that so many high calibre experts and decision makers from so many countries have gathered here in Leipzig to discuss mobility issues for the 21st century. I bid you a very warm welcome to Germany, a country that has had a long love affair with mobility, from the flight pioneer Otto Lilienthal and the automobile engineer Gottlieb Daimler to the airship builder Ferdinand Graf von Zeppelin.

These three and many others like them, both here and in other countries, have brought us undreamt of possibilities - and problems too, as we now know. It was brought home to me again last week when visiting Expo 2010. Shanghai, a global city, offers ample food for thought on the subject, with its giant port facilities and bridges, its rapidly expanding subway network, its dense web of motorways - and its traffic jams and clouds of smog. Expo 2010 showed in a very striking way how eagerly the People's Republic of China and many other countries are working for better mobility - and that also means more environment friendly mobility. Clean engine technologies were a constant theme, but other examples also showed that a great deal can be achieved if we are willing to call old habits into question. The city of Bremen, for example, presented its car sharing model and calculated that the residents of Shanghai could save themselves 180,000 cars if the level of participation in car sharing schemes was the same as in Bremen. What a contribution to cleverer mobility!

In Germany, we are planning to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2020. The European Union wants to see them reduced by up to 30%. Other parts of the world will not be able to avoid similar reductions, out of pure self interest. What can the transport sector, despite its foreseeable growth rates, contribute to the global effort that lies before us and how will it organise that contribution?

I would like to share a few thoughts on the subject with you. If I have understood aright, the International Transport Forum 2010 is seeking the answer above all in technological innovation. And of course that offers many opportunities. But anyone who thinks that innovation just means greener cars is being short sighted. So let us also develop ideas about how to avoid unnecessary travel and transport from the outset and how we can plan our towns and cities better. Let us think about what in our mobile lifestyle gives us pleasure and what merely costs us time and stress, what is worth keeping and what is not. And yes, let us also think about how we want to lead our lives, what contribution good mobility concepts make to that and how we can make them attractive to everyone.

That immediately raises the question of what we value and what it costs. I would like to give you an example. In recent weeks, buses in Berlin have carried an advertisement for an airline with the slogan "Norway is getting nearer". A flight to Oslo is offered for 29 euros. But Norway has not really got nearer. Oslo is still about 1,000 kilometres from Berlin. How much value do Berliners place on the possibility of travelling to Oslo for the price of a tie? And what does the journey cost in terms of the resources consumed and the environmental impact, without that cost being reflected in the price of the flight?

Anyone who moves people or goods around has to pay for fuel, staff, carriers, fees and tolls. But they pay little or nothing for atmospheric pollution, noise pollution, health costs and damage to the environment and the climate. That is the only reason why, to give another example, it is cheaper to take crabs from the North Sea, send them to Morocco for shelling and then bring them back to Germany to sell them. Is all that coming and going valuable? I don't think so - it is merely cheap, because the price is not right, or at least not complete. I am convinced that consumers are willing to pay a little more for a less well travelled crab if the environmental damage is obvious, if they know what the real cost is to society and the state. Because those things are also very valuable to most people, but all too often, unfortunately, they still have no price.

Cost transparency would lead to more environment friendly solutions. It would also make inland waterway and rail transport more attractive. That would improve the rail network. And cost transparency can be achieved, or compelled if necessary, through political decisions. I see a role for the European Union in that. It is trying to establish trans-European networks. It should also concern itself with the fairness of the competition between the different transport modes. Otherwise, existing distortions of competitions are merely carried over into the infrastructure.

An important first step towards cost transparency is being made in air transport. Next year it will be included in the emissions trading system. But shouldn't we be going further than that? In contrast to the electricity tax that the railways have to pay, kerosene is exempt from the energy tax, as is ships fuel. Would it not be fair, from the standpoint of the equal treatment of transport modes, to end the energy tax exemption for kerosene and ships fuel? Preferably as internationally as possible. I know that means difficult negotiations. But we should get down to it, and there are representatives from all over sitting here who would like to work together.

Cost transparency requires intelligent logistics that can optimally combine different transport modes. And cost transparency requires the spread of innovations like extra light containers for air freight, which save kerosene, and hybrid drives for trucks and carbon neutral container terminals and traffic guidance systems to avoid traffic jams.

Such competition fuelled by cost transparency is not comfortable. But it offers great opportunities, not least for us Europeans and for Germany. We are very proud of our environmental technologies and can already point to a few marvellous successes. That should give us confidence.

Cost transparency can also achieve something else: we would make more of an effort to avoid many journeys altogether. If we do not do that to a significant extent - as some speakers at the World Transport Forum 2008 emphasised - we will not be able to prevent rising levels of greenhouse gas emissions from the travel and transport sector. Less transport demand does not necessarily mean that we have to make economic trade-offs. For example, the creation of industrial clusters has a very beneficial effect on the transport balance because they mean shorter journeys. At the same time such clusters encourage creativity and better cooperation between firms and that in turn creates more prosperity. We Germans have seen it happen in many regions, including here around Leipzig.

The rediscovery of regional economic circuits can also help to reduce transport. We have to ask ourselves whether in many spheres the international division of labour has not gone too far. From an environmental standpoint, I consider it to be a matter of plain poor logistics if milk and simple dairy products in Germany and Europe are transported back and forth between places of production. I find it questionable that we should transport pigs from Germany to other European countries and much further afield, only to bring them back to Germany a few months later as bacon. I believe that agriculture is one area among many where thought needs to be given to the question of how produce or livestock can be grown and sold in the same region, thus reducing long transport chains. It cuts out unnecessary transport, it is better - staying with my example - for the welfare of the animals, our fellow creatures, it promotes food security, it maintains jobs in agriculture and it preserves the landscapes defined by farming that are part of our culture.

It is important to stop thinking in purely sectoral terms, with regard to individual transport modes, economic sectors, countries and even continents. Everything must connect with everything else. We have long grown together on a global scale. Now we need the corresponding international mobility policy and mobility strategy.

The theme of Expo 2010 is "Better City, Better Life". I find that a good slogan. According to UN estimates, by 2050 seven out of ten of the world's population, or about six and a half billion people, will be living in cities.

City life can be a blessing or a curse, depending on how we organise it. The problems are obvious: the air is polluted, noise bothers people, often even into the night, huge mountains of rubbish are created. And there are daily traffic jams that can bring city life to a standstill, wasting time and resources. That is already how things are in some mega cities.

But city life can also take on a quite different aspect. Cities are an opportunity. They can stimulate innovation and technological progress. Many things can be organised more efficiently

because people live in close proximity to one another, helping to preserve the environment. Can there be a more interesting challenge for logistic firms than to take part in that transformation? Those who have clever ideas about how the supply and mobility of millions of people packed together in a relatively small space can be organised, those who show what a lifestyle consistent with human and environmental needs can look like will not only play a pioneering role, they will also get more and better work and financial rewards.

In the German pavilion at the Expo, this vision is called "balancity". It refers to the balance between innovation and tradition, between the community and the individual, between the urban and the natural environment, between work and leisure, between globalisation and regional identity.

If we want to have such cities, the planning and the changes must start now. Investments that we make today will take a couple of years to become fully effective but will then last for decades. There are plenty of ideas, even if some of them still seem rather futuristic, like those of the scientist Michael Braungart. In his conception of a model settlement the houses are made of materials that purify the air and produce clean water. That is already technologically possible today. The roofs are planted with meadows and fields that contain many species of flora and fauna. J.H. Crawford describes underground supply systems that can transport both goods and people quickly and reliably. There are more such Utopias around. I believe we should pay attention to them, sooner rather than later.

Less Utopian and to some extent already put into practice is the short-distance city. The city is planned in such a way that housing, shops, schools, crèches and work are located close to each other. Much can be done on foot. And here another German pioneer of mobility comes into his own, Karl von Drais, who invented the bicycle - and also a man powered carriage that worked without horses and proved particularly valuable when another volcanic eruption left our country without a summer, and hence without oats!

But even in a short-distance city mobility needs support, above all through good public transport. That is something we have not yet achieved in many cities, and another challenge for the logistics industry.

Public transport does not just mean bus and rail. It has many facets. I recently heard about the idea of a company that wants to buy up empty taxi time. Apparently there is an awful lot of it. Customers buy flat rate mobility. For the price of a normal monthly transport card, or so the current business model promises, they get unlimited taxi travel within a city. There are only a few conditions: for example, they have to accept other passengers in the taxi - that requires communication! - and hence limited detours. The first trial is due to take place in southern Germany in a few months' time.

Another promising project is already being tried out in Ulm. A carmaker has distributed 200 small cars around the city. Customers get an electronic key on their driving licence. All they have to do is hold it to the car door and they can get in and drive away. When they no longer need the car, they just park it. They are billed to the nearest minute.

There is no doubt that the demand is there, because creative thinking has already begun among citizens. They are thinking along the same lines, looking for solutions, something is moving. Especially among young city dwellers. I have met young people - though not yet the majority, I must say - who no longer want to get their driving licence and who regard big cars and off-road vehicles not as a status symbol but as old hat.

And many people who share similar thoughts are jointly looking for solutions, like in the Transition Towns initiative. From London to Sydney, from Austin to Göttingen, people have set up a community that shares the same concern: how can we organise our city so that it preserves resources, protects the environment and is worth living in? The initiative uses the knowledge,

ideas and creativity of everyone looking for progress, for a better way of life. I find it a wonderful combination of civil commitment and global networking. In many towns and cities around the world people are following the same path and finding common interests, fired up by the idea of finding a livable, sustainable model for their community.

When the ash cloud over Europe brought air traffic to a halt, many people also reported positive experiences. Like someone who couldn't fly to a congress so had to give his address by videoconference and was glad to have the extra time to spend in his office or with his family. Or someone who attended a business meeting by conference call and then went jogging. Or someone who was actually relieved that a stressful holiday flight was cancelled and spent the time relaxing nearer home, rediscovering the surrounding area.

If we cannot entirely shed our old ways of seeing and thinking, at least let us question them. Together let us look for new ways towards a mobility that is not just a privilege in the here and now but remains a possibility for everyone, including in the future. A mobility for which politicians provide a sound framework and entrepreneurs offer new solutions with pride and a feeling of responsibility, a mobility that all users help to shape, a mobility that brings people and nations all over the world closer to each other in an environment friendly way.