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PRESS STATEMENT

2015 ITF Summit – 27-29 May 2015 – Leipzig

Transport, Trade and Tourism

Side-event: planning access for coach transport in Europe

Polis and EMTA hosted a side event about cities and coach transport at the International Transport Forum (ITF) Summit. European cities such as Budapest and Amsterdam have developed strategies for coach access and routing in answer to the increasing challenges that coach tourism and travel bring. The International Road Union (IRU) presented the views of coach operators.

Stakeholders involved in urban transport debated the complexities, challenges and opportunities for the fast growing market for international coach transport at a special session during this year's ITF Summit on Transport, Trade and Tourism in Leipzig Germany. One of the major challenges is how to find a fair trade-off between the significant contributions of coach transport yields to the local economy and the effect on local livability.

In general it was agreed that there is much scope for further cooperation to get a better understanding of what are the main goals for cities working with the coach sector and vice versa. Parties would welcome EU wide guidelines to have more harmonised measures on Low Emission Zones and start to exchange best practices.

Moderator Nick Greenfield of ETOA (European Tourism Association) opened by underlining two fundamentals. "Cities and operators need to communicate their plans and ideas to one another and always keep in mind that the end aim is to accommodate the customers' needs as best as possible."

The position of the coach market is very fragmented and thus not always in a position to make a distinct impact on local planners and politicians. Rick Batelaan, advisor of the Amsterdam City Council, stated: "As a strong magnet for coach tourism, Amsterdam welcomes any opportunity to have data to plan ahead for coach services. The city needs to have transparency about the long haul coach market, what is offered and especially how coach operators provide their services to enable control of the large volume of groups and their daytrip programmes. The problem is however, the coach sector is very fragmented."

He continued, "To enforce restrictions like low emission zones, cities need a European databank with license plates of coach vehicles, for instance to assess their EURO-class emission values. If we can't be restrictive for specific coaches, we might end up banning all coaches from city centres."



On Budapest László Sándor Kerényi of BKK pointed to the need to first regulate and then operate. “The different authorities have different competences and that has created confusion on what permitted and what is not. The question is whether it’s needed to bring coaches right into the heart of our cities in front of major attractions and cultural sites. It would be good to distinguish between sightseeing tours and coaches that have a specific destination like going to a hotel or the Heroes Square (Hősök tere).”

Yves Mannaerts of IRU said, “Coach transport is a major benefit for cities. Efficiency of urban space use calls for smart solutions; the challenge is to gain recognition at all political levels. Access restriction schemes will hamper local economic growth, significantly inconvenience customers and possibly force them to use less environmentally sustainable transport such as private cars.”

His colleague Remi Lebeda who handles EU legal and fiscal affairs at the IRU looked in more detail at the potential impact of these schemes. He stated, “While access schemes are driven by legitimate concerns for the city environment, there are cases where it just seems a guaranteed source of income with no concrete benefits in return for the user. The coach industry considers these measures as obstructive to the development of their sector.”

Similar to the prior discussion on solutions developed in the urban freight sector, Polis would welcome a further dialogue for the coach transport sector between parties and recognising its specific needs. “Cities play an important role in this regard as local road operators, managing access, routing, short- and long-stay parking and specific infrastructures such as bus lanes. Accommodation of coaches to these networks needs to be planned and managed – in dialogue,” stated Karen Vancluyssen, the Polis secretary-general.

Ruud van der Ploeg, secretary-general of EMTA said that his members, being metropolitan transport authorities across Europe, gradually are becoming aware that coach transport into city centres can no longer be overlooked, as it adds benefits to the local economy and hence should be part of their sustainable transport strategies.

“Coach users mostly choose a city trip by coach for a specific reason, be it feeling insecure about alternatives, a limited budget, older age or being mobility impaired. Door-to-door connectivity is an important feature of this group’s travel needs. Local transport should be more observant of specific demands of this fast growing visitors category by providing seamless transfer at stations which is reliable and offering easy, affordable and obstacle free access into urban public transport.”

Polis is the leading network of cities and regions for innovation in urban transport.

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The International Transport Forum is an intergovernmental organisation within the OECD system. Its 57 member countries are committed to tackling mobility issues for the 21st century. The ITF convenes once a year in Leipzig at the ITF summit.

www.internationaltransportforum.org