



50th Anniversary of the European Conference of Ministers of Transport

Brussels, 22 April 2003

Position of the association of European Metropolitan Transport Authorities
(EMTA)

The association of European Metropolitan Transport Authorities (EMTA) was created in 1998 so as to form a venue for exchange of information and best practices between the authorities responsible for the public transport systems of the European metropolitan areas. It now brings together 28 such authorities, which are responsible for organising and funding public transport systems serving more than 70 million European citizens.

The association is involved in various activities. Working groups have been set up to deepen the work on the issues of accessibility of public transport systems to people with reduced mobility, of development of electronic ticketing systems, of measurement of passenger satisfaction, and of the new perspectives of funding public transport systems through capture of land added values generated by the presence of public transport. Workshops are held regularly on issues of common interest (last topics have been: missions and organisation of the authorities responsible for public transport, co-ordination between transport and land use policies, and last February, contractual relationships between public authorities and operating companies).

EMTA releases a quarterly letter of information, EMTA News, and a yearly Barometer containing statistical information on the public transport systems of the European metropolitan areas. All these publications can be downloaded from EMTA's website (www.emta.com).

EMTA is very grateful to the European Conference of Ministers of Transport for recognising it as a representative organisation at the European level, and for inviting it to the meetings of its working group on sustainable urban transport and to this special hearing at the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of ECMT.

This paper presents the position of the authorities responsible for the public transport systems of the European largest cities on the future of the mobility in urban areas, on the role of the different levels of public authorities, and lastly on the challenges which public transport authorities will face over the coming years.

1- Towards an urban world

75% of the European population now lives in urban areas, and this rate even reaches 80% in Western Europe¹. Urban areas of more than 250,000 inhabitants account for one fourth of the population of our continent. Surveys of the Division of the population of the United Nations show that the fast urbanisation of Europe (+ 9% between 1980 and 1995) will go on at a pace of + 0.3% per year in average.

This trend can be regarded as a key opportunity. Urban areas are indeed the engines of economic development and of progress in society. Knowledge and the access to information will be the basis of wealth in the 21st century. Circulation of ideas and information is best achieved in cities, which have always been at the forefront of the transmission of knowledge and of technological innovations. The new technologies of information (Internet) haven't really changed that reality. Proximity and exchange are consubstantial with urban life. Cities are places where freedom (the medieval German saying that the air of city makes free is still

¹ Source : Division of the population of the United Nations

true), tolerance, social blending, art creativity and emulation of all kinds can blossom. To put it in a nutshell, cities are places of civilisation.

At the same time, the growth of urban areas can bring damages which public authorities have to cope with so as to provide sustainable urbanisation, and to enable cities to remain what they have always been: places where the quality of life is the best.

The harms are well known:

- damages to the quality of life and public health : extension of distances to the workplace, time spent in transport, road accidents (one third of the 40,000 people who die each year on the roads in the EU are killed in urban areas), breathing difficulties, psychological trouble and sleep disorders linked to noise, etc;
- economic inefficiency: the city focused on cars is sub-optimal in economic terms. Moreover, congestion which faces most cities is a source of economic waste;
- damage to the environment: air pollution, artificialisation of grounds, reduction of biodiversity;
- social segregation and creation of urban ghettos;
- damage of urban landscape with the monopolization of space - a rare and therefore precious resource – for traffic or parking;

Mobility issues lie at the core of these damages, and can be, provided that they are dealt with in an appropriate way, at the core of the solutions.

2- Public transport: at the service of sustainable urbanisation

Public transport played a key role in the extension of urban areas in relation with the industrial revolution of the 19th century. The suburbs of most large cities have grown thanks to the fast extensions of tramways, metropolitan railways and suburban railways after 1830. The setting up of efficient public transport systems turned pedestrian cities, characterised by a high compacity and density, into cities covering wider territories, although this spatial expansion didn't disrupt the urban organisation.

The fast growth in the use of the private car since 1950's has amplified this trend towards more spatial extension, and was regarded by some people as a universal solution to mobility problems. The private car was a symbol of freedom since it provided each one with door to door trips, and it was expected to replace progressively totally public transport.

However, the limits of this approach became progressively obvious and there has been a growing consensus since the 1970's on the necessity to keep high quality public transportation systems. But it is not easy to reverse such heavy trends. Between 1970 and 2000, the modal share of public transport fell by 50% in average in Europe to reach around 16% of the total number of trips, while the share of the private car grew from 73.8 to 78.3 %².

² Source : EU Energy and Transport in figures, Statistical pocketbook 2002

The growth in car trips leads to a vicious circle: the more people own cars, the more they can settle away from city centres. As a result, they become even more dependent on their car, which keeps it very difficult to reverse the trend.

And yet, public transport systems have never been as useful as today, more especially in the case of metropolitan areas:

- public transport provides mobility for all, while the private car, although widespread as it can be, doesn't benefit to all the population. The freedom of movement which it brings depends on the age and the ability to run a car and to have sufficient means. Youngsters, elderly people, deprived persons, people suffering from a handicap, are generally excluded from the mobility provided by the private car ;
- only public transport is capable of carrying fast hundreds of thousands of persons, for example at peak hours;
- public transportation systems provide the best ratio of number of passengers carried on space consumption, and is therefore very well adapted to dense urban areas.

The very bad consequences of public transport disruptions illustrate better than long speeches how public transport are absolutely necessary for the viability of large urban areas.

3- Key success factors for the provision of high quality public transport systems

Public transport systems have a string potential of development over the coming years. To achieve this, they will have to provide an attractive alternative to the use of the private car.

The improvement of public transport will mean :

- an **increase in the provision of services and an adaptation to the new mobility needs**: people will only renounce using their car if they have at their disposal public transport services in sufficient quantity. This means a good service of the territory, large amplitudes of service, and a capacity in line with the demand. Demand responsive transport systems can open promising perspectives for the service of less dense territories and for night services.
- a **strong integration of networks**, so as to provide a seamless trip to passengers. This integration must cover the various transport companies of a given territory, as well as all the different public transport modes available. It must also include other transport means (private car, walking, cycling). Integration must be functional (networks are structured in a logical way), physical (no barrier from one mode to the other), and cover also fares and information.
- an **improvement in the quality of service**. Public transportation must provide a quality of service similar to that of private car, which has benefited largely of the technological progress of the past decades. The improvement of real time information, of regularity of services, of commercial speed, of comfort of waiting conditions and on-board, and of the level of accessibility to people with reduced mobility, are key factors. It is important to measure regularly the level of satisfaction of passengers so as to highlight the priorities for improvement.

- an **attractive fare policy and a dynamic communication**. The social cost of public transport being lower than that of the private car, it should be cheaper for people to use public transport. Fare policy must take into account the financial capacities of people (youngsters, deprived people) and provide solutions to the specific mobility needs (trips with group of people, families). Besides, public transportation shall use communication and marketing tools so as to improve its image among people and thus compete on an equal basis with the private car, which can be seen everywhere in the media.
- a **strong focus on funding issues**. In most European cities, public transportation is not profitable without public subsidies. Fares enabling to attract large numbers of passengers are usually inferior to the break even points of operating companies. It is therefore fundamental that public authorities agree to bring in public money, which can stem from overall public budget, or from dedicated resources. Internalisation of external costs of the private car, charging of road usage by private cars, funding of public transport projects through capture of land value, are promising ways. Public authorities must also see to it that the cost of operation of the networks for which they are responsible are reasonable, and that gains in productivity are chased by operators.
- a **co-ordination with policies of land planning and urban development**, so that the extensions of urban areas are compatible with public transport service. It is important to increase the density of territories well served by public transport systems, and to prevent developments attracting lots of people (business districts, commercial or leisure centres, major airports) from not being served by public transport.

4- The stakes for public transport authorities

Contrary to commercial sectors in which companies are free to define their strategies to meet the needs of customers, the field of public transport cannot be ruled only by market forces and calls for a strong involvement of public authorities. Public transport is indeed what can be defined as a service of general economic interest, that it to say that it meets requirements of the society as a whole, and that no one should be excluded from having access to it. Besides, the fact that this sector is, in most cases, not viable commercially without public money confirms that public authorities cannot ignore it.

The need for a strong involvement of public authorities

Public authorities have a key role to play in:

- the definition of the objectives of the policies of mobility. It is their responsibility to define what shall be the place of private cars in cities, what shall be the quantity and quality of the provision of public transport services, the level of accessibility of the services.
- the size of networks and the choice of transport modes to provide.
- the fare policy.
- the co-ordination of the policy in terms of public transport with regard to the other aspects of mobility issues (car traffic, parking, taxis, alternatives modes such as walking or cycling) and of public policies in general (land use planning, housing, etc.).

On these issues, authorities shall work closely with operating companies, which often have a strong technical expertise and can make interesting proposals, but the decision power shall remain in the hands of public authorities. This means that public authorities shall give themselves the human, technical, and financial means to develop their own expertise so as to be independent from companies.

The current trend that can be witnessed in most European countries leads to more devolution of powers from the central governments to local authorities for the organisation of local and regional public transport systems.

It is important that authorities responsible for organising public transport systems cover pertinent territories corresponding to the reality of the everyday trips of people. When several public authorities are concerned by mobility issues on a given pertinent territory, they should come together in a structure of co-ordination, like British PTAs, German Verkehrsverbund, French Syndicat mixtes and Spanish Consorcio de Transportes. This is a pre-requisite for the definition of an integrated policy of promotion of public transport.

The need for transparent and balanced relationships with transport companies

Contracts can be regarded as an interesting tool to manage relationships between authorities and companies in charge of operations. They enable to define clearly the responsibilities of each side and to determine the amount of public funds that shall be brought by the authority in exchange for the public service obligations imposed on the company. Contracts shall take into account the quality of service provided and contain incentives enabling to reward the company when it provides high quality services.

When public authorities own neither infrastructures nor rolling stock, they shall nonetheless ensure that these strategic assets are maintained in an appropriate way and meet the security and accessibility requirements.

If authorities decide to award contracts to companies from the market sector, the procedure shall be open, transparent and non-discriminatory.

The need for new sources of funds and for an optimisation of the money allocated to public transport systems

The necessary increase of the quantity and quality of public transport supply in urban areas will lead to a need of additional public money available, since it is not realistic to contemplate strong increases in fare levels. The authorities responsible for organising public transport systems have a direct responsibility in the search of new sources of funds and in the monitoring of production costs. They should also help operators reach high levels of efficiency through incentives and new technologies.

Organising authorities must be at the forefront of the thoughts and alert national and supra-national authorities on the necessity to devise shortly new financial mechanisms. Unless this can happen, there is a strong threat that severe financial shortages will hurt lots of networks before the end of the decade.

The need for a pertinent level of subsidiarity

Although the responsibility for public transport organisation is mostly local, national and supra-national authorities also have a key role to play in the promotion of a sustainable urban mobility. The European Union, which has committed itself to reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases in the Kyoto protocol, cannot ignore the patterns of urban mobility, since this constitutes a potentially strong source of reduction of polluting exhausts. In the same way, issues such as the competition rules, transport infrastructure charging, safety of trips, to technical characteristics of vehicles (accessibility, energy consumption), and their standardisation, are in part of European interest.

The White Paper on the future European transport policy by 2010, released in 2001 by the European Commission, was a turning point in the understanding of the damages caused by the excessive use of the private car. However, this document doesn't focus enough on mobility problems in urban areas, where it is important to keep in mind that more than 75% of the European population live. The reference to the principle of subsidiarity and the fear to interfere with exclusive competences of more local authorities should not lead to forgetting that subsidiarity also means that it is the responsibility of authorities of higher level to reach the decisions which the lower levels cannot make.

The authorities responsible for public transport therefore expect from the European authorities and the national governments that they define more ambitious policies and commit more funds to the improvement of mobility conditions in the urban areas.

List of public transport authorities belonging to the association of European Metropolitan Transport Authorities (EMTA)

AMSTERDAM (ROA)

ATHENS (OASA)

BARCELONA (ATM)

BIRMINGHAM-WEST MIDLANDS (Centro)

BILBAO (CTB)

BRUSSELS (Ministère de la Région de Bruxelles)

DUBLIN (DTO)

FRANKFURT (RMV)

GENEVA (Office des Transports et de la Circulation)

HELSINKI (YTV)

LISBON (Camara Municipal)

LONDON (GLA)

MADRID (CTM)

MANCHESTER (GMPTE)

MILAN (Comune di Milano)

OSLO (AS Sporveier)

PARIS (STIF)

PRAGUE (ROPID)

ROME (Comune di Roma)

SEVILLA (Consorcio de Transportes de Sevilla)

STOCKHOLM (AB SL)

VALENCIA (ETM)

VIENNA (VOR)

VILNIUS (MECS)

WARSAW (ZTM)

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