

Framework opinion on making mobility compatible with sustainable development

- **Own initiative**
- **drafted by the Energy and Climate Working Group**
- **approved by the General Meeting on February 19, 2004**
- **original language: French**

1. Summary:

1.1. Objectives of the opinion

- [a] This opinion has been drafted with the primary aim of (re)introducing at political level the debate on mobility, in particular on making mobility more compatible with sustainable development and Belgium's international commitments, such as the European Sustainable Development Strategy, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the Kyoto Protocol.

1.2. Content of the opinion

- [b] The following text constitutes a framework opinion, prepared with a view to drawing attention to the great challenges mobility poses for the future and to the long-term measures needed to steer today's mobility towards a structure compatible with sustainable development.
- [c] This opinion will be followed by others on mobility, of more limited scope, addressing specific points such as measures for the short and medium term. The future opinion on the "mobility" chapter of the Federal Plan for Sustainable Development 2004-2008 will in all likelihood be one of these more limited opinions.
- [d] This opinion contains, in order:
- a diagnosis of the present transport and mobility situation in Belgium (data listed in Annex 1)
 - a survey of the competences exercised in matters of mobility at different levels of power
 - an analysis of obstacles to mobility compatible with sustainable development (for both people and freight)
 - a structured package of recommendations for the long term.

1.3. Why the present situation is not sustainable

- [e] The list of the ill effects of mobility that have to be paid for by society is long: congestion of the motorway network, air pollution, noise, climate change, delays affecting the economy, stress, accidents, insecurity, irreversible destruction of landscapes, water pollution, and so on. Annex 1 of the opinion gives an overview of this situation.

- [f] While every individual's right to basic mobility must be guaranteed, this right cannot be exercised any way we like. Certain negative effects can be managed effectively with technologies or with more ambitious laws and standards. The excessive dependence of our mobility on fossil fuels, however, has serious consequences:
- a potentially high risk of fragility for the economy, in the event of a sharp rise in prices resulting, for example, from the foreseeable growing scarcity of fossil fuels;
 - rising levels of greenhouse gas emissions, which are contributing to global warming to an extent potentially threatening to ecosystems and human activities.
- [g] Even more serious, the current system risks compromising access to basic mobility for all inhabitants of the planet and future generations.

1.4. What are the obstacles? (Chapter 5)

- [h] In Chapter 5, the FCSD (Federal Council for Sustainable Development) examines the present situation and demonstrates that 10 major obstacles stand in the way of making mobility more compatible with sustainable development. These 10 obstacles exist at different levels:
- First, at political level: there is a lack of political will and courage to challenge the current structure and trends. The sharing of competences in matters of mobility is also complex.
 - Second, at the level of alternatives: bicycles, walking and public transport are not appealing to the majority of citizens.
 - At the level of prices, the means of transport that offer the highest cost for society and the environment are not necessarily the most costly for the consumer.
 - Economic activities, residential areas and recreation areas are scattered across the territory, leading to an increase in the number of kilometres covered and a high overall cost for local authorities.
 - Individuals find it hard to call into question their attitudes to mobility and their habits. Individual motorised transport is still highly valued in advertising and in the dominant social models.
 - The lack of road safety is a disincentive to the use of bicycles or walking in everyday life. This has a particularly disastrous effect on the mobility of children and young people.

1.5. What does the FCSD propose? (Chapter 6)

- [i] To address the 10 obstacles identified in Chapter 5, the FCSD makes 10 recommendations in Chapter 6, summarised below.
- [j] Belgium's institutional structure and the fact that journeys ignore regional boundaries require the Federal Government and the Regions to come to the negotiating table to develop and implement a national mobility plan that features ambitious objectives, while respecting the powers of each level of government. This plan must define the mobility Belgium wishes to implement in the coming years.
- [k] First and foremost, there is a need to challenge the motivations that underpin the demand for mobility. More effective and rational management of demand constitutes one of the essential pillars of a mobility policy compatible with sustainable development.
- [l] The quality and appeal of alternatives to road transport, for both people and freight, must be considerably enhanced: this concerns public transport, of course, but also walking and cycling. For freight, this concerns rail, inland waterways and maritime shipping or pipelines. A number of financial and legal measures need to be taken to achieve this goal: investments in public transport at all levels, encouragement for the public, especially children, to walk or use bicycles, promotion of the development of multimodal platforms, etc.

- [m] In the same way, there is a need to encourage technological innovations, which can improve safety and reduce fuel consumption and pollution, for vehicles and the organisation of traffic alike. Alternatives to fossil fuel must be developed as a matter of urgency.
- [n] Finally, another mentality needs to be created, making all of us – not only individuals, but also public authorities and companies - more aware of the impact of our mobility choices. Requiring those who cause impacts to pay the price in a socially fair and foreseeable way is the way forward. Making all players aware of the different ways they can meet their mobility needs must also become a priority. Advertising is a tool that can be used to that end.