

AUTUMN 2021

Step change: how citizens can help design the transport of the future

EVENT REPORT



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This event is organised as part of the [European Climate Pact](#).



The European Climate Pact

We all have our own worlds. Our world could be the house we live in or the community we are part of, or it could be the family we love, the work we do, or the region we come from. Whatever your world is, climate change is affecting it – because of the impact on our environment that we are already experiencing, and because of the changes we need to make as a society to ensure a better future for everyone.

The good news is that each of us can do something in our own world every day to reduce the effects on the environment and to move towards living more sustainably – a shift that brings with it benefits and new opportunities. While many of our actions may seem small in isolation, taken together the impact is far bigger than in our individual world.

The [European Climate Pact](#) encourages everyone to act. It is a movement of people united around a common cause, each [taking steps](#) to build a more sustainable Europe for us all. Launched by the European Commission, the Climate Pact is part of the European Green Deal and is helping the EU to meet its goal to be the first climate-neutral continent in the world by 2050.

Step change: how citizens can help design the transport of the future

This report reflects the conversation during the Policy Insight ‘Step change: how citizens can help design the transport of the future’.

During the lockdowns, car was no longer king, citizens reclaimed public spaces and clear skies were the norm. Policymakers should grab that momentum to futureproof transport systems now that the world is opening up again. The challenge is vast – transport is responsible for 27% of EU emissions, is the main cause of air pollution in cities and impacts social equality and economic development. As such, transport is a big piece of the puzzle in the EU’s aim to be climate neutral by mid-century.

City after city is banning diesel cars from the centre, and industry and policymakers alike are moving away from the internal combustion engine. The transformation of transport has a profound effect on daily life, and citizens shouldn’t have to carry the brunt of the burden. As the European Commission comes out with a range of proposals to introduce the sustainable transport of the future, this debate asks how citizens can be the starting point.

Speakers and participants considered the following questions:

- What must be done to ensure that the cost of transforming the transport system doesn’t fall on the shoulders of citizens?
- How can city planners and citizens work in tandem to design the sustainable transport of the future?
- What policies are required to make climate-neutral transport affordable and accessible to everyone?
- Policymakers count on behaviour change to transform our transport systems. Are citizens open to this?

The way forward

Looking ahead, the meeting offered several suggestions on the way forward for co-designing the transport of the future with citizens:

- Decarbonising transport will be key to achieving the Fit for 55 targets. This will require a mix of modal shifts and making cars that pollute less.
- Citizens must be at the heart of the debate, and they must be kept well-informed so that policy changes do not surprise them and lead to a backlash.
- It is important to acknowledge that many of the required changes entail costs. But it is also imperative to highlight that doing nothing is not an option and brings with it costs of its own in terms of the impacts of climate change.
- Trialling ideas and then soliciting feedback may work better than asking people to choose between options that are not yet in place, which are harder for them to visualise.
- When seeking to engage citizens, you need to start by working out who you want to reach, what your goals are and how you define success.

Event summary

The battle to reduce emissions and tackle climate change will be one of the defining themes of the 21st century. Through measures such as the EU's Fit for 55 Package, this will involve huge changes to people's lives – how they live, work, consume and travel.

More than 25% of the EU's carbon emissions are from the transportation sector – and much of that from road transport – so it has a vital contribution to make in achieving these targets. Simply put, we will not be able to achieve our targets without decarbonising transport.

To do that, we need to put more electric cars, buses and trucks on the roads as the EU works towards its 2035 ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles, but also to shift the modes of transport that people use. These changes will only be possible if governments and regulators clearly explain the changes that they want to make, why they are necessary and bring people with them, Friends of Europe's 21 September debate heard.

The debate is part of the European Climate Pact, an EU-wide initiative inviting people, communities and organisations to participate in climate action and build a greener Europe by connecting and sharing knowledge, learning about climate change, and developing, implementing and scaling up solutions.

There are many things that people can do to reduce their transport carbon footprint. These include driving less, replacing their car with an electric vehicle, walking and cycling more, and increasing their use of public transport. There is also much that city and regional governments can do to encourage modal shifts and more sustainable vehicles, ranging from congestion charges and closing roads to vehicles to electrifying municipal vehicles, as well as increasing the road space available for cycles and reducing that available for cars.

Putting people at the centre of the transport debate

Huge transformational changes need to happen because of climate change, as reflected in the EU's binding obligations to cut emissions by 55% by 2030 and become climate neutral by 2050, under the Fit for 55 Package, said **Yvon Slingenberg**, Acting Director for Climate Strategy at the Directorate-General for Climate Action. These will affect everyone's lives and so we have to talk to citizens, she stressed.

But the way people travel is deeply embedded in their lives and changes are not always welcomed, said moderator **Joe Litobarski**, highlighting the emergence of the *Gilets jaunes* movement in France, which emerged from protests against a fuel tax that aimed to help the country make the transition to a low-carbon economy.

It is an example of how “policies enacted with the best of intentions” can cause a huge backlash if they are not introduced sensitively, he pointed out. “If the government had consulted first, perhaps it could have avoided the backlash. Even if a policy doesn't benefit everyone, if you communicate upfront, at least it doesn't take people by surprise.”

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Joe Litobarski, Editor at Debating Europe

Rafał Trzaskowski, Mayor of Warsaw and European Climate Pact Ambassador in Poland, explained how the Polish capital, the only city in the country with a target to be climate neutral by 2050, brings inhabitants into the decision-making process through surveys, consultations and citizen panels.

“It is essential to bring citizens into the process,” he said, adding that the city uses citizen panels to consult on areas such as energy efficiency and public transport, which is one of the key priorities for the carbon neutrality target.

But he stressed that education and awareness are also vital so that citizens are aware why changes must be made. “We can’t cut emissions or improve air quality without improvements to public transport, but for many people, the benefits are not clear. In Warsaw, 34% of people only travel by car and they want wider streets, not narrower ones. They want more parking spaces. They don’t get the overall picture of why we are narrowing the streets, removing parking and taking cars out of the city centre.”

Show, don’t tell

It is often better to make changes by providing examples of how they will improve quality of life before the consultation, to enable residents to see the measures in action, he added. The city removed cars from one square, he pointed out, and people protested initially, “but when they saw how new restaurants were able to open and we put in some greenery, and it became a much nicer place, people liked it”.

“If you can show a real example of the effects of what you want to do, then do a consultation, you are more likely to be able to implement your decision. You need to involve citizens and explain your motives.”

László Mátyus, Director of Innovation and Service Development at the Public Transport Company of Debrecen, DKV Debreceni Közlekedési Zrt, agreed, saying that it is hard for people to understand the benefits of particular initiatives without seeing them in action. “It’s much easier to get reaction on measures you have already introduced,” he pointed out.

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Rafał Trzaskowski, Mayor of Warsaw and European Climate Pact Ambassador in Poland

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Yvon Slingenberg, Acting Director for Climate Strategy, Governance, and Emissions from Non-trading Sectors at the European Commission Directorate-General for Climate Action

It is important to provide alternatives, show their benefits and give citizens ownership of the process, Slingenberg added.

“We’re very aware that some of these changes, such as putting a carbon price on fuels, will involve extra costs. There are ways to balance these costs and we have proposed a social impact fund to mitigate the impacts on the poorest,” she said.

The cost of doing nothing

It is also important to highlight that doing nothing is not an option because it has costs as well, said **Janet Veldstra**, Assistant Professor in Psychology at the University of Groningen. These include the floods and extreme rainfall that hit Europe this year and the heatwaves the Arctic Circle has suffered in recent months.

Warsaw’s initiatives are an example of how cities can use psychology, said Veldstra, but she added that “creating awareness is important, but it is not enough. People are usually aware of climate change but often not aware of what they can do about it. It’s not tangible for them – they don’t feel the costs or the benefits.”

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Engagement is an important tool in helping cities to home in on their goals, but “it is a vessel rather than a silver bullet”, said **Alexandra Chandran**, Head of Partnerships at CitizenLab. “You need to understand your audience – who you want to communicate with and how much power citizens have in the process.”

“It’s about creating space for communities to feel a level of ownership in the decision-making process.”

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Alexandra Chandran, Head of Partnerships at CitizenLab

Target your interventions

New digital platforms are essential to bringing young people into the conversation, but they must be complemented with offline engagement. “You need to consider who this consultation is serving, what you are trying to achieve and how you define success,” Chandran added. Some people are more engaged than others, not just because they feel more strongly about an issue but if they have the time and resources to devote to getting involved, and they may therefore be over-represented in the consultation process unless you can put measures in place to enable people to take time off work or meet their childcare needs.

Debrecen held a debate of smart city professionals that generated many good ideas, said Mátyus, “but it is difficult to make progress in all areas ... You have to focus. We narrowed our efforts down to three areas including mobility.”

When devising mobility plans for cities, it is important to remember those who live outside the city but use its transport because they work or study there or visit for pleasure and not just residents.

And while many cities are working to reduce the number of cars they host, cars will remain one of the dominant modes of transport, so it is important to make car travel as easy as possible. Debrecen introduced a navigation app providing real time information that relies on driver for that data, Mátyus said.

Initially, the app gained little traction because people didn't know about it, he explained. “It can be perfect in theory but if it doesn't reach the public, it won't have any effect.” So the city contacted schools and asked students to get involved in promoting the app in shopping malls and public squares, which led to a tripling of uptake.

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László Mátyus, Director of Innovation and Service Development at the Public Transport Company of Debrecen, DKV Debreceni Közlekedési Zrt

Conclusion

We need to cut emissions to tackle climate change and we cannot do that without dealing with transport. We know what needs to be done – measures such as more electric vehicles, and encouraging people to drive less and use different modes of transport more. Citizens can take steps towards changing how they move as part of the European Climate Pact. This is an area that is central to citizens' lives and so they need to be fully consulted and involved in any changes.

Rather than present them with ideas before they have been put into action, it is often best to show them what you want to do through pilot projects and ask them to comment on real life initiatives, so they can see the benefits and drawbacks of any scheme for themselves.

