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Co-creating the shift to clean mobility

EVENT REPORT



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Friends of Europe's first event of 2023 examined how the conditions can be created to enable all European citizens to have access to clean mobility, regardless of their income and location. The event was organised as part of Friends of Europe's work with the SSH CENTRE project, the new centre of excellence for the social sciences & humanities (SSH) across the Horizon Europe Cluster 5: Climate, Energy and Mobility. The project aims to create a bridge between research in SSH and policymaking, promoting an integrated approach to the establishment of measures towards a just transition to net-zero.

The shift to clean mobility must be inclusive

Transportation is responsible for 25% of greenhouse gas emissions in the European Union. In October 2022, European lawmakers agreed to set a mandate that will require new cars and vans to be emission-free by 2035. This will require significant investment in infrastructure, such as electric vehicle (EV) charging stations and public transportation. However, this transition to a clean-mobility future should also be one that does not establish a 'two-speed Europe', but one where sustainable mobility solutions are available for all.

Digital technologies could make mobility smarter, more efficient and greener, but we need to know more about how people travel in both rural and urban areas in order to create the most efficient clean mobility solutions. **Julia Poliscanova**, Senior Director for Vehicles and E-Mobility at Transport & Environment (T&E), pointed out that most car kilometres are driven outside cities. Since people in rural areas more heavily rely on cars, it is essential to decarbonise vehicles as well as improve public transport.

Professor Chris Foulds, Principal Research Fellow at Anglia Ruskin University's Global Sustainability Institute, explained the ethos of the SSH CENTRE project. "Social science and humanities research is about exploring questions to do with infrastructure and political systems, and the ethics and justice dimensions of climate change. Skills and jobs are not just an add-on to solving climate change, they're central." Through the SSH CENTRE, the needs of Europe's citizens are taken into account in policy discussions through cross-sectoral collaborations and the development of socially innovative solutions for the EU's climate transition.

Moderator **Dharmendra Kanani**, Chief Operating Officer at Friends of Europe, asked the panellists how mobility policy can address inequality. Europe's mobility system already has a significant amount of built-in inequality, pointed out **Cathy Macharis**, Full Professor at Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) and Co-ordinator of the Mobilise Research Group. "There is a lot of transport poverty and not enough digital inclusion," she added. "There is no choice because the way spatial development is done creates car dependency. People in transport poverty become really dependent on cars."

Technology alone is not the answer, she added. "We need to invest more in public transport to reduce inequality and CO2 emissions. In rural areas, investing in shared mobility will reduce transport poverty," Macharis added.

Strategic vision

Rosalinde van der Vlies, Director of the Clean Planet at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD), argued that the Commission needs to do four things to improve the EU's transportation systems.

- 1) It needs to set a common strategic vision, not working in isolation but with the member states. "For the first time we have a common and long-term strategic vision: we want to be the first climate-neutral continent by 2050," she said. "It's not just our sustainability strategy, it's also our competitiveness strategy and our inclusiveness strategy."
- 2) It needs a regulatory framework that supports EU ambitions, which the Fit for 55 package provides.
- 3) We need massive investment from the public and private sector in research and innovation – not just in technology, but social and government innovations as well, she added.
- 4) The Commission must focus on the societal dimension. "We can't deliver on the green and digital transition if we don't bring citizens on board. We need to build the skills of the workforce in Europe."

The Commission is seeking to co-create its policies to ensure that they meet the needs of the whole community, although van der Vlies remarked that it can be difficult for engagement to reach beyond the "usual suspects".

As Macharis pointed out, citizen panels are a useful tool to encourage participation and get a true range of diverse opinions, allowing citizens to be heard and feel acknowledged while helping policymakers reach decisions. "We need to think about the messenger," said Poliscanova. "Who represents that community? Community organisations are the ones to engage local people."

One example of this co-creation process is the Cities Mission, which is using urban areas as the driver of change. The Commission has chosen 100 cities to work towards climate-neutrality and asked them to co-create necessary measures with local communities to achieve that goal by 2030. "We hope they will reach more diverse communities than the Commission would be able to," said van der Vlies.

Engagement is not enough, though. From the audience, **Ian Catlow**, Head of the Brussels Office of the City of London, pointed out that there must also be a transfer of powers and finance to the local level.

There is a tension between inclusion and ambition, speed and urgency, warned Foulds. "To do it right is not necessarily quick," he said.

Material risks

EPoliscanova remarked that there are both risks and opportunities in the need for new raw materials to drive the energy transition in mobility. “We don’t have the minerals base in Europe, but there is no shift to clean mobility without raw materials. It’s also about people and their acceptance of these technologies,” she said.

While there is a danger that we continue with a linear system of resource use, there is also an opportunity to do things differently and put circularity at the heart of the industry, she added.

Policies to improve supply chains are needed, particularly within the mining sector in relation to the materials that will be essential to low carbon transportation, such as cobalt, lithium, nickel and copper.

Europe must develop an industrial policy that can help secure supplies of critical materials, but it needs to work with the climate and green agenda. “We need to make permitting faster, but not at the expense of green regulation,” Poliscanova stressed. Nonetheless, half of the batteries used in European cars, trucks and grids are already made in Europe. The jobs created by this industry are mostly in central and eastern Europe. “This is part of the just transition,” she added.

Both technology and behaviour change will be important, Poliscanova added. “It’s not one or the other. It is also crucial to put in place the necessary infrastructure and systems.”

Further success will depend on joined-up thinking, van der Vlies concluded. “The Commission should be connecting the dots between different EU programmes. Silo-breaking is extremely important.”

Recommendations

1. Build an explicit focus on tackling inequality and transport poverty into mobility policies by investing in public transport, shared mobility, digital inclusion and smaller, affordable electric car models.
2. Adopt an integrated approach to mobility by implementing technology while considering behavioural trends and spatial development issues. This can be done by working closely with researchers from the social sciences and humanities field.
3. Use investment from the private sector to increase research and innovation, as well as deployment of technology.
4. Listen to and encourage citizens’ perspectives through public consultations and other participatory tools to ensure that the policies put in place fit the local mobility culture.

