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SERVICES FOR A CITY NETWORK ON TRAFFIC LIMITATION

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How can cities learn from each other?

The academic community has a great deal to contribute to the European Car Free Cities network. Researchers and consultants have knowledge of various city initiatives and experiences through professional "networks" and contacts, and through their project contracts for cities and governments. This paper puts forward a mechanism whereby this knowledge and experience can be pooled, developed, and made available to city authorities where sustainable transport policies are being developed. An international agency is proposed (referred to here as the "Agency") for the exchange of information on how cities can halt the trend of traffic growth.

The need for the Agency arises from the change of direction in urban transport policy away from the counter-productive attempts to adapt the city to the car, towards policies that are environmentally sustainable and which policies which support a revival of urban quality and city life. The information Agency will draw together those bodies and individuals who have made the break from "conventional" practice, or who wish to do so.

The new direction involves a radical shift of politics, theories, policies and actions. The "new realism", as it has been called by Goodwin (1991), brings in its wake a range of changes: from supply management to demand management, from capacity provision to quality achievement, from piecemeal to integrated plans, and of course a switch of resources (both financial and human) from the old to the new tasks. There is precious little experience of this new approach, and a consequent thirst amongst decision makers for more knowledge and understanding.

An Agency for city authorities

As the author has argued elsewhere (Pharoah 1992), traffic reduction is not an end in itself, but a means of achieving a range of environmental, economic, social and personal benefits.

Whatever means are employed to bring about less traffic, it will be local or city authorities which have the main responsibility for delivering these benefits. The Agency is therefore aimed at local authorities, together with their contractors and advisors. Cities joining the "Club of Car Free Cities" will have an immediate interest in such an Agency, but most authorities sooner or later will need help in facing the challenge of traffic growth.

Do city authorities need such an Agency?

Most local authorities have limited resources to find out what others are doing. There are bodies which attempt this nationally (eg. local authority associations) but these deal with a wide range of issues, and rarely explore other countries. The task is costly and requires specialist expertise.

Local authorities sometimes undertake their own research (eg. the development of traffic calming policy by Devon County Council, England, following studies of European practice), or set up collaborative studies (Bautzen-Cambridge-Heidelberg-Montpellier [Louth 1993]) or projects (Paris-Berlin [Senate for Urban Development and Environment, 1990]), or send key personnel on study visits (Dublin, Hertfordshire).

Such ad hoc or "one off" ventures can be valuable, but if widely replicated, they would lead to duplication, and excessive demands on those with information. Pioneer cities such as Amsterdam, Bologna and Freiburg, for example, could be flooded with requests for information and visits. To be better than individual effort, however, the Agency will need to respond to the specific needs of individual authorities, and not just provide general information.

How will the Agency work?

There are various existing sources of pan-European information on traffic limitation initiatives. These include bibliographic database services and journals (provided commercially), training events and conferences (eg. PTRC, UITP), professional and academic networks, political and inter-government bodies (EC, OECD, ECMT), and environmental network services such as EAUE and ICLEI. These existing mechanisms are not, however, targeted at the new approach to urban transport, and not all can respond to the needs and problems of individual cities.

Compared to general networks or individual inter-city collaborations, the model suggested here will draw on more comprehensive sources of information, and will be available to all authorities. It will be carried out by academics and consultants with a commitment to and expertise in the new approach, who through this work will be able to maintain and develop information on the latest techniques and initiatives, and on their results. Expertise is already available, but it needs to be drawn together to operate at an international level.

In terms of organisation, a host administration (eg. at South

Bank University, London) will be established to hold and update information centrally, and to appoint, coordinate and specify the activity of associates, who will contribute according to their expertise, and their country or language. These associates will be researchers in Universities, local authority associations, consultancies, and other bodies.

How can city authorities profit?

A range of services can be provided, falling into three categories (see also Figure 1):

Information
Bespoke services
General services

Information about initiatives in traffic limitation will be held on a database, and made available to subscribers as a specialist news information service.

Subscribers will also be offered "bespoke" services. This will consist of information in response to specific requests and needs, often involving new research and analysis. In this way, when a local authority embarks on a new policy (for example "park and Ride", or reduced city centre parking) information can first be sought on the experience of other cities with similar characteristics which have already employed this solution. The team of associates can also act as "trouble-shooters", bringing people with problems together with people who have already encountered and solved similar problems. In this way, subscribers can learn about pitfalls to be avoided, as well as success stories relevant to their own situation.

Other bespoke services can include study visits, staff exchanges, "in-house" training, and action research projects.

Associated general services can include books, articles and conference contributions from network members, and an annual conference. A book expected to be published shortly which compares traffic limitation efforts in ten European cities, provides an example of the comparative analysis which the Agency could provide (Apel and Pharoah, 1994).

The Agency will fill a gap left by existing services, both by offering specialist help in the field of traffic limitation, and by providing bespoke information and advice based on pan-European experience. The link with the academic community will also help in the provision of training.

Apart from services to subscriber bodies, the Agency can play a part in the harmonisation of urban transport policy and practice throughout the European Union. For example, convergence of data collection methods in different countries and cities will be of immense benefit in cross-national comparative work.

How will the Agency be funded?

There are two aspects to funding the proposed Agency. The first relates to the establishment, updating and operation of the international database. This should be paid for by subscriptions from city authorities and others. The second relates to the various bespoke services, which will be charged only to the cities requesting them.

The travel and communications activities arising from this will be multi-purpose, and the costs involved can thus be spread between all users of the Agency.

Who will supply the information?

Basic information about traffic limitation initiatives is already available through academic networks, journals and conferences within each country. The main effort will therefore be directed at getting more specific information and channelling it between countries, and from cities that have experience to offer to those with a need to learn from it. Information on traffic limitation initiatives will be sought from the promoters themselves, and further analysed and followed up before being made available to an international audience. The Agency will thus go beyond the provision of raw information transfer such as already provided by news agencies and bibliographic databases.

Information can be classified according to four different levels of authentication and analysis, perhaps reflected in charge rates:

- Level 1. Information obtained from secondary sources (eg. magazines and newspapers;
- Level 2. Information obtained from primary sources (eg. reports obtained from authorities responsible for the policy/scheme). Official data series will be included here.
- Level 3. Information verified by staff researchers through personal contact, and subjected to checks on the validity and comparability of data.
- Level 4. Information derived from research and consultancy undertaken by the organisation's own associates.

What difficulties might there be?

Assuming that there is sufficient demand from city authorities to make the Agency financially feasible, the main difficulties are likely to be those which have inhibited the development of international information exchange services so far. There are perceived to be four main difficulties:

- 1. Language
- 2. Cultural and contextual differences
- 3. Differences in data methods and definitions
- 4. The cost of international travel and communications

While these are all real obstacles, an important objective of the new Agency will be to devise and develop ways of overcoming them.

The language problem will be tackled by employing multi-lingual staff and associates, by developing a common lexicon of technical terms and their equivalents in other languages, and by responding to subscribers in their own language.

Cultural and contextual (eg political and legal) differences can be made explicit when information is disseminated between one country and another, based on cross-national comparative studies already available, or undertaken specifically for the Agency. This will be a unique feature of the Agency.

Data differences and definitions must be made explicit when information is disseminated to the client cities. An objective of the Agency will be also to promote comparability between data sources and survey techniques. For example, the Munich based company "Socialdata" has been refining a standard method of measuring mode split information, allowing consistent comparison between cities where these methods have been employed. The goal of traffic reduction demands more rigorous monitoring than was the case with supply-led planning, and so data methods are likely to form an important part of the information sought by cities. When a city is implementing a light rail scheme, for example, it will be interested not only in its viability but in its impact on all forms of travel, and in methods of assessing this impact.

The Agency will incur international travel and communications costs which the subscription charges will have to cover. However, there is already a great deal of travel and communication between the academic and consultancy communities which can be exploited for the Agency, from which local authorities currently derive little direct benefit.

Conclusion

This paper has provided a scenario for an international Agency on car-limitation initiatives, available by subscription to cities in the "Club of Car-Free Cities" and others. The idea originated from discussions with researchers and city representatives in several countries, and from a recognition that city authorities often do not benefit from the considerable reserves of academic expertise and knowledge in this important and growing field. The aim is to enable all authorities trying to redirect their policies towards sustainable transport to learn from the ideas and experience of cities in other countries. At the same time the cross-national comparative analysis that will be carried out to support such an information network will itself help to promote the harmonisation of data collection, language and understanding of the issues, and perhaps the harmonisation of urban policy itself.

Success will be determined by the ability to provide services that are useful to local authorities at a charge they are willing to pay, and more work is needed to determine the structure of the Agency and the likely market for its services. There is - as this conference demonstrates - a growing commitment to reducing traffic-induced problems in cities, and

the proposed Agency will help city authorities to achieve this goal.

References

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FIGURE 1 TRAFFIC LIMITATION INFORMATION AGENCY

