

For a realistic and sustainable mobility

Alfonso Perona Gómez. Executive Secretary Fundación RACC. Professor at the Prevention and Security School (Escuela de Prevención y Seguridad) of the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona. Spain

The transport sector is a sector which has been growing at a considerable pace in the last few years, not just in terms of the number of journeys but also in terms of the number of vehicles and the routes. This situation has an impact on the environment from the points of view of congestion, degradation in the quality of public space and decrease in the quality of life of the population in general.

In addition, the sources of energy used in this sector are based on the use of oil derived fuels. This causes a significant environmental impact due to the excessive consumption of natural resources and its exhaustion caused by overexploitation

The most important environmental impact of the current model of transportation is the emission of pollutants such as: carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide, hydrocarbon or air-borne particles. Special and dangerous residues are also being created as a result of vehicle maintenance operations, acoustic pollution, ground degradation and occupancy of space.

There are positive aspects of mobility which should not be ignored, but if measures are not taken and the model is not changed we could be driven to a chaotic situation, and its effects are starting to show in the cities.

The new model of sustainable mobility should allow the free and satisfactory mobility of people without causing any damage to life, to the availability of resources or to the environment of future generations.

To design a sustainable mobility and transportation model we must not forget about the agents of society involved in this sector, i.e. drivers, manufacturers, fuel distributors, managers of public infrastructure and transportation and the public administration. Therefore, we should specifically consider:

- a) Consumption, use and maintenance of vehicles by the population, since with different actions and behaviour changes on the part of the drivers (who are the most frequent users within the system), environmental improvements could be obtained.
- b) The improvement of conventional vehicles to achieve a higher efficiency in the engines and to use lighter and more easily recycled materials, in order to decrease the impact they are currently having.
- c) Promotion and implanting of new energy technologies, such as natural gas, liquid petroleum gas, bio-fuels, hydrogen and electricity since they are all better for environmental pollution, as they do not neglect the new vehicle traction systems, but use systems that are less pollutant and equally efficient.

But we will not move forward solely with these measures. In addition, a series of “transversal” policies have to be applied. These include urban and territorial measures adequate to the limited public space, an improvement in the existing road network infrastructure and an improvement in its management (which does not always mean extending the aforementioned infrastructure). We also need a clear, convincing and determined bet in favour of the collective public transport system, which should be a quality and competitive model when compared with the more environmentally inefficient use of private transportation.

Public policies should be directed towards this change of model. These policies should be the starting point for all the mentioned agents involved in order to achieve change and also to promote the most positive measures and place an economic burden on the most harmful ones. User information and awareness policies are necessary, as well as measures that promote the correct destruction of used vehicles and a fiscal policy devised with consumption and pollution in mind. Policies directed to the vehicle manufacturers are also needed, so as to limit the consumption and emission of toxic gases and to fiscally encourage the implanting of new technologies.

In the area of infrastructure, a clear policy of territorial structure should be implemented, with new roads and improvements of the existing road network, with the distribution of parking zones in areas around the big city centres and inter-modality as a universal model as well as the increase of collective modes of transportation.

Everything explained up to this point can be very valid, but there will be no improvement without a clear responsibility of implementation of the different initiatives, with fiscal policies with a different point of view to the one currently in place and with fee payment policies for the use of infrastructure. The free use and abuse, paid for with everybody's taxes, must come to an end.

In territorial matters, two different aspects should exist for mobility: on one hand we have long journeys through interurban routes and on the other we have urban mobility.

The cities should stop being a model of unsustainable coexistence and they should start to think about urban planning, without speculation and with more measures in favour of mobility. The binomial urban mobility and sustainable mobility cannot be opposed any longer. Cities must be all-purpose and diversified, as opposed to the specialized and "single-use" city which forces unsustainable mobility on people. The new policies of territorial ordinance must offer sufficient and necessary services based on a strategy of contributing to the reduction of both optional and necessary journeys. Compact cities must allow each zone or neighbourhood to have access to the services that the population needs, without diminishing the quality of life. Thus, the American model of a diffused city where the services are divided in specialized zones and only accessible for the people with a private vehicle must be eliminated.

Freight transportation between urban and interurban zones must be subject to management and regulation policies. This must be coupled with the improvement of transport vehicle movements inside the city, by allocating specific space for loading and unloading and limiting and controlling maximum parking times in which to complete these actions.

Municipal policies must have regulation with parking plans and strategies as a way of regulating the demand, and of releasing public space which the citizens should recuperate.

The plans for urban mobility, through its planning and management as the basic axis for implementation, should be a strategic element in order for it to be a sustained urban mobility. This will also facilitate a reduction in accidents and an increase in security by gaining space for the pedestrians which, in the end, will translate into a better quality of life for the city population.

The aim of planning for urban mobility must be to achieve a universal improvement. This will undoubtedly not satisfy everyone, but it will abolish the unequal situation between a minority and the rest of the city. The recovery of the streets as a space for pedestrians or as improved space for the citizens must not be done carelessly. Instead, a route hierarchy should be devised with the amount of use in mind; pedestrian only zones should be determined for commercial or cultural areas that are frequently used by pedestrians. If this is not done correctly we run the risk of creating deserted zones, with the consequent security problems for the population.

Without any doubt, to allow more space for pedestrians, it must be removed from other sites. This is easier said than done due to the physical characteristics of some cities. The ideal solution for mobility which would be good for everyone does not exist. We must not forget that if sustainable mobility policies are applied, the strategies and the configuration of the cities must change, and spaces for coexistence and relationships must be recovered. The planning done today in many Spanish cities does not contemplate these parameters and is, thus, doomed to a sustainability failure.

These changes should not mean closing the cities to traffic, the point is not to make a bunker out of the city centre, but to look for the difficult equilibrium between freedom and mobility, between the development of society and the environment. Automobiles should keep having their space but with an order of preference different from the present one. People should come first, then the community and finally the individual use and enjoyment of mobility.