

Investment in smart mobility keeps EU's economy moving

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Opinion

Smart and sustainable mobility will give our economies a huge boost, but for this to work there needs to be closer cooperation between all levels of government, writes Henrik Hololei.



Electric car | *Photo credit: Press Association*

European Mobility Week has proven to be an excellent tool for creating awareness of sustainable urban mobility and has helped cities and towns to introduce positive change to citizens.

The message the European Commission wants to convey with this year's campaign is that smart and sustainable mobility is an investment for Europe. Creating smarter and more environmentally-friendly ways of moving in our cities does not only have economic benefits: it also improves the quality of our lives.

As the European Commission's Director General for Mobility and Transport, I am delighted that the

number of local authorities taking part in this initiative has grown to 2000 in recent years. The efforts made by towns and cities to ensure cleaner and more efficient transport for people and goods are crucial for the European economy.

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The impact of European Mobility Week goes far beyond the actual week of 16-22 September; its long list of permanent measures is the best legacy a campaign like this can leave. Last year alone, 5657 permanent measures were implemented by 799 local authorities.

These measures relate to such issues as urban freight and the improvement of public spaces, and they include reallocation of motorised areas for pedestrian use and for clean and active modes of transport - and the implementation of ICT solutions.

The objective of this year's campaign is twofold: It is about promoting smart and sustainable mobility, and also serves to demonstrate that investing in smart and sustainable mobility contributes to job creation and growth in Europe. Recent figures illustrate the valuable contribution made by the cycling and public transport sectors to the EU economy.

For example, public transport operators employ around two million people in the EU. The number of jobs in the cycling sector could reach one million if we double the number of people riding bicycles; currently 650,000 Europeans have a full-time job in this sector.

If we want to strengthen our economy, then the savings we can make by investing in smart and sustainable mobility can play a significant role. Active travel boosts our physical activity, which could save the EU over €80bn a year in healthcare costs. Conversely, traffic congestion costs the EU €100bn per year.

Another expected outcome from this year's campaign is closer cooperation between local administrations and other stakeholders involved in urban mobility. European Mobility Week is only possible thanks to an extensive list of partnerships sought by local campaigners.

Among these partners are civil society organisations, local media, schools and academic institutions. But given this year's theme, I would also like to press for greater cooperation between local campaigners and local businesses.

One of our main priorities is decarbonising the transport sector. This will help make Europe more competitive, and will require cooperation at all levels of government, from local to national and European. This is in line with the new EU strategy to accelerate the transition to a low-carbon economy, following the Paris agreement on climate change.

The transition to low-emission mobility is a priority for achieving the EU's climate objectives.

Transport accounts for a quarter of Europe's greenhouse gas emissions. Decarbonised transport will improve quality of life for all Europeans.

The transport sector is taking the first step towards a low-carbon economy and other sectors should follow suit in the years to come. This means the transport sector would need to reduce its emissions by 30 per cent until 2030 compared to 2005.

The main elements of its strategy include making the most of digital technologies, speeding up the deployment of advanced biofuels and renewable electricity and moving towards zero-emission vehicles.

We encourage European towns and cities to introduce and promote new measures in favour of clean vehicles.

As demonstrated by European Mobility Week, European towns and cities are already encouraging a modal shift towards cycling, walking, public transport and promoting the use of low-emission vehicles. Many are also launching shared mobility schemes at the local level, such as bike-sharing or car-pooling.

The European secretariat of the campaign is managed by the network of major European cities (EUROCITIES), together with two other city networks (ICLEI and Polis), an international NGO (Regional Environmental Centre) and a Europe-wide communication agency (ICF-Mostra). These players are well placed to convey our message regarding the importance of working for smart and low-emission mobility in European urban areas.

So let's use European Mobility Week 2016 as an opportunity to adopt new and more environmentally-friendly mobility habits, and let's enjoy the benefits that smart and sustainable mobility can bring to our economy and society.

About the author

Henrik Hololei is the European Commission's Director General for Mobility and Transport

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