Building Governance Capacity To Achieve Sustainable Urban Mobility Transitions

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1. INTRODUCTION

Mobility faces an unavoidable problem. Despite major technological developments in electric vehicles, hydrogen power, and mass transit digitisation, the transport sector still contributes around 25% of urban carbon emissions[2]. Compounding this, emissions have not seen the same pace of reduction as in other sectors, remaining 28% higher in 2017 compared to 1990. As such it is becoming increasingly clear that without a step-change in how we approach managing urban transportation's role in carbon reduction and climate change mitigation, the EU will be set to miss its 2050 net-zero targets to cut transportation GHG emissions by 90%.

To provide a framework to address these sustainability issues the EU Commission has been promoting Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs) among the cities of its member states. While over 1,000 SUMPs have been adopted in the EU, deficiencies in governance capacities have resulted in a lag in their implementation. Little attention has been given to small- and medium-sized ones, which often lack the resources, competencies, and governance capacities to formulate, implement, and evaluate SUMP.

Working in close collaboration with six city partners[3] of varying sizes but sharing a similar ambition for sustainable mobility, the SUMP-PLUS partner Sciences Po[4] helps bridge these remaining gaps and achieve this step change in governance by looking beyond technological fixes, by:

- investigating how governance can accelerate and intensify the shift to sustainable mobility,

- developing and applying a set of context-specific mobility transition pathways and

- transforming existing infrastructures and networks, while working across sectors and engaging every segment of society.

Cities are best placed to identify and target their own mobility reforms in consultation with stakeholders and to address context-specific and path-dependent barriers and opportunities in mobility transformation. Thus, new governance frameworks need to be developed to support them in transforming their cities beyond currently existing paradigms. **A number of salient takeaways to achieve this transformation have been identified**.

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2. GOVERNANCE GAPS: WHAT ARE THEY?

Governance is often portrayed as a constraining factor when it comes to sustainable transitions. Several deficiencies can be identified as contributing to these constraints:

1. Sustainability initiatives to shift away from fossil fueled mobility are commonly hindered by limited ownership and leadership at city level. Delivering on long-term policy ambitions must be accompanied by a sense of responsibility to ensure active continued support beyond election terms. Without such responsibility, transition pathways risk being subordinated to a changing political agenda.

2. Multiple levels of governance may limit the ability of city authorities to develop and deliver an ambitious sustainable transition agenda. While powers and responsibilities at a local level are shared with regional and national authorities, these higher authorities do not necessarily share with local governments the resources that they require to function. As a consequence, city governments often compete against, rather than cooperate with, different levels of authority in the decision-making process. This creates negative lock-ins.

3. City governments often lack the needed resources, in terms of fragmented funding, data, and human capital to address sustainable transition challenges. In addition, governance gaps are often accounted for by the lack of policy tools enabling strategic priorities to be translated into concrete actions.

4. Fourth, policy makers - or, in this case, "transition managers" - often encounter difficulties engaging and communicating with specific stakeholders and citizens at large, which can induce resistances and protests. Spaces dedicated explicitly to engagement between policy makers and citizens can help avoid such conflict. However, in many places, these are missing entirely, or exist but not necessarily in a legitimate and accountable format.

3. WHAT GOVERNANCE SOLUTIONS TO STRENGTHEN CAPACITIES?

Provided cities hold sufficient resources and capacities to enhance and adjust them, governance arrangements can operate as an enabling factor supporting sustainable urban mobility transitions. This can be achieved in three different ways:

First, **governance structures** need to be adjusted to strengthen ownership and leadership. This includes the development of dedicated governance structures, such as departments explicitly dedicated to sustainable mobility planning, appointing a politician to lead on this portfolio or administrative reforms facilitating the dissemination of the carbon agenda. Good practice examples can be found in:

- Antwerp, where the development of an ambitious sustainable urban mobility agenda was achieved through the reorganisation of the politico-administrative apparatus. This multidimensional portfolio was entrusted to a leading political figure in charge of mobility, retail and tourism, and on an operational level, mainstreaming procedures ensure the incorporation of perspectives from across other departments.

- Lucca, where a dedicated team was set up within the city administration to lead the development of a new generation of sustainable mobility plans, providing authority to shift away from a mode based to an integrated approach of mobility planning.

While not fully succeeding in overcoming preexisting silos, these changes enhanced policy coherence and contributed to sustainable mobility being considered an issue in its own right.

Second, **governance processes** help ensure a dynamic interplay between long-term strategic goals and short-term action plans, contributing to accelerate their transitions. Good practice examples include Klaipeda's Strategic Development Plan 2021-2030, which puts emphasis on the resources available at national/European levels to deliver on sustainable mobility goals (e.g., Recovery and resilience plan, 2021-2027 programming period).

Further, city authorities draw on partnership models and setting-up consultative venues to achieve buy-in from trip-generating sectors and the wider public. Good practice examples include Lucca's initiative with the logistics sector, where such initiatives have constituted a first step towards decarbonisation incentives.

Other solutions aimed at identifying additional carbon emission reduction reservoirs are being considered. This is the case in Greater Manchester, where long-term mobility policy goals are being reshuffled in line with the 2038 carbon neutrality objective and under the authority of a newly created mission "GM pathway to net zero". Efforts to decarbonise the health sector have led to the development of a joint action plan with the mobility sector.

Third, efforts to deliver a fair socio-spatial distribution of benefits have led to the monitoring of **governance outcomes**. By building institutional partnerships and accelerating the reduction in carbon emissions, city authorities seek to strengthen their metropolitan leadership and expand their agendas towards less densely populated areas. An example of this comes from the Antwerp Transport Region, which draws on enhanced inter-municipal cooperation between thirty-two municipalities located around Antwerp to support the implementation of Roadmap 2030.

Overall, findings from the SUMP-PLUS project confirm the critical role of governance capacities in overcoming the formal distribution of powers and responsibilities. In short, strong urban governance should contribute to reconciling diverging interests, aligning policy priorities, facing adaptation limits, and mobilising needed resources to adopt and regularly revise a common vision.

4. WHY SUPPORT CITIES IN A MULTI-LEVEL CONTEXT?

Having examined how governance solutions unlock sustainable mobility transitions, it is important to underline the real and very positive impacts that support from multiple levels of governance can have on efforts made at city level.

The EU can support city authorities by calling for their substantial role in EU climate governance to be formally acknowledged. The role of EU leadership in kicking off this process and keeping up the pressure is crucial. Existing tools, including the Covenant of the Mayors and SUMPs, are being updated. Alongside, new resources are being introduced to revise local transport plans in alignment with macro-climate strategies.

Yet debates about whether this is enough have resurfaced during negotiations about recovery and resilience plans. As these policy documents are under the direct management of the EU Commission, cities have repeatedly highlighted the need for a more structured dialogue with EU institutions to overcome implementation gaps resulting from limited capacities being devolved towards cities.

National states can support local authorities, through administrative reforms scaling up the competences of metropolitan or urban functional areas. The provision of dedicated policy tools and the creation of legitimate and accountable venues plays

a critical role. Examples of a fruitful application of devolution comes from:

- Lithuania, where the introduction of urban functional areas provides a new impetus for municipal authorities in the Klaipeda City region to agree on a joint sustainable mobility agenda as a prerequisite for additional funding from the

Klaipeda Public Transport

national government.

- Alba Iulia County, where several administrative units jointly developed a public transport association which was eventually acknowledged in the 2021 SUMP as a legitimate functional urban area for sustainable transport planning.

National authorities can also support the introduction of place-based transport strategies, to avoid a mode approach and/or integrate funds. Further, they may also allow and support even smaller and medium-sized cities to experiment with sustainable mobility planning as observed with Platanias.

In other words, defragmenting administrative authority through devolution to the city level is a key step in addressing governance gaps.

At city level, authorities can make administrative reforms to work transversally with other departments and authorities to monitor the implementation of strategies. For example, the power to impose sanctions in case entities fail to achieve the goals set out for them can be an important pillar of local transition strategies. Further, short-term implementation strategies can help facilitate buy-in from politicians, businesses and the wider public. Local authorities can also reach out to other sectors and private actors to experiment with transformative policies, such as the greening (or blueing) of city streets, such as Antwerp's garden streets.

A multi-level approach to governance capacity building is thus crucial to achieving durable and responsive implementation of solutions and good practices. Venues for interaction and mechanisms for support across levels are key elements to ensuring net-zero

pathways in urban transitions are maintained.

5. CAPACITY BUILDING FOR STRONG URBAN GOVERNANCE: WHAT LESSONS BEYOND SUMP-PLUS?

There is a strong necessity to accelerate the pace of sustainable transitions. Beyond just size and geography, governance and policy capacities matter. They need to expand to meet more ambitious targets while flexibly adapting to a shifting context driven by environmental, economic, and technological triggers.

However, although each city's transition is different, the SUMP-PLUS project has been able to identify five governance solutions that have proven to be necessary for turning governance from a constraining factor to an enabling factor, namely:

• Building ownership and leadership through appointing leading teams/persons;
• Adopting a revisable strategy that allows flexibility in adapting long-term goals to present shocks

and constraints;
• Enhancing pressure by shifting from a mode-based approach to an integrated approach;
• Scaling up towards metropolitan/urban functional areas; and
• Speeding up by exploring new carbon reduction reservoirs with a wider range of stakeholders.

In addition, support is needed from higher levels of governments to bridge gaps in current governance frameworks, namely:

• to devolve administrative and political authority to the (inter)municipal level;
• to collaborate to enhance their capacities; and
• to allow cities to manage their own path dependent transitions and defragment authority to streamline management.

There is much work still to be done on developing a new vision of sustainable mobility but by using the research provided by SUMP-PLUS to build governance capacities at the city-level cities can obtain the tools to find it.