

Polis Conference 2009

The Polis network of European cities and regions discusses solutions to unlock the potential of innovation in urban and regional mobility to overcome current economic and environmental challenges.



As climate talks are going on in Copenhagen, more than two hundred representatives from European cities and regions, the private sector and the research community gathered yesterday for the Annual Polis Conference in Brussels to discuss the future of local and regional sustainable mobility.

Helma Orosz, Mayor of Dresden – and newly elected President of Polis – opened the Conference. In her speech, she insisted on the important role of innovation to improve local and regional mobility, and as part of the solution to support economic recovery and to overcome global environmental challenges. “[Innovation] is essential to strengthen the competitiveness of our cities, to protect our environment at the local level, and to fight climate change”, said Ms Orosz.

Ms Orosz stressed the importance of collaboration between all public actors – at local, regional, national and European level to – face current economic and environmental challenges. With this, she added that innovation requires the creation of new markets to allow for economies of scale.

Hermann Meyer, President of ERTICO-ITS Europe, and panelist at the opening round table, continued along the same line: “it is counter-productive to have an insular approach: we need to team-up”. He stressed that a collaborative approach also means the involvement of industry.

It is not just technology that is changing, but also demographics. Sandro Santamato from the European Commission highlighted that “by 2060, 84% of the Europeans will live in urban areas, and 30% will be more than 65 years old”. Sir Albert Bore, Councillor of Birmingham and Member of the European Committee of the Regions, said that addressing shifting demographics requires local authorities to develop a long term vision for transport while keeping these predictions in mind.

Stéphane Coppey, President of Toulouse transport authority Tisseo, and chairman of the Polis Political group, insisted on the importance of ITS (Intelligent Transport Systems) to “optimise” existing mobility infrastructure: “priority should be given now to ITS deployment in public transport. This would allow the public transport sector to reach the same level as in private cars”.

Electric cars provide another area of innovation, and for Jean-Luc di Paola-Galloni from Valeo (and Vice-Chair of ERTRAC), they can contribute to the improvement of urban mobility, but only if they are affordable. It is not just the issue of affordability that needs to be addressed, but “the model of private ownership of cars has also to be reconsidered.”

“Innovation needs to be driven by policy”, concluded Mary Crass, from the European Transport Forum, who moderated the round table: “the action plan on urban mobility goes in the right direction but further policy developments are expected”.