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Urban mobility in the EU

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Cities worldwide are characterised by population growth, urbanisation and high levels of dependence on private cars. All of these contribute to traffic congestion and pollution, which raise considerable environmental and health concerns. In the EU, inefficient travel networks in urban areas cost Member State economies an estimated €110 billion each year. The Commission has also calculated the health costs of air pollution, much of which comes from road traffic, at several hundred billion euro per year.

The EU has put in place a range of policies and the Commission has adopted specific action plans to help Member States address the challenges facing urban mobility. More than €60 billion from the EU budget has been made available to implement these and other initiatives during the 2014-2020 period.

The European Court of Auditors has recently launched an audit of the effectiveness of the EU's action and funding on urban mobility.

If you wish to contact the audit team, you may do so at the following e-mail address: ECA-urban-mobility-audit@eca.europa.eu.

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Background

Urban mobility – the range of travel options and associated activities in a city or urban area – depends on several factors. These include topography, land-use, population structure and wealth, car ownership, mobility policies, governance and behaviour. Side effects of mobility, particularly in urban areas, are traffic congestion and the pollution caused by transport.

Around 70 % of Europe's population lives in urban areas, and the UN forecasts that this figure will increase to around 80 % by 2050. Traffic congestion is therefore a growing daily problem for many people in the EU, and efficient mobility management is a key issue for urban areas.

A Eurobarometer survey has indicated that around 60 % of EU citizens consider congestion to be the most serious problem affecting mobility¹. As well as bringing economic benefits, efficient infrastructure and public transport systems address wider issues of health and well-being, protecting the environment from air and noise pollution, improving safety and reducing energy dependency. In this regard, action by the EU and the Member States also contributes to the emissions targets that are part of the EU's 2020 Strategy.

The European Parliament has frequently expressed its concern about traffic congestion, and has promoted sustainable urban mobility plans as a way of addressing the problem².

Economic concerns

Research has shown that fluid traffic flows have a positive impact on urban economic growth. Studies suggest that a 10 % decrease in journey times can boost productivity by 2.9 % and that, in highly congested regions, free-flowing traffic could mean productivity gains of up to 30 %.

Inefficiencies in urban mobility, and road congestion in particular, cost the EU an estimated €110 billion per year. This is more than 1 % of the EU's GDP.

Environmental and health impacts

Road transport is responsible for a significant part of air pollution and environmental noise in urban areas, both of which are harmful to ecosystems and biodiversity.

As many as 96 % of EU citizens living in urban areas are exposed to air-borne pollutants at levels which the World Health Organisation considers to be damaging to health. Road

transport is already one of the main causes of air pollution in the EU and the European Economic Area, especially in terms of CO₂ emissions.

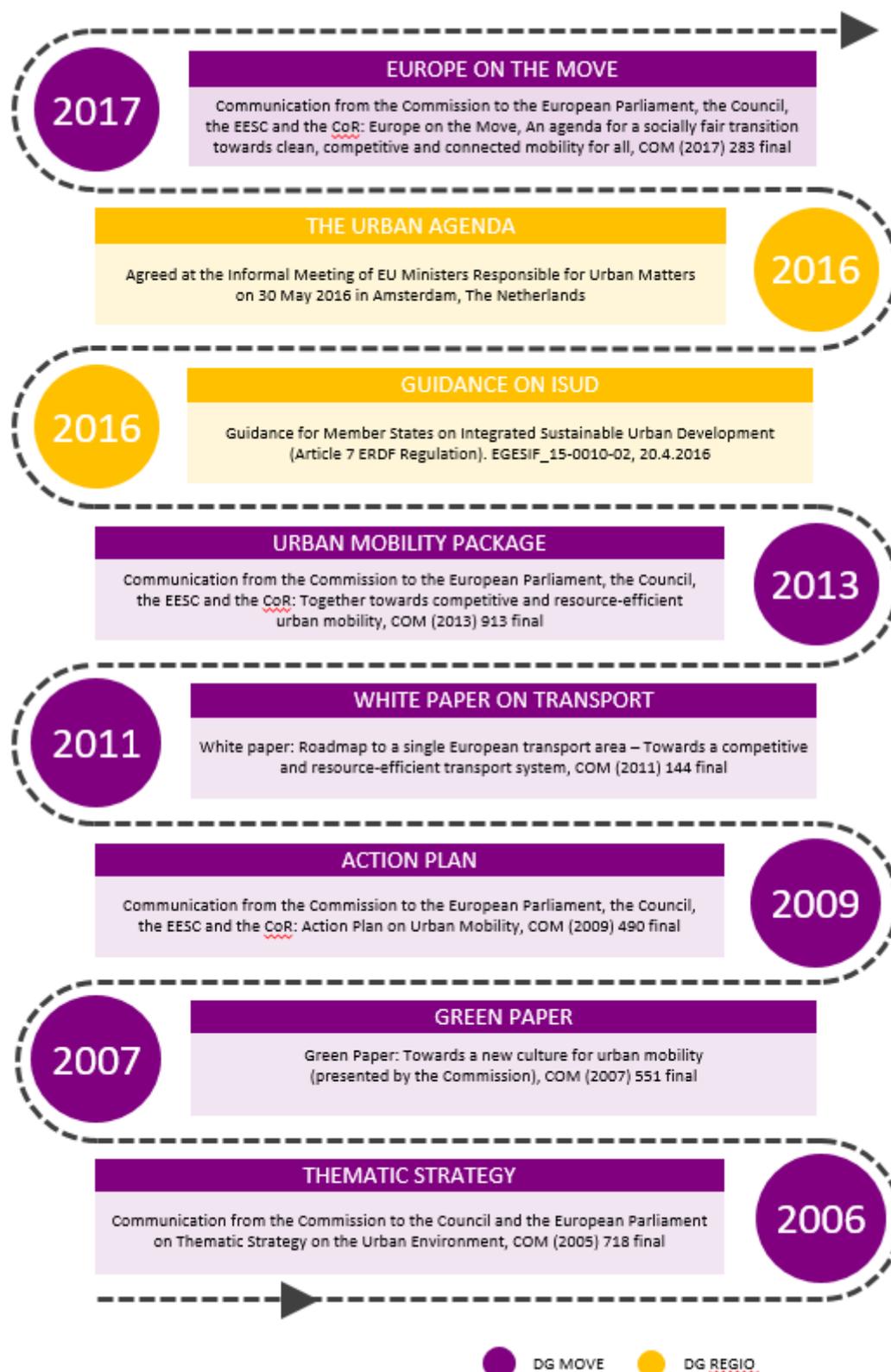
A recent ECA report found that air pollution is the biggest environmental risk to health in Europe³. In 2013, the Commission valued the health-related costs of air pollution in the EU at several hundred billion euro per year.

Policy framework

Urban mobility is a subject mainly managed by national, regional and local authorities; there are no EU regulations or directives in this area. However, given its wider impacts, especially in the areas of competitiveness, health and the environment, the European Commission has a role to play in supporting research, centralising information, encouraging and disseminating good practices and innovative approaches and subsidising projects.

In recognition of the growing importance of the issue, in the past decade the Commission has also adopted several policy statements and other documents of relevance to the sector – as shown in *Figure 1* below.

Figure 1 – Main policy documents adopted by the Commission



Source: ECA

Roles and responsibilities

Responsibilities at the Commission

The Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport (DG MOVE) is responsible for transport policy and provides financial support through the Innovation and Networks Executive Agency (INEA), mainly from the Connecting Europe Facility.

The Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) provides financial support through the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund.

The Directorate-General for the Environment (DG ENV) and the Directorate-General for Climate Action (DG CLIMA) jointly manage the LIFE programme – the EU funding instrument for environment and climate action, much of whose work is delegated to the Commission's Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (EASME).

The Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD) is the lead DG for Horizon 2020, one part of which is the CIVITAS Initiative for city-led mobility projects.

The Joint Research Centre (JRC), the Commission's science and knowledge service, supports EU policy-making by providing independent scientific evidence. The JRC has published several reports and articles on urban congestion.

Other stakeholders

The European Investment Bank (EIB) manages the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) on behalf of the Commission. The EFSI provides loans and guarantees for the implementation of projects.

Financing

Transport infrastructure and public transport projects often correspond to the largest public investments for decades and can transform cities. The EU offers urban mobility funding from a range of sources. Overall, we estimate that, for the period from 2014 to 2020, over €60 billion is available from the EU for urban mobility projects:

- over €32 billion has been specifically earmarked from the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund for urban mobility projects;
- €24 billion comes from the Connecting Europe Facility; and
- €8 billion from Horizon 2020 is available for general transport, including urban mobility.

In addition, since 2014, the EIB has signed or approved EFSI projects in the transport field, including urban mobility, for a total amount of €6.9 billion.

Focus of the audit

In the course of this audit of EU action and funding in connection with urban mobility, we have identified several important areas to focus on:

- the measures put in place by the Commission to encourage Member States to adopt sound policies and consistent strategies with a view to improving urban mobility;
- the use of EU funding to implement the Commission's policy on urban mobility; and
- progress made in the area of urban mobility during the 2014-2020 programming period in terms of the levels of congestion compared to population growth.

Since these focus areas are identified before the audit work commences, they should not be regarded as audit observations, conclusions or recommendations.

We will also draw on previous ECA special reports, such as a 2014 report on the effectiveness of EU-funded urban transport projects⁴.

ABOUT ECA SPECIAL REPORTS AND AUDIT PREVIEWS

The ECA's special reports set out the results of its audits of EU policies and programmes or management topics related to specific budgetary areas.

Audit previews provide information in relation to an ongoing audit task. They are based on preparatory work undertaken before the start of the audit and are intended as a source of information for those interested in the policy and/or programme being audited.

If you wish to contact the team in charge of this audit, please do so through the following e-mail address: ECA-urban-mobility-audit@eca.europa.eu.

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- ¹ Special Eurobarometer 422a, Quality of Transport Report, December 2014.
 - ² European Parliament Resolution P8_TA (2015)0310 of 9 September 2015 on the implementation of the 2011 White Paper on Transport: taking stock and the way forward towards sustainable mobility (2015/2005(INI)) of 29 July 2015.
 - ³ ECA special report 23/2018 “Air pollution: Our health still insufficiently protected”, paragraph 2.
 - ⁴ ECA special report 1/2014 “Effectiveness of EU-supported public urban transport projects”.

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