

SPEECH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MALTA INSTITUTE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON 'SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY IN MALTA: TRANSPORT RESEARCH IN PRACTICE' AT SMARTCITY, MALTA. FRIDAY, 30 NOVEMBER, 2012.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to convey to you my Minister's gratitude for your kind invitation for this important conference and regret that he was unable to join you this morning due to other unforeseen commitments.

I also wish to convey his appreciation for your significant research which guides future policy in this sector. Transport has been undergoing a major transformation over the past several years but as more people move around the islands more frequently for a wider variety of reasons the great challenges we live with seem to outpace all efforts to mitigate it.

The underlying context of a densely populated island-city with highly seasonal concentrations of incoming visitors and a wide dispersal of land use makes the job even tougher. We experience this difficulty in managing all aspects of an urban reality: the challenge of managing waste; the challenge of sourcing, distributing and managing the use of water and energy; the challenge of building, developing and managing our built environment.

The irony of a sustainable objective is that it is counter-intuitive: it is too easily perceived to be promoting stepping back into the past, when in reality the objective must be to enable and liberate the future.

For in times like these, what must be foremost on our minds, is economic growth and the creation of more and better jobs for our people that will sustain a population that lives longer, healthier and fuller lives. As the demographics and the expectations of individuals counted by those statistics change, so must change the tools of the urban landscape that support that society. A society impeded by unmanaged construction, mired in mountains of waste and stuck in a perpetual traffic jam has no time for growth and does not make enough money to provide for the reasonable expectations of a modern society.

Our plans for transportation fit into the European context as – unlike what some people seem to think – our problems are not unique and we can do a better job of solving our problems if we follow a harmonised program of changes as part of a European drive for change.

A few months ago, the European Commission adopted a roadmap of 40 concrete initiatives for the next decade to build a competitive transport system that will increase mobility, remove major barriers in key areas and fuel growth and employment. At the same time, the proposals will dramatically reduce Europe's dependence on imported oil and cut carbon emissions in transport by 60% by 2050. The aim of the EU White paper is to halve the use of 'conventionally-fuelled' cars in urban transport by 2030; and to completely phase them out of cities by 2050.

It can be hardly controversial to argue for improved sustainability in transportation. Argument is easy. It becomes rather more complicated when one comes to implement, as every step of the way is taken out of the context of a bigger picture and taken as an affront to old and sacred habits.

Even so if one were to sum up the vision for sustainable mobility one can take it down to three principles: AVOID, SHIFT and IMPROVE.

Not all journeys are necessary. This is a more complex statement than didactic finger-pointing at end consumers. Travelling is often required when staying put could produce more. A drive to more tele-working and tele-conferencing; more on-line trading; more electronic public services; reduced public administration; all that is a start which requires leadership from the top.

Our management of land use must also focus on clusters of products and services so that the journeys that do remain necessary are conducted more efficiently. It is a blessing that most of our public administration is on the right side of Portes des Bombes. But if one were to shop around for electronic equipment, say, or a new kitchen, one must effectively cover the entire road network before they can start comparing prices.

This is true of goods as much as it is true of people. Is it necessary for every individual brand of cola to have its own distribution system multiplying practically identical journeys to the same point of origin and for effectively the same purpose?

Therefore at planning and management stages, but also at the day-to-day decision making that one makes on an evening when planning their next day: the question must be asked whether a journey can be AVOIDED.

If it cannot, the second drive must be to SHIFT mode towards more efficient and more sustainable means of transportation.

Right up to next year's budget we have year on year provided incentives for cleaner vehicles that have less of an impact on the environment than their older versions. In 2010 the National Household Travel Survey had revealed that around 75% of all trips made by Maltese citizens in a typical day were made by car as a driver or a passenger. The survey also highlighted our increased demands for mobility and the complexity of our travel patterns compared with similar surveys carried out in 1989 and 1998. Mobility is vital and where the use of motorised vehicles is absolutely necessary, cars, buses and trucks fuelled with renewables, electricity or utilising hybrid engines reduce greenhouse gases and other pollutants.

The market take-up of electric vehicles across EU countries has, to date, been slow due to the relatively high purchase cost of such vehicles, consumer fears about new technology and the lack of designated charging infrastructure. As you will hear in a presentation by Transport Malta this afternoon, apart from budgetary measures Malta has been awarded EU funds to set up two electric vehicle demonstration projects. The aim of these projects is to initiate the installation of electric vehicle charging points at key strategic locations in Malta and Gozo and to procure a number of electric vehicles which will be deployed as part of a demonstration project to make the case for change.

In the meantime, we have also liberalised group transport markets attracting unprecedented levels of investment from the private sector. We have completely transformed scheduled public transport which has not yet reached its true potential in terms of quality and attractiveness but on which most users agree is an unprecedented improvement on anything in existence before now. These are enablers but the cultural change we all have to go through is a much harder process that must however catch up with the growing demands of our economy and our ever-moving society.

We must also re-think what we mean by SHIFT as it is clearly insufficient to restrict our drive from one mechanised form of transport to another, however improved the efficiency of the latter would be. The most sustainable means of transport one can possibly have is walking and except for leisure purposes it has been stigmatised over time. In small pockets we have started to experience the return of walking. Certainly the pedestrianisation of the core of Valletta has given the space and provided the safety for more journeys within the city to be completed on foot.

Which takes me to third principle: to IMPROVE the infrastructure to create the space for more sustainable mobility. The paving of central Valletta not only made the city more attractive; it gave pedestrians the safety and the space they needed to move

around. Just yesterday I had the pleasure of trying out the new elevator between the Upper Barrakka and the waterfront. That too is a model of how infrastructure can be developed to enable sustainable mobility.

Clearly that is the best example of the multi-modal approach that we must take to travelling. A daily commute between Bormla and Valletta can take the form of starting a car parked awkwardly on one street down from home, driving through the metal quagmire of Marsa and hunting for parking in Valletta. It can also be a walk down to the shoreline, a 10 minute ferry ride across the harbour, and taking the elevator up to the city centre. The perception of switching modes will be hard to overcome which is why we must provide the enablers and improve the infrastructure to encourage their use, starting with making sure pavement and road crossings and waiting points are safe for people standing on their two feet.

It is very positive that we have managed to secure unprecedented millions of euro to re-develop our major road network. There's no doubt we needed that investment and we still have significant challenges ahead of us: the nodes of Kappara and Marsa; the coast road; what to do with the road on Għadira Bay. There's also the tremendous ambition of an under-sea tunnel link between Malta and Gozo.

The new TEN-T as is being proposed for Malta reinforces the important role of the sea ports of Valletta and Marsaxlokk, and the airport for international connectivity and proposes the extension of TEN-T road network from the current 51km to 130km across Malta and Gozo. This will provide increased opportunity in the next budget period ending in 2020 for Malta to build on successes in modernising transport infrastructure through the EU Cohesion Fund.

But as more of the major road network is completed, the mobility of people making shorter journeys must go further up our priority list. Government is currently preparing a comprehensive transport plan that will prioritise its investment programme in transport infrastructure right up to 2020.

Over 10 years ago, we realised that the traditional policy days of predicting demand for travel and providing new infrastructures to meet this demand was, in the long run, unsustainable. In many of our congested roads physical or environmental restrictions prevent road or junction widening. Innovation in traffic management will help to make transport more sustainable, which means efficient, clean, safe and seamless. Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) apply information and communication technologies to transport. Computers, electronics, satellites and sensors are playing an increasingly important role in our transport systems. The main innovation is the

integration of existing technologies to create new services. ITS in Malta has, so far, been limited to provision of speed enforcement and in-car navigation systems. Next year, Government through an ERDF financed project will be rolling out an ITS in traffic management infrastructure which will see the setting up of a traffic management control centre which will coordinate traffic management and incident management in real-time through digital road signage, CCTVs and central coordination of traffic signals to minimise delays to vehicles in traffic and, where necessary give priority on the roads to emergency vehicles and public transport.

It is an irresistible cliché to say today that the road ahead is tough and that we have yet a long way to go. I thank you for your research which helps show us the way ahead. It will take a lot of money, a lot of courage and a lot of controversy to get there. But in truth we can either go through all that, and give space to our country to continue to grow and sustain a thriving economy or we risk being stuck in a stagnant traffic jam that stifles economic activity and drives investment elsewhere.

It is our job not to let that happen.

Thank you.