



EUROMONTANA



The EU Strategy for a Sustainable and Smart Mobility Bringing mountain territories into the transition

EUROMONTANA'S RESPONSE TO THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE EUROPEAN STRATEGY FOR A SUSTAINABLE AND SMART MOBILITY

SEPTEMBER 2020

Mobility: taking into account the specific challenges of mountain areas

Mobility plays an important role in the attractiveness of a region. In many rural and mountain areas, there is a persisting car dependency and the absence of adequate collective transport solutions imposes social and territorial exclusion of some segments of rural inhabitants. No matter how much effort is spent on education, promotion of tourism, development of new economic initiatives, etc.: accessibility remains a key to success for development initiatives and the lack of good accessibility affects any development strategy implemented in rural territories¹.

This holds true for the accessibility of rural areas from urban areas but also for accessibility within the rural areas. This also particularly holds true for the accessibility of the 13% of the EU population who live in a mountain area, covering nearly 29% of EU27 countries, such as for all the tourists coming to enjoy mountain areas. Every year, 95 million long-stay tourists and 60 million day-trip visitors visit the Alps for instance.

Rural and mountain areas present specific challenges such as the importance of distances to cover while the number of inhabitants can be low, sparsely populated areas with several villages of small towns (like

¹ Euromontana "[Towards a long-term vision of rural areas : contributions of Euromontana for Vice-President Šuica](#)", May 2020



in Spain or Romania) reducing even more the economic viability of public transport lines, a high number of elderly people, sometimes a high poverty rate and a relative remoteness to the main airports /railway /road nodes.

Mountain areas should also face specific geographic conditions with slopes, altitude and protected areas. Roads and railways are expensive and difficult to build up steep mountain valleys. Tunnels and bridges are often necessary. Heavy snowfall, avalanches, landslides and floods can also block the roads.

These natural, geographical and sometimes demographic handicaps of mountain areas thus lead to a high dependency on road transport, both for permanent residents, who often need to travel a certain distance for work, education, services and leisure activities and for seasonal tourists.

According to Move on Green project, there is a **remaining car dependency** in rural and mountain areas. Small labour market and low numbers of consumers prevent delivering some private and public services in a cost-effective way. Decreasing or already declined public transport and increasing necessity of owning car as transport mean, limit the access of people without a car to those services. Most of all, peri-urban and rural areas are characterized by higher number of driven kilometres per person as in urban areas (but only in old EU), which brings to a higher number of cars per person and significant share of CO₂emissions. Even in rural areas of France, only 9 to 16% of people in rural areas have access to public transport less than 1 km from their home. In France, whereas the share of public transport has increased in the main urban centres, individual cars largely remain the main transport used in rural areas, where less than 6% of all travel are made by public transport.

Furthermore, as many rural areas are also border areas, special attention has to be paid to cross-border commuting workers. Each day 2 million persons cross a national border in Europe for professional reasons, 600.000 do so in the EUSALP-area (EU Strategy for the Alpine Region). Due to a lack of public transport infrastructure and harmonised cross-border transport schemes, most of these trips are operated by car. A huge effort has to be made at European, national and regional level to overcome these gaps. Macroregional strategies and territorial cooperation programmes are ideal tools to take up this challenge.

These challenges require specific mobility solutions to be addressed in the future EU Strategy for a Sustainable and Smart Mobility.

Mobility: leaving no one behind in the transition towards sustainability

Mountain areas are rich of a unique biodiversity and ecosystems that provide ecosystem services to the whole population, such as water and carbon sequestration. Yet, these ecosystems are put at risk by CO₂ emissions and pollutions from road transport. Mountains are important tourism destinations and some valleys are the busiest road axes for trade and businesses, with heavy consequences on mountains' unique environment. In the Alpine Space for instance, one-third of the 40 million tons of goods transported each year is conveyed by trucks through mountain areas².

A risk of social exclusion

Even if the aim is to increase sustainable mobility for all, the different target groups in rural areas are facing specific challenges. According to Huygues, Baptiste and Carrière, the inhabitants of rural areas can be characterised in three categories regarding mobility:

- ▶ The “territorial assigned persons” who don't have access to mobility for financial, physical or cultural reasons. These persons are very dependant and rely on local shops and services and on their families to increase their mobility. Elderly people with no cars, young unemployed with no

² [“Background: Combined Transport – a sustainable alternative to road freight transport”](#), AlpInnoCT, October 2018

financial means to get a driving licence or a car, women in households with only one car used by the other spouse and disabled people are included in this category.

- ▶ The “vulnerable persons” who are spending more than 18% of their budget in mobility expenses (car, fuel, insurance, parking and toll costs etc.). Low income households with workers and employees are often in this category. They have often moved to rural areas, as they can’t afford the more expensive housing in urban areas. The distance travelled every day is important and there is a huge risk for this target group to become more vulnerable, due to its high motorisation rate and the increasing costs of fuel.
- ▶ The “other mobile persons” who don’t have specific mobility difficulty, at least financially, but who mainly rely on their private car. These modest to well-off households represent the most important part of the rural population. In the context of growing costs of fuel, a part of this category can become vulnerable tomorrow.

The “territorial assigned persons” have difficult access to mobility, which complicates the access to jobs, services and reduce the possibility of interactions with other people. It can lead to precarious situations, isolation or exclusion. The “vulnerable” ones are threatened by the fuel costs and if the transport costs continue to rise, they will be obliged to make savings on other spending (like heating), or move away to cities closer to jobs and services where transport costs is less expensive, or they will reduce their mobility.

A risk of territorial exclusion

In addition of these social risks, all rural and mountainous inhabitants are facing the risk of territorial exclusion. Even if territorial cohesion is an important aim of European policies, with a number of policy and funding instruments pointing towards an increasing territorial balance in Europe, larger cities and growth poles are in the centre of most national and European policies. While challenges in remote and peripheral areas are increasing, demographic trends and the imbalances in the education and transportation systems are not in favour of rural areas, territorial cohesion is thus challenged. As a result, support to transport infrastructure in rural areas should remain considered as an investment for public good as it helps to prevent their territorial isolation. If such support is made to public transport, it simultaneously contributes both to economic growth and less pollution, which in total can ensure the quality of life and prevent rural exodus. The development of transport systems should thus be integrated in spatial planning of rural areas.

Recommendations

Euromontana welcomes the initiative of the European Commission to adopt a Strategy for a Sustainable and Smart Mobility but draws attention to the fact that no one should be left behind in its measures in order to provide to all citizens adapted, efficient and sustainable means of transport. Avoiding social and territorial exclusion by developed specific and targeted mobility strategy for rural and mountain areas would be a key to achieve this goal.

Therefore, Euromontana especially recommends to:

- ▶ **Improve rural and mountain mobility:**
 - Adopt a Rural Mobility Package, which would detail measures for the development of sustainable transport in rural areas and addressing the specific challenges in remote, mountainous and sparsely populated territories. Revising the European agenda for sustainable urban and regional mobility is a risk of generalising the measures applied to

urban mobility without taking account of the specific features of mobility in rural areas (fewer and more scarce people, longer distances, costs of the infrastructures in mountains), such as the financial viability of mobility schemes.

- Restructure the “European Local Transport Information Service” (ELTIS), an initiative of the European Commission, which is so far only focused on urban mobility, to integrate a strong rural component. Such European urban and rural mobility platform would help regional and local authorities in the development of sustainable transport for different types of territories with the support of inspiring case studies, briefings on available tools and funding schemes and good practices.
- Ensure that Member States address the issue of rural mobility at regional level notably through the Cohesion Policy and Rural Development Programmes.

▶ **Encourage the development of rail transport:**

- Promote the development of rail transport both for passengers and freight, as well as combined transportation, and the maintenance of smaller railway line. This would help increasing the offer of sustainable transport for mountain communities and decreasing the number of trucks, whose heavy traffic in the valleys affects the climate, the environment, and the air quality in the mountains. In the Alpine Space for instance, one-third of the 40 million tons of goods transported each year is conveyed by trucks through mountain areas, with heavy consequences on mountainous ecosystems due to emissions.
- Encourage the maintenance of smaller railway lines as a solution until the last mile both for permanent residents and tourists.
- Take the opportunity of the 2021 European Year of Rail to engage reflection on rail transport in rural mountainous areas, including for the tourism and trade sectors³.

▶ **Encourage innovation in transport in mountain areas:**

- Encourage Member States to improve the multimodality of transports in and between regions, including in cross-borders areas, with common pricing and ticketing for instance but also multiactivity of transport to increase their viability.
- Promote social innovations in the transport sector to encourage sustainable options such as carpooling and on-demand transport where the viability of public transport remains too low for their development.
- Encourage further reflection on transport issues in the framework of Smart Villages and encourage rural territories to share good practices and exchanges experiences.
- Pay attention to the digital divide as in 2018, 50% of the EU rural areas still did not have access to broadband. Connectivity and digital skills must be considered in the Strategy to meet the needs of all citizens, including older adults, for example by proposing different booking options for on-demand transport which are not all digital.

For more information

Euromontana also invites the European Commission to discover the [50 good practices](#) collected and [policy guidelines](#) formulated for sustainable transport in rural and mountain areas within the course of the [Move on Green](#) Interreg IV C project (2012-2014).

The Horizon2020 project SIMRA (Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas 2016-2020) also provides inspiring examples of [social innovation’s contribution to the Green Deal](#) and benefits for [rural services](#)

³ Euromontana “[The European Year of Rail: make it work for mountainous regions](#)”, April 2020

including transport. SIMRA's [policy brief](#) also provides more recommendations on how to support social innovation at EU, national and regional levels.

Euromontana - the European Association for mountain areas

Euromontana is the European Association for mountain areas. Founded in 1996, it assembles around 65 organisations (regions, universities, chambers of commerce, of agriculture, development and environmental agencies) from 15 European countries in and out of the EU. Dedicated to the improvement of the quality of life of mountain people, Euromontana is working on different themes of crucial importance for mountain areas, such as cohesion policy, rural development, climate change, innovation, mountain products, tourism, agriculture and forestry, transport, youth among others. Euromontana is also officially supporting the RUMRA (Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas) & Smart Villages intergroup of the European Parliament.

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