Consumers International

Policy position on climate change and transport

1. Background

The greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with transport have grown exponentially over the last 50 years as the costs of car and air travel have diminished and consumers have moved to less energy efficient modes of transport. The increase is also due to a concentration of technological innovation into power and speed over fuel consumption and emissions. Transport now accounts for around 13% of global GHG emissions[1] and is predicted to be responsible for an estimated 60% of the increase in global emissions from 2002 to 2025.[2]

When it comes to transport, it is clear that it is the use phase that requires our attention. In cars for example, 81% of emissions arise from the use phase.[3] Technological improvements to the production of emissions and to fuel efficiency, while necessary, are only one part of the puzzle, rather than a solution in themselves, as they are not capable of producing the dramatic reduction in emissions that is needed.[4] Instead, changes must be sought in the way we think about access and mobility, including heightened consumer awareness of the impact of different forms of transport and an increased policy emphasis on public transport using infrastructure, cost, and speed to promote sustainable choices.

Ultimately a change of emphasis is needed at a governmental level to place access at the centre of transport planning, recognising mobility as just one means to this end. This should involve innovative thinking on methods for providing access through looking at, for example, planning for proximity or service delivery methods. All such innovation should take place around a framework that acknowledges consumer rights to affordable, accessible low-carbon mobility.

A key distinction to draw is between holiday travel versus 'getting around'. This does not equate to distinctions between modes of transport. Modes of transport and their use by consumers differ in different countries and regions, including locations where isolation may provide a compelling argument for higher use of carbon-intensive modes of transport. Even in these cases, an access approach to mobility is capable of providing solutions, for example through infrastructure improvements.

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[1] UNE P/Wuppertal Institute Collaborating Centre on Sustainable Consumption and Production *A key solution to climate change: Sustainable consumption and production making the link*, The SWITCH-Asia Network Facility, p.5

[2] UNE P/Wuppertal Institute Collaborating Centre on Sustainable Consumption and Production *A key solution to climate change: Sustainable consumption and production making the link*, The SWITCH-Asia Network Facility, p.11

[3] WWF-UK Evidence Base 2006 taken from WWF-UK, 2008

[4] World Business Council for Sustainable Development, *Mobility 2030*, WBCSD, 2004

Transport is a cross-cutting issue. Solutions to the environmental impact of transport must recognise the pivotal role transport plays in a wide range of areas of consumers' lives. At a macro level, it is widely acknowledged that transport has a significant effect on economic growth and trade.[5] It impacts on access to education, employment, health products and services, local trade, scale of production and agriculture amongst other factors. Lack of transport infrastructure may even be seen, in and of itself, as a defining characteristic of poverty.[6] This centrality of transport to the many dimensions of consumers' lives underlines not only the need for cross-sectoral planning to reduce emissions, but also the importance of preparing and responding appropriately to the impact of climate change on transport such as damage to infrastructure from flooding.

Solving the problem of transport-related emissions is sometimes blocked by arguments around cost to government, to industry and thus to consumers. This is often overplayed and ignores the industry realities. It is essential that dialogue on transport and climate recognises, in a transparent way, the role of governmental and intergovernmental subsidies in relation to transport and fuel in determining transport costs. An important example is the current subsidy at an international level of fossil fuels in spite of objection on environmental and justice grounds by lobby groups, and the lack of subsidisation of sustainable energy sources and technology despite the obvious potential benefits.

While the transport sector must see a shift to focus on access rather than mobility alone (for example through telecommuting or video-conferencing), low-carbon mobility remains a critical goal in order to reduce emissions from transport. As vehicle ownership has increased, occupancy rates have fallen and more must be done to raise awareness amongst consumers of the environmental benefits of cycling, walking and of public transport. Responsibility should not lie with consumers alone, and methods to facilitate change such as personalised travel plans should be considered. Infrastructure is also key, including innovation for converting existing infrastructure from motorised to non-motorised or collective use, as well as for the construction of new systems. Taxes on fuels and on vehicle purchases based on fuel efficiency must also be used to influence consumer choice for modes of transport and overall transport demand.

Increasing taxes on fuels or removing fuel subsidies are often portrayed as contrary to the interests of poor consumers but often, alternative methods for addressing the needs of poor consumers are preferable both in terms of mobility and emissions. Moreover, environmental approaches to all aspects of transport must take into account the needs of poor consumers. The provision of transport infrastructure, for example, has been identified as one of the leading causes of resettlement, and it is poor consumers who are disproportionately affected by resettlement, relocation and eviction in the name of improved infrastructure.[7] And poor consumers are often

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[5] UK Department for International Development *Transport's Role in Achieving the Millennium Development Goals* DFID Transport Resource Centre, 2002, p.6

[6] UK Department for International Development *Transport's Role in Achieving the Millennium Development Goals* DFID Transport Resource Centre, 2002, p.6

[7] Brian Williams and Paul Barter, *Double Jeopardy: The link between transport and evictions,* UN-Habitat p.1

excluded from the benefits.[8] These issues may in part be due to the control for public transport development often lying in the private rather than the public sector.[9]

Technological improvements for low-carbon vehicles such as battery electric, plug-in hybrid electric, and hydrogen fuel-cell electric vehicles should be combined with better labelling for consumers and stronger efficiency standards. Efforts must be put into mainstreaming such products including through public procurement and through product road-mapping and removing financial disincentives to low-emissions vehicles.

2. Recommendations

Consumer Organisations should

- Engage in dialogue with government to counteract the weight of the oil and vehicle industry lobbies on issues such as subsidies.
- Provide consumer education around the impact of different modes of transport.
- Work with industry and government to identify ways to encourage culture change towards sustainable modes of travel.

Industry should

- Engage with government and consumer organisations to develop product roadmaps for mainstreaming low-carbon vehicles.
- Promote technological innovation to reduce fuel consumption and GHG emissions in vehicles.
- Where applicable, plan responses to infrastructure damage from climate change.

Governments should

- Secure the rights of consumers to accessible, affordable low-carbon mobility.
- Use a cross-sectoral approach to transport that incorporates environmental concerns and acknowledges the cross-cutting role of transport in consumers' lives.
- Prepare for the impact of climate change on transport such as damage to infrastructure from flooding.

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[8] Brian Williams and Paul Barter, *Double Jeopardy: The link between transport and evictions,* UN-Habitat p.1

[9] UK Department for International Development *Transport's Role in Achieving the Millennium Development Goals* DFID Transport Resource Centre, 2002, p.7

- Place access at the centre of transport planning, recognising mobility as just one means to this end.
- Consider converting existing infrastructure from motorised to non-motorised or collective use.
- Commit to low-carbon vehicles through public procurement policies.
- Remove financial disincentives to low-emissions vehicles.
- Ensure effective efficiency labelling and standards are in place and adhered to.
- Stop subsidising fossil fuels and move towards subsidisation of renewable sources of energy alongside measures to realise the rights of poor consumers to affordable low-carbon mobility.
- Deliver standardised and regular reports on fossil fuel subsidies.