

Cities for Mobility

”Inclusive mobility – access for all” is the theme for this conference the answer is:

Pedestrians and bicyclists are city life

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Pedestrians are the fundamental basis for inclusive mobility for all

Mobility for all begins with the understanding that the human being is a walking animal. When we are about one year old we start to walk and we are individually mobile until we cannot walk anymore. Walking is the basic way of moving for humans. All our senses are geared towards moving on our legs. We can see all the details and experience a lot of things with the moderate speed of walking compared with driving in cars. Mobility can of course take other forms but the backbone of mobility in daily life for any city should be a dense, highly comfortable pedestrian network.

There is much more to walking and cycling than transportation.

People walking are often doing more than just getting from A to B. They can easily stop and have chat when they meet other people. They can take a short break for a coffee or sit down for a little while on a bench to enjoy the sunshine.

People meeting other people are the essence of what cities are for. A comfortable and fine-grained pedestrian network, which is inviting all members and ages of society to walk and meet, is important not only for social life, but also for democracy. It is important that people in our societies meet as human beings – as equals – and public spaces are great places for people meeting. It supports an open, friendly society. People who are meeting informally are also important for any city that want to be creative or knowledge based. Meeting and sharing information is very important in contemporary societies.

Cyclists in cities are just people moving their legs on a small convenient devise while they are still present as people in the space. They move with moderate speed and they are visible as people who can easily stop without the problem of finding a parking lot. They can easily change from being pedestrians to be cyclists again. It is easy to stop for a chat or just take a break, get a coffee, or take a rest and enjoy looking at other people. People on foot and on bicycles are simply accessible, open and visible in the public spaces, which is quite different to car drivers. People in cars do not have the same options in their boxes on wheels. It is difficult to see who is inside and they cannot so easily change to become pedestrians. They have to find a parking lot first. People on foot and on bicycles are simply city life.

Walking and cycling are for all – it is inclusive

Walking and bicycling are essential forms of city transportation. It is cheap so all people can afford it - unlike owning a car. It makes people of almost all age groups mobile on their own. At another conference I was told that even in the wealthiest parts of California 30% of the population are immobile as they are too young, too old or handicapped in

other ways so they have to get other people to drive them around. In a fine, dense city with a tightly woven network of pedestrian routes and bicycle tracks you can have easy and cheap access to most of what you need in life. Facilities for walking and cycling are in that way supporting social equity.

Walking and cycling is environmentally friendly

Walking and cycling do not produce CO₂ and cities with many people bicycling and walking are simply saving a lot of CO₂. The cyclists in Copenhagen for example save the city for 90.000 tons of CO₂ every year. Walking and bicycling are not noisy or polluting in any way and the infrastructure takes up little space comparing with other types of mobility infrastructure.

Walking and cycling is convenient, fast and for everybody

In Copenhagen 37% of the citizens go to work on bicycles compared to 31% in cars (2008). This is not because the people of Copenhagen are poor – on the contrary – but because it is the most flexible, convenient and fastest way of moving around in the city. People of all strata of society use their bicycles as part of daily life – not just as exercise in their free time or because they do not own a car.

Walking and cycling is good for your health

Internationally we are facing an obesity epidemic. But it is rewarding to know that half an hours exercise every day can expand your life with 7 more (healthy) years, as doctors tell us. It takes just about 2 years of your life to do that, so you gain lifetime as you pedal or walk around for your errands as part of your daily life.

Public transit, walking and cycling

A fine network for walking (and cycling) is a prerequisite for good public transport. Great public transit must be linked to the surroundings by a good pedestrian network. For longer distances and low-density city districts cycling in combination with transit can make it easier for a lot of people to use public transportation.

As long as you can walk and bike you are better off. BUT we must plan our cities based on people on foot and bike – this is the challenge for planning in the 21. Century.

Walking and cycling is simply transportation for the 21. Century. And it is much more!