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The beauty of human-powered mobility: UNECE workshop promotes cycling and walking in cities

Finding sustainable and alternative ways to move about in urban areas -- such as "human-powered mobility" like cycling and walking -- was the topic of a workshop held outside Prague from 24-25 September 2009. Cycling and walking are examples of environmentally-friendly modes of transport that contribute to lower greenhouse gas emissions in cities, have a low impact on urban congestion and are a boost to human health. National and local policies are needed to support walking and cycling as increasingly attractive and viable modes of urban mobility.

The latest in a series of workshops held under the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme, **THE PEP workshop on Safe and Healthy Walking and Cycling in Urban Areas** was organized in cooperation with the Czech Republic Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Regional Development, Ministry of Health, the City of Prague and non-governmental organizations. THE PEP is run jointly by the UNECE and the World Health Organization's Regional Office for Europe.

The World Health Organization has estimated that 30 minutes of walking and cycling shows positive health effects. But the beauty of human-powered mobility is that it can also reduce traffic accidents and congestion in our cities as well as noise and air pollution. Walking and cycling can also be a fun way to do shopping, go to work and to spend leisure time.

Around half of the trips we make with our cars are shorter than 5 km and a third of our car trips are less than 3 km. Many of these trips could be made by public transport or by walking and cycling. As a rule of thumb, walking is suitable for distances of up to 1 km or 15 minutes; and cycling for distances of up to 5 km or 20 minutes.

A systemic approach to human-powered mobility requires new thinking by transport and city planners. It requires initiatives and support from national Governments - municipalities cannot do it alone. It requires an integration of car parks, public transport and walking and cycling networks and appropriate infrastructure. It requires education, training for motorists and cyclists and a change in public perception. And it requires money and the political will to do things differently.

The workshop identified strategies, policies and measures to promote innovative policies to support walking and cycling as increasingly viable and attractive modes of urban mobility.

As such, the focus of the workshop was on cooperation between national and local authorities, industry and civil society in design, planning, financing and legislation to support walking and cycling – best practices on translating national policy objectives into local action.

The workshop followed a High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment, hosted by the Netherlands, where more than 30 governments across the UNECE and WHO-Europe region agreed the Amsterdam Declaration and four priority goals, including reduced emissions of

greenhouse gasses and noise, clean and efficient public transport and effective mobility management schemes.

This event kicked-off THE PEP *staffete*, or relay race, to spread the word from Amsterdam to Prague, by “passing a baton” of best practices in sustainable urban transport to raise awareness and promote a coordinated policy approach.

The workshop agreed concrete action points, urging policymakers, industry and civil society to:

- Recognize walking and cycling as an integral part of transport and urban development planning and policy, on par with public transport and car traffic;
- Promote human-powered mobility which contributes to individual fitness and public health, reduction of traffic accidents, noise and air pollution, less greenhouse gas emissions and congestion and increases the attractiveness of cities;
- Ensure that cycling and walking infrastructure is focused on safety and eliminating barriers, including for children, the elderly, those with reduced mobility and is safe, accessible, convenient, comfortable and attractive.

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