

The Mobility Covenant Programme in Flanders

- Concept, implementation and evaluation -

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Abstract - In 1996- 97 the Government of Flanders introduced the mobility covenant as a new organisational instrument to enhance a local and urban sustainable mobility policy. This new policy aims at traffic safety, liveability, selective accessibility and environmental concerns. Early 2003, almost all 309 Flemish municipalities are in the process of drawing a sustainable mobility scheme and an important number of mobility schemes are being implemented. The mobility covenant structures an innovative partnership between the Flemish road administration, the municipalities and the public transport agency (De LIJN) under the umbrella of a so-called taskforce ‘mobility covenant programme’. The paper elaborates on the content of the covenant, basically the mobility scheme and the (project) modules.

In 2001 the Flemish Administration carried out a SWOT analysis. The analysis showed a growing support of the different stakeholders for the mobility covenant policy. In general the municipalities see the instrument as an added value with respect to the earlier fragmented and instrumental planning process.

We refer to the main features of some of the best practice examples of Hasselt, Gent, Mol and Geel, cases that are dealt with in a separate workshop.

1. Mobility Covenant Flanders: setting and state of the art [1] [3] [5]

In 1996- 97 the Government of Flanders introduced the mobility covenant as a new organisational instrument to enhance local and urban sustainable mobility policy processes. This new policy based on the instrument of the mobility covenant aims at traffic safety, liveability, selective accessibility and environmental concerns. It intends to modify the modal split and mode choice behaviour in favour of sustainable means of transport, such as public transport, collective transport and the use of the bicycle and to deal with the mobility issue in a methodical and multimodal and intermodal way based on an integrated view on mobility.

The covenant instrument was a strategic answer to the problem posed by the highly fragmented and instrumental decision and planning environment of the traditional traffic policies of the past in Flanders. As sustainable transport policy is moving towards multi - modal and inter-modal applications, its process inevitably becomes multi – sectoral and multi – actor in nature. The techno-centric and non – integrated approaches of the past are being overruled by a changing context of interactive and decentralised decision-making in mobility policy. Co-production of policies and the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders - even

conflict resolution - became the norm from 1997 on. Signing the covenant committed all the partners to acting on the basis of achieving an integrated sustainable mobility.

The mobility covenant, basically, structured an innovative partnership between the Flemish road administration, the municipalities and the public transport agency (De LIJN) under the umbrella of a so called taskforce 'mobility covenant programme'. The Flemish Government supported the programme in its initial phase of development and implementation and issued a mobility covenant decree in April 2001 to secure its continuation.

A guidance structure for all actors involved was set up. These guidance tools covered a range of start -up information sessions, a handbook with guidance and best practices (currently turned in to a website), training sessions, a monthly newsletter, a new staff to coach the implementation and an audit structure to ensure the compliance of the plans to the overall goals. An ongoing project is dealing with a quality assessment of local mobility processes in ten volunteering cities and towns.

Early 2003, more than 95% of all 309 municipalities have signed a mobility covenant and are working on a local sustainable mobility planning scheme. Currently, an important number of mobility schemes have been finalized and have been adopted by the municipal councils concerned.

The covenant also provides a blueprint for the future to include new partnerships with the Belgian Railway Agency (NMBS), and with semi public and private sectors.

The covenant policy has changed the concepts of mobility planning and practice, the organisation of public works and supporting activities. Flemish cities and municipalities have a crucial role to play in the current mobility planning process. It is the task of the municipalities to lead and steer the design of a municipal mobility scheme. The policy is shaped in practical terms through a large number of (project) modules that the municipalities can conclude with their partners (Region, the Lijn and so on). Next to modules on infrastructure (liveable through roads, diversions, cycle roads, safety and public transport related road restructuring and so on), there are (project) modules on the provision of information, public transport, innovative funding of public transport, school environments, green travel plans with schools, companies etc. to influence the demand - side. It is this very attunement between supply-related and demand-related measures and the way they are being drawn up through co-operation between the various partners that makes the approach to the mobility covenants so attractive.

The mobility covenant programme with the mobility scheme as a mid and long term policy document lays the foundations for a multi-annual programme of actions.

2. The municipal mobility planning process in Flanders in a nutshell [4] [5]

The mobility covenant

A covenant is a (voluntary) agreement between the partners involved (mainly but not exclusively public administrations), made in order to reach a previously defined goal. The mobility covenant consists of a mother covenant and one or more 'modules'.

The 'mother covenant'

In the mother covenant general arrangements are made. In other words, it is a declaration of intention of the signing partners to collaborate in dealing with the mobility problems for the municipalities in a systematic and multimodal way. To enforce this, the municipality commits

itself to draw up a mobility scheme. Obviously, this is done in consultation with the other partners.

The mother covenant also determines that a Municipal Advisory Commission (GBC) will be set up. This commission is the consultation forum for preparation of and the decision-making regarding the covenant. Concretely the GBC takes care of the preparation and follow-up of the municipal mobility scheme. It also counsels the preparation of covenant-linked project modules (see below). All local actors and partners of the covenant have a seat in the GBC.

In order to discourage ad-hoc solutions and improvisation the mother covenant prescribes that mobility schemes and future projects have to be audited to comply with the goals and targets of the covenant policy. A Provincial Audit Commission (PAC) takes care of this checking. The auditor makes an advisory report to the attention of the Minister for Mobility and Public Works.

The mobility scheme

The local administration commits itself to draw up a mobility scheme after the signing of the mother covenant. Conceiving such a scheme is on the average a three years process. During that process a vision for the future sustainable mobility development has to be developed.

Without dwelling too much on the guidelines for drawing up the mobility scheme it is important to indicate the four steps in designing a mobility scheme. The development of a mobility scheme can be defined as a planning process that consists of:

1. The *orientation phase*, in which an inventory and a synthesis is made of the existing schemes and studies, an overview is given of the visions of the actors, a description and analysis is made of the mobility problem and a definition is given of the further analysis. This leads to a first step report, called 'the *orientation note*'.
2. The phase in which the scheme is *developed*. First the necessary additional analysis is done. Next comes the phase in which a trend scenario and one or more alternative development scenarios geared to "sustainable mobility" are worked out and evaluated. This phase results into a second report, called 'the *synthesis note*'.
3. The phase in which the *policy scheme* is drawn up. A choice is made among the different scenarios. This choice gets its concrete expression in a policy scheme, containing the headlines of the action domains and the responsibilities of the policy actors. The measures that the partners are supposed to take are written down in an *action programme*. The actions are ordered according to priority and time period, giving them a hierarchical structure.
4. Once the mobility scheme is ready the implementation of the policy choices can go ahead. The evaluation and feedback of it takes place in the evaluation phase.

Consequently the municipal mobility scheme is the framework for the action programme.

3. A closer look at the (project) modules of the covenant

A municipality, which has signed a mother covenant, can also (depending on the needs) conclude modules. The number of modules that can be concluded in the framework of a covenant has not been determined in advance. But that does not pose any problem given the modular structure of the covenant.

In the section below, we give a short overview of the modules of the mobility covenant.

- Module 1: (financial) support for the mobility plan
- Module 2: ring roads
- Module 3: 'liveable' through roads (within cities and towns)
- Module 4: lighting on liveable' through roads (within cities and towns)
- Module 5: baffle boards
- Module 6: maintenance of roads
- Module 7: information about public transport
- Module 8: (separate) bus and / or tramlanes
- Module 9: increase of public transport supply & facilities
- Module 10: school surroundings
- Module 11/12/13: bicycle routes & networks
- Module 14: accessibility of commercial zones
- Module 15: supporting measures (green travel plans, parking guidance,...)
- Module 16/ 18: safety measures on cross roads and trajectories outside build up areas
- Module 19: new planning and re-engineering schemes for existing trunk roads

Some of these modules cover innovative measures such as:

- Module 3: 'liveable' through roads (within cities and towns). This is a long lasting programme dealing with restructuring and redesigning regional roads, which lead through towns and cities. Leading principles are: enhanced traffic safety, traffic calming, and liveability. The programme started in the late eighties and resulted in some hundreds well- visible realisations, with some three hundred to come in the next decade.
- Module 7: As to information about public transport, new communicative techniques are encouraged. This module also finances local marketing of public transport services and invites municipalities to participate financially in public transport services. Most famous example is the city of Hasselt which offers public transport for free. Some other cities offer special public transport services for target groups).
- Module 10: schools located alongside a regional road, get the possibility, provided they draw up a green school travel plan, to have an impact on road safety plans and works, mainly regarding road safety in the immediate surroundings of the school.
- Module 14: a module in true PPS-style (PPS: collaboration between public and private sector), that is collaboration with a private partner regarding accessibility and road safety for, among other things, industrial sites. Even artefacts on a roundabout can be dealt with in this module.
- Module 15: subsidising of local accompanying measures such as projects concerning public involvement, stimulating environment-friendly transport, stringent parking policy and green travel plans with companies, administrations, hospitals.
- Module 19: these are project dealing with the development of binding vision for regional roads over a longer trajectory between various municipalities and with all actors involved (environment, spatial planning, roads administration, public transport)

4. What are the opinions of the actors, perception of the covenant policy by the stakeholders? [4] [5]

Finding a broad base of support in favour of the new policy is a necessary prerequisite for its smooth implementation. Regarding the mobility covenant policy in Flanders a steady growth of the base of support with the various stakeholders can be witnessed.

To map out this base of support, the Flemish Administration interviewed in 2001 a great number of people from municipalities (co-workers from the technical departments, municipal secretaries, aldermen and mayors). Next to these local stakeholders, Flemish and provincial civil servants, collaborators of planning offices and external mobility experts have been interviewed. The technique used is the SWOT analysis in combination with a number of open questions.

There is a large degree of agreement between the opinions of the different stakeholders regarding the mobility covenant policy. This bears witness to the fact that the base of support has grown over the years.

In general the municipalities see the instrument as an added value with respect to the earlier planning process. The structured approach appeals to them. The emphasis in the approach by the municipalities lies on what is feasible in the short run. To the extent that the mobility scheme is helpful, they lend their support to this instrument. They refer to the need of having sufficient and competent staff and resources to implement the policy.

The municipalities stress the necessity that the mobility scheme has to be embedded well within the overall policy field. They point to the importance of supramunicipal consultation and attunement. They also ask a more direct linking between their action programme and the implementation programmes of the higher authorities.

5. Some best practices: Hasselt, Gent, Mol, Geel [6]

These cases will be dealt with in the separate Mobility Management workshop at the Cesura conference. Main features of these cases are:

City of Hasselt , “Samen Anders Mobiel” (SAM – campaign), mobility covenant based on partnerships

The city of Hasselt is the commercial and services centre of the province of Limburg (B). Hasselt commercial area has a hinterland of 310,000 people and as such ranks third in Flanders.

The aim of the Hasselt “SAMEN ANDERS MOBIEL” (SAM) CAMPAIGN is to include the Hasselt citizens and visitors in promoting environmental modes of transport with a vast set of goal-oriented actions.

The incoming new political coalition, formed in 1995, put in their manifesto “Hasselt for the people”, a strong focus on various aspects of a citizen oriented transport policy. As a result a "sustainable three-track transport policy" was born. The three tracks are based on urban traffic safety, liveability and transport comfort concerns and goals. These three tracks are seen as equally important and are covered under the formal umbrella of the mobility covenant.

Track 1: 'THE LARGER TRANSPORT POLICY'

Policy on framework conditions such as the overall mobility plan, plan for bike policy, plan for parking policy, by pass programme, urban and transport improvements in the railway station surroundings, Groene Boulevard (Green Boulevard), public transport enhancement (including the famous and popular 'city busses for free' programme), etc.

Track 2: 'THE SMALLER TRANSPORT POLICY'

Quick solutions for residents' problems such as a parking signposting schemes, traffic calming measures, improved crossings, marked gateways to the city, residential areas with speed restrictions, 30 km/h zone, cycle network improvements including, among others, good and safe infrastructure, guarded and free bike parking, etc.

Track 3: "TOGETHER TOWARDS ANOTHER MOBILITY CULTURE", the SAM ongoing campaign. As a multi targeted action campaign it supported the overall municipal transport policy with a package of some 20 specific actions. The very nature of these actions aimed at visibility on the streets and encouragement of residents to participate.

GENT, campaigning for a liveable city

Gent, as the second largest city of Flanders and the third centre in Belgium, is the core city of a metropolitan area of about 500.000 inhabitants. The city itself has 226.000 inhabitants (excluding non residential students). Every day, about 35.000 people commute to Gent.

All these elements make Gent an attractive city and generate considerable levels of traffic from and to the city. Major highways that link Gent with all other important cities in Belgium surround the city. Some of these highways lead directly into the centre of Gent, making it very attractive to reach the city centre by car, and leading to excessive private vehicle usage.

The present modal split (excluding non permanent residential students) is: car 60%, walking 17%, bike 14%, public transport 8%, moped 1%.

Whereas former attempts to pedestrianise the inner city failed, in 1997 the steering policy of the City Council succeeded to introduce the new 'Mobility Plan for the Inner city'.

In order to counter the traffic problems, a number of plans were established. The main features of these plans were:

- No through - traffic anymore in the city centre of Ghent. Part of the city centre has been pedestrianised - an area of some 35 hectares/86 acres and as such the largest car-free centre in Belgium - and in other parts traffic-calming measures were introduced with the creation of a 30 km/h area.
- Pedestrians, cyclists and public transport are given more space, since only few cars are allowed in the city centre;
- Traffic calming: apart of the pedestrian area, a speed limit of 30 km/h. has been established between the pedestrian area and the parking route;
- Re-designing streets and squares aims at making the city centre more attractive to citizens and visitors;

Partnerships with SCHOOLS: the towns of Geel and Mol

Within the framework of the mobility covenant programme, the two small-scale cities of Geel and Mol entered a partnership with the schools, 5000 pupils, parents, teachers and headmasters. 13 out of 16 schools in Mol and 12 out of 25 schools in Geel joined the programme. Both cases can be characterised as strongly embedded in a local mobility planning process, which evoked a vivid interaction with local partners. The project, which was part of the EU Tapestry project on transport campaigns, resulted in an average of 10% mode shift amongs the pupils towards walking, cycling, bus and carpooling

6. References

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