



## SUMMARY OF WORKSHOP ON «URBAN MOBILITY IN TUNIS, TRENDS AND PROSPECTS»

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**Blue Plan**

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# Outcomes of the workshop on «Urban Mobility in Tunis, trends and prospects»

15 January, 2009 at the Ministry for the Environment, Tunis

The Tunis case study, which was drawn up by two experts (Morched Chabbi and Hassen Abid) was presented at the handover workshop on 15<sup>th</sup> January, 2009. The workshop discussed its content and debated its conclusions.

## 1. Organisation of the workshop and participation

The workshop was organised and chaired by Mr. Nouri Soussi, Director of the Tunisian Observatory for the Environment and Sustainable Development (OTED) and the Blue Plan focal point in Tunisia.

Some thirty representatives from the bodies involved in the study were present. The Ministry of Transport sent two representatives, although despite the fact that the discussion focused partly on the provision of public transport in the city, neither the DGTI (General Directorate for Land Transportation) nor the DGPE (General Directorate for Planning and Studies) were represented. As for the donors, the French Development Agency (AFD) was present as was the GTZ, which spoke in particular in support of the OTED.

In his introduction, Mr. Nouri Soussi stressed the strategic importance which the Tunisian government intended to attach to sustainable development. He announced that the OTED was drawing up a guide on sustainable transport, assisted by the GTZ.

Following a presentation of the Blue Plan's work by Mr. Philippe Vallouis (a series of case studies on urban mobility in various cities), both experts (Mr. Chabbi and H. Abid) presented a summary of their contribution.

The views of all those present were sought, allowing the main reactions to the report to be noted, before the second part of the meeting proceeded to a discussion.

Xavier Godard moderated the discussions during this second part, which concluded at around 2:00pm.

Before opening the debate on Tunis, Xavier Godard informed participants that Codatu had published a recommendations guide for urban transport in the Mediterranean Region, which followed the Skhirat regional seminar held in January 2008, with which the Blue Plan was involved. He briefly detailed its content and key messages in order to put the debate on Tunis back into perspective. (Document available on [www.codatu.org](http://www.codatu.org))

## 2. Reactions to and comments on the report

Nouri Soussi invited participants to send their comments on the report in writing to ensure that they were correctly reflected in the final version. Several of the comments made were in fact related to the transport section. The expert pointed out that most of the shortcomings

pinpointed stemmed from a lack of available information, but that the study's limited budget not allowed further investigations. Comments were made on the following points:

### **Widespread satisfaction tempered by some criticism of the report's shortcomings**

Many participants expressed satisfaction at the fact that this report highlighted the links between transport and urbanisation. They welcomed the Blue Plan and OTED's initiative at a time when studies and dialogue concerning such transport issues were becoming few and far between. They felt it was a good summary.

But following up on N. Soussi, some regrets were also expressed. Although reference was made to low prospects, there was also not enough linkage between urbanisation and transport. More specifically, the transport section did not adequately take into account the influence of urban development, although the urbanisation section did strive to highlight the effect on travel and transport. The other regrets mainly concerned energy and the environment (see after).

### **Lack of indicators on quality of service**

Whereas transport flows were given broad coverage with plenty of indicators, the same could not be said of the qualitative aspects related to the conditions for actually making these trips: travel time, regularity, comfort (particularly vehicle overcrowding). These conditions were evolving in an alarming manner, reflecting the crisis in public transport provision. This aspect should be stressed more forcefully in the report.

### **Lack of accident data**

Although transport safety was clearly one component of sustainable mobility, the report made no mention of accident data or trends therein. Reference was made to one worrying phenomenon which seemed to emerge from road accident records- the major involvement of public transport.

### **Insufficient mention of the influence of major projects**

Although the major urban projects (Jardins d'El Menzah, Cité des Sports, Berges du lac Nord...) shaping current urbanisation were mentioned in the presentation of the current phase of urbanisation, how they actually affected transport issues was not sufficiently brought to the fore. Most of the major projects targeted high-earner social groups and would lead to massive use of the private car, giving rise to the fear of major congestion problems in the future.

Moreover, either the public transport plans did not really integrate these major projects or the major projects failed to address issues of mobility and public transport service provision. The report should integrate this component. .

### **Clarification of energy data**

The report touched very briefly upon energy consumption in transport and trends therein. The oral presentation, however, provided some useful fuel consumption data, which was not included in the report. The estimated 40% of national fuel consumption attributed to the city of Tunis should be further clarified, with reference to the sources and bases for calculation. The consumption trend figures for petrol and diesel (oral presentation) should be checked because certain inconsistencies would appear to suggest that the data had been reversed.

### **Insufficient mention of environmental impact (pollution, greenhouse gases)**

Not enough was said in the report about the environmental impact and pollutant emissions from transport in Tunis (they were covered in the oral presentation but did not feature in the report), despite this being a major aspect of concern to sustainable development. Sensors had apparently been in place at points throughout the city for some years now to measure pollutant concentration in order to take stock. As far as CO<sub>2</sub> emissions were concerned, a study was

currently underway (ANPE) at national level but using regionalised data, the results being expected for late 2009.

### **3. Thematic discussion of prospects**

The thematic discussion, which picked up on and clarified the comments made on the report can be summed up as follows:

#### **The need for studies**

Some participants, particularly from Tunis Council, were firmly convinced of the need for a flow of updated studies.

As far as basic information was concerned, it should be recalled that the last Household mobility Survey dated back to 1994, since when the situation had witnessed enormous change, thus the lack of systematic data severely hampered analysis and planning. A new household survey was considered back in 2004 but no funding was forthcoming.

It was also pointed out that the 1994 survey showed a certain bias, particularly regarding modal distribution, which was revealed through cross-referencing with other sources, such as road counts. This should come as no surprise as this type of difficulty was inherent in any survey, but it provided a further reason for carefully analysing, cross-checking and regularly updating the results of the survey.

The statistics from the operators themselves were open to a certain bias, since it was clear from cross-checks that there might well be an appreciable level of fraud or non-payment due to vehicle overloading.

The town planning agency also pointed out that in the absence of a household survey it had itself conducted a survey amongst the employees of a certain number of companies (239), with a sample of almost 2000 participants.

#### **The need for institutional coordination and a transport organising authority**

Since action was fragmented, the need for coordination and institutional unification was ever more keenly felt, albeit with deep-seated reticence at political level, particularly given the major financial stakes involved.

As the report pointed out, although the April 2004 law brought institutional reform to the manner in which transport was organised, it had still not been possible to implement the law. It planned for organising authorities within each governorate, with inter-governorate coordinating committees within any one single city such as Greater Tunis, with its four governorates.

But there was a further level of coordination which required attention- that linking the district to the governorate.

It was noted that there was a tendency to focus on the involvement of the City of Tunis, but that the other towns, which might well have their own traffic plans and whose means were even more limited should not be forgotten.

Since establishing genuine coordination even between the Greater Tunis governorates appeared to be a tall order, moving to the level of the Region as was sometimes suggested with reference to metropolisation looked completely unrealistic for the near future.

This issue was tackled in 2008 by the President, who was in favour of entrusting the Town Planning Agency with the coordination of transport and town planning. This initiative naturally evoked the past experience of the District, to which some people looked back with regret. The announcement prompted consultation to specify the exact scope of the task. Things did not appear to be moving in the right direction however since, from what seemed to be emerging, the Agency would be in charge of coordinating the work of the town councils, but would have no say in the coordination of the Governorates.

### **The place of the car**

The aim of bringing car use under control always featured in Greater Tunis transport policy, the target being 50% private and 50% public transport for motorised trips.

In 2006, the modal share of private transport was estimated at over 60%, which could well rise to 62% by late 2008, although public transport accounted for less than 40% of trips. The immediate objective was to halt the decline in this share before clawing back market share and edging towards 50%.

It was noted, moreover, that taxis were logically included within private transport but that they should be differentiated in the indicators and analyses for private cars as such. They actually accounted for an appreciable share of trips, something in the order of 7% according to estimates taken from the 2004 surveys (Sedet's Urban Development Research Programme).

But congestion was increasing and there was no saying whether it would ease over the next few years. Moreover, the congestion which plagued the city centre was no longer the main concern with congestion having become more serious outside the first "ring", the centre could well appear to be getting off lightly.

The attraction of the car for the middle classes, to which the car pooling programme was a response, was highly likely to continue if allowed so to do by the financial constraints on households. The rate of car ownership (currently 102 vehicles per 1000 inhabitants in 2006) could rise to 130 and some people believed the trend would continue to nudge closer to European levels. This should be widely discussed and a distinction should be drawn between the number of cars per household, which was likely to continue its rapid upward trend, and car use. The latter could be more selective according to various supply parameters on which the choice of transport mode depended, including congestion charging.

These factors included the alternative provided to drivers by public transport provision, albeit still not enough to be able to credibly support modal transfer objectives.

### **Shortfalls in public transport provision**

Compared with the objectives on sustainable mobility and the sought-for rebalance of modal shares, inadequate public transport provision was currently a concern. It was noticeable during the morning rush-hour on the outskirts, when groups of passengers were to be seen clinging to the outside of buses. The report cited usage rates verging on over-loading. New public transport projects had been delayed and the central stretch of the current light railway had reached saturation (which was nothing new).

The fact that account was taken only of observed rather than potential demand could also be thrown into the equation. Some people abandoned the idea of making a trip because of the lack of transport provision.

The most dynamic part of provision in terms of usage statistics came from private operators, although it still only represented a very low share of modal distribution. Discussion was therefore on-going as to whether developing them could provide a response to the supply crisis.

## **Difficulties with implementing planning**

Despite the inadequacy of studies as reported elsewhere, planning documents did actually exist. However, planning recommendations often fell short in their implementation, as was summed up by one of the participants: the implementation of a traffic plan boiled down to simply creating 2 or 3 roundabouts ...

One of the major constraints mentioned was the lack of funding to enable the measures foreseen in the plans to be implemented. The City of Tunis was apparently particularly affected by this financial difficulty, as generally speaking were all the municipalities, having little financial leeway within a context of limited decentralisation. This explained why the measures in the 2004 traffic plan had still not been implemented.

But there was no point in attacking the symptoms of the difficulties and ignoring the causes. Sometimes, transport problems could be solved by looking beyond transport itself. Various examples were mentioned and should be studied:

- Adjusting the working hours of businesses, administration and schools;
- Providing road traffic information;
- Promoting working from home.

In another connection, planning itself was plagued by many difficulties, which brought us back to the sectoral approach mentioned in the report. This explained why there was still no coordination between road infrastructure and the railways, as was demonstrated by the problems with dovetailing the RFR route (still rather vague in the North) and that of the X20 bypass. Similarly, the brusque announcement of the new Technopolis project in Manouba meant that the route of the X20 bypass would have to be changed without consultation. It was as if major projects simply eluded the urban planning process drawn up elsewhere.

## **The difficulties faced by the RFR**

One of the flagship projects for developing mass public transport was that of the RFR (regional railway network), which was on the drawing board for years, the roll-out of which began in 2008 following the setting up in 2007 of a roll-out group known as Transfer (a limited liability company supported by the State). The RFR project was presented in a nutshell in the report.

In the course of the discussion, major difficulties hampering the implementation of this complex project (which in any case would extend over many years and several plans) were flagged up. Not everyone supported this viewpoint, some believing that the project was already underway and being funded, so a new service should be up and running within a few years.

However, the parallels with the extension of the light railway line towards El Mourouj were mentioned in order to instance the difficulties with implementation as well as the sizeable delays over the initial deadlines: the El Mourouj line was announced in the early 90s and had only recently started to operate, i.e. some fifteen years on.

Apart from these problems of implementation, it was pointed out that when all was said and done the purpose of the RFR project was simply to catch-up with existing urbanisation rather than being part and parcel of the drive for major projects, which still needed to be dove-tailed.

The question also arose as to whether urbanisation programmes took any account of this major project in order to densify around stations and the routes served (see later).

Bearing in mind the RFR's long construction time, ways of boosting public transport provision should be sought and rapidly implemented. Proposals along these lines were made in the study on modernising the Traffic Plan, multiplying the number of reserved lanes which could be of benefit to new buses or minibuses providing quality service (seated places, speed...) liable to attract potential car users.

It was asked at this point whether reserved bus lanes might provide a possible solution: the BRT (Rapid Transit Bus) after the South-American model, or the BHNS (High Quality Service Buses) according to the French approach. Such projects might be complimentary and could be implemented more quickly. They could run on the main highways although bringing them in would entail some adjustments, which would need to be considered right here and now, before the new road infrastructures were finally settled.

## **The tricky inter-linkage of transport and land use**

An urban densification policy had been decided upon, which through a review of the Town Planning Plans (PAU) should give rise to new town planning provisions.

However, land speculation represented a major obstacle to controlled town planning. It was further aggravated by the policy of unfailingly laying on bus services to new outlying developments, be they shanty or other, in response to popular demand and indirectly at the request of agricultural landowners involved in de facto real estate development.

In any case, unless flanking measures were brought in, was the RFR project not likely to increase the trend towards peri-urban shanty development by making rural areas more accessible?

The idea of using the added land value generated by these projects to fund various components of the public transport projects, or even to have integrated operations allowing cross-financing was indeed an attractive one and one which worked in certain corners of the globe. It would seem, however, to be unworkable for Tunisia, given the land interests at stake.

**Major funding constraints**

The sector was under major funding constraints, particularly in terms of the creation of new facilities and implementation of new projects. It was a highly sensitive issue for Tunis Town Council. There was huge demand on State budgets to meet the growing financial needs for running the STT (Tunis Transport System), with the result that investment appropriations could not be granted on as broad a basis as might have been wished. They were now apparently being channelled into the RFR project. But how funding decisions were taken in the sector was a question which needed to be raised in terms of planning and sustainable mobility objectives.

Was it then not simply a matter of correctly inter-linking technical, financial and political aspects?

**Conclusion**

This workshop marked the end of the Tunis case study. The discussions allowed several sensitive issues to be flagged up in all their importance. Although town and transport planning do exist, in the absence of a clearly identified authority with the necessary funding it is very difficult to bring all the ends together. The need for the sort of information produced by a household survey, better control of property ownership mechanisms and the essential monitoring of environmental impact are all points to be put to the forum on urban development and mobility planned for 2009. Finally, any additional contributions over and above these discussions may be submitted before the forum.

## 4. Annex - List of participants

Abid Hassen, transport consultant

Adel Aissa, Greater Tunis Town Planning Agency

Allaghi Saida, Tunis City Council

Baya Taoufik, DGAT, Ministry for Planning

Ben Salem Ridha, DGPC, Ministry for Planning

Bouskoffara Hussein, Ariana Town Council

Braham Lotfi, Ministry for Planning (Housing and Town Planning)

Chabbi Morched, town planning consultant

De Vericourt Thomas, AFD

El Gharbi Abdelfattih, Ministry of the Interior

Farhati Karima, STT

Fourts Mohammed Cherif, OTED

Godard Xavier, Blue Plan adviser

Hassen Wafa, Tunis City Council

Jomni Bahloul Fatma, Greater Tunis Town Planning Agency

Khalfalla Abdelamid, DGE, Ministry of Energy

Koubar Yousr, Greater Tunis Town Planning Agency

Majdoub Mancir, GTZ

Mehni Habib, Ministry for the Environment and Sustainable Development

Morbach Wolfgang, GTZ

Nafti Kamel, DGTT, Ministry of Transport

Nefzi Benjrad Samina, OTED

Saidi Mohammed hedi, DGPE, Ministry of Transport

Slimane Mohammed, ANPE

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Soussi Nouri, Director of OTED

Thlija Maez, Ministry of the Interior

Vallouis Philippe, Blue Plan