



(Top/middle) Tallinn, Esonia, a city of contrasts and challenges for its dynamic future development; (bottom) Toulouse in France – what kind of cities do we and future generations want to live in?

A complex but feasible instrument . . .

...and worth the effort, argue **Sebastian Bührmann** and **Ivo Cré**.

Sustainable urban transport planning (SUTP) is a new planning approach that is growing from and within existing practices and being promoted at European level. But why is it necessary to change current planning practices, and what can the SUTP approach offer?

Today's cities face complex challenges in the field of urban transport planning. Everyone knows that transport and mobility are vital for society. At the same time, the negative impacts of moving goods and people – air and noise pollution, decreased accessibility, congestion and safety problems – profoundly affect people's lives all across Europe, particularly in large urban agglomerations.

Clearly urban transport planning affects, not only transport infrastructures and services, but society as a whole, and needs to be looked at in connection with the environment as well as social and cultural aspects. The fact that the general public wants its local authorities to act on problems caused by transport is not the only source of pressure; EC Directives on noise abatement and air quality also legally require local action.

More and more urban transport policy experts agree that a truly holistic approach is needed effectively to tackle these problems. Yet, in many places, organisational divisions between transport modes, agencies and services still hamper development of integrated planning processes.

Again, transport planning frequently focuses too much on technical planning aspects, while stakeholder participation is lacking. In the end the result is often a set of piecemeal measures, rather than the effective integrated approach needed.

This is where SUTP comes in, offering a viable approach towards achieving a multi-faceted policy response that will generate innovative processes and result in fully-integrated strategies. To answer our second question and explain, briefly, what SUTP is all about and how it differs from conventional transport planning approaches, we need to be specific about its aims, subject area and distinctive qualities.

Aims and operation

SUTP aims to achieve a sustainable urban transport (SUT) system by addressing, at minimum, five objectives; to:

- Ensure accessibility to all;
- Reduce negative impacts on the health, safety and security of the general public, in particular the most vulnerable;
- Reduce air and noise pollution, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and energy consumption;
- Improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the transportation of persons and goods, taking external costs into account; and
- Help enhance the quality and attractiveness of urban environments and design.

Policies and measures defined through SUTP need comprehensively to address all transport modes and forms throughout an entire urban agglomeration: public and private; passenger and freight; motorised and non-motorised; in motion and stationary (parking).

SUTP is a way of tackling urban transport-related problems more efficiently and cost-effectively. It builds on EU Member States' existing practices and regulatory frame-

works, and develops through interaction by local mobility stakeholders. Its essential characteristics are:

- A participatory approach – involving general populations and stakeholders from the outset and throughout the decision-making, implementation and evaluation process, building local capacities for handling complex planning issues, and ensuring gender equity;
- A pledge of sustainability – balancing social equity, environmental quality, and economic development;
- An integrated approach – bringing together practices and policies across transport modes, policy sectors (eg spatial and urban planning, the environment, economic development, social inclusion, health, and safety), public and private agencies, governmental hierarchies and neighbouring authorities;
- A focus on achieving measurable targets – derived from short-term objectives, aligned with a vision for transport, and embedded in an overall sustainable development strategy;
- A move towards cost internalisation – reviewing transport costs and benefits again across policy sectors (ie taking into account wider societal costs and benefits); and
- A cycle of policy-making and implementation. This last comprises five key tasks – see diagram.

It is important to underline that SUTP does not simply mean developing a transport ‘master plan’, embracing all the plans and programmes that local authorities are formally required to prepare. Nor does it imply completion once a plan containing appropriately innovative transport measures is adopted.

Rather, it represents the direction in which current planning practices should be continuously moving to enhance sustainable urban transport development. It is a new planning approach that needs to grow from and within local authorities and existing practices – and move these forward.

Building on practical experience

SUTP is not a theoretical construct. It is building on the experiences of forerunner European cities and regions, which have proven that new planning approaches can decisively enhance the effectiveness of urban transport planning. Good examples include Bristol (UK), Freiburg (Germany), Genoa (Italy), Grenoble (France), Hampshire County (UK), The Hague (The Netherlands) and Lille (France).

France and the UK, in particular, have valuable experience, as both countries have undertaken initiatives aimed at harmonising local transport planning approaches. Both have endorsed the SUTP concept through



Overview of the five key SUTP tasks, showing their interrelationship

national regulatory instruments: the French plan de déplacements urbains (PDU) and the UK's Local Transport Plans (LTP) are obligatory for larger agglomerations.

Many cities and regions in other European countries have also voluntarily developed integrated urban transport plans. Their planning processes are often linked to national or regional authorities' funding and investment schemes.

In this way, the SUTP process is showing itself as an ideal tool to support moves to decentralise transport currently under way in most EU Member States. Within EU expert groups and projects, relevant knowledge has become accessible through involving professionals with experience of locations that have developed advanced planning approaches. (These have helped develop a standard SUTP methodology).

Communication issues

The EC supports the SUTP approach, which is an integral element of the Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment it adopted in January 2006 to help Member States and regional and local authorities improve cities' environmental performance. This is an important tool for achieving key EU policy objectives, including commitment to an at least 20% reduction in GHG emissions by 2020 as compared with 1990.

SUTP also offers an effective means of complying with EU Directives on air quality and noise emissions. In September 2007, the EC published an SUTP preparatory document as part of its follow-up to the Thematic Strategy (Technical Report 2007/018; http://ec.europa.eu/environment/urban/pdf/transport/2007_sutp_anne x.pdf).

SUTP is, however, not easy to communicate to local and national stakeholders. There is a common misperception that it would require cities and regions to dump existing plans and activities and start something completely new.

It needs to be highlighted that this is not true, as SUTP needs to evolve within existing local frameworks over time. A proposed Directive to make SUTP obligatory for agglomerations of over 100,000 inhabitants, as discussed at EU level a while ago, met opposition both from Member States and at the local level.

It was eventually abandoned, for reasons probably including the difficulty of selling such a complex approach and fears of new (and maybe costly) obligations. Nevertheless, SUTP will be taken forward in EU policymaking via other instruments (eg guidance and exchanges of best practice); and it appears in Towards a New Culture for Urban Mobility, the EC's new Green Paper on Urban Transport, adopted in September 2007.

The PILOT project

PILOT ran from 2005 to September 2007 with the support of the EC's Environment Directorate-General. It demonstrated preparations of SUT plans in four cities: Braila (Romania), Évora (Portugal), Lancaster (UK) and Tallinn (Estonia). In parallel, by building on their experience, and with input from experts from relevant local authorities and organisations, PILOT was able to propose tools, guidelines and recommendations for the elaboration of SUTPs in other European regions and local authorities.

The project made its new SUTP Manual available to the four PILOT cities to help their planning tasks. In turn, during a test phase, these – together with experts from the forerunners – provided valuable feedback on fine tuning the methodology.

The Manual aims to give a concise overview of SUTP and make stakeholders across Europe familiar with the concept. It is available on the PILOT website (www.pilot-transport.org) in seven languages: English, French, German, Italian, Polish, Romanian and Spanish).

The PILOT cities offered four very diverse settings for SUTP – a national capital; ports; representatives of new Member States, varying in size – historic and developing – each facing different challenges.

Braila (population 240,000), a remarkable merchant city on the River Danube in eastern Romania, is transforming itself rapidly into a modern European location. Renewed investment has generated denser development and revitalisation of the city centre; while increased private vehicle ownership has given a new impetus to urban city life.

But the results include heavier traffic and Braila's first experience of congestion and parking problems. The public transport system is good-quality, but needs a strategic plan to prepare itself for future investment and funding opportunities – a key issue being the integration of a private minibus network.

The city is starting to develop the internal capacity to monitor its urban transport, and the SUTP approach has put it on the right track to improve this. Achievements during the project include putting in place a traffic monitoring and counting system and the modernisation of public transport dispatching.

The city has also established new communication channels with the travelling public and evolved an integrated vision for its future public transport offer – including the re-establishment of an abandoned trolleybus service.

Évora (population 56,000) is an historic Portuguese city, its perfectly preserved walls separating the historic core from the rapidly-evolving outskirts. Transport issues relating to the interaction of the two zones have dominated discussions on Évora's SUT plan.

The public transport system has adapted itself to the new spatial pattern (with eg a free shuttle serving the centre and linking it to major bus routes lines). But no decision was made on a progressive parking and access restriction policy until the SUTP process had started.

This has also helped Évora to evolve a strategic view on the future development of the local railway station, and the High Speed Train (HST) terminal to be built 5km away – the only stop on the future Madrid-Lisbon HST line.

For **Lancaster** (UK, population 95,500), the big challenge was to draft an SUTP that could complete at local (lower-tier) level what the Lancashire LTP had accomplished at county (upper-tier) level. A list of potential measures (including major infrastructural investments and innovative mobility management schemes) was available.

What were lacking, however, were tools to involve the general public in the planning process and a method of prioritising meas-

ures in the light of set objectives. The SUTP approach led to the creation of a Lancaster Sustainable LTP.

The Estonian capital **Tallinn** (population 400,000) is a fast growing economic pole, facing the challenge of matching spatial with transport planning. With its centrally-located freight and passenger harbour keen to expand operations, and neighbouring municipalities generating suburban living patterns, its urban transport system has been coming under severe pressure.

Long-term spatial strategies were not being linked to a sustainable and feasible transport action plan. The SUTP process helped connect the strategic planning level with operational implementation units,

and eventually replace previous attempts and lead to real implementation. This (political) commitment leads to a sense of urgency ('it's now or never'), activating all the stakeholders.

Second, better internal cooperation and capacity building. SUTP increases coherence between strategic planning and active roll-out, which are often currently divided between separate administrative units. 'SUTP makes people talk'.

Third, a new way of approaching the general public. All four demonstrator cities have established new channels, shortcutting existing formal consultation channels, and their communications departments have been closely involved.

So, can SUTP can make a real change? We believe it can.

Although the presumption is that most EU Member States want to file SUTP under the 'other subsidiarity issues category', the EC is maintaining considerable interest in it as an instrument. Both DG Environment, in its follow-up of the Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment, and DG Energy and Transport (DG TREN) are committed. As we have seen, SUTP is mentioned in the new EU Green Paper, and will most likely recur in the contingent action plan.

The PILOT project recommended that SUTP become a prerequisite for EU-related funding, eg via structural funds or loans granted through the European Investment Bank (EIB), the EU's financing institution. This could be a real incentive; but, as a tool, SUTP needs to be enhanced and standardised.

All four PILOT cities are committed to the SUTP planning process, and to the roll-out of the action plans that will be its final achievement. They have all engaged very deeply in involving the general public in plan development.

So we can say, with some confidence, that change has occurred, and that the fruits of SUTP will become visible over the next few years. SUTP is a complex but feasible instrument, and it is worth the effort.

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www.pilot-transport.org

www.polis-online.org

www.rupprecht-consult.de



The SUTP Manual provides stakeholder guidance in seven European languages

increasing the likelihood of full roll-out of an SUTP activity plan

Dimensions of improvement

Although it is difficult to draw general conclusions about what SUTP has meant for the four demonstration cities, we can see three clear dimensions of improvement. First, a more strategic view of transport policy, with SUTP helping transport professionals make the link with strategic economic, social and environmental objectives.

Crucial during the process has been stakeholder awareness that SUTP provides the essential and over-all plan that will integrate