

TRANSPORTATION IN AN ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVE:

NONSENSE ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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For the past few months we've been inundated with political nonsense about climate quotas and technological "solutions" in order to justify the preservation of our own contaminating and resources squandering consumer attitudes and ways of life.

We want to call attention to the fact that - in itself - no motorized modes of transportation can be called "environmentally friendly", despite the rhetoric to the contrary. And increased demand and need for such modes of transportation constitute an even greater burden on the environment. Automobile emissions are used to assess the degree of "eco-friendliness". Such a perspective is way too narrow when trying to grasp the serious situation the World is in with regard to pollution. In urban centers increased automobile traffic is in itself an environmental problem: there's literally not enough room to let every person continue to drive his own car to work or to the nearby supermarket, regardless of how "environmentally friendly" the cars might be. Also the roads needed for the increased number of motorists constitute an environmental problem as they add up to sizable barriers in cities and the countryside, destroying local environments and recreational areas and preventing the population access to them.

In addition, added congestion is a traffic safety problem: a cyclist or pedestrian will find little comfort in being hit by a car with little or no detrimental emissions.

We therefore question the alleged concern for the environment by national politicians and leaders in their increased efforts to build bigger and better roads in and around the urban centers. It is a paradox to observe the planning of a highway going in to Oslo which will be able to accommodate 50% more cars while generating 20% more traffic locally - and not even alleviating the rush hour congestion: This gigantic project is simply a billion kroner investment which will let even more cars be packed together in exactly the same traffic jams as before. It is even more absurd that this enterprise is marketed as "environmentally friendly".

The main challenge today and in the foreseeable future is, therefore, not to play these games with the superficial symbolic politics to please the automobile industry, but instead 1) reduce the absolute - not only the *increased* - need for transportation, both locally, regionally and globally, and 2) move as much as possible of the transportation to the least polluting and environmentally damaging modes of transportation.

The best way to meet these challenges is to make sure the least environmentally damaging alternatives also are the most attractive for most people. This might appear to be so obvious and thus is easily taken for granted, but today this is definitely not so.

In this context we want to point out that all motorized modes of transportation is subsidized (or under priced), both relatively and absolutely. Air traffic over long distances is obviously subsidized, air travel over medium long distances is subsidized relative to less environmentally damaging modes of transportation (such as rail and bus), and the use of automobiles are subsidized relative to all other motorized modes of transportation. This means that the prices do not reflect the real and total cost of the environmental damage caused by the specific mode of transportation. It should be sufficient to take a look at any Norwegian city to be convinced of what is regarded as the most attractive mode of transportation for daily commuting: In Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim and other cities there are endless lines of cars both in and out of the cities, every morning and afternoon. Despite this it is obvious that motorists consider this practice to be *more attractive* than the alternative, i.e. rail, bus, bicycle, both in regard to price, availability and service.

And still more plans are made all over the country for huge investments in road infrastructure so that the motorists will have even more attractive and convenient facilities for increased car traffic. And plans are made for new and the expansion of existing airports to be able to accommodate the rapid rise in air traffic, again resulting in even more damaging emissions.

So where does the bicycle enter the picture?

- **The bicycle is the only mode of transportation which actively contributes to better health.**
- **The bicycle is the only mode of transportation which is not a burden on the environment, and**
- **The bicycle is the only mode of transportation which most effectively can improve access in and around urban centers.**

Naturally the bicycle cannot replace air and rail traffic across continents and countries. But most of the transportation activities do not take place over such long distances. Incredibly enough: about 50% of all automobile travels are less than 5 km! Increased use of the bicycle is therefore a very current and relevant solution to the transportation and environmental challenges the politicians face and tell us they wish to find a solution to. It is obvious that much of – perhaps most of! – the local automobile use can be replaced by the bicycle (or simply walking). And herein lies the biggest potential to reduce the use of automobiles and the need for developing public transportation in areas with little available land.

One obstacle is that in Norway – and other countries - the bicycle is still viewed as *recreation*, not as a real and equal *mode of transportation*. If politicians and planners would accept the proper role of the bicycle in the total transportation picture, one would integrate roads for bicycling together with other roads, and we would have had a bicycle infrastructure good enough so that more people actually would find it preferable to bicycle. Today many feel that when on a bicycle, they do so at the risk of their life, and this price is – understandably! – unacceptable.

Our solutions are as follows:

- **All modes of transportation should have an environmental and energy account;**

- **All modes of transportation should be priced based on their real costs to society, including environmental damage and extrapolated health costs;**
- **The least environmentally damaging and energy demanding modes of transportation should be favored, clearly and consistently in all areas of planning;**
- **Ambitious goals for dramatically increased bicycle use as part of the total traffic in and around urban centers should be established. These goals should act as guidelines for all transportation planning and in the distribution of the investments in infrastructure.**

In 2008 the Norwegian Government will propose a new National Transportation Plan for the subsequent ten year period. If this plan reflects our simple suggestions Norway will have taken an important step towards a more environmentally friendly society, a society more suitable for human beings.