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Keeping sustainable mobility on the mayor's short-list

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European city leaders will agree: each city operates in its own reality. No two cities in Europe are the same. Even neighbouring cities face distinct sets of priorities.

The details of economic, social, business, health, energy, environment and safety considerations vary, and the solutions that mayors put in place are those that are best-suited for its residents. But there are a handful of core issues – such as access to sustainable public transportation – universal to all cities.



CIVITAS is an EU initiative to promote cleaner, better, more sustainable and energy efficient urban transport strategies. The CIVITAS Political Advisory Committee realised that by providing a mechanism to enable cities to rally around a common issue, change could happen. Earlier this year the “Funchal Statement” was born. Consensus has spread, and now more than 200 European cities have signed it. The Funchal Statement is a tool that will – we hope - encourage the European Union to help fund and guide city-based approaches for sustainable mobility. The agreement reaffirms the cities’ original commitments to sustainable urban transport, and puts the spotlight on their targets to decrease CO2 emissions.

Many people want to know how to define “sustainable urban mobility.” The immediate assumptions include seemingly “typical” measures: developing a ‘green’ bus fleet, building a network of cycle lanes across a city, or powering a Mayor’s vehicle with an alternative fuel. These are valid examples. But CIVITAS activities comprise a much more broad spectrum of measures.

Students in Gent, Belgium will tell you why they are attracted to the city’s rental bike system and its theft prevention measures. Urban mobility planners in Constanta, Romania, met public demand for a summertime double-decker bus service to connect the city centre with its beach resort. Mobility was redefined in Toulouse, France when zone changes there improved delivery patterns. Residents in Brighton and Hove are the first UK residents outside of London to enjoy a street-side electric vehicle charging station scheme.

In Funchal, Portugal, we will present the Funchal Statement at the CIVITAS Forum, an annual event that has attracted as many as 400 city- and EU-level politicians and urban mobility experts in the past.

The Funchal Statement comprises a two-way commitment for the signatory cities. First, the cities are committing to their citizens. Leaders are promising to put in place solutions that will, among other things, reduce traffic jams, prevent lost time, and minimise wasted fuel. Second, signatories

are committing to making sure that the European Commission understands how critical their support is to making sustainable transportation a reality in cities. Without long-term funding from the European Commission, initiatives like CIVITAS will have limited success in the short-term.

And that is a key point of the Funchal Statement. To keep integrated urban transport strategies on the short term agendas of our cities, we need long-term EU support. Considering that four out of five Europeans live in towns and cities, failure is not an option.

The concept of cities joining together to agree to change is not new. Think Agenda 21. Or the Covenant of Mayors. Or the European Initiative on Smart Cities. Or the European Green Capital project.

But the Funchal Statement is different. This time, it is not European powers proclaiming that cities must join together for an agreement on urban mobility – it is the reverse. This time, the impetus for change came from the ground up. This time, the idea was born in a city hall. This time, 200 cities will stand up and proclaim the need for change.

Despite the fact that seemingly countless problems face today's municipal managers, we need to make sure that mobility makes it on the short-list of city priorities. It's no secret that the issues that tend to gain attention and inspire change are those that have the promise of long-term funding.

Advancing the goals of sustainable transport is about much more than hardware, technology and infrastructure. It's about health and education, and in many cases, it's about changing mindsets and influencing individual behaviour.

At the same time, transport specialists know that we need to continue to innovate and give citizens transportation solutions that are sustainable. And leaders need to educate about why choosing a sustainable mode of getting from point A to point B is so vital, and we need to give the public sustainable options for getting from point A to point B.

The presentation of the Funchal Statement is a clear indication that 200 European cities will make sustainable urban mobility a priority. And the promise of EU support will help keep it on their agendas for the long-term.

CIVITAS stands for CItY-VITAlity-Sustainability. Roman Jakic is the outgoing Chair of the CIVITAS Political Advisory Committee, and Member of Ljubljana City Council. Bruno Miguel Camacho Pereira is candidate for Chair of the new CIVITAS PAC and Deputy Mayor of Funchal.