EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Abstract

The study deals with the interaction between integrated urban transport plans (sustainable urban mobility/transport plans, SUMP) and the cohesion policy of the European Union. After tackling the concept of SUMP and the role of transport/urban transport in cohesion policy, eight case studies analyse the link between integrated urban transport planning and funding for transport policies/projects by cohesion policy. Finally, the study provides policy recommendations including on the 2011 cohesion policy reform proposals.
This document was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development.

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LINGUISTIC VERSIONS

Original: EN.

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

To contact the Policy Department or to subscribe to its monthly newsletter please write to: poldep-cohesion@europarl.europa.eu

Manuscript completed in November 2012.

This document is available on the Internet at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/studies

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Background

European Cohesion Policy plays an important role in improving the competitive position of the Union as a whole, and the weakest of its 271 regions in particular. Through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF), otherwise known as the Structural Funds, as well as the Cohesion Fund, the EU invests in thousands of projects in different economic sectors, cultural and social issues across all of Europe’s regions. For the funding period 2007 to 2013 the overall budget of €347 billion represents the single largest source of financial support for investment in growth and jobs on EU level. The instruments to guide the funds to the applicants, the so-called Operational Programmes (OPs), are prepared by the Member States and adopted by the European Commission.

Roughly one fourth of €347 billion (total cohesion policy funding) is allocated to transport. Only 2.3% of this total is allocated to decided urban transport projects. On the other hand, some 70% of the European population live in urban areas, and this proportion is still rising. All in all, €8.1 billion have been allocated by the Operational Programmes to urban transport projects. Each OP is normally supported by a single fund, i.e. the Structural Funds or the Cohesion Fund. The OPs are managed by national ministries, regional authorities or local councils, which are assigned to act as Managing Authority (MA) of an OP by the Member States.

Beyond the classic OPs of cohesion policy there are specific support instruments, in part supported by the EIB. Five of them should be mentioned, in the context of the financing of urban mobility projects: JASPERS provides technical assistance for the twelve new Member States in relation to high quality, major infrastructure projects. JESSICA (Joint European Support for Sustainable Investment in City Areas) focuses on supporting urban development and regeneration. European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) is often associated with the INTERREG IVC programme, which supports regional and urban networks by sharing best practices. URBACT II is an exchange and learning programme promoting integrated, sustainable urban development and ESPON supports policy development regarding territorial cohesion.

The White Paper on Transport (European Commission 2011d) suggests examining the possibility of a European support framework for a progressive implementation of Urban Mobility Plans in European cities. Thus, the interaction of cohesion policy and sustainable urban transport projects is clearly addressed. Moreover, the White Paper refers to the concept of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs) or Sustainable Urban Transport Plans (SUTPs) which represent comprehensive planning instruments aimed at addressing all modes of transport in cities and their vicinity. The concept of SUMPs was already highlighted in two preceding EU documents – the Green Paper (European Commission 2007a) and the Action Plan on Urban Mobility (European Commission 2009).
Aim and activities

The aim of the study is to provide a clear understanding of the concept and status of urban areas, urban mobility and SUMP (or SUTP) in Europe. In addition, the link between cohesion policy and SUMP is analysed.

The methodological basis of the study is twofold: first, a review of the key literature is undertaken, and second, an examination of eight tailor-made case studies revealing a potential link between OPs and SUMP is performed. In fact, only two third of projects identified in the OPs officially constitute a part of a sustainable urban mobility plan or equivalent transport development plan. The eight case studies included four cases of convergence regions:

- Cluj Napoca (Romania);
- Halle (Germany);
- Krakow (Poland);
- Tallinn (Estonia);

three RCE regions:

- Barcelona (Spain);
- Liverpool (United Kingdom);
- Rennes (France);

and one cross-border region under the ETC objective:

- Strasbourg/ Kehl (France/ Germany).

Findings and Recommendations

The literature on SUMP defines several criteria which characterise a SUMP. This study shows that only a few of the investigated plans fulfil all the criteria. The case study analysis generally reveals that the linkage between EU cohesion policy instruments and the local or regional urban mobility planning differs significantly across the cases. In cases where no real SUMP exists, the OP often funds transport infrastructure rather than traffic management measures (Halle, Tallinn). On the other hand, sustainable urban mobility projects play an important role within the OPs in Liverpool and Krakow, even though they are not formally part of the urban mobility plan.

Moreover, the Liverpool case demonstrates the advantage of the bottom-up approach when implementing the OP, i.e. local stakeholders submit specific projects, which are then assessed against the OP priorities. However, due to the complex system of support, which ensures flexibility in meeting the needs of the region, it is often challenging for potential beneficiaries to absorb and understand these conditions and the interaction between the different forms of financial support.

Local transport planning authorities are often not aware of the funding options of the OP, and consequently do not take the OP into account when drafting a (sustainable) urban transport plan. The reason seems to be the different geographical scope: OPs are focussed on regional or national development, while the local plans consider urban conditions.
Thus, it is recommended to raise awareness among urban infrastructure planners about OPs covering their municipalities and to appoint institutions that connect suitable OPs, e.g. those with urban development objectives, with potential new SUMPs. This includes:

- The provision of comprehensive, but **tailor-made information for potential beneficiaries**;
- The establishment of an **exchange between the MA and transport authorities** and current/potential beneficiaries, e.g. by holding regular “Round Tables”;
- Making the establishment of a **SUMP a condition for OP funding for urban transport** measures;
- Issuing a **guideline about the elements and implementation of SUMPs**, taking into account the subsidiary principle and the planning authority of municipalities;
- The consideration of the **future trend of potential population decrease**, expected for many but not all regions, when deciding about the focus and priority axes of (new) OPs as such a development alters the mobility needs of a region.

Moreover, good governance plays a key role when both an OP and a SUMP are established. This includes that administrative, reporting and audit requirements associated with the funds are not regarded as a bureaucratic obstacle by potential beneficiaries. Therefore to improve governance and cooperation between existing OPs and SUMPs it is recommended:

- To require coordination between MA and SUMP managers even if there is no obvious link between OP transport projects and urban mobility;
- To establish an institutional setting to encourage communication between MAs and SUMP. One option could be to set-up a national contact point for SUMPs that then needs to be informed about OPs in a country as well as to forward such information to SUMP planners;
- To include any OP project that may affect urban transport in the SUMP in order to strengthen its comprehensiveness and effectiveness;
- To assess if either the administrative rules to apply for funds from the OP could be simplified or transport authorities and potential beneficiaries could be educated to overcome the barrier of real or perceived bureaucracy.

For strengthening the linkage between cohesion policy implemented by an OP and sustainable urban mobility, three important lessons can be drawn from this study. First, strategic and high-level issues should be laid down by the OP as this covers a larger scope, i.e. a nation or a region, and will consider the wider regional aspects in the surroundings of an urban region for which a SUMP should be set up.

Second, the actual urban mobility projects must be developed from the bottom up at the local level, strictly following a participatory and integrative approach. How these fit together with the strategic objectives and high-level issues needs to be discussed between the actors at the two levels, e.g. the managing authority of the OP and the planning authority of the SUMP.

This already implies the third lesson to be learnt: communication between managing and planning authorities of the OP and the SUMP needs to be ensured and facilitated. The case studies revealed different successful communication options. A strategic approach always
feasible is to set up institutions (such as a coordination board) with members from both the managing and planning authorities as well as the beneficiaries of OP and SUMP. In other cases institutional structures that existed prior to the establishment of the OP and/or SUMP safeguarded communication. For instance, when exchange between municipalities and regions was already in place for long, ad hoc working groups could easily be established to deal with emerging issues that would require cooperation between OP and SUMP. Finally, cooperation could also be implemented by persons involved in both the OP and the SUMP.