



## **Japan Local Government Centre, London**

### Monthly Report April 2011 (Germany) – Rethinking transport in the city

It has been a truism for many years that increasing car traffic is choking the cities, and over the past 20 years (in some places even earlier than that) many efforts have been undertaken to reduce the amount of individual car traffic in cities. In particular, German cities have invested huge sums in underground, trams and combination systems of inner-city trams and suburban trains, as well as making cycling more convenient and attractive by increasing cycle routes, parking facilities and signage. More recently new efforts are directed at electro-cars and electric bicycles as well as car hire schemes. The issue remains however that the demand for mobility has continued to increase, and that concentration on different modes of transport separately does not yield the outcome of traffic reduction that is deemed necessary. Increasingly the consensus is growing that further efforts are needed to make combinations of different transport modes as fast and convenient as possible, and that many disciplines need to work together: not only traffic planners, but designers and brand consultants and 'lifestyle' experts need to get involved.

It remains a fact that cycling still has a lot of potential to offer, and without question the model that everybody is trying to emulate among the larger cities is Copenhagen, where long years of improving the cycling infrastructure as well as implementing policies such as a 'green wave' for cyclists have led to cycling making up 36% of total traffic volume in the city. Many smaller cities in Germany have had success with cycling policies already in the 90s – such as Munster (pop. 275,000), which has roughly the same percentage as Copenhagen in cycling and boasts the title of 'Germany's cycling capital', and Freiburg (pop. 220,000) with about 28% of cycling as a share of traffic volume. However Berlin is a different matter – as the capital and the biggest city in Germany, problems are on a much larger scale, and starting from the current modal split of between 7% and 21% for the different areas of Berlin, there is still a lot of scope for improvement. A system of rental bikes had been established previously by the Deutsche Bahn, and on 20 May 2011 it started a new roll-out of 50 fixed stations many of which will be close to train and underground stations in Berlin-Mitte only, to be enlarged with an additional 30 stations by summer. By locating many bike stations immediately at train and underground stations, the transfer between public transport and bike is made easy. Previously, in Berlin the bikes could be picked up and left at any crossing, which was appreciated by a number of users, but experience in other cities, particularly Hamburg, has shown that fixed stations are still convenient for users and also reduce loss of bikes. Currently, the rental bike system run by Deutsche Bahn in Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Munich, Cologne and Karlsruhe still uses the system of dispersed pick up and return.

At a seminar on possibilities for diversifying and linking different transport modes taking place on March 25 on the fringes of the bicycle-oriented trade fair 'VeloBerlin', experts from various disciplines and cities came together, and there was agreement that what is needed is a comprehensive approach that smoothes the links between different modes of transport. As the rental bike system shows, being able to switch quickly and conveniently is what people on the move are looking for.

Besides, the position of the car in German society is changing. Owning a car used to be a symbol of coming into adulthood as well as a status symbol, but among younger people, this is changing rapidly. A study by the Center of Automotive Management (located within the private technical business college in Bergisch-Gladbach) published in March 2011 showed that ca. 25% of the 18 to 25 year olds regard owning a car as not necessary. For many young people, internet-enabled communication devices and social networking are much more important.

It is also worth noting that there is already a comparatively long history of organised car sharing in Germany. Together with Switzerland, from the early 1990s onward it can be regarded as a pioneer in establishing and popularising urban car clubs (car sharing) as a replacement for owning a private car – nowadays such clubs exist in various forms in over 290 cities. Furthermore, owing to the fact that the Deutsche Bahn holds a monopoly over transport between cities and it was not legally possible for private providers to establish city to city bus services in Germany, an organised system of ride sharing called 'Mitfahrzentrale' sprang up in the 1980. By registering names and details of drivers and sharers, it also provided added security compared to hitchhiking. Through the system, contact was established between drivers who registered a planned journey and those who wanted to join the ride, paying a portion of petrol costs. This was a cheap way to travel from A to B and popular among students and younger people, but it always took a fair amount of time to organise.

It is therefore no surprise that given these two developments surrounding car use, new ways of combining shared care use and social media are also emerging. For example, by combining the possibilities of smartphones with satellite navigation, it is possible to update the car sharing concept of 'Mitfahrzentrale' to connect drivers and sharers quickly and efficiently, and using social networking to also enhance real world social contact – which is the explicit aim of 'flinc', one of those systems which was also introduced at the VeloBerlin. However there are various approaches already happening, including shared taxi-services as well as co-operation with traditional car rental businesses, and car companies are also actively engaging in the field. One example of this is Daimler-Benz and its engagement with the car2go project in Ulm and elsewhere (see Monthly Report June 2009), which provides 200 smart cars distributed throughout the city for short-term rental, helped by electronic registering and monitoring systems. The system has already been introduced in Austin (Texas), and from April of this year has started in Hamburg (which has been chosen as European Green Capital 2011) with 300 cars.

Successful urban mobility of the future looks likely to be a smart combination of public transport with individualised sharing solutions and rental schemes, and as in many other fields, it is the cities which need to provide leadership, work in partnership with others and make it happen.

*Any opinions expressed in this report are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of JLGc or CLAIR.*