

## Right to mobility – in Cologne, in São Paulo, in Boston...

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The rising prices of energy and petrol or diesel are currently on everyone's lips – and rightly so, because they expose middle- and low-income people to an ever-increasing risk of poverty. This applies to people in the EU as well as to other regions of the world, such as Brazil, where the movement for a zero fare for public transport (Movimento Passe Livre) emerged in 2013 and continues to grow.<sup>[1]</sup> In the USA, a car country, the mayor of Boston, Michelle Wu, recently spent eight million dollars to allow residents to use part of the local bus routes for free.<sup>[2]</sup>

The introduction of a CO2 price for transport and buildings is currently being discussed in the European Union. The European Commission has presented a corresponding proposal within the framework of the EU-Fitfor55 climate policy package, which aims to produce a corresponding change in human behaviour by increasing the price of fossil fuels. The problem here, however, is that many people can neither switch the heating system in their homes to climate-friendly heat pumps, nor, if they have to commute to work, give up the car, if the public transport offer is simply not available or too unreliable. So they have no choice and must use fossil fuels to manage their daily lives.

But mobility means social participation and must not be restricted by rising prices. The left-wing group in the European Parliament is therefore calling for the introduction of the European CO2 price for transport and buildings to be abandoned, and for a European Social Climate Fund to be set up instead to provide EUR 23.7 billion for the period from 2023 to 2027. This is intended to reduce the burden on households affected by mobility poverty and also energy poverty. Rapporteur Leila Chaibi of La France Insoumise (in the left-wing group in the European Parliament), who is currently campaigning against Macron, has presented corresponding demands in her statement.<sup>[3]</sup> It also calls for this money to be spent in the Member States on the development of public transport and rail transport. Because millions of people in the EU are affected by mobility poverty and are suffering with rising fuel prices, low household incomes, high costs for using public transport, and also simply from the lack of alternative mobility services such as public transport and rail. The demands of the yellow vest movement in France alone show how urgent and emotional this issue is. It also justifiably calls for the introduction of a European definition of mobility poverty, for a start, so that the problem can be identified and comparable data is available for the various Member States.

On the other hand, purchase premium for electric cars have been introduced in many EU Member States (e.g. in Germany, France, Austria, Italy, Spain, Hungary and Croatia) <sup>[4]</sup>. This is, of course, socially unfair, because low-income households simply cannot afford to buy an electric car, whether with a purchase rebate or without. Quite apart from the fact that we need to reduce the number of cars on our planet (so far, the number of registered cars is increasing without any controls), and merely shifting from cars with combustion engines to electric cars will not reduce the increasing greenhouse gases in the transport sector. Electric cars, especially the particularly large and heavy ones, are very energy- and resource-intensive to make and, of course, also produce greenhouse gases accordingly – both during manufacture itself and during the energy-intensive extraction of raw materials for the batteries, such as lithium, cobalt and nickel.<sup>[5]</sup>

And the question of the use of space in our cities and the question of fair distribution of public space (parking versus housing, parking versus green spaces) are also part of a socially just mobility transition. "The Kölner Verkehrswende Jetzt" alliance is campaigning for a real mobility transition that relieves this city of suffocating car traffic.<sup>[6]</sup> Because so far, hardly any headway has been made in terms of boosting cycling and above-ground public transport – despite assurances to the contrary from the city government. On the contrary, resources are still flowing into the construction of the north-south tunnel (tunnel constructions generate a lot of CO2), whereas above-ground public transport is neglected. At a Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung NRW event, Guda Wienke, an expert resident of the City of Cologne Transport Committee (LINK), explained that half a million commuters enter the city every morning – with corresponding consequences for noise pollution, air pollution and the use of space for parking spaces.<sup>[7]</sup> And a cycling concept for the city of Cologne is available, but little progress is being made for its implementation. In contrast, the Danish city of Copenhagen, where almost 50 per cent of all journeys are made by bicycle, has chosen the right approach, taking cycling planning away from the district level and centralising it. This meant that it was possible for the cycling share of the so-called *modal split* to be significantly increased.

It shows that a socially just climate policy that guarantees the right to mobility for all also means creating alternatives: expanding

public transport, expanding cycling, expanding rail transport and creating liveable cities, because space is a democratic arena that must be an area for interaction. So that life within planetary boundaries is possible and mobility poverty is combated.

## References

- [1] <https://www.mpl.org.br/>
- [2] <https://www.boston.gov/news/mayor-wu-takes-steps-expand-fare-free-bus-service>
- [3] [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TRAN-AM-719781\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TRAN-AM-719781_EN.pdf)
- [4] <https://www.acea.auto/fact/overview-electric-vehicles-tax-benefits-purchase-incentives-european-union-2021/>
- [5] <https://www.rosalux.de/en/publication/id/44154/fast-and-furious-for-future>
- [6] <https://verkehrswende.koeln/koelner-verkehrswende-jetzt>
- [7] [https://www.rosalux.de/veranstaltung/es\\_detail/IK6AZ/verkehrswende-fuer-die-stadt-verkehrswende-fuer-koeln-Ökologisch-und-sozial?cHash=b38316a0dc3f1066dca86bc968b0a605](https://www.rosalux.de/veranstaltung/es_detail/IK6AZ/verkehrswende-fuer-die-stadt-verkehrswende-fuer-koeln-Ökologisch-und-sozial?cHash=b38316a0dc3f1066dca86bc968b0a605)

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