

Governance and transformation of **urban mobility**

Executive summary

Vol. II

Reflections on mobility and the implementation of low emission zones in 10 Spanish cities — **Recommendations**

March 2022

Executive Summary

In Spain alone, more than 30,000 people die prematurely every year from pollution-related diseases, and in many of our cities the air quality guidelines established by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2005 are constantly exceeded. Only seven of Spain's 80 most populated cities comply with the new recommendations proposed in September 2021. In addition, the Spanish authorities have been referred to the Court of Justice of the European Union over air quality breaches in Madrid and Barcelona.

It should be remembered that Spain made a commitment to a 23% reduction in emissions by 2030 compared to 1990 figures. A modal shift towards decarbonisation needs to take place as outlined in the **National Energy and Climate Plan (PNEC)**, which is due to be revised next year as agreed by the EU Member States. This is a fundamental aspect of the process to achieve sustainable mobility, together with the **Climate Change and Energy Transition Law**, the Safe, Sustainable and Connected Mobility Strategy and the forthcoming **Sustainable Mobility Law**.

One of the main measures affecting a large proportion of the Spanish population will be the implementation of **Low Emission Zones**. By 2023, all cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants — and those with more than 20,000 with air quality problems — will have at least one. These zones are a key tool to reduce air pollution and CO2 emissions, as well as providing cities with more liveable spaces. They are a commitment to the health of our citizens, a means of returning the streets to pedestrians, reducing private vehicle use, raising awareness and educating regarding sustainable urban planning and practices and prioritising active mobility and public transport.

So far, only two cities have implemented low emission zones in Spain — Madrid and Barcelona — and with limited ambition and varying criteria. Indeed, the steps taken are far from what can be seen in other capitals on the European continent. Achieving the proposed targets requires measures such as these to transform urban mobility and public spaces. Some such measures are included in the **National Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan**, which has already provided aid for the implementation of low emission zones and sustainable digital transformation of urban transport.

Low emission zones involve an interplay of three factors: **urban mobility, the city model and citizen health and wellbeing**. Cities have a decisive role in the implementation of a new concept of sustainable mobility. Due to their close connections, they are an important channel for transmission of information and awareness-raising actions. Moreover, some cities can play a politically and socially influential role in **tackling health, energy and climate challenges**, helping to bring about changes in models that enable **progress towards clean, liveable and healthy cities**.





However, in order to achieve sustainable mobility in a context of energy transition, the parties affected need to actively participate in its design, development and implementation. The citizens themselves must be the protagonists of the mobility of the future and **the transition must be by and for everyone**, towards mobility at the service of people and not vehicles.

In order to gather first-hand feedback from citizens and city councils on the implementation of low emission zones, a participatory process was designed involving ten Spanish cities in the form of **27 participatory sessions**. The sessions were held online between June and December 2021 and the cities selected were: **Cuenca, Logroño, Malaga, Mérida, Palma, Seville, Valencia, Valladolid, Pontevedra and Zaragoza**.

The **operational targets** of this process were as follows:

To analyse the mobility situation in the selected cities.

To identify common guidelines allowing progress towards the implementation of low emission zones that are truly capable of transforming cities.

To connect citizens and civil society with the aim of promoting future synergies in the field of sustainable mobility.

All the cities in the initial sample had more than 50,000 inhabitants, in order to draw conclusions applicable to a large number of the cities required to implement low emission zones. **The final selection of cities was made applying multiple criteria based on population, location, mobility advances and ruling political party**. Madrid and Barcelona were discarded on this basis due to the specific nature of their mobility situation and the political scenario surrounding both cities.

In each of the cities selected, **three online participation sessions were held: two for citizens and one for technical or political representatives of the city councils**. The call for the participation sessions was made through social media and by sending emails, although in all cases there was intense follow-up by telephone.

The basic **profile** of the groups contacted was as follows: pedestrians, cyclists, users of personal mobility vehicles, people with special mobility needs, elderly people, environmental groups, car-sharing, shopkeepers, neighbourhood associations, schools and parents' associations, groups focusing on gender issues, health professionals, taxi drivers, logistics, experts in urban planning and mobility, professional associations, etc. As for the working sessions with the city councils, three were attended by technicians, one by technicians and politicians and the remaining five by politicians only.

A total of **27 online meetings were held with more than 300 individual hours of participation**. As a result of these participatory processes, **12 citizen proposals were made for the implementation of low emission zones**, which together with the municipal analysis and the prior diagnosis with civil society resulted in **11 key recommendations** to be taken into account from 2023 onwards:

Recommendation 1



Determined will and political agreement

Municipal councillors hold their office because they have earned the support of the city's eligible voters. At the same time, urban projects, both large and small, tend to have their detractors. The traditional configuration of cities and the habits acquired by society over time have meant that certain urban mobility policies or measures, such as those affecting private vehicle use, have met with little sympathy. However, when their justification lies in the common good and criteria ranging from economic and social through to environmental and health reasons a determined will is required.

At a local level, it seems that sociological sympathies weigh more than party affiliations. Nonetheless, political ideology permeates most decisions and often determines whether or not agreements are reached. In the case of measures such as zero or low emission zones and many others aimed at achieving clean, liveable and healthy cities, it is essential to reach a political agreement that unites all the different political groups. Public representatives should therefore be looking to ensure continuity under an ambitious sustainability framework that is not dependent upon the electoral results in 2023.

Recommendation 2



Planning and homogeneity

A total of 149 Spanish cities are required by national legislation to establish at least one low emission zone by 2023. However, no minimum requirements or content have been established for their implementation to ensure a planned and homogeneous mobility model. This jeopardises the effectiveness of these kinds of measures, as well as creating different urban scenarios for citizens depending where they live merely because of the political criteria applied. Such a patchwork approach is not the way forward and minimum criteria must be established.

City councils, taking their Urban Sustainable Mobility Plans and other mobility-related regulations as their basis, should integrate the implementation and design of measures such as low emission zones into other municipal policies such as urban planning, commercial and environmental affairs, education and services. Urban projects require planning and phased implementation of low emission zones is both possible and recommended, gradually increasing in scope and ambition to eventually convert the whole city into a zero emission zone; a city that belongs to the people.

Recommendation 3



Citizen participation

If municipal decisions are made in a coordinated manner with citizens there is less need to be concerned about electoral attrition or the unpopularity of certain measures. It is worth remembering that democracy is not just about voting every four years. A favourable election result does not give the ruling party free reign, nor does the incoming government instantly appreciate all the knowledge and peculiarities existing in the urban and social environment of every part of the city itself and the surrounding municipalities where daily commuters come from. Talking, particularly if all options are kept open, can truly achieve results.

Coherent implementation of low emission zones brings improvements for the city, but also changes for residents, shopkeepers and citizens who travel into the city for work or business. It is essential to implement well-designed participatory processes to hear the opinions of these people without internal bypasses to decision-making levels or unduly favouring sectoral interests. Citizens' opinions must be taken into account in projects like these and any other kind of comprehensive project in public spaces. It is necessary to build alliances.

Recommendation 4



Car-free environments

In order to move towards sustainable mobility, private vehicle use in urban areas needs to be discouraged. Not only that, we must also progressively reduce the number of parking spaces available in the most heavily congested areas to contribute to this process. Transformation of mobility is not about replacing all ICEs with electric vehicles, but rather prioritising and giving public space to pedestrians, cyclists, buses, trams, taxis and personal mobility vehicles — or to none of them! A vehicle-free environment also means a living space that is only for people and green infrastructure.

The transformation brought about by low emission zones is directly related with a drastic reduction in traffic, the recovery of urban spaces for pedestrians, other forms of mobility and greening. It is vitally important to create people-friendly spaces adapted to the current context of the fight against climate change (shade, fountains, benches, etc.) that encourage meetings and safe public enjoyment, in a process of integration and pacification of the urban zones where most of the population moves. As Tonucci said, "A city designed for children is a city which is good for everyone."

Recommendation 5



Coexistence and prioritisation of active mobility

Bicycles are an alternative to private vehicles. They need cycle lanes so they can move safely, although it should also not be forgotten that they need to coexist with pedestrians. Regulation and information and awareness campaigns are important keys to success, but so is proper urban planning. In the transformation process that cities are currently undergoing, active mobility should be a fundamental pillar of any policy to be implemented. The development and maintenance of cycling infrastructure in optimal conditions, both at a municipal and metropolitan level, should be a priority for any city council.

In a context of deployment of low emission zones and decarbonisation of cities, active mobility in the form of cycling and walking should be promoted. Creation of pedestrian zones, traffic light regulation, zebra crossing designs and maintenance of footpaths are essential to provide citizens with the necessary comfort, safety, continuity and autonomy, thereby converting urban spaces into peaceful transit routes. Together with traffic reductions and improvements to air quality, they constitute a means of guaranteeing a city's healthiness and liveability. Furthermore, coexistence is compatible with segregation at certain points.

Recommendation 6



Public transport, the pillar

A city's public transport system speaks volumes about the quality of life it offers both residents and visitors. The needs of each city are different, as are their financial capacities and other aspects that make each city unique. City councils should promote the quality of the services provided by both public and private companies, monitoring to ensure due regularity and frequency of the different types of transport, as well as other guarantees of service quality. This is necessary if citizens are to adopt public transport as their preferred mode of transport.

The existence of a network of zero emission buses with exclusive routes and high capacity transport systems such as trams and metro lines, supported by an adequate suburban network for the interior of low emission zones and the entire municipality (including commuters) is essential to make public transport the priority choice for citizens. The process should also include information and awareness campaigns to change the false beliefs of certain groups regarding the social class of the people who use these systems and encourage intermodality habits.

Recommendation 7



Nobody gets left behind

Issues such as transport equity and other dimensions of social equity need to be identified and addressed within the sustainability framework. Transport and poverty are therefore significant policy dimensions in any comprehensive discourse relating to sustainability and the emission reduction process. It is imperative to implement policies and measures that do not exacerbate existing situations of poverty and inequality. Lack of access to mobility has different effects, particularly among the poor in urban or outlying areas.

Coherent public policies are required that do not generate households with a high ratio of mobility expenditure to income or limited availability of affordable public or alternative modes of transport necessary to meet basic socio-economic needs. Mobility poverty has increased dramatically in recent years due to the urgency of the changes needed to ensure we protect the planet and society in all its different aspects. All policies must take this into account and include compensatory mechanisms.

Recommendation 8



Polluter pays: sanctions

The polluter pays principle is a fundamental and guiding principle of European environmental law which therefore takes precedence over national law. It establishes that companies causing environmental damage are liable for such damage and must take the necessary preventive or remedial measures and bear all related costs. Applying the same principle, citizens should also bear the cost of their polluting. This is the basis for the development of green taxation, another aspect of the current transition process. A good example of this is urban tolls.

An effective control and sanctioning system is required to enforce low emission zones, ensuring it is very difficult to breach access, circulation and/or parking restrictions without being penalised. In addition to the mechanism used, the sanctions applied are crucial. The idea is to initially promote changes in habits with a particular emphasis on discouraging private vehicle use, applying sanctions backed up by a communication campaign and the corresponding signage to allow the local population, the economic sector and tourism to gradually adapt.

Recommendation 9



Sustainable logistics: finding the solution

One of the biggest problems that cities face is the distribution of goods in urban zones and loading and unloading on public thoroughfares, in accordance with the established custom and practice and the characteristics and opening hours of each type of establishment or service. Apart from the necessary respect for workers' conditions, urban logistics must address the environmental, health and spatial consequences of uncontrolled growth. City councils have to work to solve the problems arising from this activity and ensure its sustainability, for example by promoting local trade.

At the same time, the logistical needs of residents and economic actors in low emission zones must continue to be met. Other forms of delivery (cycling and pedestrian) should be encouraged, along with the creation of freight hubs to favour a modal shift. This evolution will benefit not only the low emission zone itself but also the whole city. Reducing environmental impact involves use of zero-emission vehicles, reoccupation of public spaces, addressing noise issues and regulating timetables. Commitments need to be made by all parties.

Recommendation 10



A focus on both tourists and residents

Spain is a leading tourist destination. Its cities (some more than others) focus much of their economic activity on this sector. Depending on the characteristics and location of each city, the means of arrival for tourists varies: by car, train, plane or bus. In addition, the most iconic and sought-after tourist accommodation is located in city centres. Furthermore, tourism involves travelling which at times requires motor vehicles. Both tourists and residents are stakeholders in urban mobility transformation processes and they should both be taken into account.

Private vehicle journeys require parking spaces associated with hotel accommodation, which as mentioned above are located in city centres and therefore in the areas forming part of low emission zones or other types of restricted traffic areas. Meanwhile, residents are entitled to access their private parking space with any vehicle. Both these cases need to be taken into account in the prior planning of the policies and measures to be implemented, although they should not place limits on them if solutions exist that reduce their impact.

Recommendation 11



Commuting in a sustainable way

The centre is usually home to a large part of a city's economic and business networks. Together with external economic hubs such as industrial estates, technology parks, logistics platforms, terminals, etc., they are poles of concentration of atmospheric pollutants resulting from travel by workers. Most workers travel by private vehicle mainly for convenience, but also in most cases because either there is no alternative or it does not meet the minimum standards of quality, comfort and/or availability.

Work Mobility Plans are therefore indispensable. Current experiences are limited and difficulties exist for implementation of these plans depending on the size of the companies, their location and their working methods. However, city councils, supramunicipal entities and companies need to jointly promote alternative mobility in this area through public collective transport, cycling infrastructure, incentives to promote the modal shift, flexible working hours, reduction of forced mobility and the possibility of teleworking, availability of recharging points, etc.





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Recomendaciones

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Further information

Public Policies and Climate Governance Department
politicaspUBLICAS@ecodes.org
T.: (+34) 976 298 282