



“The pivotal role of mobility”

Speech

by Federal President Horst Köhler at
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A few weeks ago all eyes were on Iceland. The volcanic ash cloud from the volcano whose name we Germans find so difficult to pronounce was the hot topic of conversation. In Europe one could not see it or smell it; but we came to feel it almost everywhere as air transport came to a standstill. Holiday makers were stranded far from home, managers were grounded, fruit and vegetables could not be transported and were left to rot and many factories ran out of parts – first no deliveries and then no production.

This is how our highly mobile society experienced what can happen when one single mode of transport is no longer available because nature sets us limits. Was this just a taste of things to come, of climate change and the oil shortage which lie ahead? Fortunately not, because climate change and oil wells running dry will not be sudden like a volcanic eruption. We can prepare for them - I say: sooner rather than later. But it remains a tremendous challenge.

Today there are almost seven billion people living on earth. In 40 years, in 2050, it will be noticeably more than nine billion. There are many things which divide these billions of people – seas and mountains, borders and language barriers. But there is also a great deal which connects them, such as the need for mobility and the desire to participate in the global economy. That is why transport is key for quality of life and cooperation between nations and why the mobility of people and goods has grown so rapidly over the past two or three decades.

And that was just the start. Experts believe that the number of vehicles could double between 2002 and 2030. The frequency and density of air transport in Asia and South America, which has up to now been far lower than in the West, will quickly increase. It is true of almost all transport modes: transposing the figures for industrialised nations to other continents results in dizzying levels of movement. However, if this increase in movement is also linked to the correlating increase in environmental impact and consumption of resources then we should not only be feeling dizzy but also afraid and concerned. Already today 13-14 % of global greenhouse gas emissions are caused by transport – some estimates are much higher. We cannot and should not continue in this vain. That is why it is clear that the world does not just need *more* mobility, but for the good of our environment – and for our own good – it needs *better* mobility.

I know, Ladies and Gentlemen, that you are aware of this. That is why you are working on making global transport ever more efficient and environmentally friendly. In this endeavour you are in a race against increasing traffic volumes and the burden that existing mobility levels already present. Your success is important for all of us. It depends on many different factors: intelligent political framework decisions, technological progress and stakeholders' sense of responsibility. The International Transport Forum can bring all these factors together. Which is why it is a key venue for discussions on future mobility and why I gladly accepted Federal Minister Ramsauer's invitation to attend the International Transport Forum.

I am very pleased that such top-class experts and decision makers from so many different nations have come together here in Leipzig to discuss mobility concepts for the 21st Century. And I would like to offer you a warm welcome in Germany, a country that has been quite crazy about mobility for a very long time – from flight pioneer Otto Lilienthal through automobile engineer Gottlieb Daimler to aircraft constructor Ferdinand von Zeppelin.

These three and their colleagues at home and abroad have offered us unexpected opportunities – and unexpected problems, as we now know. This fact became clear to me once again whilst visiting Expo 2010 last week. The world city of Shanghai offers us many visual examples, with its vast port complexes and bridges, its rapidly growing underground rail network, its dense network of motorways – and its traffic congestion and smog clouds. The Expo impressively demonstrated how feverishly the People's Republic of China and many other nations are working on improved mobility, and by improved I mean more environmentally friendly. Ecological, clean drive technology was a key topic, including examples that show how much can be achieved if we forget our old habits. The Hanseatic City of Bremen presented its car-sharing model and calculated for Shanghai's inhabitants that, with the same levels of participation as in Bremen, car-sharing could take 180,000 cars off Shanghai's streets – what

an amazing contribution to clever mobility!

In Germany we have given ourselves the tasks of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 40 % by 2020. The European Union wants to reduce them by up to 30 %. All other continents will also have to make reductions, simply because it is in their own interest. What can the transport sector contribute to the international effort ahead and how can they organise it?

I would like to share a few thoughts with you on this topic. If I have understood correctly, the International Transport Forum 2010 is looking for answers in technological innovation. And there are doubtless many opportunities there. But any assumption that innovation means 'cars with reduced emissions' overlooks greater potential. Let us also develop solutions to avoid unnecessary journeys and transport before they take place and plan our cities more efficiently. Let us think about what we like about our mobile lifestyles and what is simply frustrating and time-consuming; what is worth keeping and what is not. Indeed, let us consider how we really want to live, what contribution good mobility concepts make to that and how we can make them attractive for everybody.

The question that must initially be asked is what we value and the price we pay for it. I will give you an example: there are buses travelling through Berlin this week displaying an advertisement from an airline with the slogan "Norway's getting closer". There is a flight offer to Oslo for €29. However, Norway has not moved a single inch closer. Oslo is still around 1000 kilometres from Berlin.

How much do the people of Berlin value being able to fly to Norway for the price of a tie? And what are the costs of that flight in terms of resource consumption and environmental impact which are not reflected in the price?

Passenger or goods transporters currently pay for fuel, staff, vehicles, fees. But they pay little or nothing for air and noise pollution, health costs, environmental and climatic costs. This is why, to cite another example, it can be cheaper to shell North Sea prawns in Morocco rather than on the North Sea, before selling them in Germany. A worthwhile trip? I do not think so – simply a cheap one because the price formation is wrong, or incomplete. I am convinced that if consumers knew the true costs for society and the country they would be prepared to pay a little more for less travelled prawns if this clearly spares the environment. Because the environment is often very highly valued by people – but unfortunately still all too rarely taken into account in the price.

Charging true costs would lead to environmentally friendly solutions. It would also make transport on inland waterways and by rail more attractive. This would lead to expansion of the rail network. And the charging of true costs can be achieved or if necessary imposed, by political decisions. In this I see a task for the European Union. It is working hard to construct trans-European

networks. It should also be addressing the fairness of competition between modes of transport; otherwise existing distortions in competition will simply be extended into infrastructure.

An important first step towards charging true costs is being taken in air transportation. Next year it will be included in emissions trading. But do we not need to go further than that? In contrast to electricity tax, which the railway has to pay, kerosene is free of any form of energy tax – which is indeed also true of fuel for sea vessels. With the idea of creating a level playing field for transport would it not be fairer to end energy tax exemptions for kerosene and sea-vessel fuel? Preferably as internationally as possible. I know that this would entail difficult negotiations. But we need to tackle this situation – after all here we have representatives from all over the world who want to work together.

Charging true costs encourages intelligent logistics, combining different modes of transport optimally. And charging true costs encourages the expansion of innovation such as the use of extra-light containers for air transport, which save kerosene, hybrid drive systems for HGVs, CO² neutral container terminals and traffic management systems to avoid traffic congestion.

The competition that charging true costs would cause would have its challenges. But it offers great opportunities, notably for Europe and for Germany. We are very ambitious in the field of environmental technology and we already have some shining examples of success. That should make us confident.

And there could be further effects of charging the true cost: we would make even more effort to completely avoid some journeys or shipments. If we do not manage to achieve this on a large scale – as emphasised by several speakers at the 2008 International Transport Forum – then we will not be able to prevent the transport sector from emitting ever more greenhouse gases. Less transport does not necessarily mean the economy has to suffer. For example the formation of industrial clusters has a positive impact on transport because distances are reduced. At the same time these clusters encourage creativity and improved cooperation between businesses, which create additional wealth. This has been shown time and again in different regions of Germany, including here around Leipzig.

Equally the redevelopment of regional economic cycles can contribute to reducing transport. We must question whether the international division of work has not already gone too far in some areas. From an environmental point of view I see it simply as flawed logistics if milk and simple milk products are being transported back and forth between producers' production sites in Germany and Europe. I find the value of transporting piglets out of Germany to other European countries and much further afield only to be returned to Germany months later as ham questionable. I believe that agriculture is one of many areas in which consideration

should be given to producing and selling locally to reduce long transport chains. This avoids unnecessary transport and, to continue with my example, it is good for our fellow creatures, the animals; it supports our food security and maintains both the cultural landscapes formed by farming and jobs.

It is important that we stop thinking in boxes – concerning individual transport modes, economic sectors, nations and continents. Everything must be interlinked. We have long been globally intertwined. And we need the international mobility policies and mobility strategy appropriate to this situation.

The slogan of Expo 2010 is: “Better city - better life”. I think that is a good motto. UN estimates state that by 2050 seven out of ten people will live in cities, which correlates to around seven billion people.

This city life can be a curse or a blessing – it depends how we organise it. The problems are clear: the air is polluted, noise disturbs people often even at night, huge mounds of rubbish form. And there are daily traffic jams which can lead to gridlock in city life and simply represent waste. This situation already exists in a number of megacities.

Yet city life can also look very different. It is precisely cities that provide opportunities. They are a breeding ground for innovative ideas and technological progress. When people live so close together things can be organised in a much more efficient and environmentally friendly way. Surely helping with this transformation would be the ultimate challenge for logistics companies. Anyone who has clever ideas on how to provide for and transport millions of people who live very close together, who presents a lifestyle whereby people’s needs and the environment can be looked after in harmony, this person will take on a pioneering role and gain work and income ahead of others.

In the German pavilion at the Expo this city is called “balancity”. This refers to the balance between innovation and tradition, community and the individual, city and nature, work and leisure, globalisation and regional identity.

Whoever wants to develop cities like this must start planning and changing now. The result of investments today will only be seen in their full glory in a few years and their effect will be felt for decades. There are many ideas out there, even if some of them sound futuristic such as those of the scientist Michael Braungart. His concept of an exemplary housing development entails houses made of materials that clean the air and produce clean water. The technology to achieve this already exists today. On the roofs there are meadows and fields, home to a diverse range of plant and animal species. Or that of J.H. Crawford, who describes underground supply systems able to transport flows of goods and people quickly and reliably. There are many more such utopias. I think this is something we need to look

into, the sooner the better.

Less utopian, indeed to an extent already implemented, is the city of short distances. This city is planned in such a manner that homes, shops, schools, nurseries and workplaces are close together. This means many journeys can be made on foot. And this is where a further German pioneer of mobility comes into his own: Karl von Drais, who invented the bicycle and indeed also a muscle-powered carriage which could be driven without a horse and proved very useful when a different volcanic eruption deprived our country of summer – and oats – for a year.

However, even in the city of short distances mobility requires support, especially from good public transport. This is something we have yet to achieve in many cities and towns – and is also a challenge for the logistics sector.

It is not just a matter of buses and trains. Local public transport is multifaceted. Just recently I heard about the idea of a young entrepreneur who wants to buy taxis' idle time. It would seem that there is a great deal of it. Customers can purchase mobility at a flat rate price. For the price of a normal monthly travel pass, according to the current business model, they have unlimited travel by taxi within a city. There are only a few restrictions, for example they are obliged to accept additional passengers in the taxi – which encourages communication! – and accept the limited detours this may entail. In a few months the first trial is to be introduced in southern Germany.

A further very promising project is currently being trialled in the city of Ulm. A car manufacturer has positioned 200 small cars across the city. Customers are equipped with an electronic seal on their driving licenses, which they simply have to hold up to the car door to be able to use the car. And when they are finished and no longer need the car they simply park it. It is billed per minute.

There is already demand for this as the change towards creative thinking started long ago. People are thinking, looking for solutions, things are moving forward. Particularly among young people in cities. True, they may not yet be in the majority, but I have met young people who do not even want to take their driving test and do not see big limousines or 4x4s as status symbols but rather as something old-fashioned.

And many who are thinking in the same direction are looking for solutions together, in the Transition Towns Initiative for example. From London to Sydney, Austin to Gattingen people with the same concerns have come together: how can we organise our cities in a manner that uses fewer resources, protects the environment and makes them worth living in? The initiative uses the knowledge, ideas and creativity of each and every person in search of progress towards a better life. For me this is a wonderful combination of community commitment and global networking. In many cities across the world

people are taking this path, finding common ground and being enthused by the idea of discovering a liveable, forward-looking model for their city.

When the ash cloud brought air transport to a standstill across Europe, there were many people who spoke of positive experiences. One could not fly to her congress so gave her presentation by video conference and was pleased about the time she had gained which she could then spend in the office or with her family. Another participated in his business meeting by phone conference and went jogging afterwards. And a further person was relieved when their stressful exotic holiday was cancelled and relaxed at home and rediscovered the local area.

Let us move away from the established perspective and way of thinking and try to question how we do things. Let us look for new ways of being mobile which are not a privilege for here and now, but rather will remain available to everyone in the future. Mobility that politicians develop policies to foster and business people ambitiously strive to achieve, conscious of their responsibility to offer new solutions, including input from all sides; this mobility protects the environment and, at the same time, brings people and nations closer together.

