

**5th User Group Meeting
CURACAO Political Meeting Barcelona
26 November 2008
Proceedings**

Introduction

The Curacao User Group enters a third phase of activities (Phase 3: take up phase). This phase provides CUG members with answers to questions such as:

- How can I overcome the barriers to implementing RUC, using the knowledge acquired within the CUG activities?
- How can I disseminate the knowledge I acquired from Curacao within my own organisation and to my local politicians?
- How can I continue to share knowledge (e.g. through research projects) on the topic of RUC?

This phase aims to assist User Group members with taking up the Curacao results. Links with local politicians are established and tools are provided to take the knowledge back to the members' respective organisations. Tools that are used include:

- Fact sheets for easy dissemination of results.
- Two meetings: one political meeting in Barcelona, and the final event to take place in Italy in spring 2009.

This document presents the proceedings of the Curacao political meeting in Barcelona, which took place in conjunction with the Polis annual conference.

Participants

Because the topic is very delicate to most local politicians, and to create an atmosphere of trust and openness, the choice was made to open this meeting to politicians only. Additional advisor took part to the meeting as well.

The target audience firstly consisted of members of the Polis political group. The Polis Political Group brings together locally elected representatives from Polis member cities and regions in order to debate transport policy, set common objectives and voice recommendations. The Political Group was created during the Annual Polis Conference in 1999, Rotterdam. Since then, it has played a major role in the relationship between Polis and the European institutions.

With a constant aim of improving the legal framework for local transport and encouraging initiatives for local sustainable mobility, the Political Group guides and validates Polis' political positions and recommendations towards the European institutions. This makes the voice of cities and regions better heard at EU level. The Polis Political Group generally meets twice a year, and decided to dedicate one of its 2008 meetings to Curacao.

Political Representatives:

Cllr Narvaez, Barcelona
Councillor Russell Imrie, SEStran,
Pascal Smet, Brussels Capital Region
Jean Yates, Lancashire County Council
Helena Hecimovic, Koprivnica
Diego Fernandez Mavrido, Burgos
Councillor Philip Coote, West Sussex County Council
Karsten Moering, Cologne
Cllr Pedro Calvo, Madrid

Senior Advisors:

Angel Lopez, Barcelona,
J. Garcia Ramon, Barcelona
Alex Macauley, SEStran
Youri Besbes, Tisséo
Oliver Starkey, Lancashire County Council
Fabio Nussio, ATAC
Hans Haarsma, Utrecht
Sylvain Haon, Polis
Lucas Osterholt (Speaker)

Curacao Consortium:

Kenneth Macleod, TIE
A. May, ITS Leeds
D. Blackledge, TTR Ltd
Chris Humphrey, TTR Ltd
Ivo Cré, Polis

Objectives

- Exchange of views on road pricing
- Identify barriers at EU level for pricing take up
- Identify interests in future processes (being these research driven, or exchange driven) regarding pricing

By means of

- Presenting Curacao findings (with a focus on the UNAQ and Guidance Paper)
- Setting EU context (Green Paper discussion, Internalisation of External Costs)
- Giving inspiring examples

- Creating room for debate (reflected in the meeting methodology)

Meeting report

Lunch of Polis political group, 26th of November, from 13.30 to 15.00

The lunch included a key note speech by Lucas Osterholt, secretary to two advisory commissions for the Dutch ministry of Transport regarding road pricing. In this function he has participated closely with the chairman to create consensus between opponents and supporters of road pricing in the Netherlands, and has taken part in the process of intense interaction between local authorities and the national government. He will put the finger at crucial governance issues related to road user charge.

CURACAO and POLIS political meeting on pricing, 26th November from 15.00 to 16.30

The meeting was chaired by Mr Narvaez (Councillor for the city of Barcelona – President of Polis).

After short welcome and introductions, David Blackledge and Tony May presented the following issues, using the Curacao guidance presentation:

- Introduction to road user charging issues at stake
- Why road user charging?
- What do road user charging measures entail?
- What does the public think?

After this presentation, a lively debate developed.

National level versus local level

A central question that was addressed is the role of national authorities. The Dutch idea was highly supported. The fact that there is a central driving force creates the framework that can lead to success. It makes implementation easier for local authorities. If there is no direction coming from the national level, local authorities have to struggle.

The Scottish example showed that the national level came too close to implementation issues. It was very positive that the national parliament had created the enabling policy framework, but it should have ended their, and should have left implementation to the local level.

The Sussex representative was against road pricing as another way to tax people. In this regard the Dutch scheme was highly appreciated: collecting taxes in a different way seemed fair to all participants. This measure could have the maximal effect. The councillor was interested to learn what the difference was between the Dutch system and a simple increase of fuel tax.

The representative of Lancashire County Council is interested to know how the money is distributed in national schemes. Local politicians talk about local measures. She sees that she could convince local voters of a local pricing scheme if she could link it with a concrete local infrastructure development (i.e. M6 link),

Acceptability

There is a concern about geographical inequity, the fact that people out of the city pay. In this regard, charges that have a regional basis might be better acceptable.

In some occasions in the Edinburgh scheme, the side people lived on in a street determined whether they would be charged or not. This is not good for the acceptability of a system.

It is very important to ring-fence the revenue. People should not have the impression that the charge is a black hole that serves general purposes budget.

A coherent policy on exemptions is crucial for successful schemes.

The Rome experience shows that implementation of electronic control is a big shock. This experience shows that introduction of the environmental zone and the electronic enforcement does not have to coincide. It is better to start simple (manual enforcement) and wait until this system is accepted, before introducing automated control.

Referendums

A third topic that reoccurred in the discussion was the role of referendums. The representatives of Edinburgh gave the advice not to take referendums as the end game. On many occasions, referendums are a test of the local authority, not of an individual transport management measure. “Local authorities take crucial decisions each day, without that they are confronted with direct democracy. Why is road user charge such an exemption?”

In Cologne (Germany) referendums are a democratic fact: it can be asked for by 10% of the population. If 50% of the electorate shows on the day of the referendum, the vote has to be adopted by the local authority. In the German experience, most referendums end with a vote against what was proposed.

Annex 1

Briefing received by participants

Urban road user charging is on the political agenda at the local and European level. Throughout Europe, local authorities investigate advanced pricing measures, supported by technological progress and leading examples such as Rome, Bologna, Trondheim, Stockholm and London. The EU is currently revising the Eurovignette directive, and is finalizing its urban transport action plan. Both initiatives will have an impact on how authorities will organize urban and interurban traffic. That is why Polis invites you to share your views on this controversial and delicate issue during a closed session of the Polis Political Group. The discussion will be built around three basic questions:

Why road user charges in cities? The motivation to work with pricing measures can be manifold: congestion abatement, environmental concerns, revenue generation...

How to implement pricing policies in cities? It is interesting to see that urban road user charging practices are becoming more and more diverse. The “classic” charging schemes that are implemented in London and Stockholm, are complemented around Europe with a range of other local pricing approaches, e.g. the Dutch Spitsmijden (peak avoidance) where a group of selected drivers are paid not to drive during peak hours, thus solving local congestion issues.

And what does the public think? Public acceptance is key for successful transport project in general, and for road pricing in particular. The acceptability of local pricing measures has been well studied; insight on the findings will be presented at the meeting.

To start the discussion, we have invited Lucas Osterholt. He is an independent consultant who advises the task force on road pricing in the Netherlands. In this function he has created consensus between opponents and supporters of road pricing in the Netherlands, and has lead the process of intense interaction between local authorities and the national government. He will put the finger at crucial governance issues related to road user charge.

Then politicians from Polis members who have implemented, considered are or opposing urban pricing will present their views. Their intervention will be followed by a debate.

This meeting is organized in cooperation and with support of CURACAO (Co-ordination of Urban RoAd-user ChArging Organisational issues). This is a EC funded project which aims to coordinate research and monitor the results of the implementation of road user charging as a demand management tool in urban areas. Polis has the responsibility of the Curacao User Group in the project, which has been asked by the European Commission to formulate concrete actions regarding road pricing in the follow up to the Urban Transport Green Paper. The CURACAO User Group provides the shortest access to state of the art information on pricing to urban transport professionals and decision makers.

For more information on this project visit www.curacaoproject.eu.