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How Do You Solve a Problem Like Mobility?

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It is difficult to paint a coherent, all-encompassing picture of mobility. This is in the nature of things: mobility is a process that changes every day, takes on various forms - with different emphases in different contexts. Any status-quo already carries its expiry date within itself. This makes the crucial question - what will tomorrow's traffic look like? - a challenging one to answer.

While there is no definitive path to what our future mobility may look like, what exists are guidelines for action and ideas at various levels. The most important being that everyone can already do something today. We are not stuck in a traffic jam - we are the traffic jam. The traffic of tomorrow is not something abstract that will simply be there sometime in the distant future. The traffic of the future is already here right now - in us. Each individual can already make a decision today on how they want to be mobile. Whether they use public transport more often or take advantage of the tax breaks when buying an electric car, whether he gets his bicycle out of the basement or asks his landlord to install a wallbox for recharging electric cars, everyone has the opportunity to influence tomorrow's infrastructure already, today - even if it's only being more aware of how much space an SUV takes up in a parking lot.

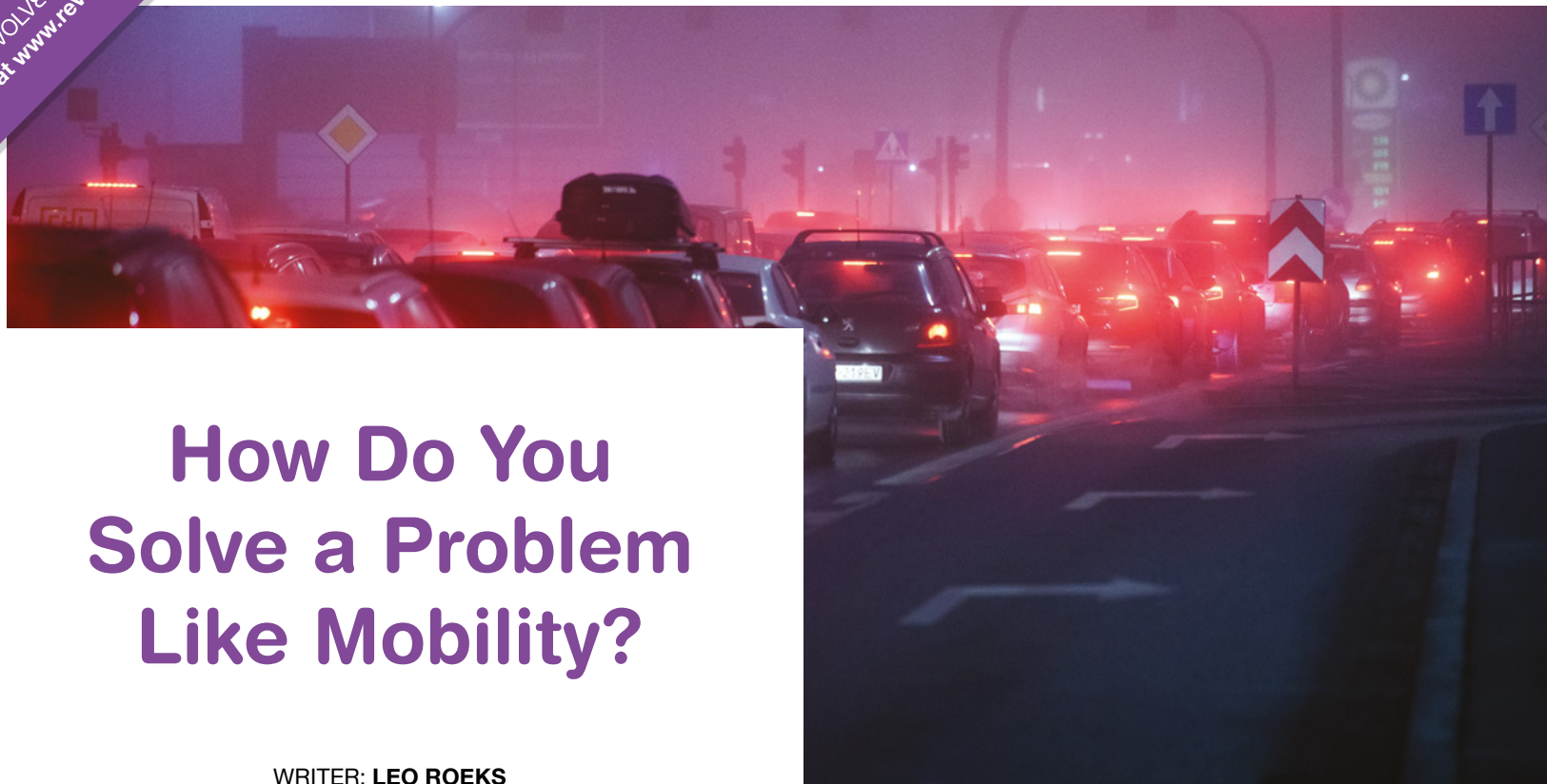
This also applies at the political level. One can be governed or decide to take part in the decisive decisions for the immediate environment - in initiatives, at council meetings or through letters to the local newspaper or statements in social media. What is important and already starting to make the change is the existence of an awareness of change, a feeling for one's own role in the multimodal game of transport and the will to take action.

Rethinking traffic for the community

All of this is the opposite of egoism, and thus a departure from the 'higher, faster, further' approach to mobility that has been used so far. Up to now, we have built wider motorways, erected more multi-story car parks and directed the 'green wave' of traffic lights towards the internal combustion engine - allegedly in order to cope with traffic and to ensure free movement for supposedly free citizens. But the result of this game of hare and hedgehog is clear: more roads create more traffic, enslaving us even more in our selfish tin shells instead of getting to the root of the evil and rethinking traffic in the sense of the community of all citizens.



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1. Bike parking lot, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
Photo: Jordi Moncasi.

2. Charging point for electric car, Munich, Deutschland.
Photo: Marc Heckner.

3. Smog and heavy traffic at night, Kraków, Poland.
Photo: Jacek Dylag.

4. Photo: Mika Baumeister.



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We are no longer in ancient Greece or in a canton of Switzerland, where all citizens met at certain intervals in the marketplace to vote directly on the basic lines and details of community policy. We are used to having our interests represented by representatives in the municipalities, the states and at the federal level. These representatives therefore have particular importance and responsibility with regard to the mobility concepts of tomorrow.

Starting a new dialogue on mobility

In this regard, it is important to shine a light on the holistic transport concepts which are, so to speak, at the micro level and can generally be implemented on an ad hoc basis without major financial effort. The same applies to the individual: what is critical is the awareness of the need for change in the citizens' immediate living environment. The famous pop-up bicycle lanes are only a small, relatively easy example, but these rather symbolic changes should not be the only ones. On both a large and small scale, a coherent overall concept is the crux of the matter for sustainable development. Developing this overall concept in dialogue with the citizens in their role as voters, consumers, drivers, retailers or recreational sportsmen and women is a challenging, but at the same time achievable task at the local political level. The obstacles will be great, interests will have to be weighed up against each other and contradictory demands will have to be moderated, but on closer inspection that is the core of every policy - even in the marketplace of Athens or Appenzell-Innerrhoden. And despite all the difficult concomitant phenomena, in the end a newly designed traffic world can emerge in cities and communities, making life on and along the roads much more livable than it is at the moment. With a little pathos and



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patience can lead to the emergence of a new form of public welfare that is no longer just subject to the demands of car traffic, but that also raises the serious question of how the interests of all road users can best be represented in the cityscape.

We cannot wait for a mobility miracle

The clock is ticking. As described above, the crystal ball science of looking into the future is fraught with all sorts of risks, but once you get away from any shaky predictions, the realization is that it is the now that will shape the future. There is no reason not to start the change today. There is no point in waiting for technical progress, for groundbreaking inventions and successful economic solutions - what is possible today can change the world just as much as the successful application of hydrogen as a source of propulsion or the digitalization

of inner cities. There is no reason to wait for a paradisiacal future of mobility and simply continue as before until then. On the contrary, only if we start thinking here and now about how we want to be mobile tomorrow can we create structures that can integrate new developments.

The car-friendly city was not built in a day. Before it materialized there were clever and less clever concepts, discussions and lectures - why don't we do it again in the same way, but this time with different premises that focus on people and not machines? Traffic flows do not always need a computer program to control them. In many cases, common sense is enough. Anyone who wants to reduce the classic, motor-driven individual traffic in city centers can increase the frequency of public

5, 6. Temporary bicycle lanes in Switzerland. Photos: Rue d'Avenir Suisse



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transport, as well as the parking fees and pedestrianized zones. If you want to encourage cyclists, you can give them more safe spaces within the cityscape. And those who make the roads leading into the city narrower and at the same time make the arterial roads more spacious, automatically create a mobility environment in which the decision as to which means of transport to use is not immediately the private car.

A fearless future

All this need not be set in stone. If there is one thing we have learned from the digital culture of the internet and start-ups over the last twenty years, it is a healthy attitude towards mistakes and failures. Nor will tomorrow's transport

policy be perfect; it will give birth to mistakes and apply inappropriate solutions in the wrong areas. In doing so, it will merely continue what classic transport policy has been doing for decades, from ghost bridges and motorways that were never built to the failed car toll in Germany, which cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of euros. So why should not an enlightened, forward-looking mobility policy also have the right to make mistakes? After all, the central objective is to create an environment worth living in, in which the balance between economic requirements, technological innovation, public welfare and sustainability is, if not achieved, then at least aspired to.

This problem will not solve itself, but by fearlessly facing the future, we can again reinvent the wheel of mobility. ●

7. Amsterdam, like many Dutch cities, is well known for being bicycle friendly. Bicycles are used by all socio-economic groups because of their convenience, Amsterdam's small size, the 400 km of bike paths, the flat terrain, and the arguable inconvenience of driving an automobile: driving a car is discouraged, parking fees are expensive, and many streets are closed to cars or are one-way for motor vehicle traffic. Photo: Alfredo Borba.

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