Sustainable Transport in Vienna:
From Transit Expansion to Traffic Management

Summary

In 2012, the City of Vienna capped off several decades of heavy investment in the expansion and modernization of its already-extensive public transport system with a dramatic reduction of annual transit ticket prices. Since 1993, the City has also adopted, district-by-district, a system of resident preferences in the allocation of on-street parking, built around sharply increased prices and tighter time limits for non-residents. In addition to implementing parking management, Vienna traffic-calmed three-quarters of its residential streets, reducing speed limits to 30 km/hr or less and in some cases barring through-traffic entirely. To complement these gains, the City further developed an extensive network of bikeways, along with rules enabling bicyclists to be among the major beneficiaries of traffic-calming. Concomitant with this set of reinforcing, integrated measures, Vienna experienced a remarkable shift in mode share from 1993 and 2013. The car share of trips fell by a third (from 40 to 27 percent) while public transport's share increased by 10 percentage points (from 29 to 39 percent) and bike share doubled (from 3 to 6 percent). Although sustainable urban transport and land use planning efforts are not uncommon in the countries surrounding Vienna and German-speaking Europe more broadly, Vienna has achieved unparalleled results in reducing private car use, and done so through incremental infrastructure investments and policy measures rather than through technology-driven change.

This is a story of tightening transport-land use linkages through continued commitment to mass rapid transit expansion in combination with parking management mandates, two distinct measures involving a range of governing authorities and planning institutions. Despite a highly fragmented political structure comprising 16 districts governed by Social Democrats, Greens, and Conservatives alike, critical transport measures like parking management have succeeded because of ongoing consultation, policy revision, and negotiations between district governments, residents, and businesses. These processes and the transport policy measures they have produced served to reinforce each other over time in ways that helped achieve the aims of urban compactness while also producing unparalleled progress in shifting mode shares away from automobiles.

Strategic Actions

Coordinating public transportation investment with national authorities over the long term by linking the servicing of the city to national, political, and economic aims.

Since the 1990s, Vienna, as a city and federal state, has used federal funding to support metro construction and expansion. As the capital of Austrian, Vienna provides a range of governmental, educational, and cultural services to the entire country, and receives twice as much general revenue sharing per capita from the federal government as other cities.

Timing transport infrastructure investments with major demographic shifts.

The City of Vienna invested in public transit and cycling improvements as the influx of immigrant with lower rates of car ownership supported higher levels of ridership and cycling.

Incrementally adopting sustainable transport measures, with room for adaptation or reversal, so as to avoid serious failures and minimize political risk.

In expanding and modernizing the U–Bahn system from the 1990s, the Social Democratic Party pursued consensual decision-making processes with different stakeholder groups, at the cost of considerable project delays but with the upside of maintaining political competitiveness and influence.

Using Transport Plans (1980, 1993, 2003, 2014) to promote policy continuity in improving public transport, limiting roadway expansions, restricting on-street parking, and promoting walkability and cycling.

Complementing and integrating rather than inventing or replacing transport policies and programs.

Vienna has continued to modernize its historic tramway system, which serves many outlying areas of the city and acts as a feeder to the expanding U–Bahn network. The metro, tramway, bus, and regional rail systems form a multimodal transit network with integrated schedules and fares along with real-time information systems.

Tactical Actions

Enlarging transit financing revenues by combining different sources.

In combination with federal funding sources, the City of Vienna covers its local share of public transport operating sources by drawing on user fare revenue, a local transport tax on large employers, and revenue from on-street parking and city-owned parking garages.

Incentivizing transit ridership and increasing total operating revenues through fare reductions.

Where 94 percent of transit riders in Vienna use annual tickets, lowering the price resulted in a jump in public transport use, ultimately increasing total fare revenues.

Initiating a pilot program in a high intensity area for quick and visible results to facilitate public approval and support.

Parking management was first implemented in the city's 1st district, which had the most severe parking and roadway congestion problems. Despite initial controversy, quick results in terms of diminishing traffic while easing searches for parking spaces expedited public acceptance.

Offering carrots to key stakeholders and opponents (e.g. district residents and businesses) to gain political support without compromising policy feasibility.

When entire city districts are short-term parking zones, residents have access to exemption passes for a fee that varies by location and local needs. Businesses have received special parking permits, following their opposition, on the basis that their employees and customers as well as operators of delivery, service, and company vehicles would have greater difficulty parking. Further, residential exemptions did not extend to commercial streets, thus freeing up more spaces for businesses and their customers.

Differentiating transport measures across districts in ways that attend to the changing density and overall quality of the built environment.

Vienna's districts vary in their respective parking time limits and in the specific hours of enforcement. A longer parking duration is permitted in the outer districts as compared to the inner districts. On-street parking regulations are in effect for shorter time periods in the outer districts than in the center. The parking management commission urged the City to build off-street self-financing parking garages to supplement on-street parking in many of the outer districts (given their lower densities and need for more parking spaces).

Using spillover effects of sustainable transport innovations to spur citizen engagement with further policy and program expansion.

When the parking management program in District 1 led to an overflow of motorists to neighboring districts, the City formed a second commission to consider expanding parking management to Districts 2-9.

Fine-tuning and adapting policies based on feedback from extensive community outreach efforts so as to broaden uptake by additional districts.

Where all curbside spaces were previously available to non-residents, revising parking management strategies to include resident-only parking zones resulted in their adoption by five additional districts.

Promoting multimodal transfers between private cars and public transport rather than treating them as mutually exclusive substitutes.

The City of Vienna built park and ride facilities in outlying rail transit stations to promote car to public transport transfers.

Using informational campaigns to promote understanding and support of sustainable transport measures among local stakeholders.

The City of Vienna mounted an informational campaign to encourage adoption of parking management by additional districts. In town-hall style meetings held in local neighborhood restaurants, exhibits portrayed the advantages of parking management and how it would operate, with planning staff available to answer questions and conduct one-on-one consultations with individual residents.