TRAN
Committee on Transport and Tourism

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What measures can be taken within the Benelux to stimulate the usage of bicycles as an ecofriendly alternative to other forms of transit, also in cross-border transit?

1. Introduction

The countries of Benelux are amongst the **countries with the highest bike usage rate** in the world. Averaged out, each family in the Benelux has at least one bike, which they can use to travel to school or work, without the usage of any sort of public transport or a motor vehicle. This means that the people in the Benelux profit from a **variety of benefits**, such as saving money, time spent on the road and environment.

Because there are only a few bike-friendly border crossings, like the one in Lommel, Belgium, people from the Benelux countries who frequently study and work in different member states of the Benelux union often have to resort to using **public transportation** or their own **motor vehicles** to cross the border.

2. Key concepts

- Cross-border transit regards the infrastructure and transportation that are used to cross an international border.
- Ecofriendly regards anything that is not harmful to the environment, and is mostly used when talking about things meant to help the environment. Ecofriendly is often used in the context of transportation to compare modes of transport to each other. For example, whilst a train is more ecofriendly than a car, a bike is more ecofriendly than both.
- The Schengen area is a group of 27 European countries that allow **unrestricted and uncontrolled border-crossing** for civilians within the area. Typically, the only physical marker of a border is a sign. In the context of transport, a change of infrastructure such as road quality is often also experienced.

3. Key actors & stakeholders

- The Benelux Union - The Benelux Union is an intergovernmental body that advises on the allocation of funding. One of their priorities is **the improvement of the border crossings** between the Benelux states.

- The rural and border population of Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg -People living near national borders within the Benelux are more likely to **work or study abroad** in one of the other member states. Cities abroad might hold better opportunities for

employment or study than a city in one's country of origin. A great example would be the city of **Luxembourg**, which is only about 10 kilometres away from the Belgian border.

- The Directorate-General for mobility and transport (DG MOVE) - The DG MOVE is responsible for creating and passing legislation on mobility and transport in the EU.

- The European Cyclists' Federation (ECF) - The ECF is a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) that focuses on improving and increasing cycling in and across the European continent. Their vision is to elevate the political interest in the affairs of cyclists and create a **safer cycling environment**.

4. Main problems

Currently, **one in three** trips taken by car in the Netherlands is shorter than 5 kilometres. Considering that the Netherlands is also the world leader in bicycle infrastructure, the **necessity of** making those trips using **cars** as opposed to more eco-friendly bikes is **questionable**. Furthermore, of those already cycling, only **15% consider the climate a main motivation** to do so, even though 8 out of 10 people in the Benelux consider climate change **an extremely worrying issue**. Given the significant **environmental benefits of cycling**, this discrepancy is surprising. Therefore, the **promotion of the bicycle as an ecofriendly alternative** to more polluting methods of transportation might be inadequate.

On a different note, due to their shared involvement in the Schengen Area, crossing a border between two Benelux states has never been easier. However, due to the lack of bicycle friendly crossing, the cycling environment such as available paths and safety can **dramatically change** when crossing a border. In some cases leading to **unsafe or dangerous situations**. Other modes of transport such as cars or trains do not experience the same issues, which make these forms of travel more dependable and therefore preferred. Considering that **safety** and **convenience** play a key role for people when deciding upon the use of a bicycle, it is worrying that these cannot be guaranteed when crossing Benelux borders.

Nevertheless, these routes are more often than not used for **tourism purposes**, and international **bike routes** between major cities are **sparse**, which can influence the general public to cross the borders by other means of transportation.

Furthermore, considering these discrepancies in cycling conditions between countries, convincing potential cyclists to use the bike might take **different kinds of effort** in different countries. For example, considering the more inferior bicycle infrastructure of **Belgium** and **Luxembourg** one of their citizens **main concerns** is **safety**. Whereas in the **Netherlands** this is **less of a concern**.

5. Possible solutions

As has been stated before, there are some international bike routes that lead to an increased usage of bikes to get the students to schools and the workers to work. A solution to this could involve stimulating the construction of **more international bike paths** and therefore increasing the **number** of bike-safe border crossings.

The Benelux Union, in cooperation with the ministry of North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany, have also published their **Bike Roadmap to 'Bicycle Stimulation'**. This **extensive report** contains the following **solutions** regarding cross border cycling difficulties, lack of information sharing and financial funding discrepancies.

- The preparation for the creation of a Benelux/ North Rhine-Westphalia **cycling network map** including a special focus on **border regions** and transit.
- Creation of **a coordination point** between local and Benelux level cycling infrastructure projects. Aimed at improving issues related to **cross border communication** between local partners and stakeholders.
- The **Financing of Cycling Infrastructure**. A cooperation between Benelux countries to exchange information on their **widely varying financial policies** regarding the support of cycling. Furthermore, cooperating in considering EU funding options for cycling infrastructure.

Lastly, the bikers' initiative and active participation in politics is **raising awareness** of problems regarding the cross-state cycling, the state of roads and the overall safety of cycling. The umbrella organization that is working with both the governments and the citizens is the ECF- one of the main actors. Their portfolio of work includes lobbying and leading the dialogue between the people and the politicians.

6. Further links

- Benelux Bike Declaration, a video made by the Benelux Union to highlight their interest in cycling infrastructure and the further promotion of cycling for civilians.
- The Roadmap of Benelux and North Rhine-Westphalia for More Bicycle Use, an informational document shortly summarising the findings of the extensive research in the report.
- How cycling boosts our economy?, a Ted Talk exploring the benefits of cycling for the well-being of cities, individuals, and the economy.
- To fight climate change, we need to start biking like the Dutch, an article exploring the environmental benefits of cycling.
- Bike allowance, an article describing the initiative of bike allowance - a great way to make money by simply riding your bike.

Introductory Clauses:

A. A significant number of car trips can be made by bicycle,
B. The public is uninformed about the eco-friendliness of bicycles,
C. The safety and availability of cycling paths change drastically when crossing a border,
D. There is a lack of international intercity cycling paths,
E. Safety and convenience are key considerations when deciding upon the use of a bicycle,
F. Due to the varying development stages of cycling infrastructure, a completely holistic approach to promoting the bicycle in the Benelux might not be effective;