

Councillor Pex Langenberg, Rotterdam, Netherlands

Opening speech “European Bike Sharing Conference”, Rotterdam, 30.11.2016

Ladies and Gentleman, fellow-Mobility Councillors and participants, I'm honoured to be given the opportunity to speak to you at this bike-sharing conference. Allow me to commence by telling you a short story:

A few days ago I watched a woman leaving a supermarket with three big bags of groceries and three little kids in her wake. Maybe you automatically assume that she was on her way to her car? I confess that –for a moment— I certainly did. But this presumption proved to be completely incorrect.

First the mother started by putting two bags of groceries in panniers and placing her middle child in its carrier-seat directly behind the saddle of her bike. Next she hoisted her big wicker basket full of fruit and vegetables onto the handlebar and placed the smallest of her three children in the handlebar-safety seat. In the meantime she handed a bike-helmet to her biggest one, approximately 8 or 9 years old, who was busy unlocking his own bike. And off this mother went, the oldest child riding right next to her on a busy street. One steady hand on her own steering wheel, the other hand on the shoulder of her child, guiding him in the right direction. This mother made it look like it was the easiest thing in the world. At the same time putting the concept of 'Bike Sharing' in a rather.... defiant perspective?

Residents of Rotterdam as well as the city of Rotterdam itself, are both known and respected for a strong entrepreneurial spirit, an unprecedented drive to achieve the maximum. This spirit reflects in this supermom, navigating a fully loaded bike and a young biking child safely through the streets of Rotterdam. But it also reflects in our day to day life, our architecture, our innovative companies. Thinking out of the box –if there ever was one— is combined with a practical and hands-on mentality. In Rotterdam we are always up to a challenge.

In Rotterdam 69 percent of the population of 16 years or older, own a bike. Approximately 160.000 of them, ride their bike every day. They make good use of the 600 kilometres of separate biking lanes in Rotterdam and the 8.500 places in bicycle storages thorough the city centre that are free to use. Commuters increasingly use the so called *OV-fiets*, a bike-sharing system that is directly linked to the train stations and the user-payment system for public transport in Holland. So why, you may ask... Why is Rotterdam investigating the benefits of introducing another bike sharing system, when there are already this many cycling-facilities in place?

Because in Rotterdam we fully acknowledge that traveling by bike has experienced enormous growth and keep doing so in the future. We fully acknowledge that this kind of transport is one of the fastest and most flexible ways to make energy efficient and sustainable transport

available in urban areas. We fully acknowledge that investing in diversity of bike-related facilities will tempt more and more people to optimally use bikes in their way to work, sports, home or the shopping centre. And that is exactly what we want. In Rotterdam our cyclists are a priority. That's why we invest in existing and innovative facilities that reinforce cycling as the most ideal way to travel in the city. With the introduction of the GoBike system in Rotterdam, GOBIKE offers a bike sharing service that not only provides sustainable transport for everyone, but also connects our existing mobility network even further.

In a moment I will therefore sign the *Statement of Support for bike-sharing schemes in our communities*, together with some of my European colleagues. But I would like to present an additional challenge. Allow me to refer once more to the supermom I mentioned earlier. Of course this mother benefits from safe and sufficient bike lanes while guiding her young boy through traffic. But she will benefit from these safe lanes even more when she can rely on her children's school providing excellent traffic lessons so that her boy and her other two children will learn to ride their bikes on these lanes themselves. In Rotterdam we therefore choose to invest in both.

This mother surely benefits from the possibility to safely store her bike for free in the city centre. But she will benefit from that even more when she can easily borrow a buggy at this storage facility to take her children shopping without hassle. In Rotterdam we've already made both of this happen.

This mother surely benefits from the possibility to use a bike share system when her own bike is not available to her. But...and here's the challenge... Can we also find ways to make her benefit from that even more?

I hereby want to invite other cities in Europe to also sign the statement for bike-sharing schemes. And I want to challenge every one of you today to take bike-sharing and other cyclist-friendly systems one step further. The ambition? To make our cyclists a priority, not only here in Rotterdam, but also in your cities, in your nations, in all of Europe. Bike sharing systems play an indispensable part in this process, but let us share more than our knowledge and experiences with bike-systems today. Let us endorse the ambition to prioritise cyclists in all of Europe together and –in honour of all the supermoms out there- let's make that happen.

I thank you for your attention.