

## Government Actions-Mitigation Action 4

### Comprehensive plan for a sustainable city

Umeå is growing! Umeå, “the Capital of Northern Sweden”, is facing a new transition phase that is of the same scale as that experienced during the 1960s. It was in the sixties that Umeå University was established, which stimulated strong growth and intense physical development. Umeå transformed from a small administrative town into a city of young (and leftist) students. A different kind of transformation is taking place at present, in the form of a more “mental” shift from existence as a small town to being a big city. The starting point for planning is a desired population growth from the current 120,000 inhabitants to a population of 200,000 inhabitants, by 2050. The city has, on average, grown by 1,000 people per year over a long period, which means that to reach the target requires even faster growth. Because the growth target is set so high, the City is forced to think more structurally in order to handle the growth in a long-term and sustainable manner.

#### Growth strategies

The plan presents a number of strategies for sustainable development based on the Aalborg Commitments. These clarify the desired direction towards a more sustainable urban development, and will hopefully serve as a “checklist” for years to come, so that we (the planners) do not lose focus in the rather hectic everyday reality of our practice, as professionals involved in the current physical and mental transformation of Umeå’s city center.

#### Air pollution

Making Umeå denser puts completely new demands on traffic. At times, air quality in the central parts of Umeå can become so bad that forceful action is needed to allow further city growth. Locating a higher proportion of residents in the center also has the potential to place quite different claims on public space. Whilst traffic will not be able to take up as much space as before, at the same time transport demand will rise in accordance with increases in the population. In responding to this challenge, we wish to describe the transformations initiated in Umeå as a “paradigm shift”.

If individual development projects in the city center were to be assessed in terms of their impact on traffic and hence their impacts on air quality, growth would be hampered. Umeå’s air quality problems must be solved at a structural level through urban planning which places a clear focus on creating a dense, mixed-use city that benefits pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport.

During the wintertime, sidewalks in the center are to be cleared from snow before the streets are, in order to prioritize pedestrians and cyclists. Further, the plan also acknowledges that the City cannot ultimately facilitate car commuting all the way to central workplaces; currently, such commuting amounts to about half of all parked cars in the city district.

#### Improved public transport

Parking issues are addressed by the plan, which provides new parking requirements<sup>3</sup> for both cars and bikes. The City has previously lacked a cycle parking norm, even though Umeå is very much a city for cycling all year round due the high number of students. The plan also provides an opportunity for “green parking purchase” in the center, meaning that the number of required car parking spaces can be reduced if the property owner offers alternatives to car use.

A new public transport strategy is also being prepared, the foundation for which is outlined in the elaboration. The focus of the strategy is to define a fixed trunk network for city buses, mostly in separate lanes. The trunk bus network will support the development corridors identified in the plan.

#### Changes in behavior

Whilst much of the heavy traffic in the city center will be re-routed with the completion of a ring road in a few years, air and noise emissions from heavy delivery vehicles serving stores in the city center will remain. An on-going study of goods distribution may pose that only small vehicles may be used, that freight deliveries will be jointly planned and time-regulated, and that an environmental zone<sup>4</sup> be introduced in the city center. The desired change in behavior must be accomplished by a variety of means, utilizing the entire range of enforcement options from prohibition and increased tariffs to better service frequency of public transport, green parking purchases, and information campaigns. Here, we are just at the beginning of a long-term undertaking in order to achieve a sustainable city.

To change individual behavior, the City is also engaged in running a project called “Be Green Umeå” in order to concretely demonstrate benefits of leaving the car at home. So far, we have seen that you actually save time when biking within a 3–5 km distance; hence the strategy “the five kilometer city” is formulated.

#### Improved dialogue with “the actors”

Early in work upon the plan, a broad development dialogue was held between the municipality and business community representatives. The dialogue focused on strategic issues facing Umeå’s development and provided a good basis for setting common goals, which then were further elaborated in the comprehensive planning process. The dialogue with property owners and commerce is now being further developed at several levels – from annual surveys of perceived levels of service in the handling of building permits to participation in the Network for Sustainable Construction and Real Estate Management in Cold Climates, in which the entire industry is represented; and in negotiations addressing the co-financing of street redevelopment. The latest survey shows that the vast majority were satisfied with local authority contacts. Co-financing has led to design improvements to several major streets and made the city more accessible. A commercial need for easily accessible customer parking has been a crucial issue to handle in the new traffic strategy.

#### Continuous improvement

Our conclusion is, as in many other western European cities, that the city must be denser in order to be sustainable in the long term. Transport must be steered towards a greater use of public transport. It must become more attractive to walk or cycle instead of using a private car –especially to and from work or school. This raises a number of interesting questions. Where will new residents live and work, or in other words, where should development take place? Is there an interest to build in those places? How should traffic be integrated with all other (and partly new) claims on public space? An increased population in the city center will put, after all, quite different demands on the local area; as such, how should we relate those new demands to the existing cultural heritage, which, moreover, is of national interest in the central city? Which claims will the generation of tomorrow place upon the same area? Our newly adopted elaboration of the comprehensive plan provides a clear picture of the direction ahead, but does not deliver all the answers. Our city vision is constantly updated, through

various meetings and on-going developments, which means that residents of Umeå will have a high possibility of affecting the city's continued development.

#### The six strategies of the comprehensive plan

- The five-kilometer city – the dense city!
- Attractive public spaces during all hours and seasons
- Addition of new urban quarters as a vitalizing force – more urbanity!
- Openness, democracy, and equality in all planning – everybody should participate!
- The growth in public transport corridors and renewal of thoroughfares.
- Greater density is created through the introduction of new urban quarters with dense, mixed-use developments.