

1. Opinions



“Let's listen to what the citizens want to transform our territories”

26 September 2022

Many French people want to be able to live outside of big cities while having access to the most ecological modes of travel possible. An unprecedented coalition of environmental organizations and associations defending users (motorists, cyclists, pedestrians...), families, people with reduced mobility and individuals in precarious situations, are calling for these aspirations to be taken into account in order to think about a new way of organizing the territory.

In the summer of 2021, 120 citizens came together in a national parliament that represented the territorial dynamics and lifestyles in France ¹. They clearly asserted their desire to be able to live outside of big cities. Some of them already do, but deplore how far they are from shops, public services, doctors or cultural activities, as well as the lack of alternative transport options to the car. For those living in the heart of large cities, the health crisis has only made things clearer: more and more people want to leave, but are waiting to find a job and the activities they require. While some aspire to stay, they still want a more peaceful living environment, a better quality of life and affordable housing. This reality cannot be ignored and calls for rethinking the organization of the national territory.

Small centralities to reconcile ecological objectives and the citizens' wishes

So far, public policies have failed to reduce travel-related CO2 emissions, because daily travel distances are constantly increasing: while businesses and people are allowed to move and settle freely, public services and administrations are instead concentrated in the same locations. This reality forces everyone to travel even more in order to access employment, do their shopping or access healthcare services, and they usually have no other choice than to take their car. Citizens clearly want to reverse this trend, to revitalize small centralities (in suburbs, peri-urban areas, medium and small towns, villages...) and reduce travel, especially to get to work. On top of meeting ecological goals, such a policy would make life easier for everyone - families, the elderly, people with reduced mobility, those who travel on foot or by bike, or those whose social and financial difficulties complicate their daily travel - while promoting social ties through local life, community work and local stores.

Thinking of coherent transport solutions at the scale of these new living areas

Citizens are aware that car travel contributes to environmental destruction and air pollution: but so long as there isn't an alternative, how can they change their behavior? This is why they call for developing, at the scale of living areas, complementary and efficient transport services (continuous network of cycle and pedestrian lanes, cyclic public transport, carpooling, fleets of shared vehicles, etc.), allowing people to actually get around without having to be driving alone in their car. To implement this program, there's no shortage of technical skills, foreign examples (Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, etc.) or NGOs and organizations with ideas. But we now need strong political will to create a coherent system, instead of adding more modes of transport and letting market forces apply, without thinking about each mode's area of relevance.

Quality of life and resilience

Big cities aren't going to disappear and aren't without their advantages. But let's not forget that citizens aspire to be able to live well in a great variety of living environments: this is a legitimate wish, but also an opportunity to revitalize certain parts of the French territory, an opportunity to initiate the ecological transition and build resilient territories.

Signatories

Khaled Gaiji, President of Friends of the Earth France

Nicolas Merille, National Accessibility Advisor of APF France Handicap

Didier Bollecker, President of the Automobile Club Association & Yves Carra, spokesperson

Céline Aubrun, national coordinator of the French Federation of Angry Bikers (FFMC, Fédération Française des Motards en Colère) & Didier Renoux, communication officer

Stéphanie Clément-Grandcourt, Director of the Foundation for Nature and Mankind (FNH, Fondation pour la Nature et l'Homme) & Marie Chéron, Mobility Manager

Christophe Gay and Sylvie Landrière, co-directors of the Mobile Lives Forum & Claire-Marine Javary, project manager Philippe Quirion, President of the Climate Action Network (Réseau Action Climat) & Valentin Desfontaines, Head of Sustainable Mobility

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Notes

1 The "Mobile Lives Citizen Forum": www.forumcitoyendesviesmobiles.org/

Mobility

For the Mobile Lives Forum, mobility is understood as the process of how individuals travel across distances in order to deploy through time and space the activities that make up their lifestyles. These travel practices are embedded in socio-technical systems, produced by transport and communication industries and techniques, and by normative discourses on these practices, with considerable social, environmental and spatial impacts.

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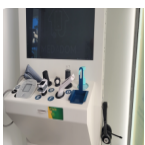
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