



PRESS RELEASE

22nd Cairo Climate Talks

April 15-16, 2014

“Cairo in Motion: Smart Transport and Urban Design”

Cairo traffic is an issue that impacts at least 18 million people every day and is estimated to cost Egypt at least 4 percent of its GDP each year. It has massive and far-reaching effects on not only the daily lives and health of the city’s residents, but also on the environment.

The 22nd [Cairo Climate Talks](#) “Cairo in Motion: Smart Transport and Urban Design” brought together experts, government officials, civil society and private transportation companies from Egypt, Germany and other countries to discuss the future of integrated and intelligent transportation design and urban planning during an experts’ workshop and a public panel.

Mr. Kai Boeckmann, Chargé d’affaires at the German Embassy in Cairo, opened the panel discussion by saying it is his dream to combine the vision of Berlin’s development with the benign climate and creativity of Cairo: “Let’s begin dealing with the smog, with bottom-up applications, with young people setting out on bikes in Zamalek, proving it’s possible and fun too, and Nile taxis, which to some extent have already come true.”

Surprisingly, the crowdedness that plugs Cairo streets and plagues its inhabitants is also a big advantage when it comes to public transport.

“If you don’t count the new towns, Cairo is one of the most dense megacities in the world,” according to author and urban development specialist David Sims, who points out that about half of Cairo’s residents live within 10 kilometers of the city center. “Trips are short in general, you can find in walking radius or small taxi or bus ride radius practically all of your social and public services ... High density means any public transport is going to be full, effective and pay for itself.”

Unfortunately, Cairo has fallen far behind its plans to implement mass transit systems such as metro lines. To serve its existing population, the city should have eight metro lines, roughly one for every 2 million residents, according to Dean of the National Institute for Transport Dr. Khaled Abbas, and as a result, the 2.5 lines in operation are overwhelmed.

While figures from 2008 show that only 15% of Cairo households own a private car, projections estimate that this ownership will double in the next decade or two, paving the way for what David Sims referred

to as the “Gloom and Doom” era. “This gloom and doom will force a rethink, since it is only when everyone suffers, including decision makers, that things will change,” Sims said. During the experts’ workshop on Tuesday April 15, academics, government officials and civil society representatives agreed that a Bus Rapid Transit system could be a strong option for Cairo. Citing the successes of several Latin American cities, experts said these bus systems with dedicated lanes would be both quicker and less costly to implement than alternatives such as new metro lines.

In the meantime small steps can also have an impact, such as better organizing informal networks including minibuses, advocated Dr. Wulf Holger-Arndt, head of the Mobility and Space research unit at the Technical University in Berlin.

Private initiatives are also cropping up to fill the gap in transportation services. The founders of mobile phone application Bey2ollak, which has 1 million users crowd sourcing local traffic information, the Nile Taxi service and Tawseela private bus service joined us to demonstrate how creative, niche solutions can quickly gain traction.

Changing the culture of the private car and the mentality of people is equally as important as building new infrastructure, according to Eng. Ahmed El-Dorghamy, Co-Founder of the Green Arm of NGO Nahdet el-Mahroussa and a pioneer of Egypt’s growing cycling club movement.

“If you lost people to the car, then they are lost for their whole lives. To change their behavior now is very complicated,” cautioned Dr. Arndt.

Although tuk tuks, minibuses and other forms of public transport may often get the blame for congestion, private cars are a more inefficient use of space, fuel and other resources.

The estimated 3,000 new cars that join the streets of Cairo each week take up the equivalent of 16 football fields, according to El-Dorghamy.

“If space belongs to everyone, there is something wrong if 70 some percent of public space in the city is used by less than 10 percent of the population [who have private cars],” Sims said.

Changing the preference for cars, though difficult, can only be done through a smart combination of incentives and disincentives, social marketing, and communicating information about traffic and its environmental impacts to the public.

“China is talking about an air pollution apocalypse, maybe in Egypt we’ll have something similar, or a traffic-pocalypse,” said Dorghamy. “Today it’s the job of everyone here to solve this because we have to survive.”

Asked where they see Cairo in 2025, the panelists predicted the situation would continue to deteriorate, making an entire shakeup of transportation and urban planning necessary.

“You have to have real political will from top that this is a priority issue and if that happens we can have a good system,” said Dr. Abbas.

Sims added, “In 11 years you will be seeing complete paralysis of major corridors like the 6th of October Bridge. The new towns will become islands and will almost be inaccessible except in middle of night. There are many things you could do, but given the way government is going it has got to be either the government forced or brought on board because you do need a fundamental change.”

Background Information:

The Cairo Climate Talks are conceived, organized and hosted as a cooperation between the German Embassy in Cairo, the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs (EEAA), the German Science Center (DWZ), the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Egyptian German High Level Joint Committee for Renewable Energy, Energy Efficiency and Environmental Protection (JCEE). For more information, please visit our [website](#) or contact press@cairoclimatetalks.net.