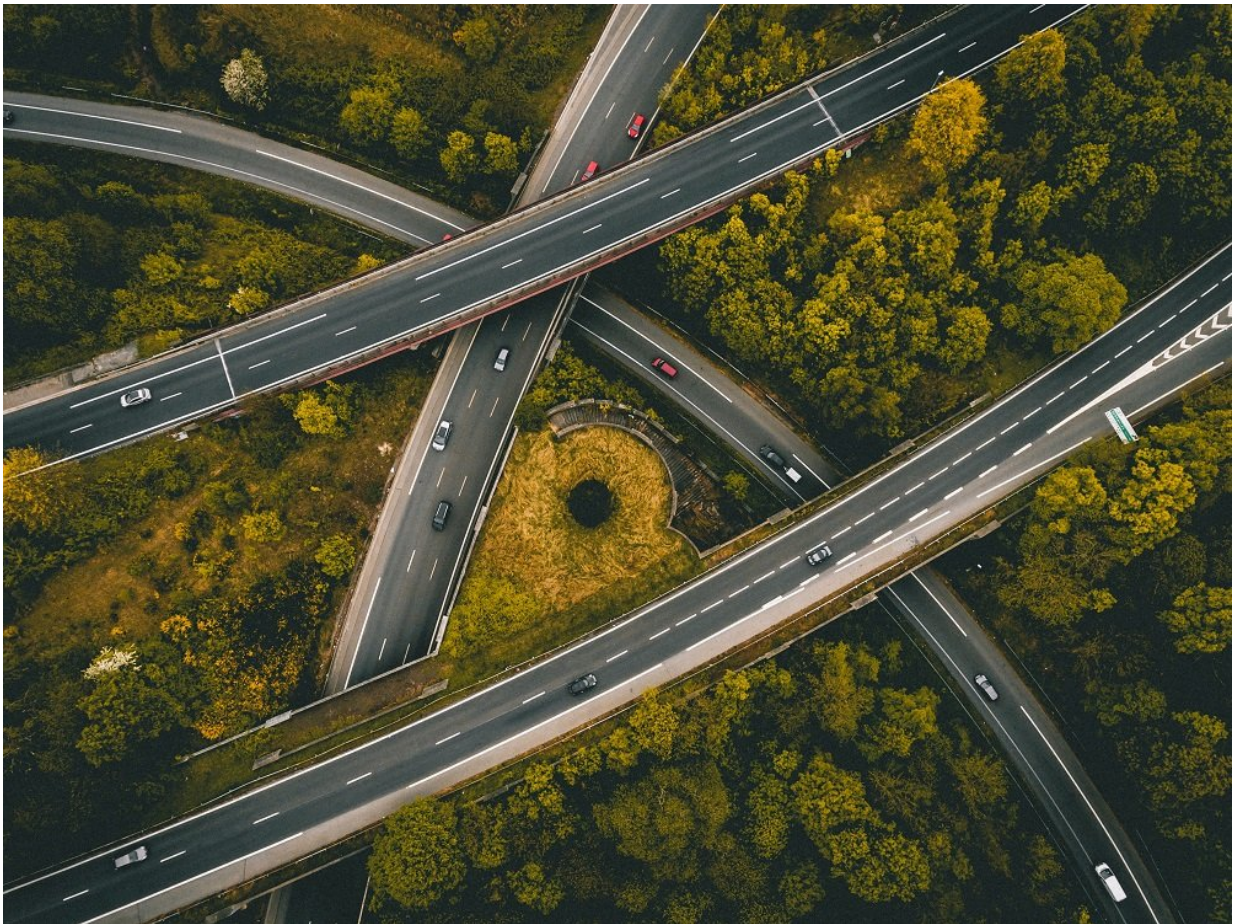# Cities: How smart strategies can turn into effective action plans

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Credit: Edouard Ki

Smart innovations are years in the making and require long-term vision.

Changes in government and citizens' sensibilities can halt or alter strategies. So how can they survive to create lasting change?

When Justin Bieber made his way to Stockholm in September 2016, city officials hardly expected the tween heartthrob to pave the way for sustainable urban policy. But when thousands of adolescent girls and their parents swarmed the concert area in an already busy sector of the city, regulators realised the zone was in dire need of new traffic regulation.

"For some people, it took them four hours to get out of the area. This zone really needs intelligent solutions to solve congestion and traffic," says Lisa Enarsson from the Environment department of the City of Stockholm, who joined a panel discussion on smart city governance during the 2017 Smart City Expo in Barcelona. The Swedish city together with Cologne and Barcelona is developing, under the EU project GrowSmarter, intelligent solutions that can be replicated elsewhere.

An example is the initiative that will monitor transportation and pedestrian movements to provide commuters with information regarding parking availability and circulation, as well as encourage ride-sharing options, to diminish greenhouse gas emissions and satisfy the city's goal to be fossil-fuel free by 2040.

However, they experienced a problem with data protection. Initially, IBM, partner of the project, planned to buy all of the needed data from the local phone company. But the phone company and citizens objected to having their information sold to the information technology giant. So it was back to the drawing board.

Finally, a compromise was reached: the city would put up sensors and cameras to capture smartphones' signals in the area, but it would also put

up signs warning users about this fact. If commuters did not want to be identified, they could turn off their phones' bluetooth setting before entering the zone. IBM will analyse the data that is provided once the project is live in January 2018.

Coming up with a strategy is only one step of the process when it comes to implementing smart solutions in cities. "Many strategies are just strategies and nothing happens with them. You need an action plan," Enarsson says and adds that being adaptable to change—as Stockholm was—is one key factor. Another is having long-term goals that can survive competing interests and a changing political landscape.

"One of the main challenge is ensuring the long-term of the strategy," confirms Miguel Á. García-Fuentes, from the EU project REMOURBAN (REgeneration MOdel for accelerating the smart URBAN transformation). "Usually, political visions are really short, only four years, and they depend on elections, so we have to ensure that we build a strategy that can survive independently of who is governing."

The project works with five cities (three "lighthouse," pioneer cities, Valladolid in Spain, Nottingham in United Kingdom and Tepebasi/Eskisehir in Turkey and two "follower" cities that will replicate the urban regeneration model, Seraing in Belgium and Miskolc in Hungary) and a number of institutions to make them more sustainable in the fields of energy, transport and information and communication technologies.

"If we involve the citizens, the local businesses, the local industries, we can create a strategy that can be in place even if there is a change on the political side," says García-Fuentes.

Finally, cooperation between cities is key to helping push strategy along. The mayor of Sabadell, Spain, was on the brink of abandoning a project]

that would install electric buses in the city after technicians suggested the technology "wouldn't be ready," explains Marielisa Padilla, from Triangulum, another EU smart city project in which the city is "follower."

After he contacted the mayor of the "lighthouse" city of Eindhoven—who showed him 43 functioning electric buses in his city—Sabadell got back on course. The city is now working on hybrid buses that will have the ability to be converted into 100% electric buses.

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