

Executive Summary

As concerned citizens we feel the urgent need to put forward an alternative vision for the way urban development and transport projects are being planned and executed. We demand that priority be given by the Government to the well-being and health of our communities. Public money needs to be invested in reducing pollution, increasing nature and greenery in urban areas and sustaining quality of life.

Who we are

We are a group of environmental NGOs, voluntary organisations and active citizens. We wish to voice our concerns in unison and share an alternative sustainable vision for our country. Our concerns are political but non-partisan; our demands are being put forward to all political parties, to the Opposition and to Government.

Vision

Our vision is for a future which promotes and safeguards human well-being and protects the natural processes that support life, to ensure we can look forward to a liveable, healthy, safe and equitable future for our community.

Our demands

1. Community needs and well-being should underpin any decisions taken for our country.
2. We need an integrated, holistic approach to planning that is truly based on the principles of sustainability and public participation, at every level of governance.
3. Transport networks must be designed around the needs of people, not cars.
4. We need a strategic plan for the development of Malta's infrastructure, not a piecemeal approach.
5. Mature and native trees should be cherished and protected. We desperately need more trees, green infrastructure and open spaces in our congested urban areas.
6. Our agricultural land, agricultural produce and rural environment should be valued and protected.

Our justifications

We believe that transport networks must be designed around the needs of people, not vehicles, with a priority given to connected pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, and dedicated space for an efficient public transport network. Active and public transport modes can easily be accommodated, since the average trip on the Maltese islands is only 5.5 km¹, as long as we create dedicated safe spaces for them. This, in turn, will make mobility possible for those who do not or cannot drive, reducing accessibility barriers such as the currently limited pedestrian spaces and cycle lanes, and providing more equitable mobility options, including for children, youths and the elderly. A modal shift to sustainable mobility will also support other objectives, such as the European Commission's emission reduction targets, promotion of healthy and active mobility, and reduction of air pollution.

A connection with nature and access to greenery is vital for our physical and mental health. Trees provide a multitude of benefits, such as air purification and water retention, which are vital services in our urban environment with poor air quality and flooding problems. Trees provide welcome shade and regulate ambient temperature, which is sorely needed during our hot summers and reduce the impacts of the urban heat island effect. Trees and greenery act as a carbon sink and contribute to local

¹ Transport Malta (2016). Transport Masterplan 2025. <https://news.transport.gov.mt/national-transport/>

biodiversity: they are a home and food source for local fauna, such as birds and pollinators. Trees and green infrastructure provide a sense of place and a pleasant aesthetic in public spaces, and encourage outdoor activity such as walking and cycling.

We take serious issue with recent communications about new urban and transport projects, where uprooting and replanting, as well as the promise of planting new trees, are proposed as solutions to justify the culling of mature trees, the take up of agricultural land and the loss of soils. Uprooting and replanting should not be treated as the default solution. It is a delicate and expensive undertaking, and since many species such as *Pinus Halepensis* (Aleppo Pine) do not survive replanting² this results in a net loss of tree cover in our urban areas where they are so sorely needed. Urban greening and biodiversity needs to be integrated in infrastructural projects, through the retention of mature trees and by planting native species. Farming and the agricultural landscape are a key part of the history, culture and environment of the Maltese Islands. We believe we need to breathe new life into our farming sector, value the contribution of farmers as stewards of the landscape and support them in their livelihoods. Agricultural land is not only important for the provision of food, but also plays a large role in supporting natural processes, for example through water and soil retention, and carbon sequestration in the soil and the plants and trees growing in the fields. Moreover, the iconic rural landscape forms part of our tourism product, which contributes to more than 25% of our GDP³.

Currently, we are seeing piecemeal projects that are not providing true sustainable solutions to the transport situation in Malta, such as the Kappara Junction, Marsa Junction, and the Central Link Project. The road widening for private vehicles and increasing urban sprawl will only lead to further traffic in the long term, since the initial alleviation of road congestion will only incentivise the public to continue using a car as their primary mode of transport⁴. The addition of 33 cars to the vehicle stock each day⁵ and the increase in petrol stations is aggravating traffic congestion, road safety issues and air pollution on our streets. We need a real commitment to modal shift, to be able to address pressing public health concerns, such as the lack of physical activity, high rates of obesity, asthma and respiratory diseases, as well as poor road safety, due to car-oriented infrastructure, lack of dedicated space for and investment in public transport, and a disrespect of traffic rules. The above mentioned projects focus on a transport model that is not sustainable, and the transport infrastructure that is currently being built will not be sufficient to meet our future needs. Urban development and transport projects must not only be in line with the National Transport Strategy (2050); the only real way forward is through the creation of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP), in accordance with the guidelines and policy set out by the European Commission⁶, and in line with the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals to which Malta is committed⁷.

Conclusion

Our demands are for a better future for Malta's current and future generations.

² www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20180619/local/rabat-road-trees-would-not-survive-being-transplanted-expert.682080

³ www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20150618/business-news/tourism-all-about-figures.573048

⁴ Litman, T. (2018). Generated traffic and Induced Travel: Implications for Transport Planning. Victoria Transport Policy Institute. <http://vtpi.org/gentraf.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20180511/local/33-newly-licensed-vehicles-every-day.678802>

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/transport/themes/urban/urban_mobility/urban_mobility_actions/sump_en

⁷ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/malta>

List of organisations supporting this statement:

ACT

Attard Residents Environmental Network

Bicycle Advocacy Group

BirdLife Malta

Din l-Art Helwa

Flimkien għal Ambjent Aħjar

Friends of the Earth Malta

'Grow 10 Trees' project

Għaqda Siġar Maltin

Kamp Emergenza Ambjent

Malta Clean Up

Moviment Graffiti

Nature Trust Malta