Thematic strategy on the urban environment

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COMMISSION'S IMPACT ASSESSMENT

For further information regarding the context of this issue, please refer to the summary of the Commission's Communication to the Council and the European Parliament on a Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment – COM(2005)0718.

1- POLICY OPTIONS AND IMPACTS

1.1- Option 1: Baseline scenario: The situation without the Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment. The likely evolution of the challenges facing urban areas in the absence of the Urban Environment Strategy is assessed. The impacts of existing policies and new initiatives such as those announced in other Thematic Strategies are taken into account.

1.2- Option 2:Scenario for the Thematic Strategy: A package of initiatives to facilitate the use of best practice techniques in the integrated management of the environment. The Thematic Strategy will comprise a package of initiatives to support Member States and local authorities in adopting integrated approaches to the management of the urban environment and ultimately improve the environmental performance of urban areas.

CONCLUSION: The preferred approach identified through the Impact Assessment is **to encourage the widespread adoption of known and proven techniques** by facilitating the exchange of good practice and information, providing guidance on key issues and making available opportunities for Commission support for specific projects and activities. The initiatives proposed contain a high degree of flexibility to reflect the diversity of urban areas across Europe.

IMPACT

Environmental:

Environmental management plans bring benefits in better administrative functioning (decisions with large environmental impacts may be avoided) and in issues such as recycling, green purchasing, improvements to green space and nature conservation. Benefits in areas such as air quality and noise exposure are generally considered to be 'small' in scale. Benefits of other measures are likely to be positive and deliver improvements in the quality of the urban environment for instance through facilitating the implementation of the existing legislation.

The scale of benefits from sustainable urban transport plans differs according to a variety of factors. Large benefits are reported for the management of urban transport issues and for issues such as safety and use of public transport. Introducing transport plans brings benefits in addition to measures adopted under air quality legislation since they achieve a wider range of benefits than improving air quality alone.

The measures considered in the Scenario for the Strategy that are obligatory (i.e. the possible Directives) would result in wider use of these management techniques since all large European cities that do not have environmental management plans, sustainable urban transport plans and management systems would be required to adopt them. This would result in between 109-378 new environmental management plans, between 205-297 sustainable urban transport plans and between 310-408 new management systems.

Economic:

The voluntary measures in the Scenario for the Strategy do not impose additional costs. The likely costs that would be incurred should an authority decide to implement the guidance are reasonable and better planning can lead to better use of existing resources with only a marginal increase in costs. Other economic impacts relate to the improved attractiveness of the urban area and its ability to attract employment and investment. Whilst this cannot be quantified, it is a recognised impact.

The measures for obligations to establish environmental management plans, sustainable urban transport plans and management systems would give rise to clear costs to public authorities. It is not expected that the obligations would give rise to direct costs to business or industry.

Some of the measures that may be included in the plans may give rise to costs for business (e.g. road pricing) but since the obligations would not prescribe which measures have to be set out in the plans, these costs are not directly attributable to the possible imposition of the obligations. The objective is to influence the way that existing and future funds are spent, rather than provide new resources for new investment in urban environment measures.

Social: The measures relating to the guidance on management plans and systems could create jobs. Responses to the Commission's survey reveal that:

40% of local authorities employed additional staff to help establish and operate the environmental management system,

45% employed additional staff to develop the environmental management plan, and

55% of authorities employed additional staff to develop the sustainable urban transport plan.

There may be some double counting in the percentages for the environmental management plan and the environmental management system. Many local authorities have also used external experts in establishing their plans and systems. Measures relating to obligations would be more likely to create jobs.

One of the objectives of the sustainable urban transport plan would be to provide better access to shops and services for those without private transport. This is reported as a 'small' benefit. Improvements in the energy performance of buildings or the quality of the urban environment would bring positive impacts, particularly for the poorer and disadvantaged groups who suffer most from these issues.

To the degree that the Scenario for the Strategy brings additional benefits to existing policies (such as air quality and exposure to noise), it will also deliver positive impacts on human health. However, the impact on human health and safety cannot be quantified.

2- FOLLOW-UP

To monitor the effectiveness of this Strategy, up-to-date, accessible urban data are needed. The Commission, with the help of the EEA, and in close cooperation with the Member States, will work to improve European data on urban environment issues without increasing the burden for national, regional or local authorities, in order to evaluate the environmental performance of European urban areas over time. This will be done in the context of INSPIRE (Infrastructure for Spatial Information in Europe) and a link with the GEO and GMES initiatives. The Commission will undertake a further Urban Audit in 2006 and publish a report in 2006 based on indicators describing the living conditions in a number of EU cities, covering economic, social and environmental aspects. To ensure that the views of all urban environment stakeholders are collected and that the process is transparent, a consultation exercise will be organised in 2009 as part of a review of the 6th Environment Action Programme in 2010.