Helsinki to test mobility system with mesh of transport

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How people move around in the city in 2014 might become quaint history by 2025, at least in Helsinki, where urban thinkers suggest revamping the system by setting up efficiently linked transportation modes managed with smartphones. One could buy modes of mobility realtime with their mobile devices. News of the rethink in urban mobility comes by way of the Helsinki Times. Earlier this month it carried a report that the City of Helsinki believes in a model for the future where, ten years from now, transportation in Helsinki will be run as a service. A person can select services wanted with just a click—whether that service is in-town public transportation, a carpool, taxi, a train ticket, or city-center parking fees. Travelers could see what service options are depending on where they want to go. There could be a chained array of options. The goal would be a system that is

affordable, flexible and well-coordinated. "The City of Helsinki believes in the model so strongly that it plans to test it at the turn of the year with a few major employers in Vallila. Employers are being persuaded to join in by building a platform that enables employees to buy transportation services with their own funds." Later on, added the report, the test will cover Kalasatama or another new area.

The Guardian explained how it would work: "Subscribers would specify an origin and a destination, and perhaps a few preferences. The app would then function as both journey planner and universal payment platform, knitting everything from driverless cars and nimble little buses to shared bikes and ferries into a single, supple mesh of mobility." One's departures and arrivals would be in the hands, ideally, of a well-run utility.

The model itself is thought-provoking enough, especially with daily news headlines in other parts of the world of new transportation upstarts competing with traditional transport and treated as problems rather than as solutions, components that could be integrated within existing transport modes. Also gaining attention is the notion, that if the plan were to fly, so to speak, private cars could be made obsolete.

In this thoroughly networked system, where one can have mobility on instant demand, who would really need to own a car? As The Guardian said earlier this week, Helsinki is hoping that a mobility on demand system—integrating all forms of both shared and public transport in a single payment network—could essentially render private cars obsolete.

Sonja Heikkilä, a transportation engineer whose master thesis explored the new model, said that doing without car ownership does not distress the younger generation. "A car is no longer a status symbol for young people," Heikkilä said in Helsinki Times. "On the other hand, they are more adamant in demanding simple, flexible and inexpensive

transportation."

How applicable would the Helsinki model be in other cities in the world? Questions arise if this could work in cities where citizens may not be as digitally connected or less apt to change their minds about private car ownership. Even within Finland, said The Guardian, it remained to be seen if the scheme could be as effective in lower-density municipalities as it would in Helsinki.

Weighing the future impact of such a plan in place, the Helsinki Times commented that, "with good luck, everyone wins when transportation services can be provided more accurately in ways that people really want to use them." On the other hand, "With bad luck, supply and demand will correlate even less, when simultaneously everyone wants to take a taxi home from their Christmas party."

Nationally, the concept of a shared mobility system is well received and encouraged. The VTT Technical Research Center of Finland, an applied research organization and part of the Finnish innovation system under the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, last month issued a statement that in 2020 the share of public transport and car pooling in densely populated urban areas will increase, with easy-to-use mobility services as a viable option to owning a car. Talking about fuel and engineering cars in certain ways can only go so far. "The entire system needs revamping," said VTT's research professor and TransSmart program manager, Nils-Olof Nylund. "You won't make the world a better place by filling Helsinki with electric cars, for example. They take up just as much room as conventional cars running on petrol or diesel. The ways to achieve change will be through increasing the share of public transport, and rethinking mobility and logistics services to include the views of the people who need the services."

Helsinki recently played host to an international conference on smart

transportation, in June. This was the ITS European Congress (Intelligent Transport Systems and Services) where focal points included better public transport through improved fleet management and smart ticketing/payment as well as "seamless journeys."

More information: www.helsinkitimes.fi/finland/f … l-not-own-a-car.html