

Better bus service and more bike lanes

In the October 6th meeting of the A21 Forum the Consultant Idom presented the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan for Xàbia.

This document outlines recommendations for the short, medium and long term to improve transport in the municipality, prioritising systems which are more efficient and less polluting. The objective of Xàbia's Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan is to propose a package of measures to help change current mobility patterns in order to improve accessibility and make urban spaces for pedestrians, resulting in a better quality of life for the people. To achieve this one must act on multiple fronts, from parking and public transport, to cycle routes and the planning of streets.

Only 621 persons use public transport

There are more than 30,000 residents in Xàbia for most of the year, although at Easter and summer the population is multiplied by three, and transportation demand increases by 24 points. Together with the fact that about 40% of the population lives in areas of low density (neighborhoods with villas), implementation of efficient public transport in the municipality is quite complicated.

For the company that runs the public urban bus service this appears to be a huge barrier, and maybe be the reason why there has barely been any improvement in decades. The result is that only about 621 persons on average use this means of transport per day. People prefer alternative methods to get around because of the great difference between the winter and summer schedules, the difficulty in recognizing the stops, and the lack of routes.

Xàbia is one of the municipalities with most motor vehicles

Xàbia has a very high rate of motorization, about 738 vehicles per 1,000 inhabitants, more than in Alicante (650), Paterna (688) and even other similar towns like Denia (727).

This figure shows an average of 1.47 vehicles per person. In the Old Town the figure is lower, at 1.13, while residents in the areas along the coast from the Arenal to Cala Blanca have 1.66 cars per capita. But not only are there many vehicles in our garages, but these are used, and Idom estimates that about 88,673 trips are made every day, of which 89.8% are within the municipality.

This index reflects high self-sufficiency. On the positive this means that the town has all the necessary resources, such as services and shops, but on the negative car travel is over-used, and 75% of journeys are made by private vehicles. The report also reveals that the largest number of trips are made by the Old Town people (3.3 per day), while those in the Portixol area perform only about 2.5 per day when the EU average is 3. Moreover, only 36% of the municipal journeys are made on foot, a figure very far from the recommended European goal of 60%. But even worse is the use of public transport, with a rate of 0.78.

More people on bikes

The bicycle is a means of transportation on the rise. Although only 0.65% of journeys are made by bicycle

and Xàbia currently only has the Avenida Augusta bike lane, the fact is that in absolute figures 184 people opt to travel on two wheels every day, while there is currently only one section of cycle path in the municipality.

This is something that will soon change, since it is the intention of the Town Hall to create more lanes and slow roads for bikes. Because, as explained by the Councillor for Participation and Urban Planning, Pepa Chorro, the idea is to obtain a subsidy from the Valencian Energy Agency (Aven) to establish a system of municipal urban bicycles.

Idom proposes more one-way streets

The Sustainable Mobility Plan for Xàbia proposes a series of actions related to improving roads and sustainable transport.

First, the results of the analysis by Idom reflect the asymmetric use of two way traffic, so that the main thoroughfares of the municipality appear to function as a large roundabout, with some streets and avenues most exploited in one direction, while others are most used going the opposite way. Therefore, the consultant recommends that the one-way routes should be enhanced, increasing safety, reducing hot spots, and also giving more space to pedestrians.

In this regard, the report recommends in a short to medium term that Avenida del Puerto-Juan Carlos I is one way, from the Port to the Old Town. In the longer term, it suggests modifying a section of Avenida Palmela to allow more pedestrianisation and the opening of a new ring road to the south, parallel to the river, which would accommodate traffic destined for the southernmost part of the municipality.

Another recommendation is to make Montañar I one-way, stop people from parking next to the sea and use the more than 1,200 parking spaces in the Avenida Augusta instead. Moreover, according to the Sustainable Mobility Plan, the municipality's citizens could improve their quality of life if more sidewalks with a minimum width of three metres could be made, as well pedestrian connections between the three urban centres, while the streets in built-up areas should have a speed limit of 30km/h.

Joining the three urban centres with bike lanes

The document also includes an annex that addresses a number of suggestions regarding the use of bicycles as a sustainable form of urban transport.

First, it recommends expanding the existing network of cycle paths to achieve the objective of uniting the three urban centres, including a route from the Old Town to the Arenal by the Camí de la Fontana, as well as roads that connect the schools with the urban centres, and the Arenal with Cala Blanca.

There are several types of bicycle lanes. From coloured lanes on a sidewalk, such as in Avenida Augusta, to shoulder lanes physically separated by blocks or pillars, which are the recommended solution for Montañar I or the Avenida del Puerto-Juan Carlos I. Another option would be a cycle road, where the cyclist shares space with cars, but in which the speed is limited to 30km/h and the priority is for bikes. Idom recommends that the Camí de la Fontana, Calle Atenas, and around the Canal de la Fontana become such tracks.

In the long term the Plan even dares to suggest that the way up to the Old Town via Avenida dels Furs, the Camí de la Fontana and the future ring road parallel to the river should have segregated bike lanes.

The consultant's proposal also includes the 12 cycling routes designed for recreational use by Xàbia AL DÍA, taking advantage of the many roads which have low traffic intensities and which would only need to be signposted. Moreover, technical consultants met with XAD's editor to collect information about the creation of bicycle lanes and signposting bike routes.

Buses every 10 minutes

As for public transport, the Plan makes clear that this must be more attractive and accessible to people and that information on bus frequency and times at the bus stops needs to be improved. At present they are barely discernible: So it is recommended that bus shelters should be introduced, as well as poles upon which information should be clearly marked.

It also indicates that an intermodal station should be created, which would provide interchange between urban and interurban buses and taxis. This should be located in Avenida Palmela, where there is now a parking lot. It would also be appropriate to restructure the bus service and improve the connections between the three urban centres.

While the analysis reveals that only 621 persons use this means of transport daily, the number of journeys made by car suggest a figure of 17,000 potential users, which would help further improve the parking problem. To achieve this, Idom recommends the creation of two new parallel bus lines, namely the existing one via Montañar I, the other via Avenida Augusta, and a third by the Pla road.

By alternating passage times, which are currently every half hour, a service having a 10 minute frequency could be provided by these three routes which are only 5 minutes walk apart. Only three coaches would be needed.

For the remainder of the municipality, a service on demand would be needed. There are several formulas, but an example would be a minibus that picks up people who have previously applied by telephone or the Internet. Also, at a longer term there could be a bus route running down the Jesus Pobre road.