

## **Journey in the future: the power of imagination**

Rita Kwakkestein, Netherlands Society for Nature and Environment  
Clasien Slebos  
Donkerstraat 17, 3511 KB Utrecht, the Netherlands

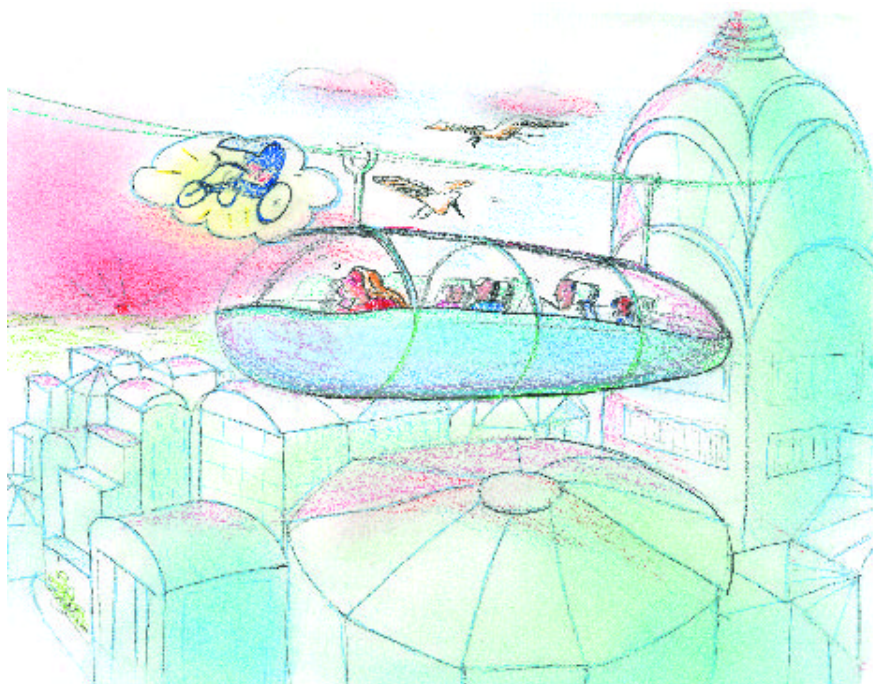
### **Summary**

Mobility is a part of life, and will probably be even more important in future. In fact, mobility is freedom. Environmental organisations that point out the negative impacts on the environment are readily dismissed as whiners and ‘gloom and doom merchants’. We – six environmental organisations concerned about traffic issues – wanted to show that a different approach is possible and we are convinced that mobility in the future can be both pleasant *and* sustainable. In June 1999 we presented *Journey in the future*: a colourful book containing a vision of a transport system for 2030, illustrated with often surprising ideas.

*Journey in the future* is based on ideas on sustainable mobility provided by our supporters and generated during a number of workshops, a literature study and interviews. It is important that the ideas reflect life in 2030 and so much attention has been paid to what trendwatchers have to say.

The vision of the future sketched out here serves two purposes for us. It shows all those involved in policies for mobility that there is another way forward that offers mobility that is both pleasant *and* sustainable. For ourselves, it is a source of inspiration and a reference point for backcasting, a method we use to define our priorities more clearly.

In this workshop we want to talk about the power of imagination. How do you compose a vision of the future? What is its value? And how can you use?



## **Introduction**

Being on the move is part of life, and will probably be even more important in future. Mobility is freedom. Environmental organisations that point out its negative impacts on the environment are dismissed as whiners and ‘gloom and doom merchants’. We – six environmental organisations concerned about traffic issues<sup>1</sup> – wanted to show that a different approach is possible. We are convinced that mobility in the future can be both pleasant *and* sustainable; we wanted to show that freedom of movement and sustainability can go hand in hand. In the summer of 1998 we began the *Journey in the future* project (De Toekomstreis). In June 1999 we presented the result: a colourful book describing a vision of a transport system for 2030, illustrated with often surprising ideas.

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## **How do you build a vision of the future?**

To gather ideas we called on our members and supporters and their networks and widely distributed a leaflet called ‘Join the *Journey in the future*’. The response was very encouraging indeed; we received more than a hundred ideas. In addition, we held two brainstorming sessions on trends in lifestyles and the role played by mobility in these lifestyles. We studied the literature and held interviews with traffic experts and town planners.

The vision of the future was then sketched out, drawing on all the material and information collected and the discussions held by the working group. The proposed ideas were tested against a number of criteria: they had to make a contribution to sustainability and they had to reflect life in 2030. The sustainability criteria and trends in lifestyles were also described in the leaflet. Eventually, 35 ideas were selected, a few of which are illustrated in this paper. The implications of the vision of the future and the selected ideas were then calculated and assessed by an external consultant.

The results are presented in the book *Journey in the future*. Much attention has been paid to the design, which had to be appealing, positive and unexpected. The presentation was itself quite an event. The press and all those who submitted ideas were invited to the presentation of the book to the senior civil servant at the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management who is responsible for the preparation of the National Traffic and Transport Plan and to a representative from an umbrella group of youth organizations as a representative of the next generation. Accompanying the book is a statement by 26 non-profit organizations supporting the ideas expressed in *Journey in the future* and declaring their intention to let these ideas inspire their own work. The presentation was followed by a canal trip through Amsterdam.

The book has been distributed free to 1500 people. Copies of the book were sent to those involved in the project and to other interested parties: ministers, members of parliament, civil servants, advisory councils, consulting firms, scientists and academics, the business community and private individuals. SNM and a number of other organizations are currently running projects that take the ideas in *Journey in the future* a stage further.

### **A brief vision of the future**

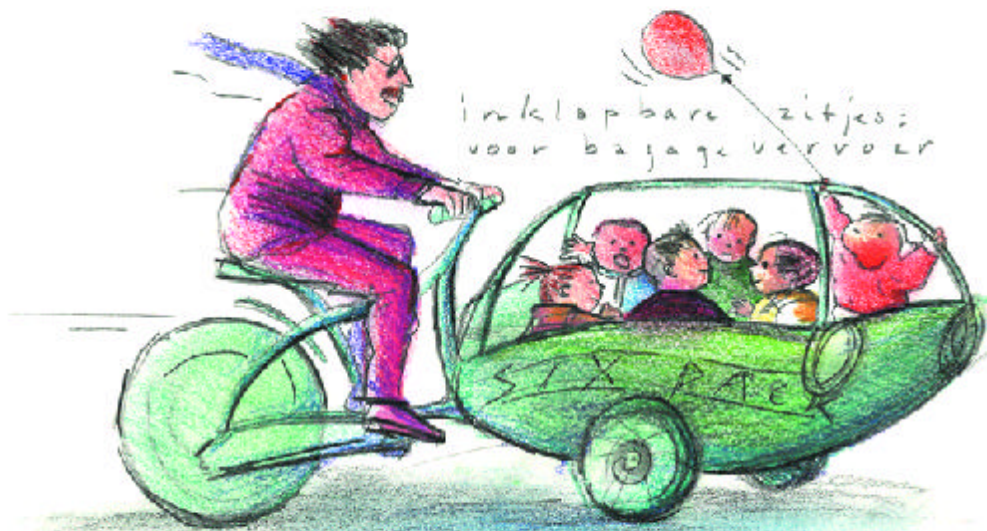
What is our vision of the future? It is important that we make a distinction between the criss-cross pattern of short journeys and the more direct journeys over long distances. Short trips are fostered and facilitated; long-distance journeys are considered much more carefully. The short, criss-cross journeys require a different transport system than the long-distance linear journeys. And, of course, passenger transport must match the lives of people in 2030!



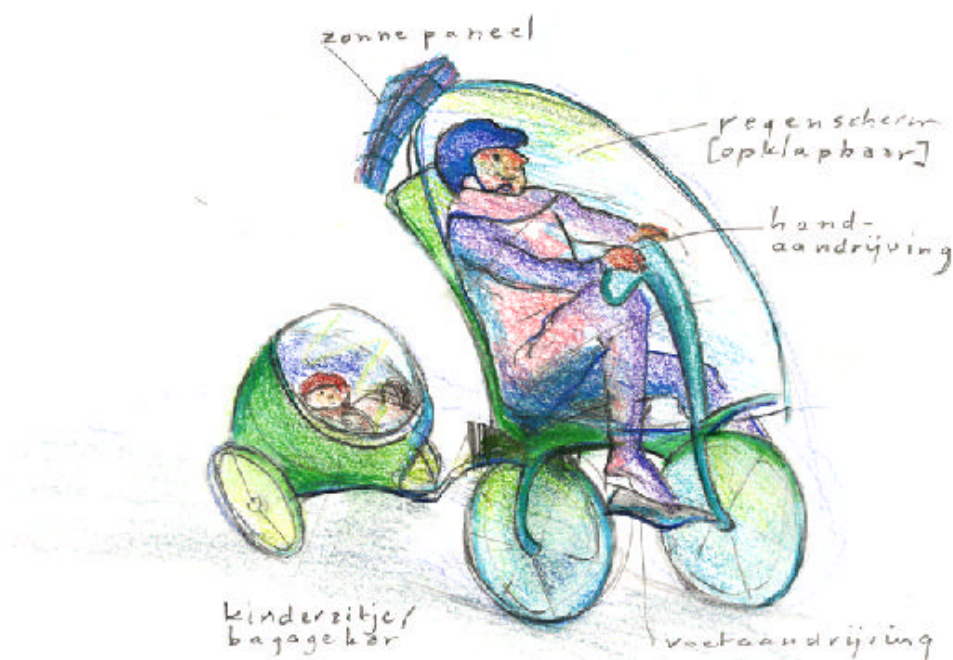
### *Short journeys*

The many daily journeys within the city or region lie at the heart of sustainable mobility. We envisage most daily destinations will in future lie within a radius of 15 kilometres. This is a busy world of to-ing and fro-ing, continual criss-cross movement involving almost everyone. The traditional distinctions between pedestrians, cyclists, public transport and cars has been superseded and many intermediate forms of transport have evolved. For journeys up to about 5 kilometres people mainly use the most individual modes of transport, driven by electric or muscle power. The bicycle, or probably one of its new incarnations, is the main form of transport over these distances and is in tune with the greater popularity of healthy lifestyles. Improvements in the technology make this method of transport suitable for many purposes and enable it to reach high speeds.



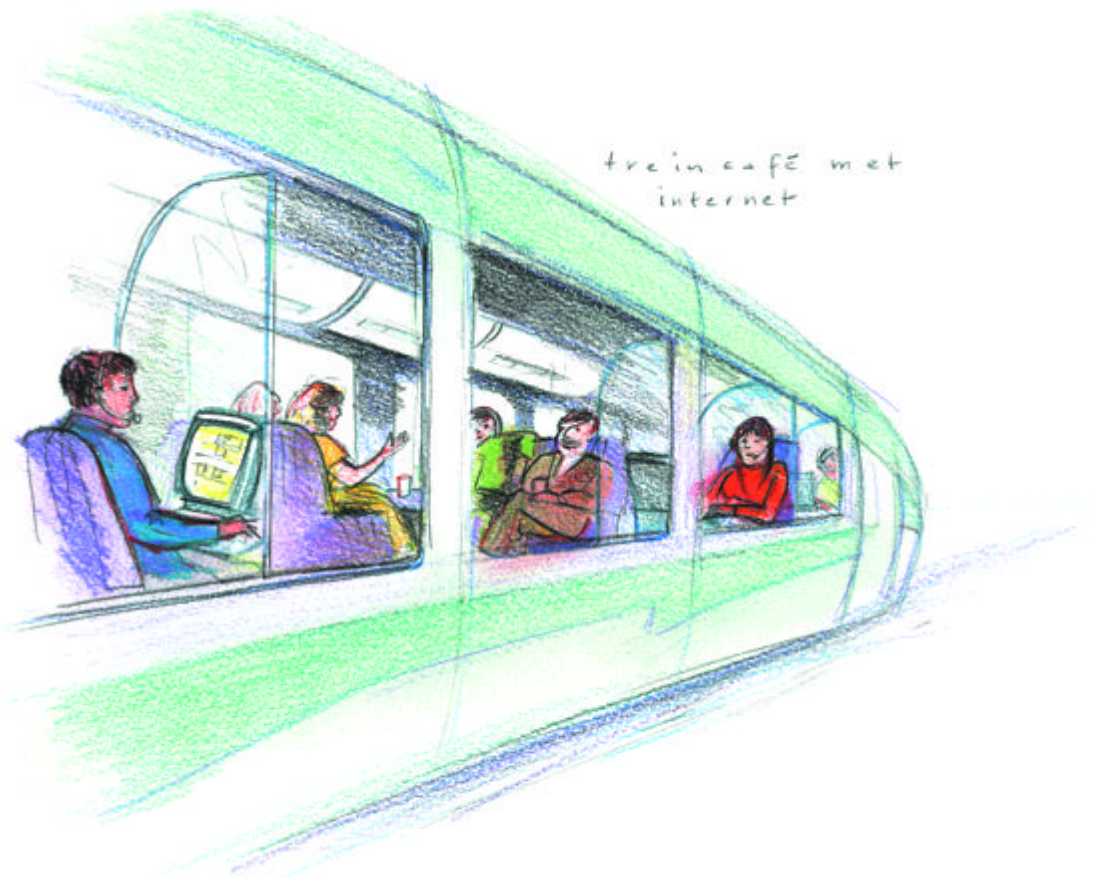


For journeys longer than 5 kilometres there is frequent public transport on the main routes, supplemented by door-to-door transport for those unable to travel unaided. Public transport stops all have bicycle parking places, shelters and online travel information. Cars have a much more restricted role at this level. The car of 2030 is light and the petrol engine has been replaced by a motor that has almost no harmful emissions. Combi-vehicles have conquered the market: combis driven by muscle power and an auxiliary motor, with detachable luggage units, collapsible all-weather protection and other features.



### *Long distances*

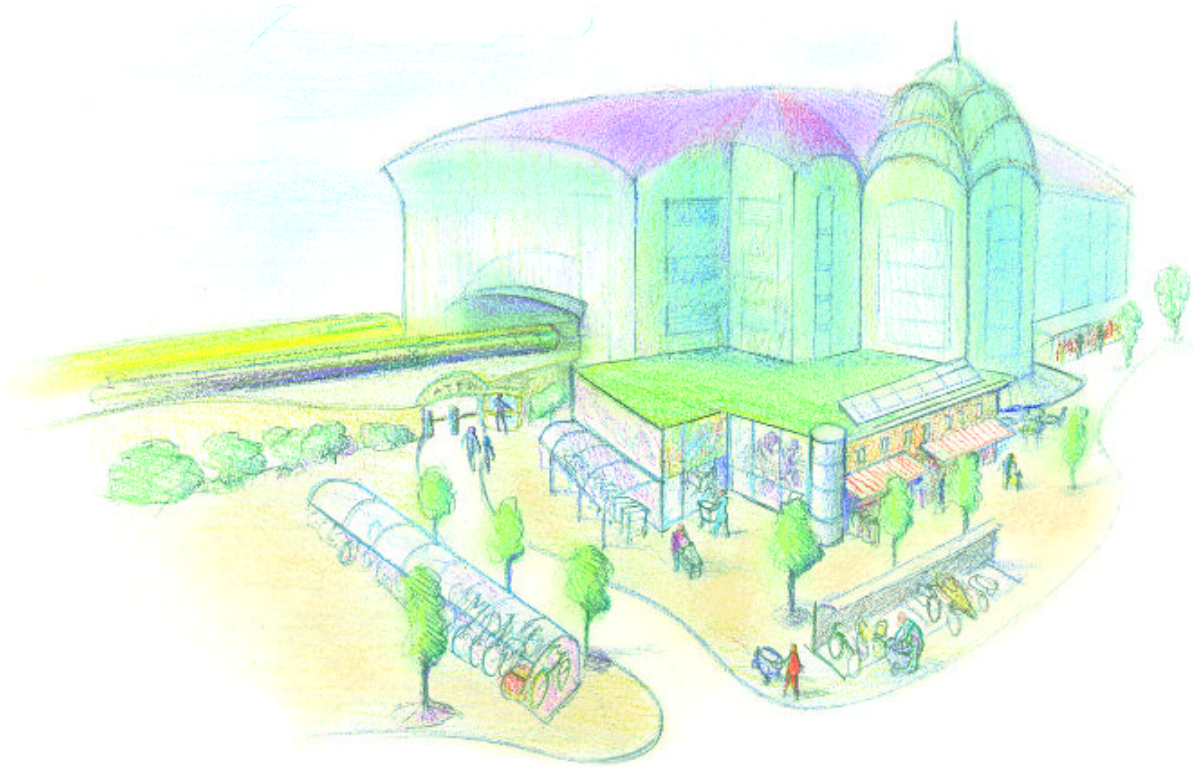
The short, criss-cross journeys are made in residential areas and nodes where activities are concentrated. Linear motorway, rail and canal connections and (for very long distances) flight connections link these centres together. Many routes also provide high speed connections for vehicles driven by muscle power. Coupled electric vehicles ride on separate lanes. Buses and other passenger vehicles driven by combustion engines, fuel cells and hybrid forms of propulsion populate the rest of the motorway. Public transport (to a certain extent individualized) makes up a significant proportion of traffic on these linear connections: express buses and trains for domestic journeys, high speed trains and airships for international journeys. The aeroplane is used for journeys which would take more than 6 hours by other modes of transport.



You can do all sorts of things while travelling by public transport: hold meetings, surf the Internet, keep fit ... Public transport has made a qualitative leap forward! But unlimited travel over long distances plays a more modest role in the system: it is relatively expensive and often unnecessary anyway because most destinations are close by. These journeys are not taken every day: family visits, days out, holidays, etc. A small proportion of the population uses the linear connections for travel to and from work, but some of these long-distance commuters only travel once or twice a week because teleworking is now common.

### *Stopovers*

Linear connections end at 'transferia', multi-modal interchanges on the edges of the centres of activity and residential areas. There the train, bus or car is exchanged for the bicycle or urban public transport system. Hybrid cars switch to electric drive and the intelligent speed controls limit their maximum speed to 50 km/h or less. Mobility shops are one of the many facilities available at these nodes or interchanges.



### **The sustainability of this vision**

The sustainability of our vision of transport in the future has been calculated by an external consultant. In essence, the vision is based on three types of changes: technological change, new modes of transport and selective restrictions on mobility through design and traffic control measures. This combination proves to be the strength of *Journey in the future*. If just one of the three elements is underdeveloped it is not possible to create a sustainable traffic and transport system; what is more, certain aspects of sustainability will be put under further pressure. But if the changes described take place on all three fronts the conclusion is that *Journey in the future* is a model of high quality mobility. A sustainable leap forward is made on all fronts. Mobility, liveability, safety and freedom of action increase for a great many people, *and* with considerable benefits for nature and the environment.

The results of the audit have been published separately in a background report.

### **Working with the vision: does it work?**

*Journey in the future* was presented a year ago. How much power does this vision have? In other words: Is it a source of inspiration for ourselves and others? Does it provide a yardstick for setting priorities? For ourselves, in any case, it has worked. How far others have been inspired by it is difficult to say. But here are a few examples.



At the moment a new long-term national policy plan for traffic and transport is being prepared in the Netherlands. This is to provide the framework for the policies of the lower-tier authorities. We use *Journey in the future* when lobbying those drafting the policy plan and the politicians who will soon have to decide on it. We are trying to break down the obsession with rapid linear connections by showing how important the shorter criss-cross journeys will be in future and the benefits to be gained from them, particularly if more attention is given to the bicycle.

We have used backcasting to establish priorities for specific elements. We argue for a passenger transport system that offers a high quality alternative to the motor car and for improved interchanges between the criss-cross transport systems and direct long-distance connections. Together with the provincial organizations we are making a strong case for designing residential areas in which the car is subordinate to cyclists and pedestrians.

Some ideas from *Journey in the future* have gained a life of their own, simply because they *are* the future. In Eindhoven, in the south of the Netherlands, a mobility shop is being built in a large new residential development in the city; a Dutch member of parliament has an idea for a glass bicycle tunnel over the river IJ from Amsterdam to Almere; the mobility pass with which you can pay for all forms of transport is just around the corner; and developments in ICT are bringing the travel information system of the future within reach.

## Notes

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In the *Journey in the future* project we worked with: Netherlands Society for Nature and Environment (Stichting Natuur en Milieu), Friends of the Earth Netherlands (Vereniging Milieudefensie), Stichting Mileufederatie (federation of provincial environmental groups), Brabantse Milieufederatie, Stichting Kinderen Voorrang (traffic safety for children group) and Vereniging Reizigers Openbaar Vervoer (public transport users society).