

Reallocate fossil fuel subsidies to fund equitable public transport

Impulse speech at the Round Table *Climate-Neutrality as a Vehicle for Greater Social Justice* by Agora Verkehrswende at the *Falling Walls Science Summit* on Nov 08, 2022

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"I can't even put into words the freedom that this offer has given me"

"Finally, I can afford to visit my grandchildren more often"

"I've squeezed in all my appointments between June and August"

I just paraphrased a few of the responses that we got about the 9-Euro-Ticket. Probably most of you are familiar with the ticket: It allowed everyone to travel all over Germany for a monthly fee of only 9 Euros, which was incredibly low.

Good afternoon, my name is Christoph Aberle. I work at Hamburg University of Technology and I have dedicated my PhD to the triangle of everyday mobility, the climate crisis, and social inequity. The 9-Euro-Ticket really came out of the blue. So, I called hvv, our public transport association, to ask if they wanted to do some research with me – and they did. Together with my grad students I was able to conduct an in-depth survey among 30 low-income users of the ticket¹.

As we found out, low-income citizens are basically role models of transport behaviour: they own few cars, they travel short distances and their carbon footprint is remarkably small. They do so, however, not by choice. It is poverty that makes low-income urbanites hold back their mobility needs to make ends meet. More than once an interviewee told me: "It's the end of the month, so I have to choose between buying a meal or a metro ticket." They have to choose between a meal and a metro ticket!

I therefore propose using decarbonisation – that we need anyway – to also pursue social equity. We could easily do so by stopping fossil fuel subsidies and using them to reduce public transport fares. There are more than 30 billion Euros of state subsidies that go into fossil fuel-powered transport alone in Germany each year² – for example, we have the so-called "Dieselprivileg", whereby, diesel is not taxed at the same rate as petrol. And the subsidies are really unfairly distributed, benefitting rich households much more than poor ones² – which in turn means: Cutting subsidies has the potential to bring together decarbonisation and social justice. That 30 billion alone could be used to fund a 9-Euro-Ticket for three years in a row!

A famous colleague from England once wrote: "The private car is an enemy of solidarity as much as public transport is its friend."³ When we take money away from fossil fuel subsidies and spend it on affordable public transport, we choose solidarity. And we achieve two things. Firstly, in triggering what we call a modal shift: The car is more expensive, so I opt for the bus. Secondly, in guaranteeing an affordable level of everyday service, which above all benefits people who are living on a tight budget. In doing so, we stop fueling the climate crisis – and grant a little freedom to anyone who currently needs to choose between a meal and a metro ticket.



¹ See some quotes of our interviewees (doi.org/10.15480/882.4562) and a 15-minute video presentation (doi.org/10.15480/882.4626; start of the presentation at minute ~26) – both in German

² Burger, A., Bretschneider, W., 2021. Umweltschädliche Subventionen in Deutschland: Aktualisierte Ausgabe 2021. Nr. 44/2021. Texte 143/2021. UBA, Dessau-Roßlau.

https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/sites/default/files/medien/479/publikationen/texte_143-2021_umweltschaedliche_subventionen.pdf. Accessed 28 July 2022. p. 59 / 63f / 104

³ Barry, B., 1998. Social Exclusion, Social Isolation and the Distribution of Income. CASEpaper 12. LSE Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion. <https://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cp/paper12.pdf>. p. 21

TUE | NOV 08, 2022 | 03.00 PM - 03.50 PM BERLIN TIME

FALLING WALLS CIRCLE – ROUND TABLE: CLIMATE-NEUTRALITY AS A VEHICLE FOR GREATER SOCIAL JUSTICE

FALLING WALLS FOUNDATION, AGORA VERKEHRSWENDE, STIFTUNG MERCATOR | MATTHIAS RUNKEL, CAROLINE ROZYNEK, CHRISTOPH ABERLE, JANNA ALJETS

Our transport system needs to be transformed due to its devastating effects on the environment and the climate. But this change needs to be discussed also within its wider social repercussions. Fiscal instruments and targeted policies can contribute to a mobility transformation that not only addresses the ecological challenges but will also be socially equitable and distributional.

The event is cohosted by our partner Agora Verkehrswende (Agora Transport Transformation) and Mercator Foundation

**THIS EVENT WILL BE ACCESSIBLE FOR OUR DIGITAL AUDIENCE
BY [LIVESTREAM FREE OF CHARGE HERE AT 3.00 PM.](#)**

[Falling Walls Circle Tables](#) give the spotlight to world-leading scientists and science strategists, along with policy-makers from academia, business and politics to shape the agenda of the future of science.



Matthias Runkel is head of transport and finance policy at Forum Ökologisch-Soziale Marktwirtschaft (FÖS) e.V. His focal points are the design of environmental and climate policy instruments. Most recently, he worked on international and national projects related to the development of strategies for CO2 reduction in the transport sector, the external effects of mobility, the phase-out of harmful subsidies and sustainable infrastructure financing. He studied economics at Maastricht University and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.



Caroline Rozynek is a research associate in the Mobility Research Unit at the Institute of Human Geography. Until March 2022, she worked on the project “Social2Mobility” funded by the BMBF, which focused on the topic transport-related social exclusion. Since April 2022, she is part of the follow-up project “Social2Mobility II – Social participation and bicycle mobility”.

Caroline Rozynek completed her Master’s degree in Geography (M.A.) at the Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main, focusing on urban and mobility research. Prior to that, she graduated in Geography (B. Sc.) with a focus on urban and spatial planning and Environmental Management (B. Sc.) at the Justus Liebig University in Gießen.



Christoph Aberle has spent a large part of his life appraising public transport systems, both as a passenger and as a transport engineer. His field of expertise can be drawn as a triangle connecting the subjects of everyday mobility, the climate crisis, and social justice.

Christoph's PhD project focuses on the financial accessibility of public transport for low-income urbanites. He recently interviewed 30 of them regarding the '9-Euro-Ticket' – a fare that enabled passengers to roam Germany during the summer and enhanced mobility options, particularly for those living on a very tight budget.



Janna Aljets is a Senior Associate for Urban Mobility at Agora Verkehrswende, a Berlin-based think tank whose aim is to promote the creation of sustainable, climate-friendly mobility. Janna Aljets is responsible for promoting ties between municipal stakeholders and for the cooperative development of strategies to transform the transport sector. She is particularly interested in the social dimensions of sustainable transport and in developing solutions that reduce impacts to the environment while also ensuring mobility for all. Janna previously worked for the German Bundestag, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in Brussels and Friends of the Earth Germany. She holds a Master's degree in Political Science from Freie Universität Berlin.