One of the objectives of the Strategieforum Frankfurt-Rhein-Main is to promote traffic and mobility across the boundaries of the German states in the region. In the ATZ interview, the forum’s Chair Axel Wintermeyer explains the potential that the organization aims to exploit in this area.

“One do not believe in state control”

One of the forum’s working groups is concerned with mobility. Has it been working on analyzing the current situation? What did the results show?

This working group is taking a very different perspective. We need to look at mobility in the region from the point of view of the people. They are the ones who are traveling from A to B every day using the different forms of transport and they are not really interested in whether or not they are crossing a state boundary. They want to be able to reach their destination by car, train, bus or 

means speeding up road building, for example, and enabling specific goals within the region to be achieved more quickly. The fact that digitization can build bridges was made very clear in the Covid-19 pandemic. The state of Hesse is coming to grips with these issues together with Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria and Rhineland-Palatinate. This will result in the creation of a flourishing region which has an efficient transport hub and is also a highly attractive business location. We want people to enjoy living and working here.

In the forum we are working with new ideas and innovative concepts that will allow us to overcome the major challenges facing us and help us to ensure that the Rhine-Main region is fit for the future. This includes strategic areas such as faster planning processes, efficient mobility systems, support for start-ups and the increasing use of digitization. In specific terms, this means speeding up road building, for example, and enabling specific goals within the region to be achieved more quickly. The fact that digitization can build bridges was made very clear in the Covid-19 pandemic. The state of Hesse is coming to grips with these issues together with Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria and Rhineland-Palatinate. This will result in the creation of a flourishing region which has an efficient transport hub and is also a highly attractive business location. We want people to enjoy living and working here.

ATZ _ Axel Wintermeyer, the Strategieforum Frankfurt-Rhein-Main was founded in 2018 to promote this metropolitan region. What has the organization achieved so far?

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bicycle without problems. We also have large numbers of people commuting in and out of the region and, in particular, in and out of the center of the metropolitan area. However, the planning culture in the individual states means that the state authorities do not look beyond their own borders. We are focusing on the big picture and bringing the different mobility concepts together. Therefore, the working group has written a joint, cross-state report about the promotion of forward-looking, efficient mobility systems involving different means of transport.

Will you be giving priority to the mobility concepts of the future?
This is all about creating a mobility concept for the entire region, because the commuter routes and other transport routes run across state borders. We need to look at all the through traffic. This metropolitan region at the heart of Germany is a central hub for road, rail, water and air transport. At its meeting on May 13 this year, the strategy forum made a firm commitment to the future: the states of Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate, Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg will create Germany’s first efficient joint transport structure.

Has the strategy forum already created models of the future mobility system?
Within the forum we have reached a joint understanding, which is that we have no intention of replacing the specialist planners. We are much more concerned about thinking ahead, taking a strategic approach and asking ourselves how we can work together to prepare the Frankfurt-Rhine-Main metropolitan region for future developments. Therefore, the report issued by the working group outlines the key points. These are the strategic areas that have already been mentioned. The various local planning departments will decide where a new bypass or park-and-ride scheme will be located.

**“Certainly the number of cars in cities needs to be reduced”**

How will the system be divided between individual and public transport?
For me, the mobility system of the future should consist of a good mixture of different means of transport that meets people’s needs. During the pandemic, individual transport became very important and that is still the case. On the other hand, public transport is essential for the large numbers of daily commuters. In many places it is extremely efficient, but unfortunately there are also problematic situations. One example is a public transport customer who boards a regional train in Untermain in Bavaria to travel to Gießen and has to get out of the train at the border of the fare zone, buy a new ticket for the new zone and climb back on board the train again. After all, this is the 21st century. This is why the strategy forum has launched a cross-state public transport ticket covering the entire region.

Do you expect cars to be banned from large cities in the medium term?
That is not an approach that I favor. Certainly the number of cars in cities needs to be reduced. This is where factors such as climate change and the war in Ukraine are having a major impact. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has sent energy and gasoline prices through the roof, which is making many people revise their plans. But I do not believe that we should ban cars from our cities altogether. We need to take the different mobility requirements into consideration, for example those of older people. It is also essential for us to bear business traffic in mind. This is why we want to create a transport infrastructure that makes it attractive and easy to switch to public transport, for instance. We must also increase the popularity of car sharing.

To what extent are the technical developments in vehicles being taken into account in your deliberations?
I am thinking primarily of autonomous battery-electric robo-shuttles and people movers with zero local emissions.

Axel Wintermeyer (born in 1960) is a Member of the Hessian State Parliament and, since 2010, has been Minister of State and Head of the Hessian State Chancellery. Before that, he led the CDU parliamentary party in the Hessian State Parliament. After completing his law degree at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz in 1994, he worked as an independent lawyer. Alongside a whole series of roles in politics and public life, Wintermeyer is Chair of the Strategieforum Frankfurt-Rhein-Main, which was founded in 2018. The goal of the organization is to develop guidelines and visions for the region across state borders.
I believe that autonomous and automated concepts are an essential part of our future strategy. That includes autonomous buses and people movers of the kind that are already in operation on short routes in airports and exhibition centers. This trend will develop further and will change in the future. Electric vehicles are just one indication of how this will work. Over recent years we have seen electric scooters, bikes and microcars joining the electrified cars and vans on our roads. This makes it clear how widely accepted these drive systems are.

Cargo bikes and biohybrid two-wheelers can reduce a city's carbon footprint. How much support should be given to these means of transport? And should they become mandatory for parcel deliveries? We should not ban certain means of transport and promote others. I do not believe in state control in this context. The cargo bikes used to deliver parcels are not yet autonomous, but they are becoming increasingly popular. A total of 1.66 million people in Germany now use them. In Hesse, we launched a program in 2020 with funding of 1.1 million euros to promote cargo bikes. The scheme was a huge success and it ran out of money very quickly, which is why we are continuing it in 2022.

**Will you take a look in your crystal ball? What will our mobility system be like in 20 years’ time?**

My goal is for us to be able to say in 2042 that we have broken down the state boundaries in the Frankfurt Rhine-Main metropolitan region as far as mobility is concerned and introduced intelligent transport concepts. I believe that the areas we have been talking about today will continue to grow and develop dynamically. That is true of autonomous driving, for instance. The mix of different forms of transport will be different from today. In 20 years, there will be much stronger links between areas such as mobility, climate action, business relocation, social infrastructure and resilience concepts. We will also be making better use of the opportunities presented by digitization. For example, apps that will show us how full a bus or a train is and which other forms of transport we can use to get from A to B. In addition, by then the planning laws will have been updated and the planning processes will be faster.

Axel Wintermeyer, thank you very much for this interesting discussion.

**INTERVIEW:** Frank Jung

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Axel Wintermeyer aims to ensure that policymakers provide the conditions for smart mobility products.
Anticipate accidents before nothing happens.

Imagine a vehicle system that can look into the future. By analyzing the environment and thereby anticipating dangerous situations. At the same time, the system observes how attentive the person at the wheel is. In this way, it can intervene in good time. We are working on this. Making Level 4 autonomous driving a reality soon.

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