



MOBILITY AFTER THE PANDEMIC

REIMBURSEMENT OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT COSTS (OR NOT?)

The Unions have been in discussions with our administration concerning the reimbursement of public transport costs since 2020. The aim of these discussions, which were started at the initiative of the FFPE and Union Syndicale, has been to simplify and modernise the existing reimbursement system while at the same time taking into account the real needs of GSC staff. In addition, at the beginning of the negotiations in 2020, Union Syndicale suggested the idea of a flat rate reimbursement system which would have de-bureaucratised the reimbursement system.

During the first round of negotiations Union Syndicale and the FFPE made a proposal for a 3-tier flat rate reimbursement system, which would have taken into account the situation of staff living in Brussels, outside the Brussels region and staff with lower salaries, and which would have avoided administrative costs.

This first round of negotiations ended unsuccessfully in February this year, due to the inflexible attitude of our administration which suggested a €350,- flat rate yearly reimbursement to all staff on the condition that they gave up their parking space in the Council car park. Our administration also offered a double reimbursement of €700 to colleagues in the FG I category. All Unions refused this proposal as this would already have involved a cut for some of those colleagues.

The second round of discussions was launched at the beginning of July 2021 but with poor results. The Secretary General did not accept our compromise proposal and the attitude of our administration did not substantially evolve during the second negotiation round.

Our administration maintained its position of €350,-/year to all staff, with a slight improvement for the FG I category where their new suggestion was to offer €750,-/year. A further meeting took place on 16 September where our administration presented this same proposal unchanged, accompanied by the option of receiving 12 vouchers/year for use of the Council's car park on specific occasions, if needed.

All Unions decided not to accept this final proposal from our administration, which does not take into account the situation of those staff members who live **outside Brussels** and who sometimes have significantly higher travel costs. To better cover the needs of **all GSC staff** we are instead asking for:

- 350 €/year for staff living in Brussels area (the area served by the STIB/MIVB network)
- 750 €/year for the FG I category and all other colleagues with more or less equivalent salary levels (i.e. most of our colleagues in the GF II, SC 1, AST 1-1 and SC 2-1 function groups), living outside the Brussels area
- either 500 €/year, or 350 € + another form of compensation (for example: 2 days of a flexicredit) for the other colleagues living outside the Brussels area.

We do understand that our administration's goal is to reduce the use of private cars (and to reduce the number of available car park spaces in the GSC car park) and to increase the use of other, more ecological means of transport, in order to comply with the official mobility policy of the Brussels region.

However, at the same time, we are bound to note that there does not seem to be enough political willingness to increase the available budget for staff transport needs or to adopt a comprehensive policy which would take into account the needs of all staff, enabling a more fundamental switch to more environmentally-friendly modes of transport. It seems that our administration is intentionally pushing aside the interests of a large number of colleagues living **outside the Brussels region**, who often have to use a combination of different transport means to arrive at work, and who incur significant yearly travel costs.

We are aware that, due to the increased telework during the pandemic, Belgian public transport providers are now offering new more flexible subscriptions/tickets to serve the needs of teleworkers and the new emerging hybrid working habits. However, we still lack concrete data on the staff's real yearly post-pandemic public transport costs and on the (future) telework situation in the GSC. In this context, it is impossible for the Unions to accept the financial contribution offered by our administration, which would mean a significant reduction for a large number of colleagues compared to the existing reimbursement scheme.

The Secretary General's proposal does de-bureaucratise the procedures and increase the overall financial contribution by the GSC towards the reimbursement of staff's public transport costs; it may also enable a reduction in the size of the GSC car parks. However, it is highly likely that staff living outside Brussels will start commuting by car again in order to come to work, so the consequence will be more cars and more CO2 and other emissions.

We are asking our administration to come forward without delay with better incentives which do not unduly penalise any staff categories.