

Aurelie Gillieaux

CEO of Skipr, a start-up offering a (comprehensive and easy-to-use) platform that allows employers to integrate relevant mobility options into their mobility policy

Interview conducted on 1st July 2022

In what ways is the home-work mobility approach changing in companies?

"We are no longer in a time where the HR manager recruits talent, creates a benefits package, and if there is a car in it, passes the file on to the Fleet Manager, who is located on the -2 level near the car park. Today, Fleet Managers are becoming Mobility Managers, and mobility is increasingly included in benefits packages. HR managers are now in the middle of a four-factor balancing act:

- Factor 1: reduction of CO₂ emissions. Top management, typically the CEO, is asking for efforts to reduce CO₂ emissions; since mobility accounts for 70% of these emissions, action must be taken: so go ahead!, they say. There are ambitions for emissions reduction, but without necessarily being equipped to do so at the level of HR and Mobility Managers;
- Factor 2: evolving legislation pushing for more ecological fleet and/or alternatives to the company car. However, these mechanisms are also subject to important fiscal constraints and risks associated with them;
- Factor 3: employees, especially the younger generation arriving in organisations, whose perceptions are changing. Previously, the car was seen as a status symbol (and therefore it was necessary to own the biggest car possible); now, it is often the opposite: having a big car can appear to many as a nonsense; the conviction is spreading that it is better to take a smaller, less polluting car or to share it than to own it; etc.
- Factor 4: new ways of working. With a majority of employees working several days a week from home, mobility plans need to be more flexible and reviewed to optimise costs.

HR managers and Mobility Managers find themselves in the middle of all this and often wonder how to manage it so that it doesn't take up too much of the existing teams' time. HR managers need a tool, a digital platform to help them manage the different options centrally."

Is sustainability gaining importance in the concerns of employers?

"Before the health crisis and before the impact of the war in Ukraine on energy prices, Skipr found itself in the 'important' but 'not urgent' quadrant for the company. For sure, no one is ever going to come out and say that their CO₂ emissions need to be increased! While everyone said they were working on the subject, there were always other more urgent matters. Now,



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there is an economic component that is being added to the mobility aspect: making mobility more sustainable is also becoming more economical - because fuel is much more expensive, because a full-time train pass when an employee works three days from home is costly and useless, etc. As soon as the financial aspect comes into play, we enter the 'important and urgent' quadrant and companies take action."

When it comes to mobility, preconceived ideas abound - debates about the company car are a good example. How to overcome these ideas to activate the right levers?

"The company car is, on one hand, very widespread in Belgium and, on the other, highly criticised and often put in question. But this is the tip of the iceberg. There are about 500,000 of these vehicles in Belgium, i.e. 10% of the country's car fleet. That translates into 20% of total car usage: someone benefiting from a company car will drive more than someone who has a private car. Obviously, continuing to offer tax exemption to a polluting mode of transportation makes no sense. The company car must evolve. We must move towards electric cars. We cannot sponsor polluting mobility. That said, it is very easy to blame the company car, but that is not the main problem. The big part of the problem is the other 90% of cars. A company car has on average two and a half to three years of age - it therefore uses less polluting technology, it is properly maintained,... The other 90% (which account for 80% of usage) have an average age of more than nine years, which makes them much more harmful to the environment. So, yes, the company car should no longer benefit from a tax advantage, but we cannot limit ourselves to this train of thought - we have to go further."

How?

"France, for example, has taken an excellent measure: the *Forfait Mobilité Durable* (Sustainable Mobility Package)- each company can subsidise or finance its employees' home-work journeys up to 800 euros per year, exempt from tax and social security contributions, as long as they are used in 'green' means of transport - public transport, electric scooters, shared electric cars, carpooling... This allows to reach out to those who do not have a company car by offering an incentive to change their habits in favour of soft mobility. They also have the *Crédit Mobilité* (Mobility Credit), which is the equivalent of the Belgian *Budget Mobilité* (Mobility Budget) - which allows them to offer employees who have a company car a budget for more environmentally-friendly mobility options. In truth, we would need both: a Mobility Budget for those entitled to a company car so that they can move towards green mobility and a Mobility Package for the others to encourage them to change their behaviour towards more sustainable travel. The cost for the State would be zero. When you take into account the price of traffic jams - in Europe, it is said that they cost between 1 and 2% of a country's GDP. In Belgium, we are talking about 4 to 8 billion euros spent each year. Not to mention the environmental cost. These budgets must be reallocated to cheaper, faster, more comfortable and more ecological mobility solutions. To do this, we need to equip companies with tools that enable them to balance the financial and the ecological aspects. "



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How does your product provide a solution?

"Our aim is to fight against single-user car use in the city. When there is a faster, more comfortable, greener and more economical alternative, we want to push employees to take it. We are providing employees with an application that will allow them to see how to get from A to B by combining the different means of transportation that exist around them: public transport, shared vehicles, electric scooters, a green vehicle to get to the station, etc. A co-pilot that will secure them in the option of not taking their car. Take someone living in Lommel who has to go to work in Hannut: I don't think there is a comfortable and fast alternative solution, because the public transportation network is not developed enough. But my dream is that before they take their car, they would first go and check. And if they decide to take their car only to get to the station and continue by train, that would be great. The second thing we put in their hands is a payment card. The application allows you to buy public transport tickets on the company's account, combined with a payment card, linked to the same budget, for alternative types of mobility. They can therefore consume their mobility budget through this means. For the company, we provide a management platform that will do two things: set up the company guidelines (determine who is entitled to what) and provide a reporting tool that gives full visibility on the savings generated and the reduction in carbon emissions compared to the use of a traditional car. This makes it possible to communicate to employees, to future candidates, to the CEO, to the shareholders, to public authorities the savings in tonnes of CO₂, to set targets for the following year and thus to drive a change in behaviour through information. Employees have a dashboard with their own situation, but the company only has aggregate reports. When searching for travel options, employees receive three pieces of information: the arrival time, the cost in euros and the CO₂ emissions.

Everyone has different mobility profiles depending on their constraints: my wife, whether she is traveling with or without children, does not have the same mobility behaviors and needs. Alone, she can take a bike; with three children, it's much more complicated. Our constraints are different during the weekend than during the week: on the weekend, we are more willing to lose a few minutes to save CO₂."

How is the recommendation made of the best mobility option for the employee?

"The Skipr algorithm was built with public transport as its backbone. Because it is the most sustainable, often the fastest, and generally the cheapest. The application will first calculate everything that is mono-solution (car, walking, cycling...) as a comparison. Then it will calculate which is the best public transport solution. The final element will then be to take the employee from where they are to the first public transport stop and from the last public transport stop to their destination, using shared transportation modes."

Digital is not without carbon impact. Is this taken into account?



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"Indeed it is. It is something that we are not going to pass on to our customers, but that we, Skipr, take care of. We are CO₂ neutral and the use of servers etc. is included in our green certification. For this we work with CO2logic."

The electric car itself is controversial...

"The electric car is not a solution to traffic jams. A car is still a car, whether it's electric, hydrogen, petrol or diesel, it takes up space on the road. It does not emit 'zero CO₂', it emits less: it all depends on how the electricity was produced. You also have to look at the whole production process of the car, of the batteries, etc. This is a debate on which I have yet to hear anyone say to me: "The electric car, it is better as of x kilometres per year, for as much as... " The electric car is still less good than travelling by train... but not everyone has access to a train. And not everyone can work from home. This is the difficulty with mobility issues: there is no such thing as one size fits all. Everyone will have their own specificity. With electric cars, there are also problems linked to cost and charging to be taken into account. There are still obstacles. Things are changing fast, but there is no miracle solution."

What advice would you give to HRMs so new ways of working can contribute to more environmentally-friendly mobility?

"HRMs should allow employees to work from where they want to and, above all, to come to the office and leave from it when they want to, which could help smoothen out the traffic jam curve. If I drive 10 kilometres, my CO₂ emissions will be radically different if I do so with, or without, a traffic jam. A driver in a traffic jam behaves radically differently: if you remove 10% of the cars in Brussels, you remove 50% of the traffic jams. It is not impossible to change the behaviour of 10% of your employees.

It is also important that companies set up a communication effort and that it is deployed on a regular basis. The message must be hammered continuously. Gamification is a great opportunity here, by making it light-hearted, with prizes to win. My ultimate dream is that one day an employee will arrive at an employer and not receive a mobility budget of 500 euros, but a budget of x kilos of CO₂ and will allocate his or her mobility accordingly, possibly with trading between colleagues or the possibility of exchanging savings for days off..."

