

Key elements from speech Vice Mayor Carolien Gehrels – AMS Infoday 25 April 2013

Welcome here for this initiative called Amsterdam Metropolitan Solutions. This initiative has a certain history. It was in December 2011 that the city council of Amsterdam decided to follow the example of Mayor Michael Bloomberg in New York. In 2008, just when the financial crisis started, Mayor Michael Bloomberg wanted to reduce the dependency of the New York economy on the financial sector. He then decided to initiate a contest in order to attract more technology, which I think was very successful.

I was lucky to be invited by the federal government of the U.S. last year to do an individual leadership program which took me across the United States for three weeks. I remember that when I arrived in Washington at immigration, the immigration officer looked at my ID and said, 'you have so many stamps in your passport, it seems you have been everywhere', I said, 'yes, I'm from Holland, we are entrepreneurs.' This entrepreneurial spirit fits well with Amsterdam's core values of creativity, innovation and spirit of commerce.

We at the City of Amsterdam really want to work on our city in the short term and in the long term. We looked at potential new economic sectors for the city and found the attractiveness of sectors such as water, waste, mobility, health. Amsterdam has a good position in these sectors, and further improvement will strengthen Amsterdam as a global business hub.

Amsterdam should remain the city where you can strengthen and capitalise on your knowledge. This is our true ambition. We want to further increase our strength in knowledge and innovation. We have two great universities in Amsterdam, the UvA and the VU. UvA started in the first golden age, while the VU started in the second golden age. We are also happy with our applied science schools because we think that applied science is of importance for the future and we are glad that we have global companies investing in our city in tangible projects. Take for instance Cisco, one of the companies which is making good use of our open digital infrastructure, or IBM which is a satisfied user of our ICT programs. Also Philips is an important investor here in Amsterdam. Together with Philips and in cooperation with the Technical University of Eindhoven we are working on a smart lighting program.

In my travels I'm often asked why it is so natural for the Dutch to work together on collective problems. I explain that we in the Netherlands historically had to act together to keep the water out. If we would not work together, we would not be able to live on the piece of land which is called the Netherlands. Russell Shorto will elaborate on this later.

I think it is of the utmost importance to have an initiative like AMS in economically challenging times. As I mentioned before, I am pleased by your presence and that you also feel excited and challenged by our contest. Since we started this project in December 2011, I had several good conversations with companies and professors. This resulted in a contest which will have many winners and will welcome all good ideas. Sjoerd Arlman will continue on that later.

Let me go into the factors that led to the development of this design contest. Firstly the belief and the need to continue strengthening our economy, and also the competition between cities. It is important that our city will continue to attract knowledge workers, that it will offer its citizens a good quality of life and that it will offer its businesses an attractive place to operate. Last week I spoke to the CEO of Arcadis who enthused about our Schiphol and Zuidas combination. He said there is no city in the world with such a high quality airport from which you can go from the airplane to your cappuccino in your own office in Amsterdam in only 50 minutes.

I think we have a very good starting position as Amsterdam. Evidently we believe in the importance of technology as I explained. We did some very good work last year in the field of mobility by promoting electric cars. It is incredible how well this works for the air quality in our city. Our electrical vehicle program is one of the largest in the world. Another example is the waste energy plant in the port of Amsterdam, which was built in 2007. It is the best performing high energy plant in the world, which creates the opportunity to position it as an export product. Furthermore we want to be in the flow of connected cities, with other cities worldwide who have a certain spirit.

Last but not least, we hope that when metropolitan solutions are found in Amsterdam, they can benefit the rest of the world. For example, our waste energy plant, I would love to see such a plant in other parts of the world. I always say garbage is gold which should not be thrown away.

All in all, we are very committed. I think you all know that we have an Amsterdam Investment Fund that is funded by the proceeds from the sale of our Nuon stocks. Half of this we invested in the North-South Subway, de Noord-Zuid lijn, while the other part we put in the Amsterdam Investment Fund. The City has reserved €20-50 million for promising ideas .

Our commitment also shows from the presence today of people from the city council. I think it is important to stress this as an initiative of the city council. We share our ambitions for the future and we want to put our money where our mouth is.

We are very enthusiastic, but more important is that you are very enthusiastic and that you feel free to give the best you have so we can make Amsterdam better together. By making our own city better, hopefully we can contribute to making all cities better in the rest of the world.

Thank you for coming!