Gothenburg (Göteborg, Sweden) plans to improve its public transport programme with its new K2020 project, a joint action by the Västra Götaland Region, the Göteborg Region Association of Local Authorities, the City of Göteborg, Västtrafik, the National Road Administration and the National Rail Administration.

Based on its six level ‘Go’ concept — GoAway, GoFar, GoFast, GoFrequent, GoClose and GoTo the project aims to get people to make 40% of all trips by public transport.

Of course, to a South African such as myself, Gothenburg public transport and non-motorised transport facilities (walking and cycling) already seems almost beyond improving. Home to 600 000 inhabitants the city centre is a disciplined confusion of trams (more than 200 of them), buses, BRT, cyclists, pedestrians, dogs and wheelchair pedestrians wander by, many of them with their own, separate lane.

Reliability, safety and accessibility are transport priorities, says Anneli Hulthen, Mayor of Göteborg. And it’s heartening to note that even a city such as this is grappling with similar issues to ours, although they’re further along the path of success.

A ‘woonerf’ is a Dutch word for an area where motorists and other users share the street without boundaries such as lanes and curbs. In a woonerf, people on bicycles and on foot have access to the whole street, not just the pavements. Moreover, the street functions as a public living room, where adults gather and children play safely because vehicle speed is kept to a minimum.

Two BRT routes, which started in early 2006, serve passengers between areas where there are a number of large companies and schools. Articulated buses (24m bi-articulated buses, the Volvo 7500), which can carry 165 passengers, leave every five minutes during peak hours.

A ‘pedestrian crossing’ is a Dutch word for an area where motorists and other users share the street without boundaries such as lanes and curbs. In a woonerf, people on bicycles and on foot have access to the whole street, not just the pavements. Moreover, the street functions as a public living room, where adults gather and children play safely because vehicle speed is kept to a minimum.

Pedestrian crossings are designed for people with impaired sight, with raised white ‘stripes’ and a sound as well as visual signals.
Electronic signs at all tram, bus, and ferry stops tell passengers exactly when the next vehicle is coming and notifies riders of any traffic hold-ups.

The City Traffic and Public Transport Authority is responsible for 400km of bicycle lanes, which are checked and cleaned every week. Potholes are repaired within 24 hours of being reported. The City aims to increase cycling from 8% (1996) to 12% by 2012. Currently, 11% of trips are by bicycle.

Electronic signs at all tram, bus, and ferry stops tell passengers exactly when the next vehicle is coming and notifies riders of any traffic hold-ups.

Pavements (a combination of cobbled and smooth) are wide enough to fit pedestrians on a mission and those with time (and dogs, bicycles, children) on their hands. Pedestrians with motorised and non-motorised wheelchairs abound — it’s not that there are more disabled people in Göteborg, but that the design for universal access enables them to get around.

Volvo’s new 7700 hybrid bus (there are two on the streets of Göteborg, three in London) cruises the streets almost silently... It reduces fuel consumption by 30%, produces 30% less CO2, and 40% to 50% fewer particles and nitrogen oxides. Its lithium-ion battery gets recharged by the engine or regenerative braking energy. It uses a 5-litre diesel engine instead of the standard 9-litre. The engine shuts down when the bus stops and the electric motor can move the bus until it reaches 15 to 20km/h, when the diesel engine kicks in.

Gail Jennings visited Gothenburg to attend the Volvo Research and Education Foundation conference on Future Urban Transport: Access and Mobility for the Cities of Tomorrow. The next issue of MOBILITY will feature a full report back.