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Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Research Report

Topic 2:

Promoting the development of sustainable transportation Infrastructure



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Introduction

The United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN Habitat) is committed to ensuring access to sustainable transport, that refers to “the provision of services and infrastructure for the mobility of people and goods— advancing economic and social development to benefit today’s and future generations—in a manner that is safe, affordable, accessible, efficient, and resilient, while minimizing carbon and other emissions and environmental impacts.”¹

“Sustainable transport is a key driver of sustainable economic growth, and a prerequisite and core component for sustainable development. There is no possibility to achieve the SDGs without sustainable transport. It boosts cross-border trade and stimulates economic integration and co-operation, strengthening development and creation jobs while protecting ecosystems. It connects rural areas to urban centers, and economic hubs to regions with less attractive business climates. It allows the safe and efficient movement of people and goods from production areas to industrial centers for value addition, distribution and consumption.”²

Definition of Key Terms

Infrastructure – “the basic systems and services, such as transport and power supplies, that a country or organization uses in order to work effectively”³

Sustainability - “Sustainability means meeting our own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In addition to natural resources, we also need social and economic resources. Sustainability is not just environmentalism. Embedded in most definitions of sustainability we also find concerns for social equity and economic development.”⁴

¹ High-Level Advisory Group on Sustainable Transport (Ed.). (2016, October). Retrieved from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2375Mobilizing%20Sustainable%20Transport.pdf>

² Global Sustainable Transport Conference (Ed.). (2016, November 27). *Summary Report Secretary-General’s Global Sustainable Transport Conference*. Retrieved February 04, 2020, from https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/12438Summary_Report_GSTC.pdf

³ Cambridge Dictionary (Ed.). (2020). *Infrastructure*. Retrieved February 04, 2020, from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/infrastructure>

⁴ University of Alberta Office of Sustainability (Ed.). (2013, June 27). *What is Sustainability*. Retrieved February 04, 2020, from <https://www.mcgill.ca/sustainability/files/sustainability/what-is-sustainability.pdf>

Sustainable development Goals (SDGs)- “The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.”⁵

Sustainable transportation – “The concept of sustainable transportation is intricately linked with the development of sustainable transport modes, infrastructures and operations. Similar to the concept of sustainable development, three major dimensions are considered:

- **Environment.** A reduction of the environmental impacts of transportation is a likely strategy for sustainability. Transportation contributes to harmful emissions, noise and to climate change. [...] However, as vehicles are becoming more environmentally efficient the global fleet of vehicles is increasing as well. An improvement of the land use impacts of transportation, especially the impacts of infrastructure construction and maintenance, is also a strategic goal to achieve. Transportation systems are also a generator of wastes (vehicles, parts, packaging, etc.) that must be reduced, reused and recycled.
- **Economy.** Transportation is a factor of economic growth, development and employment. It requires materials for modes and infrastructure and energy for operations, which can be used more efficiently. Transportation should also have a fair pricing strategy, meaning that users are bearing the full costs (direct and indirect) of their usage of the transport system. A transport system where competition is fair and open is likely to promote modal choice and efficiency. In a system where transport is a public or private monopoly, price distortions and misallocations of capital are created, which on the long run are likely to render the system unsustainable.
- **Society.** Sustainable transportation should benefit the society. It should be safe, not impairing human health and should minimize disturbance on communities. Access and

⁵ United Nations (Ed.). (2015). *Sustainable Development Goals*. Retrieved February 04, 2020, from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

equity are also two important principles as transportation should promote the access to goods and services for as many people as possible.”⁶

Background Information

“Transport drives development, links people, connects local communities to the world, builds markets and facilitates trade. In turn, sustainable transport drives sustainable development, fundamental to meeting the needs of people in their personal and economic lives, while respecting the ability of future generations to meet their needs.”⁷

Challenges for Sustainable Transportation

Climate

“Transport of goods and people is one of the key drivers for the growth in global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Although global CO₂ emissions increased by 13% from 1990 to 2000, CO₂ emissions from road transport and aviation each grew by 25%. In Eastern Asia, the NO_x and CO₂ emissions from road transport doubled from 1990 to 2000. In the European Union, most sectors decreased their GHG emissions from 1990 to 2001, but emissions from transport increased by nearly 21%. The accompanying emissions of NO_x, CO, volatile organic compounds (VOC), aerosols, and SO₂ are often higher than for other sectors but have increased less than CO₂ because of improved vehicle technologies and reduced fuel sulfur content. The growth in GHG emissions from transport is expected to continue throughout the world. In 2050, as much as 30–50% of total CO₂ emissions are projected to come from the transport sector, compared with today’s 20–25%.”⁸

Rural Transportation

“Transport is a key enabler of multiple SDGs, allowing people—including women, smallholder farmers and other inhabitants of rural areas—to access markets, employment, health and education services, social interaction and the world beyond their village or local community.

⁶ Rodrigue, D.-P. (2017). *The Geography of Transport Systems*. (D. o. Hofstra University, Ed.) Retrieved February 04, 2020, from https://transportgeography.org/?page_id=6263

⁷ High-Level Advisory Group on Sustainable Transport (Ed.). (2016, October). Retrieved from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2375Mobilizing%20Sustainable%20Transport.pdf>

⁸ Fuglestedt, J., Berntsen, T., Myhre, G., Rypdal, K., & Skeie, R. (2007). *Climate forcing from the transport sectors*. (C. Field, Ed.) Retrieved February 13, 2020, from <https://www.pnas.org/content/pnas/105/2/454.full.pdf>

[...] World Bank's Rural Access Index (RAI) and 2015 population data suggest that over 1.3 billion people worldwide lack access to roads in rural areas. In Sub-Saharan Africa, lack of access affect 66 per cent of the rural population, or about 411 million people. Lack of accessibility is also high in Asia-Pacific region (37 per cent of rural population or 794 million people), in Latin America and the Caribbean (40 per cent or 50 million people), and in the Middle-East and North Africa region (40 per cent or 60 million people), and relatively lower in Europe and Central Asia (18 per cent or 47 million people)."⁹

Costs of transport

The Transport sector has two types of costs, that should be considered:

- **Internal costs** “stem from the provision (construction, maintenance) and use of transport infrastructure. These costs have to be recovered from infrastructure users or from the public. Internal costs are the basis for all decisions on the transport market. They largely determine both individual mobility demand, and transport supply via rentability decisions of transport providers or calculations on the economic feasibility of infrastructure projects, etc.
- **External costs** on the other hand, are not part of supply or demand decisions on the transport market. They are external to these decisions. They stem from (mostly negative) side-effects of transportation, such as congestion, accidents, emissions and pollution, noise, and aesthetic factors which all negatively affect people and/or future generations. They are rarely borne by road users. Even countries that have implemented the ‘user pays principle’ (every transport user pays for all costs he/she incurs), basically apply it to internal costs only, and don’t factor in the external ones. As a consequence, road transport is too cheap and its use inefficient. This results in negative environmental and social effects that would be less severe if external costs were borne by road users as well.”¹⁰

⁹ Global Sustainable Transport Conference (Ed.). (2016, November 26). *Thematic discussion 2: Reaching the most remote: rural transport challenges and opportunities*. Retrieved February 16, 2020, from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/11682Thematic%20discussion%202%20concept%20note.pdf>

¹⁰ UNESCAP (Ed.). (n.d.). *The challenge: sustainable road transport*. Retrieved February 16, 2020, from https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/roadprice_ch1.pdf

Future Factors of mobility

There are three factors that should be considered for the future of mobility:

- **Demographics:** “By 2030, an additional 1.2 billion people with a radically changed socio-economic makeup will fuel new demands for mobility solutions. By then, 16.5 percent of the world’s population will be aged 60 or older. This demographic trend—led by OECD countries and joined by transition economies—calls for new solutions that are responsive, age-appropriate, and affordable.
- **Preferences:** People aspire to live in a mobile society where they can move easily from place to place, travel and relocate as needed, and have quick and easy access to a range of goods and services. With the trend toward increased physical movement of people and goods, new opportunities are emerging that allow the ‘virtual’ movement of people and goods as well. Examples include e-commerce, which allows consumers to order goods online, and telecommuting, which enables employees to work away from traditional offices.
- **Technology:** Digital technology will form the backbone of mobility in the future. By 2020, the world will have an estimated 26.3 billion digital devices and connections—this is estimated to be more than three times the number of the world’s people. By then over 60 percent of global mobile traffic will be in the Asia Pacific, the Middle East, and Africa. As this connectivity extends to transport systems, it can lead to more equitable, efficient, and safer mobility, and offer great opportunities for countries to reshape the way people, goods, and services travel. In many urban areas, the use of smartphones has catalyzed a move away from vehicle ownership and toward vehicle sharing, ride hailing and carpooling. However, private car transport accounts for three-quarters of all passenger mobility, making it the predominant means of transport. The main transport technologies in use today came out of the industrial revolution hundreds of years ago. Since then the volume of car traffic has increased tenfold, while cycling and public transport have seen scarcely any growth. Rural communities are particularly vulnerable to digital exclusion and hence cannot benefit from the many digital technologies that streamline transport. However, the potential gains from digitalization are huge, and some are already being realized. For example, Alibaba, an online marketplace company, connects rural residents in China with global markets—both as sellers and buyers—thus

allowing them to transport their produce to global markets and have goods like fertilizers and seeds brought to their doorstep.”¹¹

Further Background Information Documents

Understanding the Value of Transport Infrastructure: Task Force Report, 2013; available at: <https://www.itf-oecd.org/sites/default/files/docs/13value.pdf>¹²

Transport for sustainable development in the ECE Region: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe; available at: https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trans/publications/Transport_for_sustainable_development_in_the_ECE_region.pdf¹³

The Vancouver Conference 1996: Towards sustainable transportation; available at: <https://www.oecd.org/greengrowth/greening-transport/2396815.pdf>¹⁴

Sustainable Transportation Methods; available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329359932_Sustainable_Transportation_Methods¹⁵

UNECE Handbook on sustainable transport and urban planning; available at: <https://thepep.unece.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/UNECE%20Handbook%20on%20Sustainable%20Transport%20and%20Urban%20Planning%20draft%20April%202019%20reduced.pdf>¹⁶

¹¹ Sustainable Mobility for All (Ed.). (2017). *Global Mobility Report 2017*. Retrieved February 16, 2020, from https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2643Global_Mobility_Report_2017.pdf

¹² International Transport Forum (Ed.). (2013, April). *Understanding the Value of Transport Infrastructure*. Retrieved February 16, 2020, from <https://www.itf-oecd.org/sites/default/files/docs/13value.pdf>

¹³ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (Ed.). (2011). *Transport for Sustainable Development in the ECE-Region*. Retrieved February 16, 2020, from https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trans/publications/Transport_for_sustainable_development_in_the_ECE_region.pdf

¹⁴ OECD (Ed.). (1997). *Towards Sustainable Transportation*. Retrieved February 16, 2020, from <https://www.oecd.org/greengrowth/greening-transport/2396815.pdf>

¹⁵ Martins, V., Anholon, R., & Quelhas, O. L. (2019, January). *Sustainable Transportation Methods*. Retrieved February 16, 2020, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329359932_Sustainable_Transportation_Methods

¹⁶ UNECE (Ed.). (2019, April 12). *UNECE Handbook on sustainable transport and urban planning*. Retrieved February 16, 2020, from <https://thepep.unece.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/UNECE%20Handbook%20on%20Sustainable%20Transport%20and%20Urban%20Planning%20draft%20April%202019%20reduced.pdf>

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

Africa Sustainable Transport Forum (ASTF) - “The SSATP, World Bank, UN-Habitat, UNEP and the Government of Kenya are launching the Africa Sustainable Transport Forum (ASTF) to provide a platform for African stakeholders to learn, share, collectively commit and self-initiate an action framework to reduce congestion, climate emissions and improve road safety and health and accessibility for its citizens. The goal of the forum is to facilitate dialogue across Africa on sustainable transport and work with countries to develop the ASTF Framework of action that reflects a common vision and a series of activities to achieve concrete results in the area of Sustainable Transport for Africa. This framework will act as the main reference for the African continent to contribute to the global goal of meeting the growing population’s transport needs sustainably.”¹⁷

Global Sustainable Transport Conference – “The global commitment to sustainable transport was spotlighted in the first ever Global Sustainable Transport Conference, convened by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, on 26 and 27 November 2016 in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. The Global Conference brought together key stakeholders from Governments, UN system and other international organizations, the private sector, and civil society to engage in a dialogue that emphasized the integrated and cross-cutting nature of sustainable transport and its multiple roles in supporting the achievement of the SDGs. The Conference addressed all modes of transport - road, rail, air, waterborne, including both passengers and freight- and accorded priority attention to the concerns of developing countries, particularly those of Africa, LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS.”¹⁸

Sustainable Mobility for All (SuM4All) Initiative – “World Bank Group put forward the concept of SuM4All at UN Climate Action Summit in May 2016, with the view that it would be refined and substantiated further over time by the international transport community. The idea for this initiative was based on the lack of a standalone SDG for transport, the fragmented

¹⁷ SSATP Africa Transport Policy Program (Ed.). (2014, October 28). *Africa Sustainable Transport Forum (ASTF)*. Retrieved February 04, 2020, from <https://www.ssatp.org/en/events/africa-sustainable-transport-forum-astf>

¹⁸ Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform (Ed.). (2016, November). *Global Sustainable Transport Conference*. Retrieved February 04, 2020, from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/Global-Sustainable-Transport-Conference-2016>

nature of the transport sector with various actors and the perceived need for an umbrella framework.”¹⁹

UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) - “Rooted in the United Nations Charter and guided by the transformative 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) upholds the development pillar of the United Nations. We bring the global community together to work towards common solutions to the world’s most pressing problems. We help countries translate their global commitments into national action in the economic, social and environmental spheres. UN DESA is a pioneer of sustainable development and the home of the SDGs, where each goal finds its space and where all stakeholders can do their part to leave no one behind. We are a leading analytical voice for promoting inclusion, reducing inequalities and eradicating poverty, and a champion for tearing down the barriers that keep people in poverty. UN DESA helps countries make informed decisions by providing a wealth of information through our publications and databases and through our support for international deliberations at the United Nations General Assembly, Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Commissions, Forums and other bodies. Step by step, UN DESA works towards sustainable development for all.”²⁰

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) – “The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) was set up in 1947 by ECOSOC. It is one of five regional commissions of the United Nations. UNECE's major aim is to promote pan-European economic integration. UNECE includes 56 member States in Europe, North America and Asia. However, all interested United Nations member States may participate in the work of UNECE. Over 70 international professional organizations and other non-governmental organizations take part in UNECE activities.”²¹

United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) - The “UN-Habitat promotes socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities. It is the focal point for all urbanization and human settlement matters within the UN system. UN-Habitat envisions well-planned, well-governed, and efficient cities and other human settlements, with adequate

¹⁹ United Nations, S. (Ed.). (2020). *Sustainable Mobility for All (SuM4All) Initiative*. Retrieved February 04, 2020, from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/sustainabletransport/SuM4All>

²⁰ United Nations, D. (Ed.). (2020). *Who we are*. Retrieved February 04, 2020, from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/about/who-we-are.html>

²¹ UNECE (Ed.). (2020). *Mission*. Retrieved February 13, 2020, from <https://www.unece.org/mission.html>

housing, infrastructure, and universal access to employment and basic services such as water, energy, and sanitation.”²²

Relevant UN Resolutions

A/70/472 General Assembly (2015) Sustainable development Report of the Second Committee; available at: <https://undocs.org/A/70/472>

A/RES/66/288 General Assembly (2012) The future we want; available at: <https://undocs.org/A/RES/66/288>

A/RES/69/313 General Assembly (2015) Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Ababa Action Agenda); available at: <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/69/313>

A/RES/70/1 General Assembly (2015) Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; available at: https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf

A/RES/70/197 General Assembly (2015) Towards comprehensive cooperation among all modes of transport for promoting sustainable multimodal transit corridors; available at: https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/197%20&Lang=E

A/RES/72/212 General Assembly (2017): Strengthening the links between all modes of transport to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals; available at: <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/72/212>

Ashgabat Statement on Commitments and Policy Recommendations of the Global Sustainable Transport Conference Global Sustainable Transport Conference (2016); available at:

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/11987Ashgabatstatement.pdf>

E/ESCAP/73/INF/6 Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2017) Global attention to sustainable transport development; available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/B17/003/19/PDF/B1700319.pdf?OpenElement>

E/ESCWA/EDID/2016/IG.1/5(Part II) Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) (2016) Transport in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Outcome of the

²² United Nations (Ed.). (2020). *United Nations Human Settlements Programme*. Retrieved February 04, 2020, from <https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/un-and-the-rule-of-law/united-nations-human-settlements-programme/>

Global Sustainable Transport Conference; available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/LTD/I17/000/03/PDF/I1700003.pdf?OpenElement>

ECE/TRANS/2014/1 Economic and Social Council (2013) Concept note and draft programme of the policy segment “Innovations for sustainable inland transport and mobility”; available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G13/264/29/PDF/G1326429.pdf?OpenElement>

ECE/TRANS/2014/3 Economic and Social Council (2013) Sustainable transport in the post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda; available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G13/264/57/PDF/G1326457.pdf?OpenElement>

ECE/TRANS/WP.5/2016/5 Economic and Social Council (2016) Transport Trends and Economics 2016–2017: Achievement of Sustainable Development Goals through the development of Sustainable Transport; available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/133/79/PDF/G1613379.pdf?OpenElement>

ECE/TRANS/WP.5/2018/4 Economic and Social Council (2018) Road map on the contributions of member States and of the Working Party sessions in implementing the 2030 Agenda; available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/191/21/PDF/G1819121.pdf?OpenElement>

Sustainable Development Goal 9.1 – “Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including regional and transborder infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all.”²³

Sustainable Development Goal 11.2 - “By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons”²⁴

²³ United Nations, S. (Ed.). (2016). *Sustainable Development Goal 9*. Retrieved February 04, 2020, from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg9>

²⁴ United Nations, S. (Ed.). (2016). *Sustainable Development Goal 11*. Retrieved February 16, 2020, from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg11>

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue Examples

Augsburg introduces flat rate for unlimited public transport: Carter, Abi (2019) [Article about free public transport in Augsburg (Germany)]; available at:

<https://www.iamexpat.de/expat-info/german-expat-news/augsburg-introduces-flat-rate-unlimited-public-transport>²⁵

Public Transport Can Be Free: Kębłowski, Wojciech (2019) [Article about free public transport]; available at: <https://tribunemag.co.uk/2019/08/public-transport-can-be-free>²⁶

²⁵ Carter, A. (2019, November 04). *Augsburg introduces flat rate for unlimited public transport*. Retrieved February 16, 2020, from <https://www.iamexpat.de/expat-info/german-expat-news/augsburg-introduces-flat-rate-unlimited-public-transport>

²⁶ Kębłowski, W. (2019, August 22). *Public Transport Can Be Free*. Retrieved February 16, 2020, from <https://tribunemag.co.uk/2019/08/public-transport-can-be-free>

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University of Alberta Office of Sustainability (Ed.). (2013, June 27). *What is Sustainability*. Retrieved February 04, 2020, from <https://www.mcgill.ca/sustainability/files/sustainability/what-is-sustainability.pdf>