



United Nations
Sustainable
Transport
Conference



Second United Nations Global Sustainable Transport Conference

14 - 16 October 2021, Beijing, China

Thematic session 2: Sustainable transport and regional development

Concept note

I. Introduction

Sustainable transport is crucial for regional development, linking countries and regions to global markets, promoting trade opportunities, and stimulating economic growth. In many regions, however, countries, especially developing countries, often lack strong institutions, sufficient financial and human resources and highly specialized expertise needed to develop and effectively deploy sustainable transport systems and implement them in a coherent way with other elements, such as urban, land and multi-modal transport planning, logistics and social concerns. This can hamper their own development as well as the development of the region. Several measures to alleviate these challenges exist, such as building local, national, and regional capacity across all levels of government, jurisdictions, organizations, and modes, including by providing training and information resources. This notion is also reflected in SDG17 of the 2030 Agenda, which aims to “strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development” and, for example, in SDG 13 (climate action), which includes capacity-building as a target and as an indicator.

Policies, strategies, international transport-related Conventions, regulations and agreements and other measures that leverage integrated regional and inter-regional transport connectivity for poverty eradication and economic growth while at the same time enabling progress towards a sustainable and low-carbon development path should be promoted. In this context, regional cooperation and joint action are particularly important - both regarding the “hard” aspects, like transnational road and rail projects or efficient air and waterborne connectivity, and the “soft” elements, such as trade facilitation, including streamlined customs, border crossing regulatory frameworks and interconnectivity. The UN system, including through its Regional Commissions and specialized agencies, plays an important role in bringing different actors together, analysing specific regional situations and supporting regions on their path to sustainable transport. Adequate means of implementation should be provided to foster regional development, where needed.

This session will have a closer look at sustainable transport in the context of regional development and identify related solutions and recommendations as well as feature success stories.

II. Stocktaking

Overall, regional development and progress regarding the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement remain uneven. The COVID-19 pandemic has further hampered progress in some countries and regions and has, among others, underlined the need to speed up digitalization

and other innovations as well as interconnectivity. Capacity-building needs vary from region to region. Specific national capacity is, in most regions, lacking at the level of the planning departments of ministries of transport and other ministries related to the interlinkages between the performance of different modes of transport and the achievement of many sustainable development goals (SDGs) and targets.

A wide range of capacity-building tools, approaches and initiatives exist to support developing countries, including countries in special situations, yet challenges remain in gaining access to, selecting, and using them in a systemic way. Additionally, many tools and approaches were developed for a particular situation; although they might be adaptable to different socio-cultural, situational, or geographic contexts, often no specific advice is offered on how to adapt the tools and approaches, and those tools are not readily accessible for off-the-shelf use. As in other areas of development, capacity-building is not always based on capacity needs assessments or expressed needs of local or national actors, institutions, and organizations in a coordinated manner. This threatens the effectiveness, responsiveness, ownership, and sustainability of any intervention and risks diverting scarce resources from where they are most needed. Experience has shown that while financial resources are vital, they alone cannot sustain the capacity-building process without comprehensive capacity development strategy. Technical cooperation and assistance may be appropriate in some instances to address short-term needs, but tend to be donor-driven and expensive, and to rely unduly on foreign expertise while sometimes distorting national priorities. Training, in particular, may have only short-term value unless it is accompanied by changes at other levels which enable the new skills to be used. Regarding financing, MDBs can play an important role in promoting regional development. Finally, regional transport strategies or roadmaps, similar to the [STI4SDG roadmaps](#), can be useful, strategic tools for fostering regional development, ensuring policy coherence, linking public and private actors, and optimizing investments.

Below are some examples of efforts undertaken by the UN Regional Commissions to boost regional development through sustainable transport:

In the Arab region, with the support of the Islamic Development Bank and in cooperation with UNECE, UNESCWA is developing a Geographic Information System (GIS) for transport networks and facilities in Arab countries, with a capacity-building component for the national focal points on the use of the GIS tool in the analysis of transport performance in relation with inclusive and sustainable development.

In Africa, UNECA is closely involved in transport planning at the national and regional levels, especially with regard to mainstreaming sustainable development into transport planning activities (e.g., building resilience of transport infrastructure to climate change).

In the case of Latin American and the Caribbean, the lack of institutional capacity and funding for implementing sustainable transport initiatives is a common challenge, but the emphasis and tools available to face these challenges differ among subregions. Recognizing these differences, the capacity-building actions implemented by UNECLAC promote a common approach for the design of transport and logistics systems as a way to achieve coherent and sustainable solutions regionally in a coordinated manner. For example, supporting national authorities in developing and applying a common system of classification of inland waterways; the implementation of a tool for self-assessment of connectivity in landlocked developing countries; or measurement of the transport infrastructure gap, are some of the

areas where a coordinated approach could bring more efficiency, resilience, and sustainability to the region.

One of the main issues that affect the continued development of countries in Asia and the Pacific are institutional shortcomings, such as the lack of a common vision among those who domestically make decisions on matters of infrastructure, transport and logistics and the absence of coordination and integration of policies that target these sectors. This is particularly evident in relation to SDGs implementation and mainstreaming across interdependent but functionally separate transport authorities. UNESCAP piloted an institutional strength measuring exercise in selected countries to help them measure progress and institutionalize information sharing and coordination across ministries, modal authorities, and industry in a self-sustained manner.

The primary focus of UNECE capacity development activities is to improve the capacities of Member States to accede to and efficiently implement United Nations inland transport legal instruments. Furthermore, capacity development activities are being pooled towards supporting achievement of transport-related SDGs, enhancing regional connectivity and inland transport competitiveness, and promoting sustainable mobility. UNECE streamlined national stakeholder policy dialogues on the removal of non-physical barriers to transport, promoted coordinated development of regional transport infrastructure and implemented a wide range of activities with the aim to assist Member States in developing national road safety systems and effectively improve national road safety records. In line with the ITC Strategy until 2030, the Inland Transport Committee has adopted the ITC Capacity Development Action Plan in February 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impact on the development of countries worldwide, including from a regional development perspective, triggering efforts by various actors, including the UN system. A joint project was, for example, developed by UNCTAD and the five UN Regional Commissions to help developing countries tackle trade and transport challenges from the pandemic. Among others, it aims to assist them in keeping transport networks and borders operational and facilitating the flow of goods and services, while containing the spread of the coronavirus. The project will also implement UN solutions, standards, guidelines, metrics, tools, and methodologies to help developing countries build transport, trade and logistics resilience in the wake of COVID-19.

III. Proposals for advancing progress in context of SDG Acceleration and Climate Action

Going forward, connectivity that is supported by efficient, economically viable, inclusive, safe, and sustainable transport systems, including sustainable transit systems and transport corridors, while enabling regional and interregional integration should be supported. This will help particularly in promoting the connectivity of developing countries, including countries in special situations, to regional and international markets. It will be important to build human capacity and skills and to mobilize and facilitate access to finance for balanced transport system, infrastructure and service development, digitalization, implementation, and maintenance for and across all modes of transport, including through PPPs. This could also be part of COVID-19 stimulus and recovery packages. Capacity-building should be participatory, needs-based, and designed with a focus on supporting achievement of the SDGs and climate action, while ensuring that the positive changes brought about are maintained after the end of a project, by increasing the ability of local implementing organizations or communities to use their new skills to evaluate their own performance and generate new improvements and

adaptations over time. To help accelerate progress towards the SDGs and climate action, the UN Regional Commissions and other UN entities should consider expanding robust capacity-building programmes and action plans, for example in the areas of eradicating poverty, leaving no one behind, improving road safety as well as climate change adaptation, mitigation and resilience-building, based on tailored capacity needs assessments. The United Nations has also a unique role to play in promoting cooperation, for example through legally binding instruments and inter-governmentally agreed recommendations in critical areas for regional development.

IV. Guiding questions

1. What are main elements of successful (multi-modal) transport systems and services supporting regional development? Are there best practice examples and how can these be scaled up and/or adapted to other regions?
2. How can regions, supported by multilateral development actors, including the UN Regional Commissions and MDBs, better align their transport-related programmes with the achievement of the SDGs and climate action?
3. How can the UN Regional Commissions further facilitate transport-supported regional development, including with regard to funding and capacity-building support?
4. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the role of sustainable transport in supporting regional development? What key areas and measures should be prioritized in the context of regional recovery from the pandemic and/or be strengthened to ensure resilience to possible future events, including pandemics, economic shocks, climate change and extreme weather events?

Programme

Co-Chairs:

- H.E. Mr. Wang Yang, Vice Minister of Transport, China
- Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, USG and Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Moderator:

- Mr. Umberto de Pretto, Secretary-General, International Road Transport Union

Panelists:

- Mr. François Davenne, Secretary General, International Union of Railways
- Ms. Karen Vancluysen, Secretary General, Polis
- Ms. Julie Kitcher, Executive Vice President, Communications and Corporate Affairs, Airbus
- Mr. Claude Van Rooten, President, World Road Association (PIARC)
- Ms. Wang Wei, Director, Institute for Market Economy, Development Research Center of the State Council, China

UN agencies:

- Ms. Isabelle Durant, Deputy Secretary-General, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
- Mr. Yarob Badr, Regional Advisor on Transport, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Other stakeholders:

- Mr. Yang Zhongmin, Executive Director, China Railway Economic and Planning Research Institute