

Expert Group Meeting on Sustainable Transport

Geneva, Switzerland, 22 – 23 November 2023
Capitalizing on the World Sustainable Transport Day, 24 November 2023
Co-organized by DESA and UNECE

KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The following key messages and recommendations emerged from the substantive discussions on **transport as an enabler of prosperity and livelihoods**:

- a) A positive, compelling, global vision is needed for the significant contribution that transport can make to equity, sustainability, resilience and climate change goals.
- b) Differentiation is required between the policies and measures necessary for the transformation of existing highly unsustainable transport systems and the building up of new sustainable transport systems.
- c) The essential role of transport in increasing access to opportunities to all people across socio-economic groups and abilities needs to be explicitly recognized and enabled. These opportunities include education, social services, economic activities, goods, and culture, among others.
- d) Transport provides essential services to all industries. The perspectives of these “customers” (e.g., cargo owners, logistics providers) need to be considered in the debate alongside the perspectives of transport service providers.
- e) The opportunities for transport to improve global health, reduce inequalities (for women, elderly, youth etc.), and address climate change should be optimized. Customers need high-quality, integrated transport systems that facilitate multi-modal and intermodal trips.
- f) Most of the world’s population continue to lack access to affordable, safe, sustainable transport, even as the demand for transporting people and goods is projected to increase substantially.
- g) A comprehensive suite of transport-related targets – related to policy, finance, infrastructure, technical, operational, capacity building aspects - is required to accelerate the deployment of sustainable transport solutions.¹
- h) Such a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) should help monitoring progress towards a common understanding and globally shared vision in the sustainable transport community. The UN system, its Member States and various stakeholders have an important role to play in this regard, and they should consider working towards clear accountability frameworks.

2. The following key messages and recommendations emerged from the substantive discussions on **inclusive and equitable transport systems**.

- a) Balancing social inclusion and economic viability of transport systems is important. This includes ensuring gender issues and inequalities between developing and developed countries.

¹ Examples of KPIs include: (a) infrastructure targets: kilometres of bus lanes per million urban population, maximum parking provision, kilometres of protected cycling lanes per million population, high speed rail on high density corridors, etc.; (b) technical targets: internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles (car, van, truck, vessel, aircraft) phase-out dates, one billion e-bikes by 2030, etc.); and (c) operational targets: 30 kilometres per hour urban speed limits, pedestrian-only zones, loading/unloading periods, etc.

Policies should consider a wider range of issues, including job security, quality employment, gender inclusivity, and support for local businesses.

- b) Technologies can play an important role in ensuring that transportation benefits society as a whole beyond private profits.
- c) At the same time, technologies are a source of rapid transformation of the transport sector, which calls for supporting measures to ensure that the transition is just and also serves the most vulnerable population groups. This requires public funding and significant collaborative efforts that also consider the unique challenges faced by different countries and regions. It requires investments to enable alternative livelihoods and specifically address the challenges posed by informal transport operations.
- d) Social protection and social security systems are needed, including to support the transition from informal to formal employment in the transport sector. Collaboration is needed at all levels of government, international organizations, workers' and employers' organizations, and to incorporate labour clauses in transport service agreements. In fact, transport workers should be recognized as “co-creators” of solutions and a source of innovation. Collective bargaining has proven a useful tool for engaging transport workers and ensuring their protection from harm and loss.
- e) Climate resilience should be an integral objective of transport policies. This requires identification of short- and long-term adaptation opportunities, prioritization of investments, funding, and capacity building in particularly vulnerable areas and populations.
- f) Innovative financing mechanisms are needed that provide low-interest loans and enable sustainable transport investments in the poorest parts of the world. Comprehensive national, regional, and local policies are needed that integrate seamlessly to address urgent priorities, including higher energy costs, workforce shortages, and investment in decarbonization.

3. The following key messages and recommendations emerged from the substantive discussions with regard to **comprehensive, coherent and context adapted approaches**:

- a) Integrated and collaborative approaches need to be adopted for transport planning and policymaking, based on systems thinking, breaking down silos among different sectors and promoting communication. These planning processes need to follow global environmental and labour standards, supply- and demand-side regulations, and be guided by equitable policies and solutions for developing and developed countries alike.
- b) A coherent set of policies across modes that benefit from complementary policies in other sectors is required. Transport policy impacts and is impacted by policies in many other sectors. Coordinated policy means lower costs and more and faster impact.
- c) Strategies to transform the transport and energy sectors are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. The transport sector needs to reduce its energy demand and shift away from its high dependency on fossil fuels. The energy sector needs to accelerate the deployment of renewable energy capacity and necessary infrastructure, like grids and charging infrastructure. This requires strong demand signals from key energy-consuming sectors like transport.
- d) Deep, rapid and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions are needed in the transport sector to limit global temperature increase to 1.5 °C. This requires accelerated action on clean infrastructure development and on zero- and low-emissions vehicles.
- e) The adaptation to climate change and the resilience of transport systems is essential for the resilience of economies and communities. Beyond the direct costs of climate-related damage to transport infrastructures, the monetary and human impacts of transport disruptions far exceed the physical damages to assets.

- f) A balanced approach to the avoid, shift and improve hierarchy of strategies is necessary for the transformations towards sustainable and low-carbon transport.
- g) For evidence-based decision making and planning, trends in key drivers of transport demand need to inform transport policies and measures. Such drivers include, for example, economics, population distribution, location of production and distribution, allocation of public space, and culture. Such evidence-driven decision-making can support optimal investment strategies, but they also require data collection mechanisms to be improved, especially on public transport. A global database for collecting and sharing best practices was suggested.
- h) Passenger transport and freight transport have different drivers (actors and economics) and these differences need to be transparently reflected in policies and measures.
- i) Increasing standards on vehicle energy efficiency (especially with internal combustion engines) are fundamental, including in the context of international trade in secondhand vehicles.
- j) The important role and needs of informal transport need to be explicitly recognized and enabling conditions created to allow integration of its services into the formal transport systems, improve worker's conditions, renew fleets, and ensure safer, cleaner and affordable operations.
- k) Road traffic deaths and injuries remain a major global health and development challenge. A safe system approach to road safety is required – which puts people and safety at the core of mobility systems.
- l) More investment is needed to close infrastructure gaps and support the expansion and shift to rail freight, public and active travel. Such investments should be eligible for grants and concessionary loans, and climate finance mechanisms markets. Lending and projects must be affordable and bankable.
- m) We need to go beyond the traditional cost-benefit analyses of the past. Using the principle of marginal social costs of the different transport modes to guide investments and prioritizing transport action according to social and environmental value for money should become the norm.
- n) Repurposing funds currently going towards fossil fuels subsidies in transport or other polluting activities towards more sustainable, low-emission and resilient transport of people and goods makes is an important way forward.
- o) Capacity building for governments, transport operators and other actors is needed to achieve effective transformation of mobility systems. This includes institutional capacity for effective national policies and strategies and broader governance, on data collection and monitoring, and importantly for industry.
- p) Bottom-up approaches can help identifying region-specific needs. They should prioritize the human element by focusing on workforce training and on the development of national plans and concrete legal instruments.

4. The following conclusions and recommendations emerged from the discussions on **future directions for UN system support to worldwide transformations towards sustainable, low carbon transport**:

- a) The UN's work on sustainable transport can be broadly guided by the principles for sustainable transport set out in the Rio+20 outcome document "The future we want" (para. 132 and 133) agreed by UN Member States in 2012. Efforts could focus on the safe, efficient, affordable, and clean modes that serve people's everyday needs. In this regard, particular

attention should be given to the interests of those who suffer from a lack of access to sustainable transport.

- b) A robust global collaboration framework for sustainable transport could go a long way to systematically engage stakeholders from all sectors, including academia, financial institutions, governments, and non-governmental organizations to collectively address challenges in sustainable transport.
- c) While most work on sustainable transport is best undertaken at the local, national and regional levels, some kind of UN system coordination mechanism on the global aspects of sustainable transport would be useful – whether as UN-transport or an informal arrangement.
- d) Such coordination needs to be accompanied by an appropriate stakeholder engagement platform, building on existing arrangements in this regard. In this regard, effective partnerships on sustainable transport innovations need to be forged among stakeholders, UN system and Member States.
- e) The present UN Expert Group Meeting on Sustainable Transport should be instituted as an annual global expert meeting to share experiences, take stock, develop strategies, and identify innovative policy options, including country-specific challenges such as those faced by nations in constant crisis.
- f) To build global awareness and momentum, a UN Special Envoy on Sustainable Transport could help spearheading UN initiatives with global relevance.
- g) A cooperative approach on the global aspects of sustainable transport could also help better connecting relevant UN intergovernmental processes and UN initiatives at regional and global levels and across economic sectors and global issues.²
- h) Transport and mobility should be better recognized in the annual reviews of the 2030 Sustainable Agenda on Sustainable development and its SDGs. A holistic approach to transport and mobility should be taken in developing a post-2030 framework.
- i) Instituting cooperation among UN system and leading academic institutions on sustainable transport scenarios and related tech futures could provide useful insights for global policy discussions, including for the UN action plans and the choice of key performance indicators on sustainable transport.
- j) The mandated UN High-Level Meeting on Sustainable Transport on 17 April 2024 should contribute to broad-based consultations on the UN Decade of Action on Sustainable Transport starting in 2026.
- k) Planning for the UN Decade of Action on Sustainable Transport Lessons could benefit from lessons learnt from the UN road safety campaign and from the energy agreement at COP28. In particular, an action plan for the Decade should articulate a shared vision, global goals and clear, measurable targets, in order to guide nationally determined actions.³ This could also provide the much needed impetus for improved data collection and literacy. It was also suggested to engage celebrities in the activities of the Decade to raise its profile.
- l) The 3rd UN Global Sustainable Transport Conference should set clear commitments for action and transparent tracking of progress, including towards the SDG targets, and inform the vision for an integrated sustainable transport and mobility system in a “post-2030” framework, explicitly acknowledging nexus opportunities across transport, health, energy and climate change.
- m) For the mandated World Sustainable Transport Day on 26th November, a dedicated budget from multi-stakeholder sources could be mobilized for high-impact activities, including capacity building actions.

² This includes the work of the long-standing work of Regional Commissions, the regional climate weeks, UN Climate Change Conferences COPs, UN Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience, UN Habitat processes, ILO’s guidelines and resolutions on social dialogue and just transition, the upcoming UNCTAD Global Supply Chains Forum 2024, and so on.

³ At UNFCCC COP28 an agreement was reached on global targets for tripling renewable energy capacity and doubling energy efficiency by 2030.