



Sustainable Transport Day at the SDG Pavillion

2024 United Nations Climate Change Conference

19 November 2024 | 9:00-10:30 | Baku, Azerbaijan

Opening Event Summary

In 2023, the General Assembly resolution 78/148 “Strengthening the links between all modes of transport to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals” called, among others, for closer UN cooperation on transport, a UN Decade of Sustainable Transport (2026-2035), and a Third UN Global Sustainable Transport Conference, and the celebration of the next World Sustainable Transport Day on 26 November 2024. The Member States also requested United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs to develop an Implementation Plan for the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport, in collaboration with the UN Regional Commissions and in consultation with the Member States, the United Nations system and all other relevant stakeholders.

On 19 November 2024, DESA organized a dedicated Sustainable Transport Day at the SDG Pavilion at COP29 to explore how the upcoming UN Decade of Sustainable Transport can support the transition to sustainable mobility systems, bolster climate action, and contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The day featured a series of panel discussions, keynote addresses, and interactive dialogues to identify key challenges, strategies, and opportunities for transforming global transport systems.

Opening Event

The Sustainable Transport Day was opened with video remarks by **Mr. Li Junhua**, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs. Mr. Li highlighted the critical role of sustainable transport in achieving the SDGs and in mitigating climate change, emphasizing that transport contributes nearly a quarter of global greenhouse gas emissions. He called for cleaner, inclusive, and resilient transport systems powered by renewable energy and improved urban planning. USG Li highlighted the ongoing stakeholder consultations for the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport's Implementation Plan, urging stakeholders to submit their inputs. He noted that the Implementation Plan should reflect all modes of transport,



maritime, aviation and inland transport, in a balanced manner. He also stressed that the plan would reflect the principle of “leaving no one behind”, highlighting, among other things, the role of women and girls both as transport users and as workers in the transport sector.

Mr. Dmitry Mariyasin, Deputy Executive Secretary, UN Economic Commission for Europe, represented all five UN Regional Commissions. He stressed that the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport is an opportunity to move from incremental progress to systemic change, as while transport can be a great enabler for SDG progress, it also causes challenges such as GHG emissions, air pollution, noise pollution, and traffic accidents. All stakeholders, Member States, UN system, civil society, academia and the private sector need to be involved in the UN Decade activities. Regarding ECE’s work, Mr. Mariyasin highlighted the recently adopted *Strategy on Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Inland Transport* of the Inland Transport Committee (ITC), and noted *Avoid-Shift-Improve* as an important policy approach. He also noted that ECE is more actively collaborating with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to discuss aligned strategies for decarbonizing all three major transport modes – aviation, maritime, and inland.

Panel Discussion – Fully Utilizing the UN Decade to Achieve the SDGs

Moderated by **Mr. Minoru Takeda**, Deputy Director, Secretariat of the UN Forum on Forest, the panel explored two guiding questions:

- What would a fully sustainable, climate-friendly transport system look like in the future?
- How can the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport boost efforts toward sustainable transport and climate action in an integrated fashion?

Ms. Anna Walters, Deputy Director, Climate Strategy and Coordination, UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office, emphasized the critical need to address transport as the fastest growing emitting sector globally. She stressed the need for sustainable transport systems that are risk-informed and backed by adequate investments and human resources. There is a need for multimodal, low-carbon, and safe transport services that encourage walking, cycling, and the use of public transport. Stressing the UN’s role, she called for aligning climate and development agendas and incorporating



transport into the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). She highlighted the UK's support for countries in achieving these goals through research and investment initiatives.

Mr. Fariz Aliyev, Head of the Transport Policy Department at Azerbaijan's Ministry of Digital Development and Transport, outlined Azerbaijan's efforts to advance sustainable and digital transport, aligning with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the UN Decade on Sustainable Transport (2026-2035). He highlighted key initiatives such as the Trans-Caspian corridor, improvements in digital logistics systems, and the Mobility Transformation Project, as well as ongoing efforts like tax exemptions for electric vehicles, investments in e-bus production, and the implementation of Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) for optimized routing and energy efficiency. Acknowledging the high costs of green transformation, Mr. Aliyev stressed the importance of fostering startups, innovation incubators, and policy-driven incentives to drive cost-effective and sustainable solutions. He also emphasized Azerbaijan's commitment to hydrogen-powered transport through its national hydrogen strategy, which aims to decarbonize sectors like maritime and aviation, with hydrogen reducing maritime emissions by 80% and aviation emissions by 50% by 2050. Mr. Aliyev concluded by underscoring Azerbaijan's role in facilitating green corridors, particularly the Middle Corridor, one of the lowest CO₂-emitting routes, and called for strengthened international cooperation to build sustainable, inclusive, and interconnected global transport systems.

Mr. Nicolas Peltier-Thiberge, Global Director, Transport Global Department, World Bank, underscored the disparities in global transport access and noted, among other things, that over 1 billion people worldwide still lack adequate access to an all-weather road. He stressed that transport actors must ensure that such inequalities are not exacerbated and referred to challenges such as export of used combustion engine (ICE) vehicles to developing countries and unbalanced burden of road traffic accidents globally. Mr. Peltier-Thiberge stressed that inadequate transport, particularly unsafe or inaccessible options, restricts women from entering the labor force and limits opportunities for economic growth. Mr. Peltier-Thiberge welcomed the UN Decade and noted that it can support integrated policy solutions, monitoring, dissemination of innovations and new collaborative partnerships. He also noted the vast needs for financing more sustainable and resilient transport solutions and stressed that public finance will not be sufficient to meet these needs. Blended finance and innovative solutions will be crucial for the transformation.



Mr. Jari Kauppila, Head of Secretary-General's Office, International Transport Forum (ITF), stressed that the UN Decade can help transport actors form a shared vision for sustainable transport. He emphasized the need to develop transport systems that are safe, clean, resilient and provide equal opportunity and access for all. This vision prioritizes walking, cycling, shared mobility, public transport and the use of renewable energy. Mr. Kauppila also highlighted the importance of advancing sustainable fuels in hard-to-electrify sectors such as maritime and aviation. He stressed that transport is a significant global employer, with the potential to create more job opportunities through green transitions. He emphasized that the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport must focus on delivering actionable outcomes, leveraging existing tools and knowledge to drive immediate progress.

Panel Discussion – Forward-Looking Priority Setting for Integrated Challenges

Moderated by **Mr. Minoru Takeda**, Deputy Director, Secretariat of the UN Forum on Forest, the panel explored two guiding questions:

- How should climate change be addressed in the implementation plan of the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport? How can the plan avoid thematic silos while highlight priority action areas?
- In what ways can the Implementation Plan benefit from foresight and scenario modeling to ensure forward-looking policy guidance?

Ms. Maruxa Cardama, Secretary General, SLOCAT Partnership on Sustainable Low Carbon Transport, outlined seven priority impacts SLOCAT would propose for the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport. These include fostering a conversation that resonates and engages all UN member states; creating a clear vision that engages all actors from transport users, service providers, and the communities; generating open data to address critical gaps and enable evidence-based policymaking; integrating transport with other sectors such as health and energy for holistic solutions; leveraging additional and better financing; enhancing interagency coordination; and involving transport ministers in the conversations at the UN Headquarters. In addition, Ms. Cardama highlighted six cross-cutting priority areas for the decade's implementation including ensuring the right to safe, affordable, and clean mobility; supporting decent jobs and livelihoods within the green economy; and building institutional capacity. Ms. Cardama also stressed the need to build



on existing initiatives and referred to the Global Solidarity Levies Task Force. The Task Force stressed that large swathes of the global economy—including maritime, aviation, fossil fuels, and plastics—remain untaxed or are taxed low despite their significant environmental impacts. Modest levies in these sectors could raise substantial funds to address gaps in the climate finance conversation.

Ms. Rana Adib, Executive Director, REN21, underscored the urgent need for the transport sector to transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy. She noted that the sector is responsible for 30 per cent of global energy consumption, with only 4 per cent derived from renewables. She emphasized the need to re-think the building blocks of our economies, not merely aiming at changing fuels. There is a need to re-think our supply chains, financial systems, industrial hubs, and trade, with aligned infrastructure such as railways, electric grids, and green corridors in order to integrate energy and transport systems more effectively. Ms. Adib also stressed that external costs, benefits from active transport, and the avoided costs of investing in climate adaptation are not reflected in our current models. Ms. Adib noted that regional approaches often allow for better integration of infrastructure development, transport, industrialization, and job creation. There is a need to build regional hubs that can provide the skills needed and foundations for such transformational systems.

Mr. Bas van Ruijven, Research Group Leader, IIASA, advocated for a systemic approach to transport planning, cautioning against siloed strategies within the *Avoid-Shift-Improve* framework. He emphasized the role of shared mobility in reducing material consumption and the need for new business models that fully account for environmental externalities. Mr. van Ruijven presented recent work published by IIASA, which explored three pathways for achieving sustainable development goals. The first scenario focused on *green growth* driven by high urbanization and megacities, leveraging advanced technology and dense urban planning to foster sustainability. The second scenario emphasized *resilient communities* centered around small-scale living, prioritizing local solutions and civil society-driven approaches to sustainability. The third scenario, termed *commons management*, envisioned governments taking the lead in regulating and managing shared resources to create sustainable futures. He noted that such scenarios can help us see transport within more sustainable futures in a more integrated manner.



Ms. Marie Owens Thomsen, Senior Vice President of Sustainability and Chief Economist, International Air Transport Association (IATA), highlighted aviation’s integral role in global connectivity and in making all forms of transport accessible at the global scale. Ms. Thomsen referred to ICAO’s market-based initiative, CORSIA, which requires airlines to offset carbon emissions by purchasing credits. She stressed that for aviation to fully comply with these obligations, countries should release the necessary credits under the agreement. Additionally, she emphasized the urgent need for increased sustainable aviation fuels (SAFs) production, urging governments to prioritize and incentivize SAF development to meet the growing demand and to support decarbonization in the aviation industry.