

Meeting: Lunch Meeting and Panel Discussion on Sustainable Transport: An essential building block for Sustainable Development
Date: 19 November 2012
Venue: Netherlands Mission
Attendees: Permanent Representatives and delegates of several UN Missions, UN-bodies and experts

INTRODUCTION

The Permanent Representative (PR) of the Netherlands, Herman Schaper, opened the lunch meeting by explaining the purpose of the meeting. After the UN Bike Ride, which the Netherlands Mission organized last June together with a number of organizations with expertise on sustainable transport (SloCaT, Dutch Cycling Embassy, UN DESA, ITDP) several delegations and organizations showed an interest in a follow-up within the UN. Two suggestions were made in particular: to start a Group of Friends on Sustainable Transport (GoF ST), and/or to introduce a resolution on sustainable transport in the General Assembly.

The Netherlands, together with the co-organizers of the bike ride and the Mission of Thailand, therefore decided to explore the interest among Member States and UN-bodies in promoting a discussion in New York on sustainable transport as an integral part of the broader development agenda. The overall aim would be to raise the awareness among UN Delegations of the importance of sustainable transport, and to exchange information, ideas and views, best practices etc.

Two entry points for such a discussion present themselves:

1. The debate on the post-2015 development agenda, in particular the discussions on possible Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Opportunities for input i.a.: the SG's High Level Panel of Eminent Persons, which will produce its report end of May 2013, and secondly, the Working Group of the General Assembly on SDGs.
2. The SG's intention as announced in his Action Agenda for his second term: "to convene aviation, marine, ferry, rail, road and urban public transport providers, along with Governments and investors, to develop and take action on recommendations for more sustainable transport systems that can address rising congestion and pollution worldwide, particularly in urban areas".

DISCUSSION

The subsequent discussion was kicked off by a panel with four speakers:

1. Mr. Nikhil Seth, Director of Sustainable Development Division, UN-DESA;
2. Mr. Samuel Tumiwa, Deputy Regional Director, Asian Development Bank (North American Representative Office)
3. Ms. Virginia Tanase, Senior Transport Specialist, Transport, Water, Information & Communication Technologies, World Bank Group
4. Mr. Ramon Cruz, Sustainable Development Program Manager at Institute of Transportation and Development Policy

Points made by the panelists and in the discussion were i.a.:

1. Three arguments were advanced to start a Group of Friends:
 - A structural dialogue between Missions at a high level would raise awareness and the level of knowledge of Missions concerning ST, which is the basis for action
 - A GoF would facilitate the dialogue on ST between the Secretariat and Missions
 - A GoF would also provide a platform for a dialogue between the "transport community" and Missions
2. On substance 5 main areas of attention were suggested:
 - Access
 - Efficiency
 - Safety
 - Reliability
 - De-carbonization

It was also suggested that a GoF could be a forum to work on:

- Definition, as ST is a cross cutting issue, with many dimensions
- Targets
- Indicators/benchmarks

In response it was argued that the CSD19 paper provides a good starting point for a definition, and that indicators need to be universally acceptable.

3. Other points made were i.a. that:

- The focus should not be exclusively on ST in the context of urbanization.
- That this context should be first of all climate change.
- Transport, and the debate on ST, is of particular importance for the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), who depend on tourism and trade, and also for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs).
- ST should also have a social component, including affordability.
- There is a risk in the discussion on ST that the positive effects of transport would be neglected.
- Buy-in at the country level of the concept of ST is essential.

4. On the role of the development banks it was pointed out that:

- These banks increasingly recognize that the traditional focus on building infrastructure needs to be replaced by a broader approach.
- The Asian Development Bank, together with other banks, committed to \$175 billion of investments in sustainable transport in the next 10 years, with the aim to reduce poverty, environmental pollution and urban congestion, and with equity, access and safety as key points.
- The World Bank has focused on road safety and projects to improve the quality of the transport services and industry. ("safe, clean and affordable transport for development")

5. Several remarks were made on the question whether or not to aim for an SDG on sustainable transport:

- Sustainable transport could be a separate goal or part of a goal.
- Another possibility could be a cluster of SDGs, linking separate issues amongst ST.
- If sustainable transport is not a goal, it can at least be an enabler of other goals.

6. On the question what would be good subjects for further discussions between interested Missions, UN-bodies and experts, the subject most often mentioned was 'how ST could contribute to poverty eradication?'

Other topics mentioned were i.a. the cross-cutting nature of ST, the relationship between (sustainable) transport and climate change, energy security and ST, alternative technologies, capacity building, and aviation and maritime issues.

7. The Netherlands PR concluded that the idea of a GoF seemed viable, but that issues like composition, agenda etc. needed to be further discussed with Missions that showed interest.

Possible next step could be discussion with interested PRs, UN-bodies, banks and experts, on the contribution ST can make to poverty eradication.

On the suggestion of a UN General Assembly resolution on sustainable transport, the consensus was that this merits discussion, but that this would take some time to materialize.