OUTCOME REPORT

Side event of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on sustainable development – under the auspices of ECOSOC

Pathways to sustainable development: the nexus of energy, urban planning and transport in Asia and the Pacific

Conference Room 8, UN HQ, New York, Friday, 14 July 2023, 8:00 – 9:30 am
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The transport sector is one of the most challenging sectors to set on a low-carbon and sustainable pathway. Over 90 per cent of the energy used for transport is derived from oil products, making it crucial to reduce CO₂ emissions to limit global warming to 1.5°C and achieve net-zero carbon by 2050.

Annual transport CO₂ emissions need to decrease by at least 3 per cent, however, they have been increasing by nearly 2 per cent per year from 1990 to 2021, surpassing other sectors. Even if all transport mitigation commitments were fully implemented, global CO₂ emissions from transport would still increase by 16 percent by 2050 from 2015 levels.

At the side event, speakers from the United States of America and Thailand presented their national commitments to UNFCCC as well as the underlying strategies to transition to a low carbon pathway. Their plans focus on green and clean transport technologies, increased efficiency of transport solutions, community and land-use approaches that prioritize convenient access, as well as inclusivity. Key actions items include a shift to electric mobility enhanced opportunities for transportation choice over single occupancy vehicle trips. Collaboration across the energy and urban planning sectors and the integration of all stakeholders remain key elements to delivering on national decarbonization commitments.

During the panel discussion, speakers highlighted the importance of localization to promote delivery of the SDGs and contribute to more sustainable urban development. They proposed city-level policies to promote the use of green fuels, renewable energy, expand the transportation system in line with national government policy, provide tax incentives and awards schemes. From an industry point of view, electric vehicles have to play a critical role in the transition to low carbon transport, while alternative technical solutions (such as hydrogen) should also be considered. Finally, speakers urged the audience to consider that electric mobility and compact urban development, which facilitates walking and cycling, must go hand in hand to deliver on the commitments of the Paris Agreement.

PURPOSE

This side event explored the nexus between energy, urban planning, transport, and the link to SDGs 7 and 11. The meeting reviewed the shared strategies, ongoing initiatives, and specific examples for decarbonizing urban transport in Asia and the Pacific. A panel of discussants for the session elaborated and provided insights on how localization of the SDGs can contribute to more sustainable urban development, including decarbonization initiatives and identifying a range of energy policy approaches – including enhancing the efficiency and renewable energy contribution to freight and passenger transport through approaches such as mode shifting and electrification.
OPENING REMARKS

Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana

Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP

The nexus of energy, urban planning and transport in Asia and the Pacific in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

- When exploring the nexus of energy, urban planning and transport to accelerate climate action, the critical role of transport in reducing emissions in the Asia-Pacific region has to be emphasized.

- Without changes in policies, carbon emissions from the transport sector could increase by up to 50 per cent by 2050.

- The Asia-Pacific region accounts for 27 per cent of transport emissions; if all transport commitments were fully implemented, global carbon emissions would still increase by 16 per cent.

- Swift action beyond the transport sector is needed, including integrated urban planning and energy generation and distribution.

- The transport sector needs to rapidly shift away from its reliance on fossil fuels.

- Urban centres are key for action related to decarbonization as urban populations are projected to increase by more than 1 billion people by 2050.

- ESCAP is contributing to decarbonization through the Regional Cooperation Mechanism on Low Carbon Transport and the Asia-Pacific Initiative on Electric...
Mobility, which promote low-carbon transport, and a shift to electric mobility and clean energy.

Mr. Dmitry Mariyasin
Deputy Executive Secretary UNECE

UNECE's policies, strategies and activities on sustainable transport, urban planning and energy

- Transport accounts for about 40% of CO2 emissions by end-use sectors globally. To achieve the green energy goal, it is necessary to electrify transport.

- UN Inland Transport Committee (ITC) of UNECE plays an important role in terms of providing agreements and regulations for inland transport systems for member states and has published a strategy to reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions.

- Transport decarbonization is an essential component in overall climate change mitigation.

- In the UNECE region, the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP) aims to bring different ministries together and build sustainable, accessible and inclusive urban planning. More specifically, transport plays a crucial role in this case, as sound urban planning is used to facilitate urban mobility.

- The PEP’s goal is to improve environmental and health policies and its objective is enhanced coordinated transport, including cycling and walking. The policy aims at making cities more liveable and walkable.

- Digitalization offers the possibility to develop a more efficient transport system. This will have long-term benefits for urban planning, especially on public transportation.

- Promotion of an integrated public transport system is needed to comply with the Geneva UN Charter on sustainable housing which is supported by the UNECE. Public transportation has been seen as the key element for creating a ‘liveable city’ and so sufficient resources should be provided by local and national governments.
Finance scaling up is necessary to enable investment in mobility, transport and energy systems.

Although the current GHG emissions are decreasing, meeting the objectives will remain challenging.

The national blueprint for transportation decarbonization provides a viable, realistic pathway for the goal of complete decarbonization to be achieved. The main elements of this strategy are: Increasing convenience, improving efficiency, and providing cleaner options.

Increasing convenience involves the implementation of system-level and design solutions, such as the carbon reduction program, safe street and roads for all project, and reconnecting community program, for which $6.4 billion, $6 billion and $1 billion have been invested, respectively.

The efficiency aspect stresses the provision of high-quality public transportation, improvements in energy efficiency (zero emission vehicles (EV)) of all vehicle types and incentives for less carbon-intensive options and shared mobility. In detail, public transportation has been targeted for up to $108 billion in investment. $5 billion are being provided to the EV charging infrastructure through the National EV...
infrastructure formula program. Another $2.5 billion will be invested through the Charging and Fueling Infrastructure Discretionary Grant Program.

- Clean energy focuses on transition to zero emission vehicles and fuels, ensure 100% federal fleet procurement to be zero-emission by 2027. The DOT invested $2 billion in the Low Carbon Transportation Material Grant Program.

- The U.S. government promotes cross department cooperation to achieve the overall climate strategy. The agencies include Department of Energy (DOE), Department of Transportation (DOT) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

VOICE OF THE MEMBER STATES: Thailand's pathway to accelerate transport sector decarbonization and collaboration with ESCAP under the Regional Cooperation Mechanism for Low Carbon Transport

Dr. Chayatan Phromsorn
Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Transport Thailand

- Addressing the impact of global climate change cannot be done by
any single state. Thailand attaches importance to the Sustainable Development Goals. Thailand aims to reach carbon neutrality in 2050 and Net Zero Emissions by or before 2065.

- At COP21, Thailand committed to 20% reduction by 2030; At COP26, Thailand proposed carbon neutrality by 2050; By 2030, the overall GHG emissions are set to reduce by 111 MtCO₂, of which transportation will contribute 41 MtCO₂ reduction.

- Transport in Thailand faces significant challenges, such as severe traffic congestion in cities, air pollution and unsafe driving/operating conditions.

- Thailand’s Transportation Development Strategy consists of 3 pillars: Green and Safe Transport, Transport Efficiency, Inclusivity.

- The Ministry of Transportation (MoT) aims to facilitate the movement of people and goods by providing choices of transport that are convenient, safe, punctual and come at a reasonable price.

- Modal shift targets have been identified for both urban and intercity transport and include shifting traffic from private car to public transport for urban; and from trucks towards waterways and railway for intercity transport.

- To achieve these targets the MRT will expand significantly by 2029. Meanwhile, the MoT is also promoting electric buses. Bangkok already has 2,000 E-buses in operation, planning to purchase another 2,000; and utilise waterways in Bangkok, including an EV boat system.

- Reshaping the intercity rail system is another priority, as the current rail system is still 80% single-track. Completion of a double-track network is planned by 2026. Freight logistics capacity should be increased, improving overall efficiency and reducing emissions.

- The MoT is working to enhance rail connectivity and to integrate rail and motorways. Measures to promote cross-border transport include high-speed rail, motorways and double-track rail. The transition will improve the global supply chain through a land bridge connecting the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand.
• The MoT will promote international cooperation, enhancing collective partnership among countries and regional cooperation through the MR-MAP corridors, which will integrate rail and motorways.

• Regional approach provides the framework for mutual learning and collaboration, overcoming common challenges and seizing opportunities for SDGs. The partnership with UNESCAP fosters regional cooperation and enables member states to overcome common challenges for sustainable development together.

today’s commitments to deliver on SDGs 7 and 11?

Ms. Norliza Hashim
Chief Executive, Urbanice Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Cities and Community Well-Being, Malaysia

Malaysia’s Urban planning and localization efforts to transition to low-carbon urban futures

• Malaysia has actively integrated urban planning and localization to transfer to a low-carbon society.

• Malaysia has experienced high carbon emissions which are mostly from urbanization and around 70% of urban emissions are from the transport and building sectors.

• Data reflects the urgent need to transition to public transport.

• Malaysia committed in its Nationally Determined Contribution to a 45% emission reduction and has further committed to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

• A range of policies have been implemented which include regulation and tools promoting low
carbon cities framework and a national roadmap for low-carbon cities.

- The low carbon goals for Malaysia are urban planning, community participation and multi-governance, and implementation.

Mr. Nelson S. Legacion
Mayor, Naga City Government, Philippines

Naga City’s decarbonization experience across energy, urban planning and transport sectors

- Naga is a city governance unit working on the city’s decarbonization under the national government’s authorization.

- In 2015, ADB chose Naga for the local climate action plan, details included developing a GHG inventory, in which energy and transport represented 40% of local GHG emissions.

- The city adopted a series of policies promoting the use of green fuels, adoption of renewable energy, expansion of the transportation system under the framework of the national government, tax incentives and awards schemes to encourage the construction of green buildings, as well as the promotion of EVs including jeepneys.

- Naga will follow up with another GHG inventory to measure the progress.

Mr. Jens Hügel
Senior Adviser, International Road Transport Union (IRU)

Decarbonization perspectives from the private sector – strategies for road transport

- Representing the commercial road transport industry globally, IRU highlighted the essential role of road transport. IRU underlined that the sole focus on Electric vehicles (EV) reduces the chance for scaling up quickly already existing decarbonisation solutions including longer and heavier vehicles, driver training, fleet renewal and the use of collective passenger transport by buses and coaches.

- While transitioning to green energy sources which is crucial to make BEV really Zero Emission vehicles, strong disruptive political will is needed to
scale up existing pragmatic decarbonisation solutions that are technology neutral, realistic and regionally tailored, as called for in IRU’s Green Compact industry commitment.

Ms. Heather Thompson
Chief Executive Officer, Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP)

ITDP’s research on public transports’ impact on global warming

- Highlighted ITDP’s history of advocacy for sustainable low-carbon transport. Referenced a key study by ITDP on whether the 1.5°C target of the Paris Agreement is achievable by focusing on electrification vs. compact urban development. Concluded that either alone is not enough, both must be implemented to achieve the Paris target. A key focus is more movement of people by public transport (buses, rail).

- Important to scale up public transport such as buses and rail. Accelerate compact city development including integration of public transport, walking and cycling, and keeping vehicles within cities to a minimum and transitioning those totally to EV.

- Emphasized the need to move faster and leverage financial commitments and investments. Cities which rely on support from the national government must be further supported to improve local systems, including mass transit but also walking and biking infrastructure. Investments in cycling have a 17:1 benefit/cost.

- Transit-oriented development (co-locating uses, and mixed-use development that reduce the need for movement) is a significant opportunity.
Closing remarks

The challenge of containing global warming at 1.5°C and achieving net-zero carbon by 2050 demands a clear, ambitious decarbonization plan and decisive action. Transport in Asia and the Pacific is a major contributor to CO2 emissions, accounting for 27% — above the global average. Urban transport demand is particularly high, making up 40% of all transport activity in the region in 2015 and representing a significant share of energy use (18% in 2020, mainly from petroleum products). Without action, SDGs 7 and 11 become unattainable, requiring collaboration beyond the transportation sector involving energy and urban planning.

The side event focused on the nexus of energy, urban planning, and transport in the Asia-Pacific region, aiming to propose strategies for the delivery of SDGs 7 and 11. Representatives from Member States outlined their strategies and commitments for this complex scenario. Prominent themes included increasing transport efficiency, using cleaner energy, promoting electric mobility, and transitioning away from road transport. Cross-departmental cooperation was emphasized as vital for meeting national decarbonization commitments.

The panel discussion underscored the importance of localization in achieving SDGs. Speakers offered detailed cases and policy advice, such as improving transportation efficiency, shifting to electric mobility and promoting greener energy in transport. The event aimed to contribute to the development of regional dialogues on energy, urban development, and transport, involving stakeholders from national governments, local authorities, civil society, city networks and UN entities.

The outcomes of this event will be incorporated into other regional dialogues, including the Regional Cooperation Mechanism on Low Carbon Transport, the Asia-Pacific Climate Week, and the 8th Asia-Pacific Urban Forum, thereby engaging a diverse range of stakeholders.