MESSAGES FROM THE UNITED NATIONS REGIONAL COMMISSIONS ON SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

WORLD SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT DAY

#SustainableTransportDay
Transport at the Heart of Sustainable Development

Transport accounts for about one-quarter of global energy-related carbon dioxide emissions and is at a crossroads. It is a challenging sector to set on a sustainable, low-carbon pathway, as more than 90 per cent of its energy is derived from oil products. At the same time, the world recognizes the important role of transport in supporting economic growth, facilitating global supply chains, enhancing international cooperation and trade, in connecting people and communities to jobs, schools and health care and in the delivery of goods and services to rural and urban communities, thus providing all with equal opportunities and leaving no one behind.

Ensuring access to efficient, safe, and inclusive mobility with a much smaller climate footprint is key to getting back on track on the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

The UN Regional Commissions undertake regulatory work and policy research, provide platforms for dialogue and knowledge sharing and leverage regional cooperation to spearhead initiatives aimed at enhancing sustainable, socially inclusive and resilient transport systems in the regions. In line with this mandate, the UN Regional Commissions are commemorating the first World Sustainable Transport Day with this overview of our work on selected topics of sustainable transport.
Our Common Messages

Challenges

Transport is estimated to contribute every fourth ton of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions globally and is one of the top emitting sectors in all regions, with a tendency to grow further on the back of economic growth and development.

Fossil-fuel based road transport remains the dominant mode of transport in all regions, due to lack of viable alternatives.

Road safety remains a major challenge in all regions. Globally, road crashes cause 1.3 million preventable deaths and 50 million injuries each year, 93% of which occur in low- and middle-income countries.

Underdeveloped infrastructure, especially in rail, inland waterways and intermodal terminals/dry ports, hinders opportunities for modal shift. Investments in infrastructure and in physical and operational measures to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of transport systems, especially in freight, remain insufficient.

Recommendations and opportunities for action

- Developing low carbon pathways for transport is critical to set the sector back on track to deliver on the 2030 Agenda and the commitments of the Paris Agreement.
- Strong alignment with the energy sector is essential to promote low-carbon transport ecosystems, including through the transition to electric mobility and the development of low emission fuels.
- Improving road safety calls for long-term commitment and action by governments. The Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021-2030 has set an ambitious target of preventing at least 50% of road traffic deaths and injuries by 2030 and provides the framework for the UN and its partners’ efforts to support countries’ in their road safety efforts, following the Safe System Approach.
- Digitalization, innovation and technology are key enablers for fostering connectivity, lowering transaction costs and making transport systems more efficient and reliable.
- Integration of mobility planning with urban planning, while taking due account of the principles of just transition, gender equality and social inclusion, is a key lever for increasing efficiency and environmental performance of urban transport systems.
- Achieving an environmentally sustainable modal share for rail and inland waterways requires prioritization of investments in transport infrastructure.
- Transport and logistics connectivity can unlock economic, social and environmental opportunities for least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS).
Regional policy priorities, challenges and opportunities for sustainable transport

Roads are the predominant mode of transport in Africa, carrying at least 80% of goods and around 90% of passengers. Limited rail transport and the high costs of air transport leave road transport as the only viable alternative for freight in most countries. Transport contributed nearly one-quarter (24%) of total CO2 emissions in Africa in 2021, with the region’s transport CO2 emissions having increased to 34% between 2010 and 2021, the second highest regional growth rate after Asia. Traffic deaths account for about one quarter of the global number of victims, even though the continent has the lowest motorisation rate globally.

The main challenges facing the transport sector in Africa include lack of integrated planning across transport modes, insufficient data on transport systems, poor transport infrastructure and access, and the highest road fatality rates globally.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa's (ECA) work on sustainable transport is guided by, among other frameworks, the Africa Union Agenda 2063 which seeks to achieve a modern, environmentally friendly and socially inclusive intermodal transportation system that connects cities and production hubs.

In advancing the priorities of the AU Agenda 2063, limited resource availability to ramp up sustainable transport infrastructure and attendant services in rail, road, and inland water ways remains a persistent challenge.

ECA’s work on transport is anchored around three areas, namely railway connectivity, digitalisation of African corridors and the Trans-African Highway Network, as well as improving road safety.

Transformative initiatives addressing sustainable transport issues

The Kofi Annan Road Safety Award: With the primary objective of motivating key stakeholders to develop and implement innovative and outstanding ideas and initiatives to save lives on Africa's roads, the Kofi Annan Road Safety Award is jointly initiated by ECA and the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for Road Safety. The first two annual Awards were held in Ghana in 2022 and in Morocco in 2023. The Award has already established itself as the top annual road safety event on the continent contributing to innovation, the sharing of experience and knowledge as well as motivation in terms of road safety.

The African Road Safety Action Plan for the Decade 2021-2030: In the context of the Implementation of the Action Plan, ECA supported the establishment of road safety centre of excellence; the development of the road safety strategy for the Kingdom of Eswatini; development of the road safety action plan for The Gambia; capacity building...
for stakeholders; support to the African Union Commission on the implementation of the African Road Safety Action Plan and Second UN Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021-2030.

**Digitalisation of corridors (rail/roads):** ECA works with member States and corridor management organisations to harness innovative technology to improve the efficiency of regional transport corridors. The work relies on satellite imagery and artificial intelligence to assess the condition of transport corridors in the context of the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) and the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). ECA has worked with the Centre for Transport and Logistics of the Sapienza University of Rome to implement a pilot project on the LAPSSET Corridor (Lamu Port – South Sudan - Ethiopia Transport Corridor).

**Railway connectivity:** The AU Agenda 2063 designates the Africa Integrated High-Speed Railway Network Project as a priority flagship project. Railways are also crucial for the complete realization of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), particularly for cost-effective and environmentally friendly transportation of large quantities of goods over long distances. ECA is supporting the shift from road transport to rail and is strongly advocating for the Africa railway renaissance and for the ratification of The Luxembourg Rail Protocol to achieve a drastic shift from high-carbon, greenhouse-gas emitting modes of transport to railway.
Regional policy priorities, challenges and opportunities for sustainable transport

The Arab region possesses a core road network, spanning more than 41,000 kilometers, ensuring land connectivity between Arab countries. However, railway connectivity is currently lacking, with missing links constituting approximately 60% of the required railway network length needed to interconnect Arab countries.

The predominance of road transport as the main mode ensuring land connectivity in the Arab region comes with severe impact on sustainable development such as increased cost of transport, effects on air pollution and the environment coupled with high cost of social and health consequences of road traffic crashes.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) supports tackling challenges on sustainable transport including through the development of the ESCWA Integrated Transport System between the Arab States (ITSAS) to guide the integration of various means of transport, to boost trade and legal instruments for the development of international road and rail links between the Arab States. Additionally, ESCWA has produced several technical papers and capacity-building activities related to the links between transport modes and the Sustainable Development Goals when preparing transport strategic planning, taking into consideration the role of innovation and technology in the development of safe and sustainable land transport in the Arab countries.

In advancing sustainable transport in the Arab region, it is important to enhance the capacity of the Ministries of Transport and their auxiliary bodies towards strategic planning of sustainable transport in the long-term support innovative solutions for the development and operation of rail and other clean energy transport modes considering the fiscal shortage faced by many Arab governments and the competing developmental priorities.

Transformative initiatives addressing sustainable transport issues

Under the framework of the Integrated Transport System in the Arab States (ITSAS), ESCWA has elaborated several initiatives to support the development of sustainable transport in the Arab region:

A parliamentary paper on “Transport and the Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab Region”, mapping the interlinkages between transport performances and the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The paper aims at assisting the Ministries of Transport in the Arab region to incorporate transport issues in their national programs and plans for sustainable development.

A report on “Technology and Innovation for the Development of Land Transport in Arab Countries”, focusing on the transformative role of technology in land transport. The report examines, in a holistic manner, provision of appropriate communications infrastructure and the requirements for the safe use of technology, legal and regulatory environment, capacity and skills development, innovation, budget allocation, and private sector participation in the transport sector.

A report on Land Electric Mobility in the Arab Region: Options and Opportunities, focusing predominantly on e-mobility on land. The report discusses the accelerating increase of electric vehicles, trucks and other road vehicles including micro-mobility, electric buses and public transport systems.

A parliamentary paper on “Safe, accessible, efficient and affordable transport systems as enablers of women’s economic empowerment” was developed, discussing transport from two perspectives: transport as a service leading to women’s empowerment and transport as a sector with potential to promote women’s employability. It also addresses barriers affecting mobility and gender gaps, and explores economic, social, and
psychological dimensions and gaps in gender data.

ESCWA and UNECE co-organized the "Mediterranean Conference for Raising awareness on adaptation of transport infrastructure to climate change and on setting up an effective intervention programme". Held in May 2023, the conference emphasized the importance of using climate projections effectively to assess future climate impacts on transport systems and adaptation measures to prevent future transport disruptions.

ESCWA, with the support of the Islamic Development Bank, is developing a “Geographic Information System for Transport Networks and Facilities in the Arab region”. This project aims to develop a web portal for the follow up of the implementation of ESCWA agreements on international roads and railways in the Arab States. In this context, ESCWA organized several in person and online workshops to train focal points from Arab countries on GIS tools.

ESCWA, with the support of the United Nations Road Safety Fund, is developing the Arab Integrated Road Safety Observatory, AIRSO. This project aims to assist ESCWA member States to design and implement evidence-based policies, strategies and plans of action to achieve the global targets of the UN Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021-2030 and SDG 3.6, by monitoring road crashes, enhancing cooperation and exchange of information, methodologies, and good practices.

ESCWA partnership with UNRSF, IsDB and WB provided support to reach regional consensus of AIRSO national coordinators from 11 Arab countries, Beirut, 7-8 March 2023
Regional policy priorities, challenges and opportunities for sustainable transport

Home to more than two thirds of the world’s population, Asia-Pacific has transitioned from a historical production centre to an epicentre of consumption and mobility. The region concentrates two thirds of global seaborne trade, and accounts for more than 40 per cent of global surface freight transport flows. Negative externalities will continue to rise as passenger and freight demand in the region are set to grow significantly alongside economic growth. Transport in Asia and the Pacific is by some estimates, already contributing more than 40% of the global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from the sector.

Road traffic fatalities in Asia and the Pacific accounted for almost 60% of the global death toll in 2019. One person is killed in a road crash every 44 seconds in the region.

Attaining the Sustainable Development Goals will also be largely influenced by the progress made by the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), which comprise 30 of the 53 ESCAP Member States.

The work of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) on transport is guided by the Regional Action Programme on Sustainable Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific (RAP) (2022-2026), which was adopted by the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Transport in 2021. The Programme is thematically centred around seven areas of work: (i) Regional land transport connectivity and logistics; (ii) Maritime and interregional transport connectivity; (iii) Digitalization of transport; (iv) Low-carbon mobility and logistics; (v) Urban transport; (vi) Road safety; and (vii) Inclusive transport and mobility.

Transformative initiatives addressing sustainable transport issues

ESCAP is supporting its member States on, among others, the following key priorities:

Regional Cooperation Mechanism on Low Carbon Transport: Established in 2022, the mechanism provides a platform for multi-stakeholder engagement, enabling the identification and implementation of low-carbon transport goals. Member-States engage in peer-to-peer exchange on implementing their Nationally Determined Contributions, green transport corridors and sustainable transport financing. Alongside the mechanism, the Asia Pacific Initiative on Electric Mobility further supports 19 participating member-States with technical training and capacity building to facilitate the transition to electric vehicles, with a special focus on public transport.

Intergovernmental Agreements on Transport Connectivity: ESCAP is leveraging the regional transport network, formalized by the Intergovernmental Agreements on the Asian Highways, trans-Asian Railways and dry ports to pursue a broad sustainability agenda. Going beyond the initial infrastructure connectivity objectives, the intergovernmental Working Groups set up by
the agreements increasingly consider the issues of environmentally friendly and resilient infrastructure, efficient and resilient logistics and social aspects of connectivity. Beyond land-transport, ESCAP has launched a regional dialogue to promote and support policy measures towards sustainable maritime connectivity.

**Regional Plan of Action for Asia and the Pacific for Road Safety:** In line with the corresponding Global Plan, ESCAP supported its member States in the development of its Regional Plan of Action for Asia and the Pacific for the Second Decade of Action for Road Safety (2021-2030) with the vision of achieving an Asia-Pacific region increasingly free of the human suffering and economic burden of road crash deaths and injuries. The Regional Plan of Action focuses the region’s efforts on safe road infrastructure; safe vehicles; safe road use; post-crash care; safe speed; road safety management and leadership and finally, modal shift, land use planning and reduced road exposure.
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN Region

Regional policy priorities, challenges and opportunities for sustainable transport

The region is beset with lack of transport infrastructure, low level of investment and logistical difficulties. In this context, sustainable transport policies have a profound impact on the structural change necessary to achieve sustainable and inclusive development. The provision and quality of the available infrastructure largely determines the production and consumption patterns in the region, the choice of the type of infrastructure used, and the way in which the services provided are designed, regulated, and operated, with impacts on prices, times, and quality of the traded products.

Studies on sustainable transport in the region identify opportunities for multimodal connections, logistics hubs, road safety, and sustainable solutions such as more sustainable fuels.

Regional priorities in the energy transition in the public transport sector include the regulation of the retrofit/conversion of current fleet; regulation on batteries; and integrating mobility and urban planning. Policies oriented to respond to the emergency of climate change and its associated risks, with focus on the resilience of infrastructure and disaster risk reduction are also a priority for the region. Other priority areas include financing infrastructure connectivity in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and in Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), public private partnerships (PPPs) for infrastructure projects, food security, and digital technologies applied to transport solutions.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean’s (ECLAC) work on integrating logistics and mobility policies seeks to increase coordination and coherence in and across countries to reduce inefficiencies impacting logistics fluidity and competitiveness. ECLAC considers urban mobility a key sector to push for sustainability. The energy transition presents an opportunity for economic development and growth across various productive sectors. The region is rich in natural resources necessary for battery production and the established automotive industry is eager to adjust to e-mobility. Furthermore, the transition is an opportunity for a structural change in the mobility sector, with a focus on improving the service quality and living conditions in the urban areas.

In terms of challenges, fostering integration of projects in the region, competition with informal services and ride-sharing platforms, lack of integration, governance in metropolitan regions, and public resistance to increases of fossil fuel prices are some of the notable ones.

Transformative initiatives addressing sustainable transport issues

Regional UN Road Safety Fund Projects: ECLAC is the implementing partner of the UN Road Safety Fund’s projects in the LAC region. Recently, projects were delivered in Brazil and Argentina, while implementation is in progress in Colombia. The projects demonstrated the opportunities of engaging and working together with local government entities (Ministry of Transport, Public...
Works, Health, Education, Road Safety Agency, among others) to adapt to local context and specific needs of the countries.

**Digital Connectivity for Ports and Logistics:** The “VII Latin American and Caribbean Meeting of Port Logistics Communities: Network of Digital and Collaborative Ports” was held in August 2023. The event brought together a wide range of stakeholders from the maritime sector, to assess the development, evolution, and challenges of the sector in the region and its connection with other modes of transport to move towards more sustainable solutions. The event provided a clear overview of the challenges for each of the topics addressed: a) Effects of climate change on ports, b) Urban integration of port areas, c) Promotion of multimodality, d) Digital transformation to improve connectivity in ports, e) Projects and examples of interconnectivity between transport modes as part of the integration of supply chains (multimodality), and f) Regional progress and initiatives on gender equality.

**Urban Mobility:** ECLAC has positioned urban mobility as a central element of its policy agenda. The main findings and documents related to transport are curated in a new Mobility section within ECLAC’s Urban and Cities Platform.

In terms of future activities, ECLAC will release studies and organize events focusing on the co-benefits of public transport, opportunities for land value capture, regulation for batteries, and circular economy in the mobility sector. ECLAC is also working on a pilot technical assistance to Costa Rica, focused on the retrofit of buses, circular economy, and the carbon market and promoting the integration of transport and urban planning.
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE Region

Regional policy priorities, challenges and opportunities for sustainable transport

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe’s (UNECE) and its Inland Transport Committee (ITC) provide the platform for inland transport to help efficiently address the global and regional needs in inland transport. In doing so, UNECE and ITC contribute to sustainable inland transport and mobility for achieving the sustainable development goals in the ECE and UN member States through harmonizing regulatory frameworks, as appropriate, providing policy dialogue, promoting new technologies, assisting in enhancing connectivity and supporting the implementation of legal instruments.

UNECE and ITC, mindful of shortfalls in achieving the SDG target in road safety, is enhancing the regulatory function for improving road safety performance and thus contribute to the achievement of the road safety aspirations set by the international community.

UNECE and ITC are also taking urgent action to assist UNECE member States and Contracting Parties to UN inland transport legal instruments in decarbonizing inland transport through enhanced regulatory support, intergovernmental policy dialogue, and increased coordination and partnership of all relevant stakeholders.

Transformative initiatives addressing sustainable transport issues

Inland Transport: UNECE is a comprehensive platform for all aspects of inland transport, with special attention to interregional and intraregional regulatory governance through the UN transport conventions and other means. So far, 56 UNECE member States and 96 non-UNECE UN Member States have acceded to at least one of the 60 legal instruments administered by UNECE. Among them regulations for vehicles, road traffic, transport of dangerous or perishable goods, border-crossing facilitation, as well as rules for contract of carriage, and infrastructure development agreements or harmonization of railway law.
**Road Safety:** In 2015, UNECE initiated the UN SG’s Special Envoy for Road Safety. In 2018, UNECE launched and operationalized the UN Road Safety Fund. In 2020, UNECE and ITC issued comprehensive Recommendations for Enhancing National Road Safety Systems. This set of recommendations provides an effective and sustainable approach to addressing the challenges in road safety. UNECE also recommends countries to accede to all the UN conventions on road safety and encourages countries to apply the concept of national road safety system in improving road safety.

**Active mobility:** UNECE in collaboration with WHO Europe services the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP) and through the activities of the Inland Transport Committee promotes mobility and transport strategies that integrate environmental and health concerns. UNECE also works to uniform cycling infrastructure to make cycling safer and more comfortable across UNECE region.

**Transport resilience:** UNECE is elaborating knowledge tools for making transport resilient especially to climate change hazards. A framework for transport system stress test to climate change hazard and a guide on adaptation pathways in the transport sector were developed. A guide on assessing criticality of transport networks is prepared along with material on business case for adaptation in transport and projections of conditions in which transport would need to operate in the future.

**Connectivity and efficiency:** UNECE through its infrastructure agreements promotes uniform road, rail, inland waterway and intermodal infrastructure to enable seamless transport. This objective is also supported through the work on border-crossing facilitation. UNECE is at forefront of transport document and information digitalization with a view to lowering transaction costs and making inland transport, and in particular intermodal transport, more efficient and reliable.

**Transport training tools:** UNECE has developed the UN’s online elearning platform for sustainable transport – LearnITC aimed at providing multiple courses (currently 11) on transport legal instruments and their application and implementation.

*Inaugural celebration of the World Sustainable Transport Day organized by UNECE and UN DESA with focus on how transport supports our daily life, how transport makes us safe, and how transport contributes to the climate change agenda.*