

Editorial statement

The Transport and Communications Bulletin for Asia and the Pacific is a peer-reviewed journal published once a year by the Transport Division (TD) of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). The main objectives of the Bulletin are to provide a medium for the sharing of knowledge, experience, ideas, policy options and information on the development of transport infrastructure and services in the Asia-Pacific region; to stimulate policy-oriented research; and to increase awareness of transport policy issues and responses. It is hoped that the Bulletin will help to widen and deepen debate on issues of interest and concern in the transport sector.

This issue of the Bulletin is dedicated to the theme of “Combatting Congestion”. With growing motorization, most cities in Asia and the Pacific are facing tremendous challenges in coping with traffic congestion. Congestion accentuates the health and environmental impact of motor vehicles because vehicles operating in heavy traffic pollute considerably more than those operating in free-flow conditions. Congestion also exacts a heavy economic and social toll, particularly on people living in cities, in terms of wasted time and fuel costs.

As the articles in this issue describe, there are many different ways to reduce traffic congestion. Several major cities in the region have launched mass transit projects, such as the Delhi Metro in Delhi, India; TransJakarta, the first full Bus Rapid Transit system in Indonesia and Asia; and suburban metro lines in Beijing, China. Others have implemented traffic demand management policies, such as the congestion charge scheme in Singapore and car plate auctioning systems in Shanghai, China. Despite these measures, however, urban mobility continues to deteriorate in most Asian cities. This issue of the *Bulletin* looks at why this is so, and also suggests some possible solutions for policy-makers, particularly at the municipal level, to consider.

The first article, on “Smarter Congestion Relief in Asian Cities”, argues that the ways in which policies to reduce traffic congestion are evaluated can significantly affect urban planning decisions. If evaluated one way, congestion is considered the dominant urban transport problem and roadway expansion the preferred solution, but evaluated other ways, congestion is considered moderate compared with other transport problems and roadway expansion an ineffective and costly solution. The article describes new and better ways to solve urban traffic congestion problems, with an emphasis on “win-win” strategies that help achieve multiple planning objectives and therefore maximize overall benefits. It concludes that this “win-win” approach can be applied to many types of transportation problems, and is particularly appropriate in rapidly-developing Asian cities.

The second article makes a similar argument, stressing the case for using a “co-benefits approach” to tackle environmental externalities of the road transport sector. Such an approach looks at the global and local environmental co-benefits which can be derived from sustainable mobility policies, and presents applications of this approach to two very different Asian cities, New Delhi and Toyama, Japan. The authors evaluate policy packages to pursue congestion reduction, including promotion of public transport infrastructure and soft-mode programs. The analysis suggests that implementing a co-benefit approach to simultaneously reduce global greenhouse gases and local air pollutant emissions can tackle urban congestion and simultaneously promote social equity and economic prosperity.

The third article, “Urban transport systems and congestion: a case study of Indian cities”, takes a closer look at the congestion situation in Indian cities. It describes various policies which the Government has initiated in the face of rapid urbanization, and considers their effectiveness at improving urban mobility. The authors analyse selected policies which have been tried in India and assesses the policy gaps which deter the desired impact of such policies on reducing traffic congestion. It also suggests policy measures to overcome these gaps and the way ahead.

The last two articles provide in-depth analyses from very different cities where governments have tried to reduce congestion through traffic demand management policies. One looks at Manila’s circumferential highway, the Epifanio de los Santos, or EDSA, which is a major thoroughfare for the city.

It identifies the major factors contributing to congestion along the EDSA, namely the concentration of major shopping malls and business districts alongside its course; the high number of bus terminals, particularly in the Cubao area; and the ban on jeepneys and trisikel which has led to a concentration of these vehicles on the side streets and blockages for exit of cars from the EDSA. The author also explores some of the policy options which may be considered to tackle congestion on EDSA, including rail transit, traffic demand policies and bus policies, and calls for a more integrated approach to addressing congestion issues.

The final article describes the experience of the implementation of Pedestrian Day in Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan. It presents the results of two surveys conducted in the city, the first conducted several months after the Government passed an executive order declaring every Tuesday to be observed as a "Pedestrian Day (PD)"; and the second conducted in August 2013, soon after the Government decided to withdraw the initiative completely. The authors describe the results of the two surveys, which asked different groups of people in the city about their support for the idea and their desire for it to be continued or discontinued. They suggest that the experience of Pedestrian Day in Thimphu show that prior stakeholder consultations and sufficient preparatory measures are necessary for the successful implementation of this type of sustainable transportation initiative.