UN DESA Webinar Series
Sustainable Transport and COVID-19: Response and Recovery

24 JUNE 2020 & 1 JULY 2020

Summary

The two-part webinar series on "Sustainable transport and COVID-19: Response and Recovery" was held in an entirely virtual format due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The webinar series received more than 550 registration and more than 150 participated in each event.

The webinar was preceded by an online survey gathering responses from more than 50 persons. Most answers were received from Asia and Pacific, followed by the Western European and Others Group, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Western Asia and the Eastern European group. A summary of the answers can be found in Annex 1. Presentations by experts and practitioners from governments, think-tanks, the private sector and civil society were followed by short interventions from UN agencies, with multiple stakeholders contributing to the interactive discussion.

The programme and recordings of the webinar series and other relevant documents can be found here: Part 1 (24 June) and Part 2 (1 July).

The first part of the webinar took place on 24 June. Mr. Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, UNDESA, delivered welcome remarks. Speakers shared their countries' experiences and policy measures to address COVID-19 impacts on sustainable transport and made presentations focused on the impact of COVID-19 on people and planet through the transport lens.

The second part of the webinar took place on 1 July. Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu, Under-Secretary-General, OHRLLS, delivered welcome remarks. Speakers focused their presentations on the impact of COVID-19 on countries in special situations and related forward-looking transport solutions and innovations to accelerate recovery and support achievement of SDGs and climate action.

Key points raised:

- Transport is crucial for sustainable development, including poverty reduction, economic diversification and human well-being, and its central role in modern economies and societies has been brought to the fore due to COVID-19 pandemic.
- In the absence of proven treatments or vaccines against the novel coronavirus, governments across the world have taken unprecedented steps – including travel restrictions, border closures and 'stay-at-home' measures – to contain the spread of COVID-19 and limit its toll. While successful when properly managed, they have also directly impacted transport and travel across all modes to varying degrees, disrupting tourism, trade, global supply chains and labor movements.
- These have resulted in jobs lost, livelihoods placed at risk, increased food insecurity, endangered supply of medicines and other essentials, thus endangering progress across multiple SDGs. These impacts contribute to, and are exacerbated by, economic recessions and inequalities in countries.
- Short-term reductions in green-house gas emissions and other pollutants are also evident, but prior experience shows that these are rapidly reversed when the situation returns to normal unless structural changes take place. Such changes can be led by transformations in transport.

- The COVID-19 pandemic may be prompting longer-term changes in both demand and supply for transport services and change the way we use and develop transport systems, based on new kinds of safety needs and changed user behavior (e.g. increase in alternative modes, such as teleworking, teleconferences, remote learning. walking, cycling)
- In order to meet the increasing and changing transport demands, and to progress towards sustainability, we will have to change the way we plan, develop and use transport modes and systems - the same is true for the post-pandemic recovery period.
- Existing challenges, such as GHG emissions, urban pollution and lack of access in rural areas, which have been brought to the fore by the pandemic, should be addressed in a sustainable manner and in line with the "avoid, shift and improve" approach.
- The COVID-19 pandemic should be taken as a chance to accelerate a transition to sustainable transport systems and solutions in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on climate change, with long-term policies and strategies built around the objectives of universal (affordable) access, safety (including sanitary measures, such as more stringent cleaning, disinfection services), efficiency and green mobility.
- Recovery plans, stimulus packages as well as funds and technical support from international institutions should be made available to sub-national and local and governments aimed at sustainable transport development, with a focus on: decarbonization, including modernization and expansion of public transport systems; expanding opportunities for using alternative transport modes, including safe bike lanes: investment in and fostering of e-mobility, bike- or car-sharing schemes; the introduction of congestion charges and other inner-city measures; the creation of alternative job opportunities (e.g. for informal transport providers) and the introduction of new safety measures for essential workers and transport users.
- Countries in special situations are facing particular transport-related challenges and are more susceptible to external shocks, including natural disasters – they should receive support, such as finance or capacity-building, in their quest to achieve sustainable transport, including regarding access to markets and trade as well as access to advanced sustainable transport solutions and technologies.
- There is a need to facilitate and strengthen transport connectivity, including cross-border transport corridors (e.g. harmonization of cross border transport operations, adoption of standard operation procedures) and to increase the resilience and sustainability of transport infrastructure and global supply chains to brace not only current, but also future crises, while involving all actors, including the private sector (e.g. PPP).
- More informed assessments to plan for the future of transport should be made based on scientific evidence, increased data collection and enhanced science-policy interface while also involving relevant stakeholders in the decision-making process (e.g. transport workers and vulnerable groups, such as women, the youth and the elderly).
- We should invest in and use innovative transport technologies and solutions (e.g. electronic cargo tracking; management of crowds and rush hours in public transport) involving all relevant public and private actors, including transport operators.
- UN system support, multi-stakeholder, regional and international cooperation and information-sharing on best ways to address the COVID-19 pandemic, including incentives for compliance by citizens with anti-COVID-19 measures, and to move towards sustainable transport are crucial as well as the adoption of common protocols, (vehicle) regulations, guidelines and the adoption of International Transport Conventions.

- The outcome of the webinar series should inform the second Global Sustainable Transport Conference to be held in Beijing, China (new dates to be confirmed).

Annex 1: Summary of answers to webinar survey

1. Sustainable transport and COVID-191. How have COVID-19 and the associated coping strategies impacted transport and travel?

Survey participants reported that social distancing, border closures and other government measures significantly reduced the movement of goods and people, impacting transport, tourism, food security and supply chains worldwide. People were only travelling when it was absolutely necessary and alternative modes of transport, such as walking and cycling, were on the rise. At the same time, more people were looking into car ownership. As a consequence, many public transport companies were facing financial difficulties.

2. What have been the channels through which these have translated into impacts on people and planet?

Survey participants noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had important socio-economic impacts, significantly affecting food security, health and well-being and highlighting existing inequalities. There had also been significant job losses in various sectors, including the transport sector. At the same time, a temporary reduction in air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions was observed. Many cities were starting to favor active modes of transport, such as walking and cycling, as a way of healthy living and sustainability for people and the planet, accompanied by urban changes, such as new bike lanes. Different actors, including civil society, were pushing for enhanced safety measures, including with regard to public transport.

3. What is the magnitude of these impacts and how are they likely to affect the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and the Paris Agreement on climate change?

Survey participants highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic would be impacting the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and the Paris Agreement on climate change at different scales and that developing countries would be particularly affected. The temporary reduction of GHG emissions was, for example, having a positive impact on climate change, while the travel reductions and consequent job reductions or losses and supply chain interruptions were negatively affecting economic development and livelihoods. At the same time, the pandemic was seen as a chance to bring forward different perspectives, behavior change and new national priorities to possibly accelerate progress in the recovery period.

4. How will we need to adjust sustainable transport solutions in response and recovery periods? What are the opportunities for doing so, and what would be the roles of different stakeholders? What is the role of science, technology and innovation?

Survey participants saw the post-pandemic recovery period and return to daily activities as a chance to rethink transport, with an emphasis on sustainable and safe public transport, active transport modes and decarbonization, based on renewable energy and technological advances (e.g. e-mobility). Alternative working methods, such as telecommuting, were also mentioned and the need to ensure affordable access for all. Multi-modal transport, Demand Responsive Transport (DRT), Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS), such as Uber, and sustainable urban planning with more bike paths and other opportunities for active transport modes were also mentioned. Different stakeholders, including civil society, were to be involved in related decision-making processes, including through improved information sharing and education aimed at

achieving more sustainable behavior. Science, technology and innovation, including artificial intelligence (AI), were to play a critical role as were adequate policies, financing and investment, including in SMEs.

5. How can the multi-lateral system advance this process?

Survey participants agreed that sustainable transport needed to be supported by multi-stakeholder cooperation, accompanied by support for developing countries so that no one was left behind. This cooperation should extend to exchange ways of best dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic during the crisis and in the recovery period. Sustainable transport solutions should be part of a new sustainable mobility agenda which should be designed and implemented by all stakeholders.

6. Please list any relevant reports, conferences, meetings and initiatives you would like to highlight.

Survey participants listed related reports, conferences, meetings and initiatives:

- 4S Mobility Strategy (Mexico) aimed at: (1) by 2030, reducing premature mortality from non-communicable diseases by a third; (2) considerably reducing the number of deaths and diseases caused by air pollution; (3) providing universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible public spaces and green areas, in particular for women, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities and (4) expanding pedestrian infrastructure and public areas, such as widening sidewalks and redesigning pedestrian crossings to minimize user stress (see also government website)
- City of Ghent Circulation Plan to reduce inner-city car traffic (See also: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEOA_Tcq2XA&t=51s)
- United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC) course: Circular Economy and the 2030 Agenda (including cities, urban mobility and circular economy), 02 Nov-04 Dec 2020.
- UITP webinars – for example: Public transport after COVID-19- current and future challenges. Re-imagining our cities, 22 July 2020.
- DESTINATIONS Webinar: CELSO - a system for demand-responsive public transport, 17 June 2020
- BSR Electric Final Virtual Conference (including EV and congestion), 16-17 June 2020
- Tenth World Urban Forum, 8-13 February 2020, Abu Dhabi, UAE
- The Future of Transportation World Conference: 2020-2040 and beyond (including Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS)), 10-11 December 2019