



Commission to Discuss Need for Improved and Sustainable, Low Carbon Transport in Developing Countries

New York, 4 May 2010—Without adequate access to sustainable transport infrastructure and fundamental change in transport policies, developing countries will be unable to reduce poverty and meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Transport is one of the topics that will be discussed at the Thematic Interactive Discussion of the United Nations' 18th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-18) on May, 4th 2010.

Transport and mobility are essential for economic and social development. The most isolated regions of the globe are also among the poorest. Yet, how transport networks are expanded will be critical to reconciling development and environmental challenges.

The greatest unmet needs for both public and private transport are in developing countries, which will claim about 80 per cent of the projected increase over the next two decades. The number of privately owned vehicles in Asia and Latin America is doubling every three years and is expected to grow 5-10 fold in the next 20 years, according to the Asian Development Bank, International Energy Agency, and Latin American transport agencies.

“Many people aspire to own their own car, making transport one of the largest oil consuming sectors,” says Louis Alberto Ferraté Felice, Minister of the Environment and Natural Resources of Guatemala and Chairman of CSD-18.

Yet, as has been pointed out by the Partnership on Sustainable, Low Carbon Transport (SLoCaT), unless this trend is guided by sound urban management, well informed national policies, and dedicated international support, it will also lead to increased local air pollution, congestion, road accidents and fatalities, and greenhouse gas emissions.

The SLoCaT Partnership—a voluntary, multi-stakeholder partnership, registered with the Commission on Sustainable Development, consists of 52 organizations that have agreed to work together to advance the agenda of sustainable, low carbon transport. The idea of the partnership was developed jointly by the Asia Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA).

As the transport sector in many countries strives to meet the needs of an increasing population, rapid urbanization and basic economic growth, it is also emerging as the fastest growing source of global greenhouse gas emissions. In 2006, transport accounted for more than 23 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions. Between 2005 and 2030, private vehicle ownership will contribute to a 57 per cent increase in these emissions worldwide.

Promoting sustainable transport, according to the Partnership, means building or maintaining an effective system of public and private transport to meet peoples' growing needs and supporting sustainable economic growth, while reducing and eliminating negative environmental impacts.

Several initiatives, in developed as well as developing countries, provide lessons on how the sustainable transport challenge could be addressed, especially by making public transport more efficient, rapid, comfortable, clean, and safe. The most frequently cited examples include electric-powered buses, low carbon vehicles, and eco-driving, through targeted investments, mandatory standards and policies, and public private partnerships.

The situation is particularly challenging in developing countries, which need huge increases in the availability of transport services, significant reductions in unit costs of these services, and sustained investments in measures that can reduce the environmental impact.

According to Partnership members, developing countries now have substantial experience on a range of policies and programs in this regard, including pricing schemes for road use or vehicle purchases, expansion of rail networks, bus rapid transit schemes to improve public transport, provision of bike lanes and pedestrian facilities, and cleaner fuels and vehicles.

“Developing countries now need to act to replicate and scale-up successful experiences of sustainable, low carbon transport”, says James Leather of the Asian Development Bank and the current Chairperson of the Partnership.

Current international financial mechanisms set up to assist developing countries in controlling climate change have so far had a minimal effect in slowing transport greenhouse gas emissions in developing countries. New financing approaches will be required as part of a post 2012 climate agreement to assist developing countries to put in place large scale and effective mitigation policies and programs in the transport sector.

Effective action on transport in developing countries will require improvements in the availability and quality of transport data in these countries. UN-DESA, together with the Partnership, will undertake action to build the capacity of developing countries to better collect, analyze and disseminate transport data.

“The sustainability challenge is like a layer cake”, says Tariq Banuri, Director of the Sustainable Development Division of UN-DESA. “The bottom layer improves steadily with economic growth; the middle layer refers to “best practices”, which can be replicated through sound national policies and institutions; the third layer requires international support and resources. We need to accelerate development, encourage learning from best practices, and mobilize dedicated and sustained international support”

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