



UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY
**Sustainability
Week**

United Nations General Assembly High-level Meeting on Sustainable Transport

Wednesday, 17 April 2024, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
General Assembly Hall, UN Headquarters

Concept Note

As part of the Sustainability Week, and in accordance with General Assembly resolution 77/286, the President of the General Assembly will convene a high-level meeting (HLM) on sustainable transport, in collaboration with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, to promote sustainable transport cooperation in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement, the New Urban Agenda and the political declaration of the High-level Meeting on Improving Global Road Safety.

Sustainable transport systems remain crucial for sustainable development. They support economic growth, facilitate global supply chains, including the delivery of goods and services to rural and urban communities, enhance international cooperation and trade, connect people and communities to jobs, schools and health care, and thus provide all with equal opportunities.

Against this backdrop, the General Assembly, in its resolution 78/148, entitled “Strengthening the links between all modes of transport to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals” proclaimed the United Nations Decade of Sustainable Transport (2026-2035).

Sustainable transport is crucial to address the special needs of countries in special situations by establishing and promoting efficient transport systems that particularly link least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS) more efficiently to international markets and global supply chains. Sustainable transport systems are also critical to empower vulnerable people, including by providing rural communities with access to major roads, rail lines and public and non-motorized transport options that enable access to economic and social activities.

At the same time, accessible, affordable and sustainable transport services are still lacking in many parts of the world, especially in developing countries, constraining mobility and connectivity to regional and global transport networks. Over 1 billion people still lack

access to an all-weather road and adequate transport services. Even where transport infrastructure and systems are present, they may not provide safe, affordable, and convenient access for all, particularly for groups in vulnerable situations such as the women, children and youth, older persons, and persons with disabilities, with the poor often spending one fifth of their income on public transport. Deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents continue to rise, road traffic crashes kill approximately 1.3 million people worldwide annually, with disproportionate burden falling on the healthcare systems and economies in developing countries.

Existing transport networks can also face challenges, such as congestion, poor maintenance, and lack of resilience to disasters, extreme weather events and climate change. It was estimated that additional spending for roads is likely to amount to 2% of GDP in low-income developing countries to meet the SDG objectives, which do not include other components of sustainable transport, such as railways, ports, and mass transit.

There is a need to develop and enhance multimodal transport systems that fully utilize and integrate public transport systems, rail, maritime, inland shipping, ferry, and air transport, as well as non-motorized transport such as cycling and walking. Passenger and freight transport, with different stakeholders, require differentiated policy solutions and investment models.

As maritime transport accounts for over 80%, by volume, of all global freight, it is essential to support countries with the lowest shipping connectivity. These countries often face a vicious cycle, of low trade volumes that discourage investments in transport connectivity, and low connectivity that makes trade even more costly and uncompetitive.

Meanwhile, the international community must remain resolute in addressing some of the challenges caused by transport systems. Transport accounts for about one-quarter of global energy-related carbon dioxide emissions, a share that is rapidly increasing, as more than 90% of its energy is derived from fossil fuels, with shipping contributing 3% of the global emissions. Likewise, air and noise pollution as well as the ‘end-of-life’ disposal of automobiles and ships continue to pose complex challenges to healthcare systems and to the environment.

The total transport activity will more than double by 2050 compared to 2015 under the trajectory reflecting current efforts. It is an apt time to garner political momentum and engagement, at the highest level, on access to safe, affordable, and sustainable transport systems for all. International cooperation and multistakeholder initiatives remain essential to urgently accelerate the transformation towards sustainable transport in all countries, and the upcoming United Nations Decade of Sustainable Transport provides an opportunity for the global community to consider the required actions to harness the full potential of sustainable transport.

Objective

The high-level meeting will highlight sustainable and effective solutions to improve the balance between economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable transport, to take full advantage of sustainable transport in accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Format

The high-level meeting will consist of an opening, a ministerial segment, an interactive multi-stakeholder panel, and a closing segment. The meeting will be open to Member States and Observers, the United Nations system, ECOSOC-accredited non-governmental organizations and other relevant stakeholders.

Multi-stakeholder Panel: Enhancing intermodal transport connectivity and developing socially inclusive and environmentally friendly transportation.

The panel will discuss intermodal transport policy-design and best-practice to improve passenger journeys and freight movements. The speakers will address how transport infrastructure and services can be made more broadly available, accessible, inclusive and safe, in an environmental manner. It will also discuss the role of international cooperation in promoting sustainable transport systems among countries. Guiding questions:

1. How can efficient multimodal and intermodal transport solutions be used to improve passenger journeys and freight movements? Where do opportunities lie in boosting modal shift to more efficient, sustainable, and green solutions?
2. What can be done to ensure that transport infrastructure and services are beneficial to all, including older persons, persons with disabilities, women, and rural communities?
3. How can sustainable transport policies be integrated into climate change mitigation and adaptation actions? What new innovations and emerging technological solutions can help achieve socially inclusive and environmentally friendly sustainable transport?
4. What is the role of local, regional, and national governments in enhancing sustainable transport, and how can they be empowered to act as agents of change?
5. How can international cooperation be harnessed to develop transport and transit corridors? What role can the United Nations and stakeholders, including the private sector, play to support the development of sustainable transport opportunities?

Outcome

An informal summary of the President of the General Assembly will be submitted as a contribution to the implementation plan for the United Nations Decade of Sustainable Transport and will be circulated to all Member States and Observers to the UN.
