

Public transport in cities

Introduction

In 2007 the world passed an important landmark: since then half the global population has been living in urban areas. By 2050 it is estimated that the global population will reach nine billion, and that three-quarters of those people will be city dwellers.

As soon as 2015 it is expected that there will be 560 cities with populations of more than one million, and by 2025 there will be 29 'megacities' with populations of more than 10 million. By 2050 more than half of the populations of Africa and Asia will live in cities, and in more developed economies the proportion is expected to reach 90 per cent.

Many of those will live in 'megacities' – you can find out more about them [here](#). Although the challenges of urban public transport are obviously greater in the largest most sprawling cities, public transport is also vital in smaller urban areas, with populations as low as around 25,000.

Cities and climate change

Cities already consume 75 per cent of the world's energy and produce 80 per cent of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The [International Transport Forum](#) points out:

"Transport is a significant contributor to overall GHG emissions. The sector as a whole accounted for approximately 13% of overall GHG emissions and 24% of CO2 emissions from fossil fuel combustion in 2006."

Much of the increase has been associated with economic growth, urbanisation and greater use of private motorised transport in developing countries, and particularly China and India. Those trends have accelerated since 2006, despite the downturn in western countries.

qualitypublictransport

is a partnership between the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) and Public World, with the support of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

Its purpose is to build the capacity of urban transport unions to campaign for quality services and build alliances with passengers and other civil society organisations to promote sustainable transport systems.

That means services that enable everyone to travel safely, comfortably and quickly, and employ enough securely employed, properly trained and fairly rewarded transport workers to achieve that.

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The share of total emissions attributable to transport is more than 25 per cent, and 25 per cent of that is due to urban passenger travel.

What is urban public transport?

Urban public transport comprises all transport services in towns and cities that operate on fixed routes and schedules and are available to persons who pay the established fare. The modes include bus, light rail transit, metro and waterborne services and bicycles. However, quality public transport systems not only integrate those modes but also link with other transport services, such as taxis. They also recognise that passengers are also pedestrians, and encourage safe walking and cycling.

Investment and operation of effective public transport systems has been fundamental to the development of liveable cities for the past century, and has never been more important than it is now. The [International Association of Public Transport](#) (IATP) points out that public transport offers many advantages over individual transport modes. It:

- costs less to the community,
- needs less urban space,
- is less energy-intensive,
- pollutes less,
- is the safest mode,
- improves accessibility to jobs, and
- offers mobility for all.

The IATP states:

“Beyond moving people from one point to the other, public transport plays a decisive role in ensuring the vitality of urban areas and cities from different perspectives:

Public transport improves economic productivity – by enabling users to save time and reduce the uncertainty on their transport time. Public transport also generates wider economic effects based on the agglomeration benefits they create.

Public transport contributes to the improvement of the quality of the urban environment – it contributes to the reduction of congestion and noise; preserves air quality and contributes to alleviate greenhouse gases emission; preserves landscape, townscape, historic heritage and water environment; and allows a better allocation of the scarce public space.

Public transport fosters social inclusion – it contributes to the regeneration of deprived areas through land-use policy, opens opportunities to disadvantaged populations, enhances safety and security for all, and favours healthier life styles.

“These elements should always be considered when calculating the return on investment for public transport. Its recognition also opens up opportunities of new sources of financing.”

“Beyond moving people from one point to the other, public transport plays a decisive role in ensuring the vitality of urban areas.”

Urban public transport: a public service

Those characteristics of urban public transport show that it has important characteristics of 'public good' as well as 'private good'. That means that the benefits of urban public transport goes to society as a whole, now and in the future, as well as to the individual passenger.

This must be taken into account in how we define 'quality' in public transport systems and in:

- determining transport policies in the context of overall urban development policies;
- designing services to enable equitable access and sustainable land use; and
- financing public transport investments and operations in equitable ways.

Two key points:

- A quality urban public transport **system** is a public service requiring political commitment and public investment based on democratic governance to ensure equitable distribution of benefits and burdens.
- A quality system must be made up of quality **services** so that they reliably and efficiently meet the needs of their passengers. Otherwise people won't use the services, and therefore the system won't work properly.

See Briefing No. 2 *Quality in Urban Public Transport* for more.

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