

Keeping it Clean: Transport, Health and the Environment

SESSION SUMMARY

Wednesday, 25 May 2011

Are societal expectations for transport services, environmental quality and health incompatible? Much has been done to reduce pollutant emissions from new vehicles, but air pollution levels in cities have not reduced as much as expected. We generally have access to more jobs and opportunities through modern transport systems, but we rely less on walking and cycling, which could contribute to rising health problems.

Society demands greater environmental quality, but our mobility decisions often run counter to this. Dense urban areas have the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote active mobility, but many choose not to live there and our transport systems allow sprawl. This session will discuss these and other paradoxes and challenges that are posed by our mobility patterns. What is getting better, what is getting worse and is policy action required to change behaviours?

Chair

- Eva Molnar, Director, Transport Division, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Panellists

- Lawrence Burns, Professor, University of Michigan, USA
- Yasuo Hozaki, Executive Officer, West Nippon Expressway Company, Japan
- Kee Yeon Hwang, President, Korea Transport Institute, Korea
- PAN Haixiao, Professor, Tongji University, China
- Helle Sørholt, Founding Partner and Managing Director, Gehl Architects, Denmark
- Jean-Francois Toussaint, Director, Institute for Biomedical Research and Sports Epidemiological, France

Megatrends and the conflicting demands of society for transport

Megatrends of the 21st century, including globalisation, demographic change, the ageing of society, the rapid increase of motorisation especially in emerging countries, and the internet revolution, have an important impact on the role and shape of transport. Individual motorised mobility is a compelling option as incomes rise, and over the past decade, some cities have seen a reduction in the share of public and non-motorised transport. This has important

consequences in terms of health (due to pollution and a sedentary lifestyle), congestion and the environment. At the same time there is a general demand for better environmental quality and improved health.

Reconciling individual mobility and a clean and healthy transport system is not impossible, but requires a fundamental shift in thinking about mobility

Putting people first and understanding their needs are prerequisite for sound mobility and urban planning. For decades, traffic planning has created uninviting urban environments. We need a paradigm shift in order to develop "Cities for People" where mobility supports people's way of life, and is not an aim in itself.

Technology provides a partial solution to cleaner mobility

Automobile and traffic management technologies can foster personal freedom while limiting the negative side effects related to safety, energy consumption, the environment and congestion. Technology is also essential to optimise the delivery of goods to citizens. However, the session also highlighted that automobiles should not be imposed at the expense of the presence of human beings in the urban environment.

Walking and cycling are essential elements of the transport system

Walking and cycling have a great potential to contribute to more sustainable and healthy cities. Active mobility brings both physical and mental health benefits that largely outweigh possible increased exposure to pollution or safety risks. "Reintroducing" these transport modes in the mobility habits of society may require thinking outside the "conventional" box, for example regarding the use of the space. For instance, dedicated elevated paths for cyclists have been implemented with success in Seoul; though some panellists argued that sharing the space would be a better approach than segmenting it.

Tools are needed to measure the liveability of cities

Indicators are needed to measure the liveability of cities focusing on well being of citizens and costs and benefits of active mobility. There is also a need to better understand people's behaviour in order to adjust the transport system to their true mobility needs.

ITF Transport Ministers have a role to play now

Policies implemented today will determine the future of cities for many decades. Actions are needed now. Cities around the world face a wide variety of problems, and there is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Future mobility will require a combination of innovative urban design, new technologies and appropriate incentives to stimulate walking and cycling.