



The Intergovernmental Tenth Regional EST Forum in Asia opens in Vientiane yesterday.

Asia-Pacific transport forum eyes sustainable development

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Government officials are confident that the Intergovernmental Tenth Regional Environmentally Sustainable Transport (EST) Forum in Asia currently place in Vientiane will help to spur the development of Laos' transport network.

The comment was made by Deputy Prime Minister Somdy Duangdy at the forum's opening ceremony yesterday.

Laos' transport sector is dominated by the roads subsector, which represents the subsector in which 98 percent of passengers travel and 86 percent of freight is moved, he said.

Road transport remains at the core of the government's policy to transform Laos from being land-locked to land-linked and is central to both economic development and poverty reduction.

Roads are a key priority for the transport sector, linking people to resources, markets and public services, Mr Somdy said.

Despite significant progress in the development of transport facilities including roads, waterways, airways and railways, Laos still faces many challenges due to limited funding in meeting the rapid increase in sector demand, he

added.

Meanwhile, the maintenance of existing infrastructure to ensure user safety, durability and serviceability as well as withstand weather extremes requires a substantial amount of funding.

"It is crucial for all of us to join forces in the implementation of rural-urban connectivity and many other initiatives at the national, sub-regional and regional levels," Mr Somdy said.

The forum, which is taking place from March 14-16 at the Don Chan Palace hotel, and aims to identify and discuss how Asian EST member countries can contribute to achieving the 2030 Agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through sustainable transport solutions.

The meeting will also discuss various policy options, institutional measures, technology interventions, financing mechanisms and partnership arrangements in the transport sector for achievement of the SDGs.

Ideally, the forum would like to strengthen policy consultations on rural accessibility and connectivity for food security, eliminating hunger, regional cooperation and sustainable regional

development.

The session will also address the role of railways in the context of the 2030 Agenda of SDGs, and discuss how sustainable transport can contribute to gender equality and empowering women and girls.

Participants will also review and evaluate their countries' progress, initiatives and achievements in best practices in addressing the Goals of the Bangkok 2020 Declaration (2010-2020) as well as draw vital lessons and gain insights into the directions of the EST member countries moving toward the SDGs through sustainable transport solutions and actions.

More than 300 participants from 46 countries including senior government representatives from Asia-Pacific countries, city mayors, international experts, resource persons, donor agencies and international financial institutions are attending the forum.

There is also a regional seminar on inclusive and sustainable transport and an international mayors' forum.

The theme of this year's forum is 2030 Road Map for Sustainable Transport-Aligning with Sustainable Development Goals.

Regional forum ends with adoption of sustainable transport statements



Dr Bounchanh Sinthavong.

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The Intergovernmental Tenth Regional Environmentally Sustainable Transport (EST) Forum in Asia, which took place in Vientiane from March 14-16, ended yesterday with the adoption of two declarations on sustainable transport development.

The forum was attended by national and city government representatives from 38 countries. At the close, more than 300 participants adopted the Vientiane Declaration on Sustainable and Rural Transport towards Achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Minister of Public Works and Transport Dr Bounchanh Sinthavong said he hoped the Vientiane Declaration would provide a meaningful framework for countries to develop required policies and programmes including financial mechanisms to support the development of rural transport.

It was also an important follow-up by Asian countries in response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, he said, when addressing the closing ceremony of the forum yesterday.

This creates another milestone in the history of the Regional EST Forum in Asia, an area where it is recognised that transport accessibility and connectivity is a big problem.

In addition, 29 mayors and city authorities and representatives from the Asia and African region on Wednesday signed the Kyoto Declaration and Its Addendum on the Promotion of EST towards Realising Resilient, Smart and Liveable Cities in Asia.

This was a remarkable demonstration of the commitments of cities towards Sustainable Development Goal No. 11, which calls for making cities and human settlements safe, resilient, inclusive and sustainable, Dr Bounchanh said.

The forum would not have been a success without

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cooperation and assistance from international organisations and partners, he added.

They included the Asian Development Bank, Department for International Development, EMBARQ, FAO, GIZ, ICLEI, International Road Transport Union, Institute for Transportation and Development Policy, International Union of Railways, Research for Community Access Partnership, SAFER-Vehicle and Traffic Safety Centre University of Gothenburg, United Nations Human

Settlements Programme, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Victoria Transport Policy Institute, the World Health Organisation and the World Bank.

The forum has greatly benefited Laos by enabling its delegates to gain new ideas and learn about best practices in the area of sustainable transport development, Dr Bounchanh said.

He strongly believed that the Regional EST Forum in Asia had emerged as an important regional platform to discuss

policy issues both in the urban and rural transport sectors.

Laos would continue to contribute to the success of this forum, he added.

The forum discussed various policy options, institutional measures, technology interventions, financing mechanisms and partnership arrangements in the transport sector for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The 11th Regional EST Forum in Asia next year will be hosted by Mongolia.