



Department of  
Economic and  
Social Affairs



MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT  
MALAYSIA



# Investing in Sustainable Transport: Catalyzing Economic and Social Development in the SDGs Era

## Concept Note

*High-Level 15th Regional Environmentally Sustainable Transport Forum in Asia  
24-26 October 2023, Hilton KL, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

## Introduction

The sustainable development of Asia is hindered by a transport infrastructure gap. Asia has 58% of the global population and is responsible for 48% of the global GDP. Yet, it has 30% of the global road supply and 34% of the global heavy rail supply. Asia's share in global passenger transport is only 27% and in freight transport only 34%. Overcoming this infrastructure gap will be key for developing Asia to be successful in progressing economically and continue its efforts to reduce and eliminate poverty. The development of safe, clean, and affordable transport infrastructure in Asia is therefore key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Malaysia's Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 is a commitment to make Malaysia a nation that achieves sustainable growth along with fair and equitable distribution, across income groups, ethnicities, regions, and supply chains, making it an excellent venue for the 15th Regional Environmentally Sustainable Transport (EST) Forum. Malaysia's 2030 National Transport Policy calls for the development of a sustainable transport sector that accelerates economic growth and supports the well-being of the rakyat (the people) in line with an advanced nation status.

Successful sustainable economic and social development in the Asia region requires a well-developed transport infrastructure as well as passenger and freight transport services to provide access to essential utilities, markets, and services. As per 2023 UN SDGs Report, in the developing world, where globally an estimated 1 billion people still lack access to all-weather roads, the demand for mobility for people and goods has been expanding exponentially every year. While 40.9% of the population in Eastern and South-East Asian regions have convenient access to public transport, it is only 33.7 % in Central and Southern Asia. Among others, there is a pressing need for cities to integrate motorized transportation systems with walking and cycling through long-term sustainable urban mobility plans, targeted infrastructure investments, and policy implementation. Equally important, from a macroeconomic perspective, is to minimize the negative externalities linked to the transport

sector. This includes numerous road crashes, traffic congestion, air, and noise pollution, and GHG emissions the consequences of global climate change. All these transport externalities have a severe adverse impact on social well-being and economic growth. For instance, the economic impact of road crash fatalities and serious injuries in Asia and the Pacific, which has been well documented, is expected to amount to 850 billion USD in 2030, which is about 4% of GDP with the poorest often being the most affected. A recent study conducted by the ADB's Asian Transport Outlook projects that the investment required to build, maintain, and repair the region's inland transport infrastructure from 2020 to 2030 might be as high as 14.5 trillion USD (in PPP terms) i.e., equivalent to 1.6% of GDP.

The 15<sup>th</sup> Regional Environmentally Sustainable Transport (EST) Forum in Asia will have as its main focus the benefits of developing a sustainable transport infrastructure and services, which is a key development priority for Asian countries. As set out in the Aichi Declaration 2030, sustainable transport aims to fulfill economic, environmental, and social aspects bringing prosperity to all and leaving nobody behind. A growing body of research has demonstrated the significant social, economic, and environmental benefits of funding sustainable transportation infrastructure.

Since 2005, the Regional EST Forums have brought together a national government in their quest for more sustainable transport development. National government participants include the Ministries of Transport, Environment, Health, Urban and Rural Development, and Railways. A highlight of the EST Initiative is the annual EST Forum meetings hosted by EST participating countries. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, the 2020 and 2021 editions of the annual EST Forum meetings were conducted as online events. The 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum to be hosted by the Government of Malaysia will be the first in-person event organized by the Regional EST Forum since the pandemic.

A key element of the Regional EST Forum process is the joint Regional Declarations adopted by the EST countries. The first of these Declarations that guided the activities of the EST Forum from 2010 -2020 was the Bangkok 2020 Declaration on Environmentally Sustainable Transport which outlined a vision for Asia on how sustainable transport could promote a green economy. To provide new impetus to the regional EST Forum and sustainable transport policymaking in Asia, this was followed by the Aichi 2030 Declaration on Environmentally Sustainable Transport - Making Transport in Asia Sustainable (2021-2030) which was voluntarily adopted by the countries participating in the EST initiative at the 14<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum in Asia (Aichi/Japan, 2021). With its six goals, it was the first time that Asian governments agreed on a regional and sectoral “translation” of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change in the transport sector in Asia. Box 1 gives an overview of the 6 goals of the Aichi 2030 Declaration.

<b>Aichi 2030 Declaration Goals</b>
<p><b>Sustainability Goals:</b></p> <p><u>Goal 1 Environment sustainability:</u> By 2030, improve the environmental sustainability of transport in Asia for the following areas:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Goal 1a – Low-Carbon (climate change mitigation):</i> By 2030, aims to peak transport CO2 emissions and initiate reductions in transport-related CO2 emissions with the intention to move towards decarbonization of the transport sector by 2050, or shortly thereafter (Based on SDG 7.2, 9.1, 13.2, Paris Agreement);</p>

*Goal 1b – Resilience:* By 2030, increase resilience and adaptive capacity of transport system to climate-related hazards and pandemics such as COVID-19. (Based on SDG 13, Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030);

*Goal 1c – Air pollution:* By 2030, reduce air pollution and contamination caused by traffic, including PM2.5, other air pollutants and noise. (Based on SDG 3.9, 11.6).

*Goal 2 – Road safety:* By 2030, halve the number of deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents in Asia compared to 2020, with specific attention to vulnerable road users. (Based on SDG 3.6 and the second UN Decade of Action on Road Safety 2021 – 2030, Stockholm Declaration on Road Safety).

*Goal 3 - Economic sustainability:* By 2030, realize sustainable economic and employment growth by leveraging science, technology and innovation and green investments in quality passenger and freight transport infrastructure and services in a manner that fully incorporates environmental and social impacts throughout the lifecycle of the transport infrastructure and services, (Based on SDG 8.4, SDG 9.1, 12.1 and 12.c).

#### **Access and Connectivity Goals**

*Goal 4 - Rural access:* By 2030, realize accessible, inclusive, safe, affordable, and resilient rural transport infrastructure and services, thus facilitating improved access to markets, basic utilities, and services including health and education by the farming community, and other rural population including physically disabled and vulnerable groups (Based on SDG 2 and SDG 9.1).

*Goal 5 - Urban access:* By 2030, ensure access to accessible, inclusive, safe, efficient, affordable, and sustainable transport facilities, systems, and services for urban dwellers, including physically disabled and vulnerable groups through the development of urban transport infrastructure and services (Based on SDG 11.2 and 11.7).

*Goal 6 - National access and connectivity:* By 2030, facilitate inclusive multi-modal national (including rural-urban) and regional (cross-border) connectivity through the provision of sustainable multi-modal freight and passenger transport infrastructure and services (Based on SDG 9.1).

Each Regional EST Forum will review and discuss three of the goals from the Aichi 2030 Declaration; this is part of a phased approach adopted by the EST Forum participating countries. The 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum 2023 in Malaysia is expected to focus on: *Goal 1a – Low-Carbon (climate change mitigation), Goal 2 – Road safety, and Goal 6 - National access and connectivity*. The 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum will be the first in-person high-level Forum following the adoption of the Aichi 2030 Declaration and is expected to be a key milestone event in the implementation of the Aichi 2030 Declaration.

The Ministry of Transport (MoT), Government of Malaysia is the designated host of the 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum. The MoT-Malaysia is spearheading the transformation of an integrated efficient and safe transportation system. The motto of MoT-Malaysia “*Sustainable Transport, Heartbeat To Nation Development*” is well aligned with the theme and focus of the 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum. To realize its vision MoT- Malaysia is responsible for the formulation and implementation of land transport, freight and logistics, maritime and aviation policies, programs, and projects.

## Objectives of the High-level 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum in Asia

There are four main objectives for the 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum in Asia.

1. Demonstrate the economic, social, and environmental benefits of the implementation of the Aichi 2030 Declaration. The successful implementation of the six goals of the Aichi 2030 Declaration will require substantial investments in the expansion of the transport infrastructure and services in all the countries participating in the EST initiative. Such an expansion needs to reflect the sustainable development and low-carbon orientation as well as safety and resilience aspects, underscored in the goals of the Aichi 2030 Declaration. Infrastructure is understood to include both “hard infrastructure” such as roads, railways, or urban transport systems, and “soft infrastructure” consisting of systems and capacity to operate the different types of hard infrastructure. Inclusive transport can only be achieved if those who are currently underserved (including women) in transport are included in the design and operations of transport infrastructure and services. It is expected that countries participating in the EST initiative will be more motivated to make the required investments if they fully understand the economic, social, and environmental benefits of such investments.
2. Agree on the implementation plan for the Aichi 2030 Declaration towards better alignment of Asia’s transport policy and planning, programs, institutional arrangements and infrastructure development in line with the objectives of SDGs and Paris Agreement on climate change, among others. Following the adoption of the Aichi 2030 Declaration, the EST Secretariat, assisted by support from the Asian Development Bank has conducted extensive consultations with a range of existing and potential partner organizations on how the Regional EST Forum and its secretariat hosted by UNCRD can best support the EST participating countries in the implementation of the Aichi 2030 Declaration. This has resulted in a draft implementation plan which will be presented to the EST participating members for approval.
3. Discussion of bounce-back strategy for transport in Asia following the COVID-19 pandemic. This being the first in-person forum since the outbreak of COVID-19 there is a continued desire to discuss how the transport sector can bounce back from the COVID-19 pandemic. This is especially relevant for public transport, which was especially hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. Call for international actions and support for the implementation of the Aichi 2030 Declaration. In the lead-up to the adoption of the Aichi 2030 Declaration extensive consultations were conducted with the countries participating in the EST Forum on the goals included in the Aichi 2030 Declaration. Several country representatives expressed concern about their capacities to achieve these goals and indicated that they would welcome external support both financially and in the form of technical assistance for capacity building and policy development. Based on these concerns the following statement was included in the Aichi 2030 Declaration: *"We welcome the support of other EST stakeholders including the development community, private*

*sector and civil society in achieving the goals of the Aichi 2030 Declaration, and we call on these organizations, including those that were absent in this Fourteenth EST Forum to align their transport activities with the objectives of the Aichi 2030 Declaration".*

## Title and Theme of the High-level 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum

While having three proposed objectives for the High-level 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum in Asia, it is proposed to emphasize the “Benefits of Investing in Sustainable Infrastructure” while selecting the theme of the 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum: **“Investing in Sustainable Transport: Catalyzing Economic and Social Development in the SDGs Era”**. As a subtitle, it is proposed to use: *“Implementing the Aichi 2030 Declaration on Environmentally Sustainable Transport through the development of sustainable transport infrastructure”*. Having this title and sub-title will allow the Forum to have dedicated sessions on the topic of infrastructure development and to mainstream this as well in all other relevant sessions of the Forum. The proposed focus on the benefits of sustainable transport infrastructure directly reflects the current developmental needs of Malaysia. The proposed Asia Pacific Rail Summit as a pre-event should also help to ensure the relevance of this proposed Forum to the needs of Malaysia.

## Organizers of the High-level 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum

The High-level 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum is hosted by the Government of Malaysia represented by the Ministry of Transport; and co-organized by the Ministry of the Environment Japan, the Asian Development Bank, and the United Nations Centre for Regional Development of Division for Sustainable Development Goals/ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

The organizers of the 15<sup>th</sup> EST Forum will actively liaise with the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank, International Transport Forum (ITF), German International Cooperation (GIZ), the SLOCAT Partnership, and a wide range of other organizations.

The 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum and the Asia Pacific Rail Summit will showcase the growing cooperation between UNCRD, acting as the secretariat of the Regional EST Forum, and the Asian Development Bank. Key components in this cooperation are the knowledge management activities undertaken by the Asian Development Bank Asian Transport Outlook Initiative and the support provided by ADB for the implementation of the Aichi 2030 Declaration.

## Participants of the High-level 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum in Asia

Participation in the 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum in Asia is by invitation. It is expected that approximately 400 participants (including 200 international participants), including high-level government representatives including policymakers, planners, and government officials from Asian countries, city mayors, representatives of international organizations, experts and

resource persons, NGOs, academia, and the private sectors will be attending the Forum. Participation in the UN Forum is free of charge.

## Structure of the High-level 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum in Asia

A three-day event is planned from 24 to 26 October 2023.

### A. Pre-Event: The First Asia Pacific Rail Summit (23 October 2023) and Technical Visits

As an integral part of the High-level 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum, the first “**Asia-Pacific Railways Summit**” will be co-organized with the International Union of Railways (UIC) on 23 October 2023 as a pre-event of the Forum. This will be part of the 36<sup>th</sup> UIC – Asia Pacific Regional Assembly that will be hosted in conjunction with the 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum.

There will also be a possibility for other partner organizations to the organize and conduct pre-events/ post-events during the 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Details on the pre-event, side-events, and post-event will be shared in due course. Interested organizations should contact [est@uncrd.or.jp](mailto:est@uncrd.or.jp).

### B. Ministerial Session (DAY 1: 24 October 2023)

In 2021 for the first time, a Ministerial Session was conducted with great success as an integral part of the 14<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum held in Aichi, Japan. A hybrid Ministerial Session will be organized at the 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum in Kuala Lumpur to build on the success of the Ministerial Session in 2021.

### C. Spotlight on Malaysia (DAY 1: 24 October 2023)

It is proposed that Day 1: *Spotlight on Malaysia* apart from the formal opening of the 15<sup>th</sup> EST Forum, the introduction of the theme of the 15<sup>th</sup> EST Forum through a Keynote address and a Ministerial session will focus on the Malaysian Transport Sector. This will be an opportunity for the Malaysian Ministry of Transport to showcase its plans for the development of its transport sector and seek inputs from a range of national and international stakeholders including but not limited to the representatives from the Malaysian Government and representatives from multilateral and bilateral donor organizations, the private sector and selected representatives from organizations that can provide capacity-building assistance to Malaysia.

### D. Implementation plan for the Aichi 2030 Declaration on Sustainable Transport (2021-2030)

The Aichi 2030 Declaration (2021-2030) has a ten-year time frame, and it is expected that its implementation will be an incremental process. The Aichi 2030 Declaration introduced a number of new elements, including implementation progress reporting, Communities of Interest (CoI), etc. which will be rolled out in a gradual manner. Following the adoption of the

Aichi 2030 Declaration (2021-2030), the UNCRD in close collaboration with and assistance of the ADB has been working on the implementation plan for the Aichi 2030 Declaration (2021-2030). The draft implementation plan will be shared with the EST participating countries before the 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum and will be discussed and agreed upon during the 15<sup>th</sup> EST Forum.

#### E. Capacity-building workshop (2023)

ADB and UNCRD jointly hosted a three-day capacity-building workshop in March 2023 in Manila, the Philippines for the countries participating in the regional EST initiative on the implementation of the Aichi 2030 Declaration (2021-2030). The workshop also discussed how countries can best report on the implementation of the Aichi 2030 Declaration.

### Input and Outcome Documents of the High-level 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum

In preparation for the 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum, several policy recommendation papers will be prepared and made available for the benefit of the countries. These papers will be linked to the three Aichi 2030 goals that will be reviewed and discussed in the 15<sup>th</sup> EST Forum: Goal 1a – Low-Carbon (climate change mitigation), Goal 2 – Road safety, and Goal 6 - National access and connectivity. A brief status overview drawn from the Asian Transport Outlook will complement the papers.

Like in previous EST Forums, a Chairman Summary will be developed and adopted by the governmental participants in the 15<sup>th</sup> EST Forum. Unlike, in previous EST Forums, elements of the Chairman Summary will be circulated in advance for comments to the governments participating in the EST initiative.

It is currently planned that the 15<sup>th</sup> EST Forum will also result in a Call for Support in which the countries participating in the EST initiative formulate an appeal to the international community for greater financial, technical, and capacity-building assistance in the implementation of the Aichi 2030 Declaration (2021-2030). This Call for Support will also be circulated for comments well before the 15<sup>th</sup> EST Forum.

### Nature of the Forum (in person)

The 15<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum in Asia will be mainly an in-person event. However, the Ministerial segment of the Forum could be conducted as a hybrid event.

### Contact

#### **Secretariat of the Regional EST Forum in Asia**

CRC Mohanty and Ganesh Raj Joshi

United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD)-DSDG/UN DESA

Nagono 1-47-1 Nakamura-ku, Nagoya 450-0001, JAPAN and

Tel: +81-52-561-9382/9417/9536

Fax: +81-52 561 9375

E-mail: [est@uncrd.or.jp](mailto:est@uncrd.or.jp)