



MR. DAVID HANIF

Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development,
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)

Welcome Message

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the Sixteenth Regional Environmentally Sustainable Transport (EST) Forum in Asia, hosted by the Government of the Philippines, at the ADB Headquarters in Manila. This year's chosen theme '*Sustainable Urban Mobility Solutions- Empowering Cities towards Low Carbon Pathways for Achieving Co-benefits & Economic Resilience in the SDGs Era*', is a timely opportunity to highlight the many ways sustainable urban mobility supports progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Cities are spaces to deliver holistically on the 2030 Agenda by leading the global transition to low-carbon development while at the same time ensuring improved air quality, enhanced public health, reduced inequality, and greater economic opportunities through efficient connectivity. This is precisely the kind of transformative and integrated action called for at both the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Summit in 2023 and the Summit of the Future in 2024.

The Regional EST Forum in Asia brings together policymakers from local and national levels, urban planners, researchers, and industry leaders to collaborate, exchange ideas, and explore innovative solutions for integrating sustainability into urban transportation systems. Together, we aim to empower cities with the knowledge, tools, and strategies necessary to reduce ecological and carbon footprints and foster economic resilience in a world grappling with the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

Asia's demographic and economic significance makes it a focal point for global sustainability efforts. While the region accounts for 58 per cent of the global population and generates 48 per cent of the global GDP, it faces unique challenges and opportunities in the transition to sustainable urban mobility. The region's rapid urbanization, growing middle class, and expanding cities underscore the need for efficient, inclusive, and low-carbon transportation systems. The sustainable development of Asia is also hindered by a net transport infrastructure deficit. Sustainable development in the Asia region will require a well-developed transport infrastructure as well as passenger and freight transport services to provide access to essential markets, goods and services. In this regard, cities play a pivotal role in implementing innovative solutions and measures, including nature-based solutions, by fostering partnerships, investing in infrastructure, and aligning local policies with global agendas and agreements such as the SDGs, the Paris Agreement, the New Urban Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, among others.

While it is of paramount importance to expand metro systems, high-speed rail, and bus rapid transit networks to reduce reliance on personal vehicles, there is equally a pressing need for Asian cities to integrate non-

motorized transportation systems such as dedicated and safe walking and cycling provisions in the overall transport policy, planning, financing and infrastructure development.

I am pleased to learn that the 16th Regional EST Forum in Asia also calls for international actions and support for capacity building, both financial and technical assistance. Such support is essential for the implementation of the Aichi 2030 Declaration (2021-2030). I am also pleased to recognize that with the leadership of our outreach centre in Nagoya, Japan - the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD), the Forum has been providing an important avenue to strengthen regional input to various regional and global fora such as the high-level political forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), and the UN Climate Change Conference, and the UN Global Sustainable Transport Conference, among others.

In this regard, this year's EST Forum will also have a chance to contribute to global conversations around sustainable transport and its role in SDG implementation. The Member States of the United Nations have requested the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs to develop an *Implementation Plan for the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport 2026 – 2035*, in collaboration with the UN Regional Commissions and in consultation with the Member States, the United Nations system and other relevant stakeholders. The 16th Regional EST Forum will provide valuable ideas and inputs to the Implementation Plan that is expected to be launched in late 2025.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the Government of the Philippines for hosting the 16th Regional EST Forum in Asia. I also take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to the Government of Japan for its continued support to the Regional EST Forum in Asia since its inception in 2004, and also to our partners and co-organizers, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), for their valuable support.

I also wish to acknowledge the meaningful support provided to the Forum by the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the German International Cooperation (GIZ) - Transformative Urban Mobility Initiative (TUMI) and Sustainable Mobility in Metropolitan Regions in ASEAN (SMMR), International Union of Railways (UIC), International Transport Forum (ITF), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Busworld Foundation, SLOCAT Partnership, Eco-Mo Foundation, Clean Air Asia (CAA), International Federation of Public Transport (UITP), and Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI), among others, for their valuable support in organizing the Forum.

I wish you all a highly successful event.

MR. NAVID HANIF

Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development, UN DESA