



Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka



His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa
The President of Sri Lanka



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ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT IN SRI LANKA PRESENTATION BY

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Members of the Clergy, Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, first of all I must thank the National Environment Agency, Ministry of Environment and Water Resources of Singapore, the Land Transport Authority, Ministry of Transport, Singapore, The Ministry of the Environment, Japan, and the United Nations Center for Regional Development for organizing this Third Regional Environmentally Sustainable Transport Forum and for inviting me as Minister of Urban Development in Sri Lanka to make my presentation on behalf of my country Sri Lanka.....

It is not only my privilege but it also gives me great pleasure to address you today on Environmentally Sustainable Transport in Sri Lanka .



Transportation is a social and economic overhead expense in any modern country in the world. Transportation contributes 30 percent of the carbon dioxide emissions in the whole of Asia and is second only to electric utilities in the emission of carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide is projected to contribute more than 75 percent of enhanced global warming over the next century.

The majority of peoples in the Third World get around on foot. In my country Sri Lanka in our villages more than 90% of rural trips are made on foot along footpaths. Sri Lanka is predominantly an agricultural country, and more than 80% of our population consists of peasants and farmers, living off the agricultural produce from the land. Our staple food is rice and therefore more than 75% of the arable land in our country is used for the cultivation of paddy.



Picture of a footpath in a village leading to a paddy field.





Picture of a coffee house (Kopi Kaday) just by the road side.





Although Sri Lanka is a multi ethnic and multi religious country, the vast majority of people in our country are followers of Buddhism, and every village is dotted by three or four Buddhist temples. The roads to these Buddhist temples in the villages are today no more footpaths but are mostly Macadamized and tarred roads, because a large majority of our people visit the Buddhist temples along these roads and as a result due to greater use of roads leading to Buddhist temples village footpaths and gravel roads are on the decline in Sri Lanka today.



Picture of a tarred road in a village leading to a Buddhist temple seen in the background



About 80% of our people travel by bus and only less than 10% use the motor car and the motor van as a form of human transport. Cars are owned almost exclusively by businessmen, bureaucrats and foreigners and the upper middle class in our society.

Picture of a motor van , small size motor car , Van,Three Weller, carrying school.





However, the World Bank, for example, spends \$100 million on urban transport every year; most of that is car-related. Of the \$2.1 billion spent in 1985 on transport, miniscule amounts were spent on non-motorized vehicles. The long-term effect of World Bank programs has been to encourage transport systems which are both capital and energy intensive

We are a third world country in which road transportation contributes about 93 per cent of land transportation. An efficient transport network is a pre-requisite for sustained higher economic growth and regional development. I am happy to state that today under the national plan for development envisaged by the President of Sri Lanka, His Excellency the Right Honorable Mahinda Rajapakse, called the “Mahinda Chinthanaya”, Sri Lanka has taken steps to formulate some new policies in the sphere of transport, under the guidance of our President.

The Sri Lanka Government’s long term plan for the transport sector envisages the development of an efficient and safe transport system responsive to the socio- economic development needs of our peoples, that provide services at an affordable price.



Road Network Map of Sri Lanka



Map not to Scale

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Indian Ocean



While talking about how the social development in our country affected our systems of transport I am proud to tell you that Sri Lanka is the first country among the Asian people to abolish the rickshaw form of transport bequeathed to us by the British who introduced this inhuman form of rickshaw transport where one human being carries the weight of another human being exerting his full physical strength. Although the rickshaw may have been an environmentally sustainable form of transport, one of the first steps taken by our Government in 1948 when we got independence from the British was to abolish the rickshaw as a means of transport, because it is against human dignity. Although we in Sri Lanka abolished the rickshaw form of transport in our country, even today we can see this rickshaw form of transport quite widespread in Bangladesh and in certain remote parts of India and Pakistan, but in Sri Lanka I am happy to say that the rickshaw is no more seen in the streets of Sri Lanka and I long for the day when the rickshaw will be wiped out of the face of the entire Asian continent.



Picture of a rickshaw man pulling a rickshaw with a white man seated happily with a few loaded suitcases.





As I told you the abolition of the rickshaw is how social development affected our economic development, but now on the other hand I want to show you another instance how economic development paved the way for social development in our country. This is by the use of the tractor not only in the transport of produce and crops but also as a form of human transport. Today the tractor has replaced the traditional cattle drawn bullock cart in our villages. In its place the tractor come to stay in our villages and has acquired an important place because very often bands of people in our villages use it even as a means of human transport.



Picture of a tractor carrying sheaves of paddy with a few people in it.





Though the coverage of the road network in Sri Lanka is considered to be adequate by international standards, road conditions and capacities are insufficient to meet the rapidly growing demand for mobility in terms of the road density. I am very proud to say here that Sri Lanka's position stands above our neighboring countries having 1.6 million kilometers of roads per square kilometers of area and 5.5 kilometers of roads per 1000 persons.

The performance of passenger transportation in the year 2006 has shown a marginal improvement in terms of operated kilometers and passenger kilometers. The total operated kilometers of the State and the private sector operators has increased by 2% while passenger kilometers increased marginally. In 2006 the total bus fleet increased by 3% to 26,372 buses both private and public owned. The private sector presence in passenger transportation further increased in the year 2006. The share of the private bus operators in the total operated kilometerage was around 69% while the share of the private bus operators in passenger kilometers was 71% in the year 2006.



Picture of an overloaded private owned bus with people hanging on to the footboard going along a village tarred road.





More cyclists and pedestrians are affected by unsafe roads and more passengers by poor public transport than are concerned as drivers by traffic congestion or parking problems. Yet very little research has been carried out on the transport used by the poor. We have to confess that in Sri Lanka our research programs do not have even a remote relationship with the problems of poor people and rural areas of Sri Lanka. Aid agencies and development banks can have a real influence on transport policies.

The motor cycle has fast gained popularity as a means of transport for the lower middle classes and the three wheeler sales have sky rocketed in recent times. Today there are over 175,000 motor cycles and over 75,000 three wheelers running on our roads even in remote villages of the country.



Picture of a motor cyclist with his wife on the pillion both wearing helmets





Sustainable modes of transport, especially public transport and goods transport by rail, are losing market share to road transport in many Asian countries.

This trend is enhanced by the fact that the majority of transport infrastructure investment is allocated to road infrastructures, in Sri Lanka but here I must mention the great work undertaken by our Minister of Transport, the Honorable Dallas Alahaperuma in improving our railway. The Railway in Sri Lanka was established about 125 years ago by the British who colonized our country. Since we gained independence in 1948, the railway had been neglected by successive Governments and in the year 2006 the operating loss was Rs 3.9 million. Today however, we have obtained several new railway carriages from the Chinese Government under an aid scheme and are expanding the railway in the South of the country. In the year 2006 we had 4356 million in passenger kilometers and 138 million freight ton kilometers.



Picture of an overcrowded passenger boat

Picture of an overcrowded train moving with people hanging on to footboards





During the year 2007 there were 33 international airlines including four cargo airlines operating in Sri Lanka. The performance of domestic air transportation has slowed down mainly due to the restriction of services to the North for national security reasons. The services provided by Sri Lankan Airlines have been further expanded and it now operates services to 50 destinations in 28 countries. Online travel offers and E ticketing have been already introduced with a view to enhancing the quality of customer service and facilitating better holiday opportunities at more destinations. We have introduced another new airline, Mihin Airlines which is fast gaining ground.



Picture of a Sri Lankan Airlines aero plane flying in the sky



The civil aviation sector displayed a healthy growth in 2007 despite security concerns and slowing down of tourist arrivals due to the terrorist war in the North of the country. Total passenger handling at the Colombo airport increased by 12% and total cargo handling increased by 7% in 2007. Though tourist arrivals didn't show a significant growth due to the escalation of the war with the terrorist Tigers in the North of the country, air travel of Sri Lankans has increased significantly. The share of the national carrier, Sri Lankan Airlines in passenger operations increased to 65% and freight operations increased further to 58%.

Domestic shipping transport is very minimal in Sri Lanka. Shipping as a form of transport is mainly used by the Sri Lanka Navy to transport refugees from the North and to carry food to the war torn villages in the North. However the port of Colombo attracted several main shipping lines last year.



*Picture of a passenger ship
in the port of Colombo*

*Picture of cargo being
unloaded in the port of
Colombo.*





Transport activities can contaminate soil, water and air, through accidents involving dangerous goods and contamination from transport infrastructures, or by heavy metals from vehicle exhausts, de-icing substances, fuel spillages, release of fuels and other pollutants from road and rail vehicles, ships and aircraft.

The following approaches are used to evaluate and develop less polluting transport policies. We in Sri Lanka have introduced Transport enabling programs, which provide a basis for the evaluation, implementation and ongoing review of traffic management policy in our country.

Transport system management, which attempts to expand the network of our public roads is one of our priorities as a nation.

Transport demand management, which uses economic incentives, regulations and voluntary measures to influence the extent, timing and mode of travel is being introduced in Sri Lanka. Traffic calming measures, which describe various physical and design changes that allow roads to better accommodate a range of different road uses is also in our plans for development. Alternate mode transportation measures, which describe how conditions might be improved for pedestrians, cyclists and transit users are also being researched in our universities.



The paramount need of the hour is to establish a sustainable and environmentally sound transport system which promotes the use of public transport, transport by sea, rail, and non-motorized transport. Economic instruments should be used as a way of reducing transport volumes while reflecting environmental costs in transport prices, especially for freight transport.

The principles and approaches of sustainable development beneficial for health and the environment have been taken into account in incorporating into transport, policies advocated by the “Mahinda Chinthanaya” which guides us along the path to a more efficient transport system in our country.

Sustainable transportation requires that economic activity be environmentally sustainable. The current dependency on cars, intercity goods movement by trucks and lorries, and the growing impacts of aviation are environmentally unsustainable. This has profound implications for the long term structure of key sectors of national and global industry.



Vehicle traffic is still continuing to grow in all our Asian countries. In order to reduce fossil energy use and carbon dioxide (CO) emissions in this sector, traffic policy needs to reduce the need for mobility as well as discourage increases in mobility and the reducing CO emissions per passenger kilometer. This can be achieved by switching from energy-intensive transport means to energy extensive transport and through improving the efficiency of transport means. To achieve this we are developing not only our urban areas but also our villages. This is done mainly by taking to the villages the same facilities available to people in urban areas. Everyday we are increasing the accessibility of everyday facilities such as grocery stores, supermarkets, schools, day-care centers, health-care facilities by shortening distance between these facilities and the citizen's home.

We are also encouraging people to walk or jog or cycle, and not drive, distances under 3 km by publicizing the beneficial effects of exercise in keeping away obesity which leads to diabetes and high blood pressure, which today are spreading like wildfire in most of the countries of Asia.



Physical Training in the Streets





We are not only expanding our infrastructure investments in roads and parking facilities to railways and public transport; we have also progressed significantly in the promotion of telecommunication techniques to reduce business travel, for example by encouraging video-conferencing and telecommuting.



Picture of a telecommunication tower on the roof of a building





With the fuel crisis affecting our economy in an adverse manner, today Telecommuting is an effective component of travel-demand management which will reduce traffic congestion, air pollution, road casualties and energy consumption. Other advanced telecommunications technologies, such as teleshopping, home-banking and videoconferencing will all have an impact on future travel demand. In the nearer term, telematic applications hold much promise in road pricing and traffic management. We must confess that our country Sri Lanka is far behind Hong Kong and Singapore which have pioneered electronic road pricing. It is our dream to introduce telematic applications in public transport operations and to give priority to public road services.

Our Government is aware of the need to take action to secure more sustainable transport for the future. We have realized the need for integration, both within and between different modes of transport. We are fully conscious that our transport policies must fall in line with our other economic policies.



We in Sri Lanka are in agreement that Government should aim to provide the framework for all those with an interest in transport to play their part; Our Government is interested in expanding the potential for technology to provide solutions through innovation, amongst other things, in fuel efficiency and emissions, and the need to encourage awareness of transport issues, and to send consistent signals such that we all work to further sustainable development objectives

A sustainable and environmentally sound transport system is required which promotes the use of public transport, transport by sea, rail, and non-motorized transport. Economic instruments should be used as a way of reducing transport volumes while reflecting environmental costs in transport prices, especially for freight transport

Governmental policies are failing to keep pace with the growth in traffic which is adding to the problems of air pollution, climate change, noise, congestion and biodiversity, and consequently habitat loss

Transport choices do not arise out of the free interplay of market forces. The existing systems of political power strongly influence investments in roads, bridges, expressways and oil refineries. Decisions on transport policy are usually in the hands of technocrats -- engineers and economists, often Western educated, who are wealthy enough to own cars. They are backed by urban elites who profit from oil import deals, car dealerships or construction contracts. Their decisions about what kind of roads will be built, and where, are based on economic pressure or military security. The dream of an automotive society must always be the dream of a democratic country like Sri Lanka.



The principles and approaches of sustainable development beneficial for health and the environment must be incorporated into transport policies. We in the third world must have multi-sector integration of environment and health requirements and involvement of health authorities in decision-making on transport, and infrastructure policies.

Sustainable transportation requires that economic activity be environmentally sustainable. The current dependency on cars, intercity goods movement by truck and the growing impacts of aviation are environmentally unsustainable. This has profound implications for the long term structure of key sectors of national and global industry.



Sustainable development has an environmental, a social and an economic dimension, all of which need to be adequately balanced in order to avoid disharmony between these, in part, conflicting dynamics. In order to create a sustainable society, the elements of society, such as ethics, law, government and economics, must cooperate and coordinate their activities on a sustainable basis. National sustainable strategies adopted may be more effective if permitted to function on an integrated basis

Sustainable development, as a long-term, global necessity, can probably not be achieved without concerted local, national and international, and global action. This requires not only progress but constant and critical review of understanding of the interrelationships among the differing and conflicting aspirations and needs of individuals and societies. Some critical problems that we confront in the Third World are the valuation of economic growth as a positive and desirable line of development which continues unabated, in spite of a growing recognition that the earth is finite.



Another problem that we in the Third World are facing is the increasing magnitude of humankind in relation to the earth as an ecological identity, which threatens the continuing viability of the planet, for example through the greenhouse effect. We in Sri Lanka want to advance preservation of biodiversity. In spite of numerous pronouncements in support of initiatives to overcome these problems, this has up to now mainly been lip service, the necessary political steps have not been taken in most parts of the Third World. In structuring our transport policies we have always borne in mind the strategy features in the framework of Agenda 21 as formulated at UNCED (Rio de Janeiro, 1992), now coordinated by the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development and implemented through national and local authorities. Agenda 21 recommends establishing effective combinations of economic, regulatory and voluntary self-regulatory approaches. Paragraph 16 of the 1998 UN/ECE Aarhus Declaration acknowledges transport as causing problems of air pollution, climate change, noise, congestion and biodiversity and habitat loss. It promotes a sustainable and environmentally sound pattern of transport and the promotion of public transport, transport by sea, rail, and non-motorized transport. It recommends economic instruments should be used as a way of reducing transport volumes while also reflecting environmental costs in transport prices, especially for freight transport.



Agenda 21 recommends adopting integrated approaches to sustainable development at a regional level, including trans-boundary areas, subject to the requirements of particular circumstances and needs

The shift in environmental policy in our Asian countries from the struggle against the negative impacts of too-high resource use to the struggle against high resource use in itself demands changes in the prices of commodities. Price increases in primary resources thus become understood as working in the best interests of the consumption countries as well as the production countries. It must be avoided that third countries, such as poor countries like Sri Lanka which import raw materials, become victims. Here a system of tradable user rights may offer a solution to the problem.

Ladies and gentlemen, My only request is this. Let's join hands together for the purpose of building an environmentally sustainable transport system in the world. In conclusion I wish you the best of luck.

Thank you.

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