

# Intergovernmental Tenth Regional Environmentally Sustainable Transport (EST) Forum in Asia

14-16 March 2017

Don Chan Palace Hotel & Convention, Vientiane, Lao PDR

*Theme: 2030 Road Map for Sustainable Transport ~ Aligning with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*

## 1. BACKGROUND

The Heads of State and Government and High Level Representatives of 193 Member States of the United Nations adopted the post-2015 development agenda – Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 related targets at its core, at the UN Sustainable Development Summit held in New York from 25 to 27 September 2015. The Agenda which represents a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity reflects the commitment of the countries to shift the world on to a sustainable and resilient path. Through the adoption of the Agenda, the member states have significantly reinforced the vital role of sustainable transport in achieving the SDGs.

Asia, being the most populated (4.4 billion) and fastest growing region in the world, will require a massive transformation in its transport sector in order to remain on the path of resilience, economic prosperity and sustainability. Although development in Asia has achieved spectacular progress on many fronts in the last decade in implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Asian countries and cities are facing several social, economic and environmental challenges due to extensive population growth, rapid unplanned urbanization, and inadequate provision of infrastructure and basic services both in urban and rural areas. Lack of accessibility has been one of the critical challenges to uplift the rural economy and social well-being.

*SDGs calls for massive transformation and careful investment in the existing transport sector...*

Asia faces a number of socio-economic challenges which are directly or indirectly linked to the transport sector. Poverty, hunger and access to basic utilities and services such as education, health care, drinking water, sanitation, market and employment, remain formidable challenges for developing Asia. Although progress has been made towards increasing access to education worldwide, 57 million children remain out of school and according to the UN, most of them are girls from Asian developing countries. About 103 million youth worldwide lack basic literacy skills, and more than 60% of them are women in Asia. Despite global progress to access health services, only half of women in developing Asia receive the recommended amount of health care they need. More than 350,000 women die annually from complications during pregnancy or childbirth, almost all of them in developing countries. Likewise, millions of people who live in rural areas have no access to basic transportation services, which makes it challenging to achieve many of the SDGs.

*Accessibility is central to poverty eradication and achievement of many of the SDGs...*

On the other hand, vehicle fleets across Asia are doubling every 5 to 7 years (ADB, 2012) and energy demand is increasing by 2.7% annually (Energy Outlook for Asia and the Pacific, 2013). Asian cities have been plagued by a range of problems such as traffic congestion, air pollution, traffic accidents and fatalities, GHG emissions, and noise pollution, among others due to which the economic, health, and other costs of environmental degradation are already high. Traffic congestion in cities like Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur is estimated to cost more than US\$2.8 billion annually in terms of loss of productivity (Establishment Post on 23 September 2014). Similarly, traffic congestion in Dhaka costs the Bangladesh economy up to Tk 550

billion a year, more than half of the country's total annual development expense (Prothom Alo, 12 July 2015). This situation also persists in many other cities in Asia. It is estimated that road congestion alone costs Asian countries 2~5% of their GDP annually due to countless hours of delay, loss of economic opportunities, and the waste of billions of gallons of fuel and higher transport costs (ADB, 2010). Similarly, half of the world's air pollution deaths occur in China and India alone. Outdoor air pollution contributes to an estimated 1.6 million premature deaths in People's Republic of China (Rohde and Muller, 2015), and 1.4 million people in India in 2013 (Indian Express, 13Feb.2016). The total economic cost of the health impacts of outdoor air pollution in China and India accounts for about US\$1.9 trillion in 2010 (OECD, 2014). Similarly, the World Bank estimates that the cost of air pollution health damages is about US \$1 billion a year in cities such as Bangkok and Jakarta. Health problems due to air pollution cost many Asian developing countries 2~4% of their GDP annually.

***In most cases the policy favours private motorization, and the enormous health and climate benefits of walking and bicycling are often neglected in the overall policy, planning and infrastructure development.***

With only 16% vehicle share, Asia accounts for almost 60% of the world's traffic fatalities per year (Global Status Report on Road Safety, 2013; Wismans et al, 2014). Studies show that Asian countries especially emerging economies like People's Republic of China, India, Indonesia and Thailand have the highest number of traffic fatalities. According to the WHO, more than 200,000 people are killed in China every year as a result of traffic accidents (WHO, 2015). With only 1% of the world's motor vehicles, according to the World Bank, India accounts for 15% of all traffic fatalities. According to the Government of India, in 2014 alone 75,000 youth aged between 15 and 34 were killed on India's roads which is 53.8% of total road accident fatalities. The estimated annual cost of road crashes in India is around US\$ 60 billion- about 3% of the country's GDP (Government of India, 2014).

***Traffic accidents and congestion have been critical impeding factors hampering social well-being and economic prosperity in Asia ...***

According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), one third of the food produced in the world (1.3 billion tonnes) for human consumption get lost or wasted every year. This loss is equivalent to roughly US\$ 990 billion. Studies show that poor rural transport infrastructure and services, distribution networks and lack of cooling facilities result in post-harvest waste losses of 30-40% in developing countries. In Asia and the Pacific region, between 15-50% of fruits and 12-30% of grains are lost between producers and market (Global Food Losses and Waste, 2011). The handling and storage stage of the supply chain accounts for 20% of the food wasted in the Asian region. Another 14% of food is lost at the distribution stage, while 31% is wasted during consumption (China Daily, 20 Jan. 2016). On average, approximately 11kg of food per capita per year is wasted in developing Asian countries, while an estimated 80 kg of food per capita per year is wasted in developed Asian countries (FAO, 2011). According to the Government of India, nearly 40% of the total value of annual production is wasted in India, and that costs the Indian economy US\$8.3 billion. It is essential therefore, for developing countries of Asia to improve their transport infrastructure and services necessary for the improved supply chain logistics and green freight development to minimize food wastages, which is key to achieve SDG 2 that calls to end hunger and achieve food security.

***Rural-urban linkage through efficient transportation connectivity and supply chain logistics provide an important thread to rural livelihood security and sustainable regional development...***

Moreover, Asia is one of the most vulnerable regions to the impacts of climate change and natural disasters. Most Asian countries lack the infrastructure and basic services necessary to mitigate the impact of natural disasters and climate change. The frequency and intensity of catastrophic events such as cyclones, storms, floods, landslides, debris flows, avalanches, rainstorms, heat and cold waves, and droughts appear to be increasing in the region. As a result, the human and economic losses from natural disasters in Asia has significantly increased in recent years.

For example, the floods that hit South India in 2015 cost the Indian economy an estimated US\$ 15 billion (Deccen Chitonicle, 6 December, 2015).

Similarly, according to Jakarta Globe the recent floods in Jakarta and surrounding areas have caused US\$ 3.3 billion in losses. In the last 45 years about 2 million people have died, and 6 billion people were affected by natural disasters in Asia and the Pacific. Within the same period, the region suffered US\$1.15 trillion in economic damage, which is 40.7% of the global total (UN ESCAP, 2015). The Asia-Pacific region accounted for 91% of the world's total death and 49% of the world's total damage due to natural disasters in the last century (Global Environmental Outlook, 2014). Further, climate change has an enormous impact on agricultural production and infrastructure in the developing countries. ADB predicted that rice yields could decline up to 50% on average by 2100 compared to 1990. In addition, rising sea levels may result in the loss of about 12% of rice production in Viet Nam and Thailand (Economics of Climate Change in Southeast Asia: A Regional Review, 2009). Likewise, a study shows that a one meter sea level rise could destroy around 19,000 kilometers of roads in Viet Nam, and rebuilding these damaged roads could cost approximately US \$ 2.1 billion (Chinowsky et al. 2012). It is therefore essential for Asian countries to build their cities and towns in a more resilient, and sustainable manner equipped with transport policies, programmes and infrastructure that integrate climate and disaster resilience. In return, resilient cities have the capacity to reduce vulnerability to disaster risk and extreme climate events, and respond in fast, efficient and effective ways during and after the disasters.

***SDG 9 / Target 9.1: Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including regional and transborder infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all***

***SDG 11/Target 11.b: By 2020, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels***

Though transportation is the backbone of a strong and prosperous economy in Asia, rural transport has been a neglected sector. The investment and development in rural transport sectors could provide many solutions to today's urbanization issues in Asia, including rural-urban migration. Rural connectivity is an important thread for rural development, rural resiliency and rural empowerment, which have significant implications to poverty eradication, hunger elimination, social integration and sustainable development.

***SDG 11 / Target 11.a: Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, per-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning***

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development acknowledges the importance of regional economic integration and interconnectivity in sustainable development. It further acknowledges that regional and sub-regional frameworks could facilitate the effective translation of sustainable development policies into concrete action at the national level (General Assembly resolution 70/1, para. 21). Adequate, efficient, affordable, safe, low-carbon and climate resilient transport options and infrastructures are quite important enabling conditions for the sustainable development that helps integrate developing countries into the global supply chain, eliminating poverty and achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development/SDGs.

In addition, it provides an opportune time for the 10<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum in Asia to take stock of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in Ethiopia, the Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway, the Istanbul Plan for Action on Least Developed Countries, UN Habitat III, 14<sup>th</sup> UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNTACD), the Global Conference on Sustainable Transport (26-27 November 2016, Turkmenistan), and other global processes and to facilitate intergovernmental policy consultations on sustainable transport solutions and actions for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 10<sup>th</sup> EST Forum will also provide

a meaningful opportunity to make an interim evaluation of the countries' progress and achievements made in implementing the voluntary Bangkok 2020 Declaration (2010-2020), and thereby to draw critical lessons and gain insights to the directions of the EST member countries in moving towards the SDGs.

With above background, the Ministry of Public Works and Transport (MPWT) of the Government of Lao PDR, the Ministry of the Environment of the Government of Japan (MOE-Japan), Partnership on Sustainable, Low Carbon Transport (SLoCaT), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP), the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD) and the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD) will be co-organizing the 10<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum in Asia under the theme “2030 Road Map for Sustainable Transport ~ Aligning with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)” from 14 to 16 March 2017 in Vientiane, Lao PDR.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the 10<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum in Asia are to -

- identify and discuss how Asian EST member countries can contribute in achieving the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development/SDGs through their sustainable transport solutions and actions;
- discuss various policy options, institutional measures, technological interventions, financing mechanisms, and partnership arrangement in the transport sector for the achievement of SDGs;
- strengthen policy consultation on rural accessibility and connectivity for food security, eliminating hunger, regional cooperation and sustainable regional development;
- address the role of railways in the context of 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development and SDGs;
- discuss and address how sustainable transport can contribute to achieve gender equality and to empower woman and girls;
- review and evaluate countries' progress, initiatives, achievements and best practices in addressing the Goals of the Bangkok 2020 Declaration (2010-2020); and
- draw vital lessons and gain insights to the directions of the EST member countries in moving towards the SDGs through their sustainable transport solutions and actions.

## 3. REGIONAL SEMINAR ON INCLUSIVE & SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT DEVELOPMENT

About 47 % of the Asian population lives in rural areas, many of which are remote and not connected to a wider transport network. An estimated 700 million people in the Asia-Pacific Region lack direct access to an all-season road. Rural connectivity is essential to create economic opportunities, employment generation and poverty reduction by connecting farmers to markets and producers to consumers. Furthermore, improved access also has direct impact on improving education, health, women empowerment, reducing poverty and hunger and overall wellbeing of people living in rural areas that can increase labour productivity and development outcomes.

While many initiatives to improve transport connectivity are being implemented, physical access to the rural areas still remains a problem. Some of the major challenges faced by many developing countries of the region are: lack of priority and national rural connectivity policy; lack of well-established local institutions; lack of capacity of officials to initiate innovative rural connectivity policies and their implementation; and overall lack of funding and investment for rural transport infrastructure.

In this context, as part of UN ESCAP's ongoing efforts to support member countries to develop sustainable and inclusive transportation systems, the seminar being an integral part of the Regional EST Forum in Asia through dedicated sessions focuses on sustainable rural access and related issues. It aims to create awareness and enhance capacity, knowledge and understandings of related stakeholders in planning and development of sustainable rural connectivity and encourage sharing of experiences and best practices of how improved access can contribute towards ensuring food security, women empowerment, and poverty eradication.

#### **4. VIENTIANE INTERNATIONAL MAYORS FORUM (15 MARCH 2017)**

The Vientiane International Mayors Forum will be organized on 15 March 2017 as an integral part of the 10th Regional EST Forum in Asia, being led by the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD) and the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD). The main objective of the Vientiane International Mayors Forum is to provide an international platform for an exchange of experiences among Mayors and other Leaders of Local Governments on the implementation of local level policies and projects to enhance the achievement of Sustainable Cities, as envisaged for implementing the Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11) and other related Goals, as well as in line with the New Urban Agenda adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito, Ecuador, in October last year. The Mayors Forum will address range of sustainable urban development and management issues complimenting the SDGs, such as policies for achieving smart, resilient and low carbon cities, integrated planning for sustainable urban development, participatory planning, financing for SDG 11, conservation of cultural and natural heritage and provision of public space, and making cities more resilient. The participating Mayors and representatives of cities will be invited to sign the Addendum to Kyoto Declaration ~ For the Promotion of Environmentally Sustainable Transport ~ Towards Realizing Resilient, Smart and Liveable Cities in Asia.

#### **5. SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS**

The 10<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum in Asia is expected to be supported by various international organizations and donor agencies such as – Asian Development Bank (ADB), Department for International Development (DFID), EMBARQ (The World Resources Institute’s Center for Sustainable Transport), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), German International Cooperation (GIZ), ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability, International Road Transport Union (IRU), Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP), International Union of Railways (UIC), Research for Community Access Partnership (ReCAP), SAFER-Vehicle and Traffic Safety Centre, University of Gothenburg, United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Victoria Transport Policy Institute (VTPI), World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank (WB).

#### **6. GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE**

The geographic coverage of the Forum has gradually expanded to encompass 25 countries in Northeast, Southeast, and South Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, People's Republic of China, Indonesia, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Republic of Korea, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam) and Russian Federation. A number of new countries from ESCAP region are also expected to join the Lao EST Forum.

#### **7. PARTICIPANTS**

Participation in the 10<sup>th</sup> Regional EST Forum in Asia is by invitation only. It is expected that approximately 400 participants, including senior government representatives from Asia and the Pacific countries, city mayors, international experts and resource persons, and others as listed below will be attending the conference.

- High-level government representatives and policy makers from the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Urban Development, and the Ministry of Health, etc;

- Local participants including government officials from central, regional and local governments;
- Distinguished transport, environment and climate change experts and international resource persons;
- Representatives of relevant UN and international organizations, including international financial institutions, multi-lateral development banks and donor agencies; and
- Selected representatives of the private and business sectors, INGOs and NGOs etc.

Participation in the UN Forum is free of charge. A limited number of travel supports will be available on a priority basis for nominated government representatives from the developing countries. Unless otherwise stated in the official invitation, the participants are requested to kindly cover their own travel, accommodation, and all other incidental costs by their own organizations or through external sponsorships.

## **8. CONTACTS**

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