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Connections
Transport & ICT

Universal Access in Urban Areas

Why Universal Access in Urban Areas Matters for Sustainable Mobility

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As one of the four global goals framing sustainable mobility in the Global Mobility Report (GMR), *universal* access in urban areas is the ability for people to reach the destinations necessary to lead productive and fulfilling lives. But transport infrastructure and services are rarely distributed equitably, and ensuring equity of access is of paramount importance.

By 2050, the world's urban population is expected to grow by 2.5 billion people, reaching 66 percent of the total global population. Most urban growth is projected to take place in developing countries in Africa and Asia. As economic activity continues to shift from mature economies toward these emerging markets, the number of daily trips made by people in urban areas could increase by 50 percent between 2005 and 2025.

The GMR positioned access to economic and social opportunities for everyone as a key goal for achieving sustainable mobility, regardless of income, gender, age, disability status, and geographical location. The Global Tracking Framework (GTF) proposes indicators to measure progress toward that goal. This work supports Sustainable Development Goals 9 and 11 and the Habitat III New Urban Agenda.

Universal Access in Urban Areas in the Global Agenda

Universal access in urban areas is embodied in two targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG): 9.1 and 11.2. The first aims to develop infrastructure to support economic development and human well-being, and the second to provide sustainable transport systems for all, with a focus on public transport. Given this focus, target 11.2 is specifically relevant for urban areas and hence for universal urban access. In addition to the SDGs, the Habitat III New Urban Agenda underlines the need for accessible cities, and focuses on equal access to all services, including transport. It stresses "age and gender-responsive planning and investment for sustainable, safe, and accessible urban mobility for all", and supports a focus on the needs of marginalized groups.

Methodological challenges in measuring universal urban access

While there is no widely agreed upon method of measuring universal access, there is a general agreement that sustainable transport should leave

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no one behind. Data that measure access to transport infrastructure and services for urban areas are not readily available on a global scale. The data that do exist suggest that the accessibility gap is huge, and potentially growing, making it urgent for urban access to be measured more consistently and comprehensively in cities and countries around the world. Measuring access by income level, gender, age, disability status, and location adds further complexity to the task.

Several factors currently inhibit the measurement of universal access via sustainable transport: the absence of a universally agreed upon definition; the lack of a shared methodology; and the need to identify the multiple sub-groups to be considered. There is also a scarcity of data on the demographics of existing transport users and the needs of vulnerable groups; the locations of residences, jobs, and markets; and road and transit networks, transit schedules, and speeds.

The indicators proposed in the GTF complement those in the SDG goals. The principal SDG indicator for universal access in urban areas is indicator 11.2.1: Proportion of population that has convenient access to public transport, by age, sex, and persons with disabilities. However, this is not clearly defined. The current GTF proposal for a basic indicator (those using proxies that require limited data already collected on a regular basis) is to measure "percentage of the population within 500m of a frequent public transport stop or station."

The proposed access indicators include:

- Basic:
  - Number of public transport journeys by mode of transport per person
  - Vehicle-km public transport per person
- Intermediate:
  - Average percent of income spent on transport per resident (affordability)
  - Perceptions of safety, security, comfort, & user information
- Advanced:
  - Percent of vehicles & stations per network with step-free access
  - Number of People within 30 minutes of a service (e.g. hospital, school, etc.) by public transport, walking, and cycling

Trends in urban access

With people in developed countries moving to cities, the previous trend of increasing motorization appears to have stopped. On the other hand, in cities in developing countries—particularly those in emerging economies—motorization rates have grown significantly since 1995. With most of the urban growth for the coming decades projected to take place in developing countries, the trend is worrying. While car and motorized two-wheeler ownership theoretically improves access for individuals, this comes with increased external costs which are spread across the entire urban population and beyond.

While public transport supply overall nearly doubled during the period 1995–2012 in developing country cities, the growth in urban populations there has outpaced these developments. As a result, the overall level of public transport supply per capita decreased over the same period. In all regions, the supply of rapid transit has been increasing relative to the urban population, particularly since 2000. By far the highest ratio is found in Europe, mostly concentrated in the largest cities. Developed countries have recently experienced a moderate growth in the use of public transport per capita. And while cities in developing countries have experienced a significant growth in use, the use per capita is actually decreasing as urban populations grow.

Scale of the challenge

If the trends observed in the last decade of the 20th century prevail, urban areas in emerging economies could see a shift away from walking and cycling to private motorized vehicles, and public transport could see an erosion of its market share in all world regions. But doubling the market share of public transport worldwide while keeping stable the share of walking and cycling would make it possible to decouple the growth of mobility in urban areas from the growth of its societal and environmental costs.

Policies will need to be put in place to reverse the trends seen in developing countries, to avoid the problems that are already present in car-dependent cities in developed countries.

Connections is a series of knowledge notes from the World Bank Group's Transport & Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Global Practice. Covering projects, experiences, and front-line developments, the series is produced by Nancy Vandycke and Shokraneh Minovi.

The notes are available at http://www.worldbank.org/transport/connections.

The **GLOBAL MOBILITY REPORT 2017** is available at http://www.sum4all.org/publications/global-mobility-report-2017