



European Economic and Social Committee

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**Role of transport in realising the sustainable development goals,
and consequent implications for EU policy-making**

OPINION

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**Role of transport in realising the sustainable development goals, and consequent implications for
EU policy-making**
[Own-initiative opinion]

Rapporteur: **Tellervo KYLÄ-HARAKKA-RUONALA**

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1. **Conclusions and recommendations**

- 1.1 Transport is a vital enabler of several SDGs. It contributes strongly to the SDGs regarding economic development, industry and SMEs, as well as trade and investment. Consequently, it also helps achieve the SDGs that aim to promote employment and well-being, and to reduce inequalities and exclusion. Meanwhile, transport presents many challenges with respect to the SDGs, such as the need to reduce climate and environmental impacts, to improve transport systems and traffic safety, and to manage concerns related to jobs and decent work.
- 1.2 The EESC calls on the Commission to prepare a new, integrated policy framework for the next generation of transport policy, with the aim of laying the foundations for improving transport and mobility while at the same time delivering on the social and environmental objectives.
- 1.3 To this end, EU policy-making has to provide favourable conditions for transport to meet the mobility needs of people and businesses. This requires, in accordance with the SDGs, significant investments in proper infrastructure, innovation and well-functioning transport systems, including public transport.
- 1.4 Efforts are also needed to respond to the SDGs that relate to the social aspects of transport, such as promoting full and productive employment, decent work and skills development, as well as delivering on gender equality and paying special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations such as children, persons with disabilities and older persons. Social dialogue should play a key role in properly managing structural changes.
- 1.5 The Goal regarding climate change is extremely challenging for transport and requires the intensive development of transport systems, the introduction of a wide range of decarbonising measures, and new and innovative approaches to mobility.
- 1.6 Digitalisation and robotisation are among the megatrends affecting the development of transport, and require proper management of the opportunities and challenges. Digitalisation contributes to sustainable transport by making logistics more efficient, helping provide better transport information for passengers and improving traffic safety.
- 1.7 As transport is a matter for the whole of society, it is vital to involve civil society in the preparation and implementation of transport policy. Whilst the role of the public sector is essential, bottom-up action and partnerships should also be facilitated to find the best possible solutions for transport.
- 1.8 The EESC, moreover, calls on the Commission to assess the SDG indicators from the transport point of view and to enhance the development of indicators that are relevant, give a realistic and informative picture of developments, and are in line with the integrated approach.

2. **Background**

- 2.1 The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda broadly cover different aspects of the economic, social and environmental challenges we are facing globally.

None of the SDGs is specifically focused on transport and mobility, but transport is implicitly related to several Goals. In addition, a few of the 169 targets complementing the Goals are directly related to transport, notably those regarding infrastructure, local transport systems, and road safety. Correspondingly, three of the 232 indicators being used to monitor the progress are transport-related, measuring transport volumes, access to public transport, and road traffic deaths.

- 2.2 Transport has a diverse role with respect to the SDGs. The SDGs provide transport with both opportunities and challenges, and transport has both an enabling and adapting role in the implementation of the SDGs. "Transport" refers here to the transport of goods and passengers, including all transport modes.
- 2.3 The purpose of this own-initiative opinion is to
- identify how transport contributes to achieving the SDGs, as well as how the SDGs may benefit or shape transport;
 - analyse the possible implications of the linkages between transport and the SDGs for transport-related EU policies, both domestically and in the global context;
 - provide the EESC's views and proposals on how these linkages should be considered in EU policies and policy-making, in order to properly seize the opportunities and manage the risks.

The role of transport as an enabler for achieving the SDGs is analysed in Chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 5 considers how SDGs benefit transport by enhancing its foundations. Chapters 6 and 7 analyse what kind of challenges and expectations SDGs set for transport. Based on this analysis, Chapter 8 summarises the findings as implications and recommendations for policy-making.

3. **Transport and SDGs: enabling economic development and employment**

- 3.1 Transport is one of the main enablers of economic development both in the EU and in the global context and thus deserves a central place on the EU's agenda. Transport has an essential role in helping achieve Goal 8, which aims at sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.
- 3.2 Even though digitalisation is expanding into all areas of the economy and society, it does not put an end to material production and consumption. Logistics combines the various parts of supply chains, covering the transport of raw materials, intermediary products, and end products to customers. Transport is thus a necessity for industries, agriculture and commerce.
- 3.3 Properly managed transport can also contribute to the specific target of Goal 8 which calls for policies to promote sustainable tourism, with the aim of creating jobs and promoting local culture and products.
- 3.4 In addition to serving other businesses, transport itself constitutes a notable business sector providing millions of jobs and contributing greatly to the economy. Furthermore, transport gives rise to manufacturing industries, such as the automotive, railway, shipping and aeronautics industries.

- 3.5 All in all, transport contributes to meeting the Goal 9 target, which calls for a significant rise in industry's share of employment and GDP. As transport-related businesses involve a lot of small and medium-sized enterprises, transport also contributes to integrating SMEs into value chains and markets and fostering their growth, as called for by Goals 9 and 8.
- 3.6 Correspondingly, transport contributes to the creation of jobs, as called for by Goal 8, in transport-related sectors. Transport moreover enables a better geographic fit between jobs and labour and thus higher employment. There are also challenges, however, such as the transition caused by digitalisation and robotisation, which is forecast to result in profound changes with respect to jobs and tasks.
- 3.7 In the global context, transport contributes to Goal 17, which aims to strengthen the global partnership for sustainable development. This goal calls for the promotion of a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system under the WTO. As transport is the backbone of trade, it has significant potential in promoting this goal.
- 3.8 Goal 9 calls for the development of sustainable and resilient infrastructure in developing countries. This is related to Goal 10, which is about reducing inequality within and among countries and calls for development aid and foreign direct investment to states where the need is greatest.
- 3.9 By helping to generate economic development and decent jobs through production, trade and investment, transport has also a role in striving for Goal 1, which aims at ending poverty in all its forms everywhere.

4. Transport and SDGs: enabling access to goods and services

- 4.1 Consumers use transport to access commodities, be it food, as addressed by Goal 2, and other basic commodities or more luxury products. In addition, people also need transport to reach services, such as those related to tourism, hobbies, or social welfare systems.
- 4.2 Transport is one of the main elements connecting markets, be it the single market or international trade. Connected markets bring about efficiency and scaling benefits and thereby contribute to the accessibility and affordability of goods for consumers.
- 4.3 Transport is also crucial for the supply and use of healthcare services, both in the EU and globally. Transport is thus a contributor to reaching Goal 3, which aims to prevent and treat diseases, and ensure healthy lives and well-being for all.
- 4.4 The same holds true as regards providing and attending education. Transport thus contributes to Goal 4, the aim of which is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote life-long learning opportunities for all.

5. **Transport and SDGs: laying the foundations for mobility**

- 5.1 Transport must be accessible, affordable, smooth and effective, as well as safe and secure, to enable the mobility of people and goods. It is thus crucial for the EU to boost investments in proper infrastructure and appropriate technology, and to enhance well-functioning transport systems.
- 5.2 Goal 9 has a direct beneficial effect on transport, as it advocates developing "quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure" so as to support economic development and human well-being.
- 5.3 Smooth border crossings in the internal market, and in international transport and travel, are of the utmost importance for well-functioning markets and the flow of goods and people. Goal 9 promotes this objective by emphasising the role of transborder infrastructure.
- 5.4 Goal 11 aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. It calls for access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems to be provided for all paying special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations such as women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons. This requires proper planning of land use and traffic systems, as well as adequate public investments in infrastructure. The development of public transport plays an important role here, in both urban and rural areas.
- 5.5 As for innovation, Goal 9 advocates enhancing scientific research and upgrading the technological capabilities of industrial sectors. This is also important from the point of view of the development of transport and transport-related sectors.
- 5.6 In addition, Goal 7 calls for international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research and technologies, as well as the promotion of investment in energy infrastructure and clean energy technologies. These measures, including infrastructure for alternative fuels and electricity charging, also benefit the decarbonisation of transport.
- 5.7 With the increasing digitalisation and robotisation of transport, ever more attention should be paid to the needs of digital infrastructure, including automated traffic management and control systems. Goal 9 mentions the need to significantly increase access to ICT and to strive to provide universal and affordable access to the internet. Goal 17 in turn calls for the use of enabling technology to be enhanced, in particular ICT. Digitalisation makes logistics more efficient and helps provide better transport information for passengers, for instance.

6. **Transport and SDGs: responding to social expectations**

- 6.1 While transport contributes to healthcare and well-being, it also generates health risks via pollution, such as particulates in air, and traffic accidents. Goal 3 aims to bring about a substantial reduction in these risks. Effective traffic management systems, regulation and enforcement are all necessary means of improving traffic safety. By decreasing human error, advanced automation will for its part increase the safety of transport, despite technological concerns.

- 6.2 The education and training called for by Goal 4 are crucial to ensure the necessary skills for workers and entrepreneurs in transport-related sectors. Changes in tasks caused, for example, by digitalisation, imply a considerable change in the demand for skills. Goal 4 is therefore an important enabler of transport.
- 6.3 Goal 5 calls for gender equality to be achieved and all women and girls to be empowered. The transport sector can enhance gender equality by attracting more women to join the sector as entrepreneurs or workers, and thus unleash the potential of people of either gender. Transport, especially public transport, must also be made safe for women to travel.
- 6.4 Goal 8 calls for full and productive employment, the prevention of youth exclusion, decent work for all, and the protection of labour rights. Conditions in this regard vary. In developing countries, the implementation of the basic rights of workers may be the most relevant target, while in the EU the greatest concerns for the future are related to the promotion of full employment and decent work for all.
- 6.5 Managing the structural changes faced by the EU due to digitalisation and the transition towards a low-carbon economy requires comprehensive strategies regarding how to ensure a fair and smooth transition, decrease negative social impacts, and respond to the skills gap.
- 6.6 Furthermore, Goal 10 calls for promotion of the social, economic and political inclusion of all, and the adoption of policies aiming at greater equality. These policies equally enhance Goal 1, the eradication of poverty. With regard to transport, Goal 9 calls for affordable and equitable access for all. By enabling access to work, goods and services, transport – particularly public transport – has a role to play in preventing people's exclusion.
- 6.7 Goal 10 also calls for orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people to be facilitated. This is related to transport in two ways: transport has a role to play in preventing the loss of life and contributing to the safe and legal movement of refugees and migrants. On the other hand, the transport sector provides opportunities for migrants to become integrated into labour markets.

7. Transport and SDGs: realising the environmental objectives

- 7.1 In addition to meeting the mobility needs of people and businesses, transport must meet the climate and environmental requirements. Goal 13 stresses the need for urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. As transport is a major source of global greenhouse gas emissions and a sector in which emissions are still increasing, this Goal is extremely challenging for transport. It requires increased efforts to achieve the objectives defined by EU policies, as well as global cooperation with respect to international air and maritime transport.
- 7.2 The target of decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation, as called for by Goal 8, is also a massive challenge from the point of view of transport, as there is a strong correlation between transport and economic growth. Striving for decoupling thus requires the intensive development of sustainable transport systems with minimum environmental impact,

the introduction of advanced technologies, as well as new and innovative approaches to mobility. This also responds to Goal 12, which is about responsible consumption and production.

- 7.3 Infrastructure plays an important role with respect to the environmental impacts of transport. Goal 15 aims to protect, restore and promote the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, which has to be considered in land-use planning and construction of infrastructure. The same holds true for Goal 11, which deals with the need to step up efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage.
- 7.4 As energy is a prerequisite of transport, the energy-related Goal 7 applies directly to transport as well. It calls for a substantial increase in the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix, as well as significant improvement in terms of energy efficiency. Goal 12 in turn includes a target of phasing out harmful fossil fuel subsidies. Given the widespread use of fossil fuels in transport, this target has an obvious impact on transport and its users.
- 7.5 Goal 14 addresses the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources. Besides land-based activities, it challenges maritime transport to improve waste management and reduce emissions.
- 7.6 Environmental impacts are not only related to transport itself but also to the life-cycle of vehicles, aircraft and ships, from manufacture to end-of-life. The impacts can be decreased by improved resource efficiency and the use of clean technologies in industrial processes, together with recycling and reuse, as called for by Goals 9 and 12.
- 7.7 Measures that improve traffic flow also have a role to play in reducing emissions. To this end, high quality infrastructure and smooth border crossings, land use and urban planning, efficient public transport and multimodal freight transport alternatives are of the utmost importance.
- 7.8 The development of autonomous transport may lead to greater use of private cars due to the increased convenience for passengers. On the other hand, car-sharing – together with the use of public transport – is intended to decrease the number of private cars. All in all, digitalisation and robotisation lead to more efficient transport and logistics, which has a positive impact on the climate-related and environmental effects of transport.
- 7.9 Besides the fact that there is a need to reduce the emissions caused by transport, transport also contributes to preventing and solving climate and environmental problems, by enabling the dissemination of low-carbon and environmentally sound technologies, products and solutions, as called for by Goal 17.

8. Transport and SDGs: implications for policy-making

- 8.1 The analysis in the previous sections clearly shows that transport is related to a large number of the SDGs. As transport is a vital enabler of several SDGs, the role of transport should be fully recognised in the implementation of the SDGs at EU, Member State and local levels.

- 8.2 Meanwhile, the EU's transport policy should consider the SDGs in an integrated way, with the aim of laying the foundations for improving transport and mobility while at the same time delivering on the social and environmental objectives.
- 8.3 Approaching transport from the different starting points of several policy areas, "one issue at a time", leads to suboptimal solutions. It is therefore essential that transport policy is developed as a whole. Accordingly, the EESC calls on the Commission to prepare a new, integrated policy framework for the next generation of transport policy. This framework should then guide more detailed transport-related decisions.
- 8.4 The policy framework should also include a global dimension, which aims to integrate the SDGs into the EU's transport-related international cooperation and foreign action.
- 8.5 As transport is a matter for the whole of society, it is important to involve civil society in developing and implementing transport policy. This would respond to Goal 16, which calls for responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. As far as labour market-related issues and transition processes are concerned, social dialogue should play a key role.
- 8.6 Goal 17 in turn advocates encouraging and promoting effective public, public-private, and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships. Whilst the role of the public sector is vital, the EESC calls on EU policy-makers to fully recognise the vital role of bottom-up action and partnerships, as they contribute to finding the best possible solutions for transport-related challenges and ways of seizing the opportunities, for example through new models of production and consumption developed by businesses and citizens.
- 8.7 The EESC also calls on the Commission to assess the SDG indicators from the point of view of transport and to enhance the development of indicators that are relevant, give a realistic and informative picture of developments, and are in line with the integrated approach, as described above.

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Luca JAHIER

The president of the European Economic and Social Committee
