

The importance of sustainable mobility in achieving U20 goals

Executive summary

Last year, the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) was invited to submit a white paper in support of the Urban 20 communiqué to G20 leaders. We strongly supported action on the priorities identified in the draft communiqué, especially those relating to sustainable mobility and the future of work, and encouraged U20, G20 and other leaders to take urgent action in collaboration with stakeholders.

In the context of the worsening climate emergency, alongside the economic, social and political strains of the post-pandemic era, the case for action has only become stronger over the last 12 months. Ahead of the 2023 U20 summit in Ahmedabad this week, we would therefore like to reiterate the points made in our 2022 white paper and urge U20 leaders again to include sustainable mobility as a key priority in their next communiqué to the G20.

Introduction

1. In their 2022 communiqué, U20 leaders note that "cities, national governments and all urban stakeholders remain focused on delivering, collaboratively, our global goals: achieving the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda, advancing the localization of the SDGs and the rapid implementation of the Paris Agreement". In support of these objectives, the U20 identified three priority areas: health and housing; the energy transition and sustainable mobility; and the future of work. **Public investment and modal shift to public transport can help deliver on all three of these priorities**, with a particular focus on the second and third.
2. **Access to mobility is a fundamental and universal right**, and one which cannot be met exclusively or even predominantly by access to private transport. At the 2021 [International Labour Organisation technical meeting on the future of decent and sustainable work in urban transport services](#), governments, employers and unions jointly concluded that public transport "constitutes a basic service under public regulation. It is an enabler of other rights and of access to other vital services. It is a powerful driver of equity, development, sustainability, growth, productivity and employment opportunities", and "contributes to the achievement of many of the Sustainable Development Goals set out in the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)".
3. **Workers and their unions have a vital role to play in building safe, clean, reliable, inclusive and affordable public transport systems**. During the Covid-19 pandemic, formal and informal workers kept public transport systems moving and were recognised as "[guardians of mobility](#)" by the International Association of Public Transport (UITP). The ITF is the global union federation which represents transport workers worldwide, including across all modes of formal and informal public transport. The ITF's [Our Public Transport](#) programme promotes a social model of public transport, which incorporates public ownership and financing, decent work, gender equality, technological sovereignty and climate justice. We believe that our [People's Public Transport Policy](#) can help bolster the calls on health, sustainable mobility and the future of work made in the 2022 U20 communiqué.

The People's Public Transport Policy

4. Public transport should, wherever possible, be maintained in **public ownership** rather than outsourced or entirely privatised. It provides a vital foundation for other forms of economic activity, including those in the private sector, and serves a fundamental social and environmental need. While the trend in recent decades has been towards the partial or full privatisation of public transport services, the track record of such policy experiments is exceptionally poor: service quality decreases, costs to passengers increase, and labour standards for workers are eroded. Indeed, there is now a reverse [tendency to de-privatisation](#) around the world, with operations returning to municipal, regional or national ownership. Crucially, public ownership should be accompanied by robust democratic control to ensure that passengers, workers and other stakeholders participate in decision-making on their own public transport systems.
5. In addition to public ownership, public transport systems should be the subject of **public financing**. Governments should treat spending on and investment in public transport in the same way as healthcare and education, maintaining strong foundations on which the rest of society can thrive. Private financing often brings unnecessary compromises and trade-offs, such as diverting valuable public funds to guarantee profits for investors rather than using them directly for public service provision. By contrast, the public sector is a site of innovation for the common good. Cities around the world are experimenting with approaches such as [participatory budgeting](#) for public services, launching [public-public partnerships](#) to share solutions between local governments facing the same challenges, and making public transport [free at the point of use](#).
6. The most important resource on which public transport depends is its workforce, which is why **decent work** must be placed at the heart of all public transport systems. The 2022 U20 communiqué rightly identifies that the ILO core labour standards should be “respected and implemented for all workers”, including those not directly employed by public transport operators. Where informal transport services prevail, governments should support the [worker-led formalisation of employment](#) to ensure that new formal systems such as bus rapid transit do not further undermine labour standards. Formalisation can provide particular benefits for participation in the workforce by women and migrant workers. Similar to this, and as recognised in the 2021 U20 communiqué, climate action must guarantee a [just transition](#) for public transport workers so that environmental progress does not inadvertently lead to social regression. As per the 2023 International Labour Conference [Resolution concerning a Just transition](#), climate financing and public procurement should be aligned to the objectives of a just transition.
7. **Gender equality** for both workers and passengers is central to any public transport system. Women public transport workers face additional challenges compared to their male colleagues, most significantly: gender-based discrimination, harassment and violence; and routinely poor access to sanitary facilities which are clean, safe and dignified.
 - a. In 2019, the landmark ILO [Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work](#) (and its associated [Recommendation 206](#)) were agreed during tripartite negotiations between governments, employers and unions. These instruments set a new global standard for ending violence and harassment, including against women workers. In 2021, global union federations including the ITF launched a [C190 Campaign Toolkit](#) to support workers and unions in lobbying their governments to ratify the convention.

- b. Meanwhile, the ITF [Sanitation Charter](#) provides an outline of the problems and proposes solutions, including actions to be undertaken by employers, governments and other stakeholders in transport workplaces to ensure safe access to decent sanitation facilities for all workers. This is complemented by a [Sanitation Toolkit](#), launched on International Women’s Day 2022, which provides practical guidance for workers and unions to assess and improve their workplaces.
 - c. We must end the systemic exclusion of women from decent, safe and secure work in public transport, and employers must engage in proactive strategies to hire, retain and promote women workers. Much of this vision is expressed in a bipartite agreement signed by the ITF and UITP in 2019: the [Positive Employer Gender Policy: Strengthening Women’s Employment and Equal Opportunities in Urban Public Transport](#).
8. At a time when public transport systems around the world are seeing the introduction of new technologies, **technological sovereignty** for workers, passengers and residents is becoming ever more important. No new technologies should be introduced in the workplace without negotiation with workers and unions, and the uses and impacts of these technologies must be closely monitored, regulated and evaluated. Employers should be especially attentive to [the impact of new technologies on women workers](#), ensuring that they help redress rather than embed gender inequality. Beyond specific workplaces, local governments should make level-headed assessments of beguiling proposals like ‘smart cities’, ensuring that the collection, analysis and use of data by the private sector is subject to rigorous transparency mechanisms and democratic control. The U20 communiqué notes the importance of adapting “human rights to the digital age by fostering digital rights and access to data”.
9. Public transport is uniquely placed to help achieve the renewable energy transition and **climate justice**. Modal shift away from private vehicles and to public transport is one of the most effective ways of tackling both greenhouse gas emissions and [air pollution](#) in our cities. Addressing air pollution is central to improving health and safety outcomes and the quality of life in cities for both workers and residents. The electrification of public transport systems also has an important role to play, and to fully realise climate benefits this should proceed jointly with the decarbonisation of global energy systems. As already noted, the renewable energy transition must incorporate a just transition for public transport workers, including providing a new generation of good, unionised jobs for young workers, thereby contributing to Sustainable Development Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth which calls for a global strategy for youth employment. Public transport systems should also be fully integrated with other opportunities for active mobility, primarily walking and cycling.

The Future is Public Transport

10. In response to the public transport crisis triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic, the ITF has forged a strategic alliance with C40 Cities to support the recovery of the sector. ITF [research](#) identified the intense financial strain afflicting public transport systems around the world, due to a combination of falling fare revenue and potential or actual cuts to national government spending. This has created **the serious risk of public transport systems being eroded, just at the moment when they are vital to both post-pandemic economic recovery and climate action**. Only a partnership between workers and local governments, with support from other key stakeholders, can deliver thriving public transport systems which are equipped to deal with the challenges of the

coming years and decades. In March 2021, the ITF and C40 launched [The Future is Public Transport](#) campaign to make this a reality.

11. In the lead-up to COP26, held in Glasgow in November 2021, unions, local governments and other partners joined with ITF and C40 to acknowledge that **the number of public transport journeys worldwide needs to double by 2030 in order to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement**. Meanwhile, our [research](#) demonstrated that the requisite investment in public transport would: create tens of millions of jobs, both directly in the sector and elsewhere; cut urban transport emissions in half; and reduce air pollution from transport by 45%. In 2022 U20 host city Jakarta alone, such investment was predicted to create 792,700 new jobs. As we approach COP28 in Dubai, it is vital that governments take advantage of this opportunity by giving public transport a central role in their nationally determined contributions to the Paris Agreement targets.
12. Last year, the UN General Assembly also lent its support to this agenda. In July 2022, an overwhelming majority of countries voted to recognise **a new human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment**. While the [resolution](#) is not generally binding on UN member-states, it further deepens the global consensus on the co-dependence of human rights and environmental protection, including climate action. One of the best routes for national governments to make this right a reality is by prioritising public transport for its health, social, economic and environmental benefits.

Conclusions

13. The 2022 U20 communiqué identified a range of pressing challenges facing local, regional and national governments worldwide. The good news is that a solution to many of these challenges is close at hand. **Public investment in and modal shift to public transport can deliver on multiple U20 priorities**, providing social, economic and environmental benefits in a single package. As those ultimately responsible for delivering public transport services every day, workers and their unions have a central role to play in shaping the future of the sector.
14. Therefore, local, regional and national governments and international institutions should place investment in **public transport at the top of the agenda**, both as part of this year's G20 process and beyond. We hope to see this reflected at both the U20 and G20 summits, as well as in other upcoming multilateral fora such as COP28. The ITF, its affiliated unions and public transport workers everywhere stand ready to help make this vision a reality.

For more information on any of the issues raised in this white paper, please contact the ITF at opt@itf.org.uk.

Bibliography

ITF resources

[People's Public Transport Policy](#)

[Bus rapid transit and the formalisation of informal public transport: A trade union negotiating guide](#) (2019) [with the Global Labour Institute]

[A Just Transition for Urban Transport Workers: Issues and Experiences from Unions in Cities of the Global South](#) (2022)

[C190 Campaign Toolkit](#) (2020) [with other global union federations]

[Sanitation Charter](#) (2019) and [Toolkit](#) (2022)

[Positive Employer Gender Policy: Strengthening Women's Employment and Equal Opportunities in Urban Public Transport](#) (2019) [with the International Association of Public Transport]

[The Impact of the Future of Work for Women in Public Transport](#) (2019)

[The Pandemic, Local Public Transport Funding and Union Responses](#) and [Recommendations for Sustainable and Socially Just Public Transport Funding](#) (2021)

[Making COP26 Count: How investing in public transport this decade can protect our jobs, our climate, our future](#) (2021) [with C40 Cities]

Further resources

International Association of Public Transport: [The Guardians of Mobility: keeping cities alive and moving](#) (2020); [Full free fare public transport: Objectives and alternatives](#) (2020)

International Budget Partnership: [Open Budget Survey](#)

International Labour Organisation: [Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work](#) and [Recommendation 206 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work](#) (2019); [Conclusions of the technical meeting on the future of decent and sustainable work in urban transport services](#) (2022); [Resolution concerning a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all](#) (2023)

Sustainable Mobility for All: [How to unlock public transport for climate and sustainable development: Six areas for action](#) (2022)

Transnational Institute: [Public Futures database](#) [with the University of Glasgow]

United Nations: [2023 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) (2015); [General Assembly resolution 76/300 on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment](#) (2022)



World Health Organisation: [Air quality database](#)