

The Next Step for Transport in the SDGs: Devising the Right Indicators

Shaping Transport's SDG Impact

Bernhard Ensink,* Shokraneh Minovi, Roger Gorham, and Nancy Vanduycke

Transport was not part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for 2000–15, which were adopted at the United Nations in September 2000. The omission was widely viewed in the transport community as a missed opportunity to use the strong linkage between transport and economic development to advance the attainment of the MDGs. Now a new 15-year development framework, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2015–30, are about to be endorsed at the United Nations summit to be held September 25–27, 2015. This time, transport will be part of the framework as a key contributor to sustainable development. The SDGs comprise 17 goals and 169 targets; five of those targets directly involve transport, and attaining at least another six will critically depend on it. But efforts to influence the post-2015 development agenda will go on after the summit because the question of what indicators will be used to measure success is yet to be resolved. Attention in the transport community must now pivot toward that question to assure the selection of the most effective measures.



A Broader Vision

The MDGs mainly addressed the socioeconomic issues surrounding poverty reduction. The vision about to be endorsed in the SDGs is far more ambitious, aspiring to transform the world. It reflects sustainability challenges more clearly and recognizes that national issues are increasingly connected globally in scale and scope. Ending poverty is inconceivable without simultaneously achieving peace, dealing with natural disasters, connecting people to a market economy via better access to infrastructure, and reducing the impact of climate change.

Thus, the SDG framework covers the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental. The framework will stimulate action in all countries over the next 15 years in the areas of critical importance for humanity: people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership.

The Opportunity

Water and energy are the only infrastructure sectors represented by distinct SDGs. However the transport sector is mainstreamed into many of the SDGs, including energy as well as food security, health, infrastructure in general, urban development, and climate change.

* Secretary General of European Cyclists' Federation (ECF, www.ecf.com) and of the World Cycling Alliance. The ECF and the World Bank are members of the Technical Working Group of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Group on Sustainable Transport.

The mainstreaming of transport across the SDGs— in many cases explicitly through supporting targets—underscores its importance as a critical sector—an “enabler” of other sectors’ achievements. Indeed, in some cases, the largest benefits of action in transport are often visible only in other sectors. For example, the broadest gains from investing in vehicle and road safety will show up, without explicit regard to transport, in better health and economic outcomes. Thus, the broad economic and social influence of action in transport requires systemic thinking when defining and tracking “sustainable transport” in the context of the SDGs.

Five Transport Targets

Of the SDG framework’s 169 targets, five are directly related to the transport sector:

- *Target 3.6.* By 2020, halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents.
- *Target 7.3.* By 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency.
- *Target 9.1.* Develop quality, reliable, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure, including regional and trans-border infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all.
- *Target 11.2.* By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible, and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities, and older persons.
- *Target 12.c.* Rationalize inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption by removing market distortions, in accordance with national circumstances, including by restructuring taxation and phasing out those harmful subsidies, where they exist, to reflect their environmental impacts, taking fully into account the specific needs and conditions of developing countries and minimizing the possible adverse impacts on their development in a manner that protects the poor and the affected communities.

But transport is also a critical enabler of achievement in other sectors’ targets, such as agricultural

productivity (Target 2.1), air pollution (3.9), access to safe drinking water (6.1.), sustainable cities (11.6), reduction of food loss (12.3), and climate change adaptation and mitigation (13.1).

Indicators are Key

With goals and targets set for the next 15 years, the question of indicators to measure progress now comes into focus. Indicators will be the main tool used by all stakeholders to measure and evaluate progress toward a specific target. The transport community should now concentrate its efforts on developing and promoting the transport indicators that will be most effective in creating economic, social, and environmental benefits.

If the rural transport accessibility indicator—the share of the rural population within 2 kilometers of an all-weather road—is accepted as a tool to measure the SDG goal on food security (and the associated target on agricultural productivity), the enabling role of rural transport infrastructure and services will be fully acknowledged.

Similarly, making vehicle fuel efficiency an indicator associated with the target on energy efficiency will show that a key to energy success lies within the transport sector. The list of indicators to support the SDG framework is expected to be finalized by March 2016. This does not leave much time for the transport community to engage with the UN Statistical Commission, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators, and the relevant stakeholders to get transport front and center in the sustainable development agenda.

► For more information on this topic:

Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Global Action: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

Results Framework on Sustainable, Low Carbon Transport: <http://www.slocat.net/resultsframework>

For more information on the Secretary-General’s High-level Advisory Group on Sustainable Transport: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/sustainabletransport/highleveladvisorygroup>

Connections is a weekly 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>