

21 March 2024

Assessing Health Impacts of Low-Carbon Transport Scenarios in Urban Areas

Workshop Summary

Setting the context

On 21 March 2024, the ITF organised an expert workshop to feed into a new Corporate Partnership Board (CPB) project: Assessing Health Impacts of Low-Carbon Transport Scenarios in Urban Areas.

In total, 37 experts from academia, industry, think tanks, and public authorities were present online and onsite to provide insights and participate in the discussions.

The outcomes of the workshop summarised here, along with the results of a modelling exercise and desk research, will feed an ITF report to be published in late 2024.



Project background

Recognising the intricate relationship between transport, air quality, climate change and public health is increasingly crucial, with both short- and long-term implications. Failure to identify these links can lead to unintended public policy consequences.

This project aims to ensure decarbonisation efforts reduce carbon emissions while prioritising urban residents' health and quality of life. It links the OECD Strategic Public Health Planning (SPHeP) model with the *ITF Transport Outlook 2023* urban transport scenarios through to 2050. The SPHeP model includes indicators such as air quality, life expectancy, productivity, and healthcare costs, and examines how air pollution and physical activity impact diseases such as obesity, cardiovascular conditions and mental health disorders.

The report will explore how transport decarbonisation impacts the quality of life in cities by incorporating case studies and discussions on inclusive urban policies, public health economics, and equity issues.



Workshop objectives

The workshop featured discussions focused on embedding wellness into policy making, promoting active mobility, and fostering inclusive urban policies. Participants discussed strategies for integrating public health, air quality, and overall quality of life into urban transport initiatives, and ensuring these policies prioritise the well-being of urban residents.

Discussions also addressed the promotion of active transport options to improve community health and urban mobility, as well as the intersectionality of active travel, equitable access, and environmental justice.

Specific attention was given to disparities in exposure to pollutants and the economic impacts of policy measures, fostering a comprehensive dialogue on creating healthier low-carbon urban environments.

The outcomes of the workshop will feed into the final project report.



Workshop summary

The workshop convened experts from various sectors with knowledge of public health, urban planning, and sustainable transport.

The introductory session, led by the ITF, outlined the project's objectives. The ITF's Global Urban Passenger Model was presented as a tool to assess transport supply and demand globally, with a focus on its representation of health-related factors.

Subsequent sessions focused on embedding wellness into policy making, promoting active mobility and inclusive urban policies, and addressing the equity, active travel, and health impacts of policies.

Each session featured presentations from experts representing organisations including the OECD, WHO, ISGlobal, POLIS network, and many more.

Conversations underscored the need for holistic approaches that tackle the interdependence between public health, transport and urban planning.

Concluding recommendations included promoting universal design for accessibility; engaging with local communities to understand their needs; and adopting holistic approaches to urban planning. The workshop also underscored the significance of collaboration across disciplines and sectors to effectively tackle urban challenges and create healthier, more accessible cities for all residents.

Overall, the workshop provided valuable insights into the complexities involved in addressing health impacts in urban areas and emphasised the imperative of adopting sustainable and inclusive policies to improve the well-being of urban populations.



Workshop insights

Adopt holistic approaches to urban planning and modelling

Promote active mobility for all

Incorporate health considerations into transport policy decisions

Address equity in urban development

Harness technology and innovation

Build partnerships for collective impact

Adopt holistic approaches to urban planning and modelling

Participants highlighted the imperative of adopting holistic approaches that address the complex relationships between public health, transport, and urban planning. Cambridge University, Healthy Cities, IS Global and the Swiss Distance University of Applied Sciences presented modelling exercises and tools combining transport and health aspects. Moving forward, it is essential to develop comprehensive strategies that integrate these facets, recognising their symbiotic relationship in shaping the well-being of urban populations.

Promote active mobility for all

Prioritising active mobility options is essential. Ensuring that cities are designed to accommodate walking, cycling and other forms of active transport helps promote physical activity and improve public health outcomes. While not the most efficient measures for decarbonisation, the co-benefits from health impacts are much more important. The project report will discuss measures that encourage active mobility for all residents.

Incorporate health considerations into transport policy decisions

The integration of health considerations into policy decisions was emphasised as a critical step towards creating healthier urban environments. Moving forward, policy makers should prioritise health outcomes when making decisions related to transport, land use and urban development. By incorporating health considerations into policy frameworks, cities can promote well-being and equity for all residents.

Address equity in urban development

Addressing equity in urban development is essential for creating inclusive, just, and sustainable cities. It is crucial to consider the needs of marginalised communities and ensure that urban development initiatives prioritise inclusivity and social justice. Doing so requires promoting social justice through equitable resource allocation, decision-making processes, and access to opportunities. By prioritising equity, cities can build resilience, reduce disparities, and create environments where all residents can thrive.

Harness technology and innovation

Leveraging technology and innovation emerged in the workshop as a crucial way forward for improving urban mobility and health outcomes. Investing in smart transport systems, data analytics, and innovative solutions can help cities better understand and address the complex challenges they face. By harnessing technology and innovation, cities can enhance the efficiency, accessibility and sustainability of their transport networks.

Build partnerships for collective impact

Building partnerships for collective impact emerged as a core strategy for advancing the project's goals. Collaborating with a diverse range of stakeholders, including government agencies, community organisations, and private sector partners, is essential for driving meaningful change. By fostering partnerships and leveraging collective expertise through the workshop, the project has been able to identify effective policies with a high positive impact and create lasting positive change in urban mobility and health outcomes.

What's next?

Insights from the workshop will help shape the recommendations in the final ITF/CPB report, “Assessing Health Impacts of Low-Carbon Transport Scenarios in Urban Areas”, set to be published in late 2024.

Please reach out by August 2024 if you are interested in peer-reviewing the draft report.

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