

## Live Learning Experience: *Beyond the immediate response to the outbreak of COVID-19*

# Mobility

Briefing & Learning Note  
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Launched jointly by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Metropolis, and UN-Habitat on March 25th, 2020, the **#BeyondTheOutbreak** Live Learning Experience (LLE) virtual sessions aim to bring together Local and Regional Governments (LRGs), their associations, and partner organizations to allow and promote meaningful exchange as they find themselves confronting the COVID-19 crisis while maintaining an orderly functioning of public services. Following the two first consultations, the **second thematic LLE**, held on Wednesday, April 8th, was devoted to promoting a **collective reflection on the relationship between urban mobility and the COVID-19 crisis**.

## Local and regional governments at the forefront of mobility:

Local and regional governments are the first line of defense in the wake of crises and through local public service provision ensure that vital services remain in operation to safeguard the communities' health and guarantee human rights protection.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, governments have put in place important restrictions on the movement of people, the functioning of services, and rules on physical distancing. These restrictions are having profound effects on citizens' daily lives and the way in which we interact with each other and with our surroundings. Moreover, confined and crowded spaces have been defined as places of high-risk and authorities have chosen to adopt rules limiting services, including on all modes of public transport to limit the movement of people.

Within this context, maintaining a minimum level of service for mobility will remain as important as ever to ensure that essential services such as healthcare, food distribution, and vital service workers are able to reach their destinations in an orderly, safe, and sustainable manner. To this end, mobility, as the backbone of cities, must continue to be prioritized as not only allowing for the movement of people under the framework of the right to move and access to opportunity, but also vital to maintaining essential services in operation.

## Mobility and the COVID-19 pandemic

As noted above, local and regional governments are the first responders to this crisis and they play an essential role in guaranteeing rights protection and the safeguarding of health of the communities via local public service provision, including to the most







vulnerable populations living in informal settlements or slums within and around cities as well as older persons, women, children, persons with disabilities, migrants and refugees.

Mobility is one of the basic functions that keep the urban system running. Every citizen utilizes one or different modes of transport and most do that on a daily basis. Local and regional governments have a critical role as they are the main providers for public transport but also the coordinators of all other transport modes. In this regard, various challenges appear for cities during this moment of emergency.

Specific guiding questions meant to spur discussion and debate included asking how the coronavirus pandemic is changing the way in which public transport service is operated? What regulatory measures can local and regional governments take to ensure public transport services during the pandemic? How can new partnerships be fostered between local and regional governments and the private sector to work towards providing a decent level of service in times of emergency? And what can we

learn from the crisis to better manage urban mobility in the future and foster sustainable transport?



An interactive live consultation made clear that guaranteeing the safety of workers and users, the accessibility of modes of transport, and financial concerns were issues of major importance for local and regional governments. When it comes to safety, the main problem was identified to be the protection of workers and

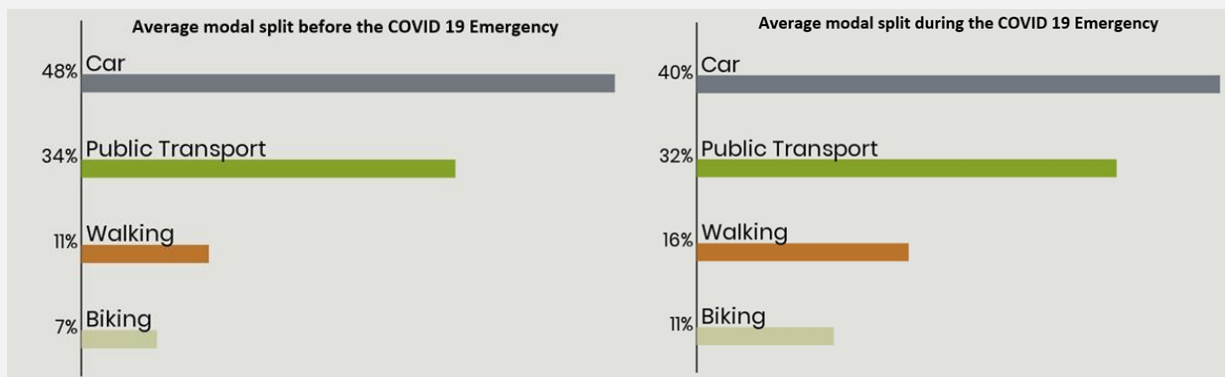
passengers. They key is to avoid additional infections for those citizens who have to move even during the crisis. Accessibility to transport during the crises is another issue and includes two components. On the one hand a social dimension that includes concerns regarding the maintenance of services for citizens with special needs or the financial accessibility. On the other hand, it includes concerns regarding the availability of transport. This is especially relevant for routes with low demand and routes that are served by private transport like it is the case in many informal settlements. Having said this, the maintenance of accessible urban mobility is opposed to the reduced demand and the protection of workers which would suggest





a reduction of public transport. Lastly, the current crises have also heavy financial consequences for transport operators. Public transport, which is usually already subsidized is challenged by revenue declines, at the same time that private organized transport is facing large-scale bankruptcy without assistance. All these issues can be summarized in the question: how to organize urban mobility in the face of the COVID-19 emergency?

The consultation of the more than 150 participants also shed light on the mobility behaviour of citizens during the emergency. Asked about the change in the composition of the modal split of their cities, the answers showed that on average the usage of cars decreased in favour of public transport (+2%) and in particular walking (+5%) and biking (+4%). This change towards more sustainable modes of transport during the emergency might inspire cities in their struggle for a transition towards sustainable urban mobility and could be an important lesson to draw on even after the return to normality.



## Mobility on the ground: the necessity of maintaining an adequate level of service

### Disinfection/protection of workers and users

The experiences from the presenting cities and partners highlighted that the protection of workers and passengers is a central challenge. The key to achieve this is regular disinfection of the public transport vehicles and stations. Even though this is a labour-intensive task, it is essential for the safety of all people involved. Moreover, the contributions showed a series of additional measure applied by cities







to ensure the safety of workers and users. This includes minimum distance between all passengers and workers enforced by information campaigns, adaption of frequencies of buses, metros and tramways to decrease the occupancy rate and provision of safety equipment for workers.

*"Four Toulouse the most important is the safety of public transport and its workers. This is why we decided to keep the metro open and make it free for all passengers at the moment. This is a measure to assure the safety for public transport workers."*  
**Vincent Georjorn**, General Director for Transport of Toulouse

### **Access to information**

The current COVID 19 emergency has created an unprecedented situation leading to LRGs to take exceptional measures that which lead, in many places, to the stop of urban life as we know it. In this regard, communicating information to the public is central to ensure that these measures become a whole-of-society answer to the emergency. Cities must explain their measures to create real awareness within citizens and to make sure that we are all pulling in the same direction. In this regard, the importance of international cooperation was also mentioned by participants. The exchange of knowledge and experiences can assist to find the best strategy to organize mobility in times of crisis. The value of existing networks becomes now especially visible and confirms the importance of united cities and local governments.

*"International cooperation on urban mobility plays, now more than ever, an important role during this pandemic"* **Roland Ries**, Mayor of Strasbourg

### **Maintaining essential services in operation**

Mobility is one of the foundations for the functioning of cities. Even with most people working from home during the current emergency, there are many professions that must continue coming to work. Examples are medical staff, police, waste management, food retail or pharmacists. Therefore, cities must guarantee the maintenance of public transport to allow this essential group of workers to arrive to





their workplace. The inputs of this live learning have shown different approaches to guarantee the safety while maintaining public transport. These include for example initiatives to flatten the demand curve like maintaining sufficient frequency of public transport or the deviation from regular working- and opening hours to avoid rush hours. In this regard it must be noted that the functioning of public transport is also important for any other emergency that require the displacement within the city. Last, once the current curfews that are widely in place will be loosened, public transport will be essential for the step by step return to normality.

*"We want to remind crucial role of public transport in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, the necessity to maintain this in the current context, and the need to protect transport operators, as they are essential to deliver the service and to maintain life in the cities"* **Mohamed Mezghani**, Secretary General of UITP

### **Mobility and Informality**

Local and regional governments and local transit authorities are key in finding sustainable and equitable solutions to allow those who cannot work from home, those who need to go out, to have access to mobility services. Within this context, partnership and collaboration with the private sector and informal providers of public transport will prove to be essential in guaranteeing that important services that rely on mobility are accessible, safe and in operation.

Both the mayors from Banjul and Kigali specifically mentioned that when talking about mobility and the pandemic, it is beyond any doubt that we have to look at how the mobility system interacts with the many actors involved including both the private and informal sectors working day in and day out to provide essential services used by the public. These mayors also addressed the need to rethink mobility going forward, and to foster sustainable urban mobility policies that can contribute to the regeneration after the outbreak including making cities more resilient, encouraging mixed use of space, and allowing all facets of society to feel safe aboard public transport.

*"Public transportation is essential service in my city. Maintaining an adequate level of transportation, for workers who must use transport is challenging, Information and awareness raising is also essential."* **Rohey Malick Lowe**, Lord Mayor of Banjul







## Accessibility

Mobility, as the backbone of cities, must continue to be prioritized not only under the framework of the right to move allowing for the movement of people within a city and territory but also as giving access to opportunity and in keeping vital services in operation, both within and beyond crises.

To this end, a whole-of society approach to urban mobility will prove to be pivotal in the way in which we respond to the pandemic now and shape the future we live in during the post COVID-19 reconstruction phase. All modes of public transport must be designed for everyone and be accessible to all. In this regard, the President of World Enabled, Victor Pineda, called for a rethinking of modes of transport which are inclusive and provide accessibility to all, highlighting that the crisis provides an opportunity to build back resilient and better.

*"As a recommendation we must understand that the responses related to transport are disability inclusive. Partnership with people with disabilities is key". **Victor Pineda**, President of World Enabled*

## Lessons learnt so far: Mobility during the crisis and beyond

### 1) Maintaining public transport in times of crisis: challenges, solutions, and financing.

#### a) The maintenance of Public Transport is key for an efficient management of the current emergency

The live learning exercise has shown that it is the responsibility of local and regional governance to guarantee a safe maintenance of public transport during the emergency. This is the basis for the continuing functioning of cities and the provision of basic services like medical care, social care, food supply, or waste management. Cities worldwide fulfil this challenging exercise through innovative approaches and with great success.





**b) Public-private partnerships are needed to organize urban mobility during the emergency**

In order to maintain an adequate level of service, local and regional governments need a clear mandate and the necessary financial resources and medical materials. It is in times of crisis, when the multi-level governance system is really tested and the value of decentralization appears as cities are at the forefront regarding the management of this emergency. In order to find an effective and inclusive answer to the current emergency, it needs therefore partnership between the public and private transport providers. It needs innovative solutions and collaboration to maintain private public transport especially in informal settlements and to guarantee the safety of workers and passengers.

**2) Local and regional governments must ensure the safety of all transport workers and passengers**

**a) The safety of all transport workers who maintain with their work urban mobility must be a priority**

The protection of transport workers is an absolute priority of all cities. They ensure the functioning of the urban system and are therefore a critical group of workers in the current emergency. In this regard, local and regional governments have a special responsibility for the safety of public workers as their employers. However, private transport workers must be equally protected and it is the task of cities to guarantee that.

**b) Citizens from all neighbourhoods who have to continue moving during the emergency must be able to do so in a safe way**

Even though curfews are widely in place a critical workforce must be able to move within the city in a safe way. To guarantee their safety national and international support and cooperation is needed. An especial effort must be made to ensure the safety of citizens in informal settlements and of those who cannot afford to stay home in quarantine.







Those citizens who suffer already in normal times from an unequal and limited service provision must now be especially protected.

### **3) Renewing trust in the aftermath of the crisis and public transport for a better world:**

#### **a) The current crisis can be an opportunity to build back better and to foster sustainable forms of urban mobility**

The discussions of this live learning event have shown that once we have managed to cope with the current emergency we will have to assess what lessons can be learned to increase the resilience of our cities. The current challenge requires innovative solutions and demonstrates the adaptability of cities to new forms of transport organization. In this regard, the discussions suggested to look at this current emergency also as opportunity to build back better and to foster the transition for sustainable mobility and for a sustainable urban future in general.

#### **b) The current crisis exposes existing inequalities regarding transport provision and calls for a stronger implementation of the right to move**

The challenges faced by cities worldwide in dealing with the current emergency are as diverse as their realities. The participation from speakers of nearly all continents and from the global south and north has illustrated the wide range of challenges and possible solutions. The session has shown the strong inequalities regarding transport provision that exist between cities but also within cities. In this regard, it must be noted that there is still plenty to do to ensure universally the right to move for all citizens. At the same time, these live learning experience has demonstrated the commitment of local and regional governments to this objective and its ability to lead the transition for a just and sustainable urban future.





## Resources

ABC (Link to UCLG's page with cities' presentations, Cities for Global Health Platform, and other links of relevant material shared during session)

- UCLG Manifesto - The Future of Mobility  
[https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/en\\_manifesto\\_mobility.pdf](https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/en_manifesto_mobility.pdf)
- The Durban Political Declaration  
[https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/en\\_thedurbanpoliticaldeclaration\\_en.pdf](https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/en_thedurbanpoliticaldeclaration_en.pdf)

