

UN-Habitat

Urban Transport and COVID-19

- Public transport remains an **essential service** during the pandemic. Even as most people stay at home, **cities must provide mobility to people who most need affordable and safe transport**, such as frontline health care workers, essential workers in the food supply chain, and those who have no other means of reaching medical facilities. Informal settlement dwellers far from city centres also need public transport to access the labour market and earn daily wages. **National governments should provide fiscal stimulus to maintain formal transport systems as critical infrastructure.**
- At the same time, **overcrowded public transport can spread COVID-19** due to the high number of people in a confined space with limited ventilation and the prevalence of commonly touched surfaces like ticket machines and handrails. Governments need to coordinate with public transport operators (both formal and informal) to monitor and regulate public transport to **ensure high standards of cleanliness and good hygiene**. Operators must make sure that all interior surfaces including poles, handrails, seats, steering and all parts that people touch are thoroughly disinfected after each trip.
- Vehicles need to carry adequate quantities of hand sanitizers for use by passengers and operators, both of which should be required to wear masks. There must be **physical distance between users**, which can be achieved by limiting transport access to essential trips, enforcing limitations on the number of travelers, or by staggering the working hours of different businesses to avoid the surge in passenger traffic usually seen in the morning and evening hours. **To minimize high-touch surfaces**, operators should promote cashless payments for tickets or temporarily suspend fares. On buses, prohibiting front-door boarding can reduce contact with drivers who can be protected with plexiglass shields.
- Public transport drivers, conductors and cleaners should **practice good hand hygiene and coughing and sneezing etiquette**. All drivers and crew members should be checked in depots before they start work for any visible signs of illness, especially fever, and ensure that they wash hands before starting work.
- **Cycling and walking should be promoted as an alternative to public transport**, where possible, to reduce the risk of viral spread, boost immunity systems through exercise and improve overall health. With low vehicle traffic during the pandemic, **cities should allocate public right of way that prioritizes pedestrians and cyclists** to allow easier walking and cycling without crowding.
- Government and private industry should **encourage the use of innovative contact tracing of passengers on public transport through technology**, such as apps like TraceTogether in Singapore, that keep a repository of all records of journeys undertaken by passengers. This information can assist public health authorities in their work to contain outbreaks. Public transport can also be an effective means of communicating health and hygiene messages to the wider public through posters and other publicity materials.

- In the developing world, public transport often consists of an informal sector of self-employed drivers of shared cars, motorbikes, vans and mini-buses, all of which are now suffering from a lack of business and require revenue support, health insurance and safety equipment. **Governments should consider financial support or a stimulus along with further safety regulation** for the informal public transport sectors to offset lost revenue and promote passenger health.
- With public transport vehicles idled, **the current moment is ripe for innovative new ideas**, such as on-demand transit service to take essential staff to work or using vehicles as a means to distribute essential supplies in cities where residents are discouraged from leaving their homes.
- **Cities must provide safe mobility today and start planning the sustainable mobility of tomorrow**, by learning from the experience they have gained during the pandemic, including on how remote working or working from home can reduce daily commutes and how the distribution of essential services across the city can make local access easier without as many needed trips.