Overview:

In the 21st century, more people are working than ever. Men, women, and adolescents have one or many jobs. In order to get to these jobs (provided they are outside of one’s living space), one must either walk or secure some form of transportation. Although personal cars may be common in western civilizations, not all countries have this kind of personal and readily available transportation system as their primary transportation. Thus, millions of people around the world rely on public transportation every day in order to go to work, to buy living essentials, to run errands, to secure childcare, or go to school.

Although mass transportation has been used in many areas of the world for over a century, there is a lot of improvement that remains to be implemented in order to achieve truly sustainable public transportation. Addressing the needs of the global public in relation to transportation is difficult, as transportation can be seen as affecting individual countries, one at a time. Thus, as with any United Nation’s operation, national sovereignty must be respected when considering methods to further developing transportation.

There are three main concerns that should be addressed when contemplating a topic as large as mass transportation on a global scale. The first is road and transportation safety. Any form of transportation, whether by land, air, sea, or underground must be safe and the people utilizing these methods of transportation must have confidence in the travel apparati. The second concern is ensuring that public transportation is affordable, accessible, and reliable. The costs for using mass transit must be cheap enough for an average worker to use it, have stations that are easily accessible, and be as consistent as possible in arrival and departure times. The final concern is the ability for sustainable public transportation to reduce poverty and increase the quality of life of its passengers. If more people had the opportunity to get to better, higher paying jobs, it could benefit them and reduce levels of poverty in poorer nations. Global sustainable public transportation is an international concern and can be addressed through cooperation in United Nations’ forums.
Background

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The United Nations has set development goals for the future with specific time limits. The current set of goals are known as the Sustainable Development Goals (or SDGs). The UN believes that, by quantifying and setting a specific timeline for a goal, it will make achieving it more realistic. (For more information regarding the specifics of each goal, see: http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/)

The first set of goals were created in 2000, following the Millennium Summit of the United Nations that resulted in the Millennium Declaration. This declaration was signed by all 191 member states of the UN at the time and 22 international organizations. These goals, known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), contained eight goals: eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting universal gender equality, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability, and global partnership for development. These goals were intended to be achieved by the year 2015. Although some of the goals were achieved with varying degrees of success, no goal was completely achieved.

In response, a further 17 goals were developed in 2011 (the SDGs) with plans to reach them by the year 2030. (For more information regarding the treaty, see: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld) There is no specific goal relating to transportation. However, a few can be applied to the idea of creating global sustainable public transportation. The goals that are applicable to the ideas of sustainable public transportation are as follows:

Goal 8- Decent work and economic growth

Achieving this goal would help to solve many of the world’s problems including solving hunger issues and increasing the amount of children that can afford to go to school. This includes achieving higher levels of economic productivity through diversifying economies, improving global resource efficiency in production and consumption, eradicating forced labor and trafficking, and supporting sustainable tourism.

Goal 9- Industry, innovation and infrastructure

This goal includes developing quality, reliable, and sustainable infrastructure that includes both regional and transborder infrastructure, something that the UN can help to develop. This includes upgrading or implementing mass transportation.

Goal 11- Sustainable cities and communities
Perhaps the most focused on mass transportation, one of the targets for this goal is to “provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transportation, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.” Focusing on sustainable cities will help to address issues related to mass transportation.

**Goal 13- Climate action**

One of the main sources of pollution on Earth is the harvesting of crude oil and refining it into gasoline in order to fuel cars and buses. If more public transportation is used globally, the amount of personal cars owned would decrease. If enough funding and research is dedicated to this topic, engineers and scientists could develop more affordable electric cars and trains, thus allowing countries to move away from harmful fossil fuels.

Sources for further research:


**Current Situation**

**First Goal: Road and transportation safety**

Around the world, nearly 1.3 million people die in road crashes each year, on average 3,287 deaths a day. In addition to this, as many as 50 million people are injured or become disabled due to car crashes every year. Road crashes are the ninth leading cause of death in the world. Clearly, it is a global issue that crosses continents.

Even though all countries have road crashes, there are certain places that are more susceptible to these kinds of accidents. Over 90% of all road fatalities occur in low and middle income countries, which have less than half of the world’s vehicles. In order words, there are significantly less cars in lower and middle income countries but they still account for 90% of all the car crashes globally. Experts state that the reason this is happening is because of the poor infrastructure that exists in these developing nations. Small and overcrowded roads, poorly lit highways, and little to no dividers or sidewalks all contribute to more crashes. People in developing nations are also more likely to have older cars that do not have adequate safety standards. The graphic below (“Figure 5”) explains further how low and middle income countries account for an overwhelming amount of accidents while still owning less than half of the world’s cars. To make matters worse, road traffic incidents affect mainly males (mostly
between the ages of 15 and 44) with 73% of all fatalities. Developing countries also face issues with pedestrians, motorbikes, and rickshaws, all of which are much less safe than a conventional four-wheeled car.

The World Bank and the World Health Organization have offered a “systems approach” to addressing the crisis. Their advice included managing risk exposure with land-use. This means that countries should work together to provide shorter and safer routes for travelers so as to reduce road exposure. Within this section they highlight how improving public transportation systems can reduce exposure. Another section for offering safety advice included planning and designing roads for safety and providing visible and “smarter vehicles.” Establishing road and safety rules and enforcing speed and blood alcohol concentration limits have proven to be very successful for limiting crashes.

Increasing road and safety practice standards, especially in developing to middle income countries, is paramount to global sustainable public transportation. An increase in a nation’s economic productivity should lead to the creation of more jobs. These jobs cannot be filled and people effectively utilized unless workers can successfully travel to and from the workplace. With more people driving every year, it is likely that more accidents will occur and that the roads will become even more dangerous. This is why increasing road safety is an important part of a sustainable transportation, one that cannot be overlooked.

Sources:
Second Goal: Affordable, accessible, and reliable public transportation

A train ticket in New York City to get on the metro can cost as little as $2.50 during off-peak times, an affordable rate compared to taking a taxi or owning a car and paying parking fees. To many in America, $2.50 is something we would spend on coffee every day without thinking much of it. However, some international organizations (such as the World Bank Group) estimate that nearly half of the world lives on less than $2.50 a day. One must consider how much someone is willing and able to spend on transportation. The focus of this topic guide is on low to middle income countries with transportation costs that are much lower than the average train ticket in NYC.

In order for people with limited income to reach better paying jobs, they must have access to affordable transportation that arrives when it is supposed to and is safe to travel on. The World Bank has been leading the fight to improve road conditions worldwide and to construct new roads to better connect people. The World Bank estimates that since 2002 more than 260,000 kilometers of road were constructed or rehabilitated by World Bank supported projects. As the world continues to grow in population and the effects of global warming as well as everyday use continue to negatively affect transport conditions, the damage and danger will only continue to grow.

Transportation must also be accessible in order for people to be able to use it effectively. Train stations are often difficult to secure funding for, as private companies may be unconvinced that they will make a profit and public governments may not be able to shoulder the cost of construction or maintenance. As a result, when it comes to train stations, cities who seek financing from the private sectors have entered into a variety of public-private partnerships (PPPs). This allows for the public sector to dictate the direction that a project is going, but the private sector contributes the funding and has control over certain aspects of the project. The downside to PPPs is that renegotiations are common as the two sectors try and work together while aiming to best serve the public. The most significant challenge to establishing infrastructure is, of course, securing the needed funding. When funding is secured, cities can expand their transportation networks to serve more remote areas that may have not previously been linked to the urban core. Although many cities already do an excellent job of accommodating the needs of larger urban areas, linking these networks to rural communities would assist the country’s economy and the nation as a whole.
Third Goal: The ability for transportation to reduce poverty and increase quality of life

This goal recognizes the integral part that transportation plays in all lives, whether we realize it or not. Take for example a wealthy nation such as Germany, famed for their Autobahn. Their transportation prowess is legendary and reverberates a message of a wealthy, interconnected nation. One of the many things that made ancient Rome such a strong civilization was the fact that they managed to connect their roadways and create an effective transportation network. If a country wants to escape the shackles of poverty and increase overall quality of life, it should look towards clarifying their transportation systems and improving it for their citizens.

Several scholarly papers point to a correlation between the presence of developed transportation infrastructure and the quality of life. As one academic put it, “The transport sector is an important component of the economy and a common tool used for development… in a global economy where economic opportunities have been increasingly related to the mobility of people, goods and information… a relation between the quantity and quality of transport infrastructure and highly connected networks are commonly associated with high levels of development.”

This committee (ECOSOC) must recognize the importance of transportation as a global necessity in the fight against poverty in support of the first SDG (“No Poverty”). Countries and individual cities may be hesitant to spend money on expensive transportation facilities, especially when funds are often limited. However, if a city is willing to shoulder the large initial cost, it will benefit them economically and socially in the future. Well-designed transportation systems have the opportunity to provide multiplying economic and social benefits that will far outstrip the initial cost. For example, say a new train stop is added to a village, connecting them with a medium sized city in a low income country. These villagers, who before relied primarily on subsistence farming, can now work in that city for a much higher wage, even if it is just that country’s minimum wage. These new workers can then buy groceries in the market or store, offering new customers to urban-based businesses, and the villagers could still have extra income to purchase consumer goods. This village has now increased from a simple farming village with little comparable income to an income-earning village over a span of a few years. This is the power that transportation has for a village. Increasing the quality of life may not take place
overnight, but with dedicated effort and a commitment to improving the lives of people they serve, transportation can help the world.

Source: [https://people.hofstra.edu/geotrans/eng/ch7en/conc7en/ch7c1en.html](https://people.hofstra.edu/geotrans/eng/ch7en/conc7en/ch7c1en.html)

**International Treaties on Transportation**

There are several international treaties between both individual countries as well as larger groups of countries at the UN level. These treaties are usually designed around a certain method of transportation, such as air, land, or sea. Listed below are some of the more prominent and influential transportation treaties.

For a general list of treaties, see: [https://www.unece.org/trans/conventn/legalinst.html](https://www.unece.org/trans/conventn/legalinst.html)

**Vienna Convention on Road Traffic** - This is an international treaty designed to facilitate international road traffic and to increase road safety by establishing standard traffic rules amongst signing parties. The main participants of this treaty are European states, as most of Europe can be accessed via road. Other signatories include Brazil, Mongolia, and Peru. The treaty was created during an ECOSOC conference on road traffic in 1968 but did not come into legality until May 21, 1977. The most significant examples of non-signers are the U.S. and China.

For the full treaty, see: [https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trans/conventn/Conv_road_traffic_EN.pdf](https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trans/conventn/Conv_road_traffic_EN.pdf)

Other source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vienna_Convention_on_Road_Traffic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vienna_Convention_on_Road_Traffic)

**Intergovernmental Organisation for International Carriage by Rail**

This is an intergovernmental organisation (IGO) that governs international rail transport. It was organized on May 1, 1985 as a result of the Convention Concerning International Carriage by Rail (COTIF). There are fifty member states plus the entirety of the European Union who are a part of this organization. The COTIF aims to further development of trail transport law in areas of carriage of dangerous goods and contracts the use of vehicles and the removal of obstacles to the crossing of frontiers in international rail transport. In light of recent terrorist attacks worldwide with the presence of transportation systems as soft targets for such events, the work of the COTIF is continually important.

Sources:


Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports

A dry port is an inland terminal directly connected by road or rail to a seaport and operates as a center for the shipment of sea cargo to inland destinations. This treaty, signed in May 2013 at the UN, is designed to promote the cooperation of dry ports in the Asia-Pacific regions. It was agreed upon by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). All states that are UNESCAP members are eligible for participation. The agreement has currently been signed by 17 states and ratified by 11. The treaty ensures that existing dry ports, and even future, potential ones, are coordinated to create intermodal transportation and streamlined logistics. As Asia is a major exporter of much of the world’s goods, it is paramount for Asian countries to effectively transport and ship goods and ensure that the logistics of shipping are as practical as possible.

Sources:
https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/2013/11/20131107%2012-02%20PM/XI-E-3.pdf (Please see second part of the document for English version; first is Chinese, third is Russian)
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intergovernmental_Agreement_on_Dry_Ports

Primary Source

Possible Suggestions:

Questions to consider

The following are a few questions to consider when preparing for the conference (including writing your position paper). You do NOT need to answer every question in your position paper. Rather, these questions should be used as a basis for research regarding this topic and your specific country assignment.

● How can the UN encourage road and transportation safety?
● What is the role of the UN in global sustainable public transportation? Is it to dictate laws and rules of the road? Are individual laws tailored to specific countries better than uniformed and universal laws?
● How can legislation created by the UN meet the sustainable development goals? What are other SDGs that can be applied to this topic?
● Should the UN work with car manufacturers to ensure safer cars? Can international railroad organizations collaborate together to encourage safety?
● What is the ultimate goal of “global sustainable public transportation”? Is it to encourage safety or to encourage better trade practices?