

C 2.1 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Can road transport contribute to the goals of sustainability at all? According to the responses given by countries participating in the Committee's survey, this question has to be clearly answered with "yes". In order to resolve a transport problem, road infrastructure is mostly just one of several options evaluated in an intensive discussion with a strong political dimension.

Recommendations to Decision makers

Member countries need to integrate environmental and social considerations into their decision-making and activities. The concept of sustainable development requires a change of mindset to bring about full integration of the needs for economic and social development while still conserving and enhancing the environment. The integration becomes possible by the means of a debate, which brings a synthesis emphasizing the essential function of governance and of local democracy. Public involvement is the key to social acceptance, and guarantees that all stakes have been expressed and taken into account. Such a debate is all the more efficient if it occurs at the earliest stages and at the main steps of the design and implementation of the project, infrastructure or transportation system.

A process based on priority given to a single main objective (usually economics or the environment) inevitably creates conflicts, usually leading to stopping or suspending the project, going against collective needs and interests, and basically against sustainability. The existence of an explicit legislation about sustainable development, inscribing its principles in law, always shows to be very helpful to implement sustainability in transports.

A thorough financial analysis of the specific projects that implement the transportation plan will help to ensure that projected costs are realistic and affordable. Unless transportation projects are tied to reliable funding sources, the recommended solutions that are developed for environmental and social aspects can easily become a "wish list."

Overall, based on the importance of social and environmental objectives in transportation plans, integrating mitigation into program level funding does not generally serve as a barrier to project budgets. In fact, integrating mitigation into the program level funding will not only provide a more collaborative, well-coordinated decision making process, it can save money by shortening the project development process and eliminating obstacles early on.

The methods and instruments used at present seem to allow a sophisticated approach towards the goal of sustainable road transport, yet there also appears to be a great potential for improvement and refinement. Whether or not a sustainable solution for a road project or road transport in general is actually achieved will always remain with future generations for final judgement. The continuous effort to optimize every single dimension of sustainability, however, seems to be a promising strategy towards sustainable road transport. This strategy should consist of always "getting more – from less – for longer".

Technical aspects

Fragmentation effects have been identified as very relevant negative impacts of road projects on the environment. There is growing awareness in a lot of countries of the need to mitigate fragmentation effects of roads and road transport in the urban environment.

The key to success consists of a holistic approach and interdisciplinary work between road planners, urban architects and public involvement throughout the project development and evaluation.

In construction and maintenance, the focus is generally on technical and, to some extent, traditional environmental concerns, especially mitigating such negative impacts that may arise during works. The link to the sustainability concept is fairly weak. Developing the kind of specific targets and, especially, functional requirements that would fully utilise the opportunities of the production process, is a sizable task that still remains. The administrations need to co-operate closely with contractors and operators.

Sustainability evaluation of road transport is in most countries based on methods originating from the environmental perspective such as Strategic Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Assessment. Few countries apply additional methods, which would give a broader view of impacts or an overall perspective on all three dimensions of sustainability. The development of such methodological instruments on the level of project and plan evaluation seems to be an open field for research.

The key to assessing sustainability of road transportation in the long run appears to lie in the continuous collection of relevant data connected to the impacts of the road network. This monitoring of crucial indicators covering all three dimensions of sustainability is an essential requirement to analyse the progress of impacts along the life cycle of the infrastructure and to allow sustainability evaluation in the future.

In order to make effective environmental assessments as well as meet all funding requirements and objectives, it is important to maintain the rigor of plan and program level appraisals. Although training programs and incentives are good tools, a routine assessment or review process is recommended to ensure that the guidelines are properly followed in all plans and programs and that key objectives are met. One should consider developing regulations or incentives to keep environmental and other mitigating factors as priorities in projects rather than allowing them to be among the first components to be compromised.

Recommendations to PIARC

Sustainability is a core issue for the whole of PIARC and all of its Committees. In developing PIARC's strategy, we need to remind ourselves of this. At present, this aspect is not totally successfully expressed within the organisation's practice.