**The economic benefits of improved transport accessibility – Lorenzo Casullo**

SLIDE 2

A transport journey is very often the first step to participating in economic and social activities – from jobs to schools to hospitals. So if we are no promote full participation and inclusion of all citizens, including those with mobility impairments and disabilities, it is imperative to provide accessible transport options for the largest possible share of the population.

Accessible transportation should be at the forefront not only of mobility and infrastructure policies, but also of urban development at large. An urban approach to greater accessibility makes a lot of sense once we consider the following: transport policies are unlikely to successfully enhance accessibility unless they integrate such concerns at the early stages of design and planning for all, and; transport accessibility is a fundamental but not sufficient component of urban accessibility.

Therefore, a key question is: how can we ensure that decision makers (at the local and national level) invest adequate and targeted sums of money to achieve these goals? Likewise, how can we steer decisions about the rights of passengers and the duties of transport providers so that accessibility for all is maximised?

SLIDE 3

This is the challenge that we, at the International Transport Forum, have laid out for discussion with our member countries and partner organisations. And being a think-tank with a focus on economic policies, we have identified one crucial factor that represents a barrier to investment and more brave regulations – namely, the lack of a common approach to identify and value (including in monetary terms) the economic benefits of accessible transport.

A year ago, we gathered world experts and campaigners in Paris so as to work together towards a clear objective: filling the gap in the theory and practice of accessibility benefits. We produced **this** report which today stands as a unique compendium of good practice in this field.

We do not wish for our focus on economic benefits to be seen as alternative to the rights-based approaches that bodies such as the United Nations have successfully rolled out globally, and that numerous governments including those in this room today implement with determination in cities across the world. Rather, our work aims to complement these efforts.

Our conclusion is that without a clear and robust framework to value the benefits of greater accessibility, these improvements will fail to become a priority – especially when other types of investment (such as to reduced congestion and improved safety) display a large benefits-tag, but accessible transport does not. In addition, the cost of inaction goes unaccounted and missed opportunities are overlooked.

Most importantly, assessing the socio-economic benefits of accessibility gives decision-makers a clear message: that investment in accessible transport is beneficial to a **large** section of the population, and not just to those who are mobility-impaired at the time of planned investment.

I would like to focus on these two key findings – that designing transport systems for those that are less mobile is actually good for everyone, and that if we do not demonstrate value, accessibility investment will be not be a priority – using the rest of my time.

SLIDE 4

First, how do we show that greater transport accessibility is good for all passengers? We need to identify the main beneficiaries. Moving away from a narrower focus on current passengers with some disability, we find that those who benefit also include passengers that are temporarily encumbered in their movements – such as parents with small children, travellers with heavy luggage, pregnant and injured people.

Recent research in the UK and France gives us an indicative magnitude of this exercise. Studies part of the Access for All programme in Britain show that only 1% of passengers at railway stations define themselves as disabled, but more than 5% fall in the “temporarily encumbered” category. Detailed surveys in the Paris metropolitan area confirm that beneficiaries go beyond the less mobile passengers, and include 7% of the population travelling with temporary limitations. For all these travellers, low-floor buses, lifts to stations and simpler pedestrian crossings are of great importance.

An even wider focus on beneficiaries should take into account those who are currently not using transport systems because they are inaccessible to them. For these citizens, better transport accessibility does not mean a “marginally better” journey. It means an entirely transformational impact, providing freedom to access opportunities and services that would have otherwise been precluded. And the number of future beneficiaries is only going to grow given ageing societies.

SLIDE 5

Secondly, how do we demonstrate the economic value of such investment? We need to adapt and further develop existing economic approaches. Many of these are already used by transport practitioners in the assessment of economic impacts, and their application to accessible transport is absolutely possible.

Our report is there to help anyone identify and capture these benefits, which include welfare benefits, reduced health and social care costs, and broader economic impacts such as increased participation to economic activities. We also need to add new benefits to the list, including social benefits like reduced stress levels and lower fear of isolation; and typically private benefits such as increased profits for transport providers.

SLIDE 6

The rare examples of economic valuations undertaken to date demonstrate that the magnitude of potential benefits from improved transport accessibility is often large enough to offset the higher costs. We see this in Britain where the government found a positive business case for investing in accessible railway stations; and in Norway where the National Transport Institute showed that the benefits of making universally accessible bus stops outweigh the costs. In France, a start-up called Wheeliz is the first peer-to-peer rental website specialising in disability adapted cars for wheelchair users is backed by financial investors and expanding across Europe.

I would like to conclude by thanking UN DESA for this opportunity, and by inviting you all to outline the socio-economic benefits that accessible transport can unlock, whenever you have the chance to do so. Let’s make this argument to attract more and better investment. Let’s work together towards more accessible and more inclusive cities for all.

SLIDE 7