

Introduction to the Substantive Programme

Expert Group Meeting on Sustainable Urban Transport: Modernizing and Greening Taxi Fleets in Latin American Cities

Rio de Janeiro, 18-19 May 2011

On behalf of the co-organizers we like to thank the distinguished speakers of this morning's opening session for their statements and their welcome remarks. We are particularly thankful to Mr Sergio Besserman Viana. In his keynote address he has clearly highlighted all the main issues concerned, and he has set the stage for our discussion during these two days.

Latin American cities all have large commercial taxi fleets. Rio de Janeiro has more than 30,000 licensed taxis, and many other cities have similarly large numbers of vehicles in operation. Unlike private cars, taxis typically operate around the clock. Taxis offer door-to-door or point-to-point transport services and form an important part of urban public transport, simultaneously complementing and competing with other systems.

A professional discussion of options for regulating urban taxi markets is certainly a somewhat unusual topic for a United Nations Expert Group Meeting. However, as has also been emphasized in the introductions, there can be no sustainable urban development unless the issues and policies pertaining to transport are adequately addressed.

There is not likely any "one size fits all" solution. Each city and, indeed, each municipality will have to define its own approach to regulate the taxi industry in consultation with the many stakeholders concerned. The main objective of this Meeting therefore is to facilitate the inter-national, the intra-regional and the inter-city exchange of experiences with the regulation, the modernization and the "greening" of this business sector.

Sustainable development requires that policy makers simultaneously consider economic, social and environmental dimensions and aspects of their respective decision making. Taxi services need to provide affordable mobility for passengers, be available where and when needed, be safe, avoid unnecessary pollution and, last but not least, offer sufficient incomes for owners and drivers. In many cities the taxi industry also provides an important source of local tax revenues.

We believe that for purposes of this event we could be flexible on definitions, so that we can discuss all forms of taxi transport, including motorcycle taxis or shared vans.

All of you already have the proposed programme for this event. We thank our local co-organizers for making our programme brochure available in all three languages.

Session 1, which will start after our break, will provide an introductory overview of policy options and best practices in regulating urban taxi systems. Under Session 2 we

will hear and discuss a considerable number of recent country, city and case studies, including presentations from Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia and Cuba. Our Session 3 will then focus on vehicle technologies and fuel choices. We will hear presentations and talk about compressed natural gas and the prospects for electric mobility, including plug-in hybrid and full electric vehicles. We are indeed pleased to have with us participants from the Republic of Korea, China and Germany, who will share with us their experience with alternative technologies. In our Session 4, under the title of the "Taxi of Tomorrow", we will hear about and discuss projected industry developments, innovations and trends.

As you may know, in just one year from now the Government of Brazil and the city of Rio de Janeiro will host the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as "Rio+20". Hence, the conclusions and recommendations of this Expert Group Meeting, proposed to be discussed session 5 in the afternoon of tomorrow, could also be brought to the attention of delegations attending the Rio+20 Conference.

We now invite all of you to join our group photo, and please use the time of the coffee break to register for the reception this evening at Morro da Urca, Pao de Acucar.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

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