ADVANCING PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Local Governments for Sustainability

UN-HABITAT

Insights

Housing, Public Transport, and Sustainable Cities:

Delivering SDG 11.2



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

TARGET 11.2

AFFORDABLE AND SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT SYSTEMS

Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable is at the core of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 and achieving this depends on progress toward various affiliated targets including SDG 11.2. This target focuses on providing access to safe, affordable and sustainable transport systems for all, notably by expanding public transport.

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Introduction

Complementary to SDG 11.2, SDG target 11.1 aims to ensure access for all to adequate, safe, and affordable housing and basic services. For households, decisions about where to live and how to travel are among the most important choices shaping daily life, as access to jobs, education, healthcare, and other essential services heavily influences these decisions. Access to public transport allows people to reach these services affordably and sustainably, promoting social inclusion and overall well-being.

Public transport and housing are fundamentally interconnected, as the location and affordability of housing shape travel patterns, while access to high-quality public transport influences residential location choices. Prioritising proximity to services is crucial for building resilience and safety in the current housing crisis and urban challenges. It reduces dependence on individual vehicles and travel costs and promotes a healthier lifestyle, encouraging active travel (walking, cycling) and limiting CO2 emissions, helping combat climate change. Secondly, it ensures better access to public and private services strengthens social equity, and thus a key factor in quality of life. Proximity encourages social interaction, strengthens neighbourhood ties and fosters a sense of belonging, security and well-being. By integrating housing and public transport planning, cities can create compact, transit-oriented communities that curb urban sprawl, reduce emissions and commuting costs, broaden access to essential services, and foster more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable cities, thereby advancing both SDG 11.1 and SDG 11.2.

The benefits of public transport extend far beyond mobility, generating wide-ranging positive impacts across numerous SDGs. By enhancing access to urban opportunities, public transport can play a critical role in ending poverty (SDG 1); ending hunger (SDG 2); promoting healthy lifestyles and well-being (SDG 3); empowering women and girls (SDG 5); ensuring sustainable and modern energy for all (SDG 7); building resilient infrastructure (SDG 9); making cities sustainable (SDG 11); and taking action to combat climate change and its impacts (SDG 13) – to name just a few (figure 1).



Figure 1: Features of sustainable public transport and linkages to the SDGs (source: UITP and UN Habitat)

SDG 11.2: Access to Public Transport - Overview and Key Trends

Global Performance

Based on a sample of 414 cities in 126 countries, about 4 in every 10 urban residents still lack convenient access to public transport. This reflects moderate progress toward SDG 11.2 but far from universal.

Around 40% of the world's urban population does not have convenient access to public transport.

Based on the sample of cities, the share of the urban population with convenient access to public transport increased from 53.2% in 2020 to 61.5% in 2025. This improvement is likely to reflect a combination of expanded infrastructure and investment in public transport, as well as enhanced data collection and reporting that provide a more accurate picture of accessibility.

Buses and other low-capacity modes account for most of the access to public transport per SDG 11.2.1, while informal and semi-formal transport systems shape the scene in cities in most developing countries. High-capacity systems such as metro and rail networks account for only around one fifth of the urban population based on the sampled cities.

With just four years remaining until 2030, universal access remains a distant goal, with progress in many cities falling short of what is needed. Although more than one-third of cities enjoy high or very high levels of access to public transport (=>75% of population with convenient access), about one in four cities in the sample has less than a quarter of its population within reach of public transport services (figure 2).

This stark disparity underscores the urgent need for accelerated investment and policies to rapidly expand public transport infrastructure and services to underserved communities, especially in the Global South.

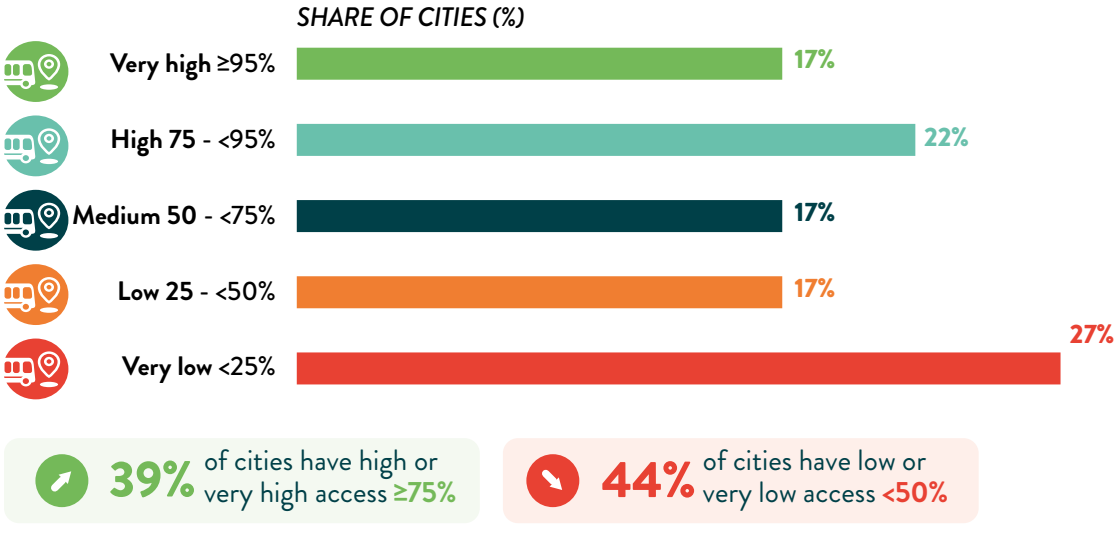


Figure 2: Proportion of cities with different levels of access to public transport, 2025

Regional Performance

Access to public transport varies widely across regions, with significantly higher coverage in more developed areas than in developing ones. The largest access gaps are found in Sub-Saharan Africa and in Western Asia and Northern Africa, where nearly two-thirds of sampled cities in Sub-Saharan Africa and almost half in Western Asia and Northern Africa fall far short of target levels. This shortfall reflects rapid urban growth that has outpaced the expansion of public transport infrastructure, limited investment in formal public transport systems, and widespread reliance on informal transport services that are often not captured in official monitoring and planning.

By contrast, regions such as Australia and New Zealand, Northern America and Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean demonstrate that high levels of public transport access are achievable. In more than half of sampled cities in these regions, over three-quarters of the population enjoys convenient access to public transport. This performance highlights the role of sustained long-term investment, strong regulatory and institutional frameworks, dense transport networks, and integrated urban planning. However, even in these better-performing regions, overall success can mask significant localised inequalities in access within cities.



→ Bogota
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Access Creates Value

Public transport generates value through access. This makes it a strategic investment, not a cost. The proof is clear around the globe, where access has cut travel times, lifted employment and job creation, and improved equality.

Gaps & Challenges of Data Tracking

SDG 11.2 is measured by the share of the population with convenient access to public transport, by sex, age and persons with disabilities. Access is deemed convenient when it can be reached within walking distance via the street network within 500 meters of a given location - such as a home, school, workplace, or market - for low-capacity services (e.g. buses), and within 1 kilometre for high-capacity systems (e.g. rail or metro). However, convenience is more than a measure of proximity. Understanding how safe, easy and attractive the catchment areas of public transport are is critical to usage.

SDG 11.2 is measured by the share of the population with convenient access to public transport, by sex, age and persons with disabilities.

While the indicator is conceptually clear, has an internationally established methodology and standards are available, and data are regularly produced by countries, a key issue remains a lack of standardised, disaggregated data across countries, making it difficult to compare access levels.

While progress has been made towards the creation of an enabling environment for monitoring and reporting, SDG 11.2 reporting requires an inventory of public transport stops and street network, spatial analysis to create public transport service areas, and their overlay with demographic data to calculate the population with convenient access to public transport, out of the total city population. This is a complex process; data is not always easily accessible or available, its quality and granularity are often insufficient to support a robust analysis, and the capacity to report such information is lacking for many local authorities and some national statistical systems. However, various opportunities arise with regards to technological advancements and the increase of open data.

As public transport infrastructure developments take time – from inception to final project delivery – depending on the mode in question, it can make it hard to report changes in urban performance over the SDG timeframe. SDG 11.2 can capture access to shared mobility services and on-demand transport as well as informal public transport systems which are widely used in developing regions and play a crucial role in supporting daily mobility. However, they often lack designated routes or stops, making it very difficult to capture them in spatial accessibility models. Alternative data sources, such as household travel surveys, which could provide complementary information, require significant processing to derive spatial accessibility indicators from observed travel patterns. Additionally, integrating public

transport access data with demographic and socio-economic information is challenging, hindering the ability to track whether various groups within populations - such as women, the elderly, and people with disabilities - have equitable access. These limitations create blind spots for policymakers, making evidence-based planning and monitoring of SDG 11.2 difficult.

UITP, in collaboration with UN-Habitat and key partners, plays an essential role in building capacity for monitoring SDG 11.2 by supporting cities, public transport authorities, and national governments with guidance, data methodologies, training, and knowledge-sharing to strengthen the collection, analysis, and reporting of sustainable urban mobility indicators and access to public transport.

Integrating Informal Transport and Informal Settlements

In many cities, particularly across the Global South, formal and informal transport services provide essential mobility and often represent the primary means of access to jobs, education, healthcare, and public services for residents of informal settlements. Rather than operating in isolation, these services should be integrated into broader urban mobility systems through coordinated planning, multimodal interchange facilities, integrated ticketing where feasible, data collection, and supportive regulatory frameworks. At the same time, transport investments should prioritise improving connectivity between informal settlements and the rest of the city, ensuring equitable access to economic opportunities and basic services.

Lastly, measuring spatial proximity to public transport does not capture actual usage or system performance. Complementary data, for example on ridership, quality of service, frequency, reliability, mode share and customer satisfaction is needed to determine whether people are truly benefiting from the system. Understanding how age, gender and ability impact the perception of quality in the convenience of access in terms of safety, comfort and attractiveness in the catchment is also important. Without such information, high reported access can obscure the SDG indicator's ability to capture real mobility and connectivity outcomes. This is because access alone (through spatial proximity) does not always translate into higher public transport use. For example, many OECD urban areas achieve high levels of walking access to public transport stops, yet public transport uptake



→ Oslo
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remains low in suburbs and commuting zones. For example, in the U.S., many metro areas have extensive bus coverage and rail infrastructure in core areas, yet only about 5% of all U.S. workers in 2019 commuted by public transport, with usage concentrated in a few cities.

Multiple factors have contributed to lower public transport ridership worldwide, and globally more than half of public transport operators (57%) have yet to recover to pre-COVID-19 levels. Looking ahead, global public transport ridership is expected to expand significantly over the next decade as urbanisation and population growth increase demand for efficient sustainable urban mobility solutions. This broader market growth will see greater investments in metro, bus rapid transit (BRT), and rail infrastructure. Innovations in vehicle technology, digitalisation and communications will also help to rapidly transform public transport systems, improving the daily experience of passengers and making public transport a more attractive option for a wider range of users.

The UN Decade of Sustainable Transport presents a pivotal opportunity to accelerate progress towards SDG 11.2.

To ensure that this growth in infrastructure and innovations in public transport translates into higher public transport usage, it is essential to provide safe, easy and attractive access to affordable and high-quality services - characterised by reliability, frequency, commercial speed, improved customer satisfaction and overall service quality. Addressing these factors will enable governments and the public transport sector to encourage more people to use buses, trains, trams, shared bikes, and other sustainable mobility options. Crucially, progress depends on multimodal systems that connect high-capacity public transport with walking, cycling, and shared mobility through seamless interchanges, integrated ticketing, and mobility hubs. Without this wider ecosystem, even strong public transport investments risk falling short of their full potential.

The Decade Ahead: Sustainable Cities Through Public Transport and Housing

Towards creating integral, housing-centred, multi-service proximity in cities and human settlements, a medium- and long-term policy integrating land use, housing, and multimodal transport must be developed to ensure the availability and affordability of housing. It should support the construction of diverse housing types, including social, affordable, and family housing, and promote their integration into a vibrant, connected urban fabric where short distances enhance

quality of life, strengthen social cohesion, and foster a sustainable and resilient urban environment. The policy should also improve access to services and jobs for marginalised populations, while promoting social interaction, diversity, and inclusion. This brings residents closer to services, reduces transport costs and frees up resources for other essential needs. The proximity of housing to services and economic opportunities thus contributes to social diversity, equity, and resilience - a forward-looking approach towards building an actual city for everyone.

Over the next decade, access to public transport and housing development in cities are expected to become increasingly intertwined as urbanisation and planning policies push for more compact, connected, accessible, and sustainable cities. The *United Nations Decade of Sustainable Transport* (2026-2035) presents a pivotal opportunity to accelerate progress in this area and towards SDG 11.2.

At the heart of Decade's vision is the need to shape people-centered urban mobility and liveable cities. It calls for the promotion of high-quality, integrated, accessible public transport systems paired with active mobility networks, recognising that safe walking and cycling environments are essential to seamless connectivity and healthier communities. It stresses the importance of integrating mobility into urban planning, ensuring that public transport networks align with land use plans and zoning for affordable housing, essential services, and public spaces. In this context, housing, urban planning, and access to public transport - as a critical basic urban service for all - is seen as fundamental to achieving sustainable urbanisation during the UN Decade.

The Decade highlights the importance of continuous monitoring and assessment to ensure that policies, investments, and actions remain effective and responsive in delivering sustainable transport beyond 2030. It recommends leveraging existing SDG indicators, making the continuous measurement and reporting of public transport access essential for monitoring progress and informing evidence-based policies to expand public transport infrastructure and services. This monitoring should be a central element of the Decade and its mid-term review in 2030, enabling the evaluation of progress, renewal of political momentum for public transport, and alignment of the second half of the Decade with emerging global and regional opportunities and challenges.

To achieve this, urgent action is required over the next four years to accelerate progress on SDG 11.2 and advance the UN Decade's vision of people-centered urban mobility and livable cities:



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Establish Sound & Supportive Governance and Planning

Local governments should prepare Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs), which integrate land use, housing, and multimodal transport planning. SUMPs provide a strategic framework for aligning investments in public transport, walking, cycling, and shared mobility with climate and equity goals. In addition, the establishment of transport institutions, such as an integrated city and public transport authority, or, even better, mobility agencies, can help ensure a well-functioning and integrated transport system within a city. These institutions enable coordination across city departments and levels of government, supporting the integration of land-use and transport planning. This, in turn, improves connectivity between residential areas, employment centres, services, and amenities, while also enabling monitoring of progress toward SDG 11.2. By strengthening governance and coordination, this approach supports the development of compact, inclusive, and sustainable neighbourhoods, enhances access to and affordability of housing, and ensures that investments in integrated, accessible public transport deliver broad social, economic, and environmental benefits.

Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)

TOD is a proven urban planning strategy that promotes high-density, mixed-use neighbourhoods within walking distance of public transport stops (typically within 500-800 m, in line with SDG 11.2). TOD encourages residential, commercial, and recreational development around public transport, reducing urban sprawl, long commutes, and dependence on private vehicles, while fostering vibrant, connected communities. Governments can incentivise TOD through technical support, planning guidance, and financial mechanisms (e.g. TOD grants).

Land Value Capture (LVC)

This financing mechanism enables governments to capture the rise in land values generated by public transport investments. Revenue from LVC mechanisms - whether tax-based or project-based, for example by governments selling development rights extended beyond the limits of specified land use regulations - can be used to enhance TOD and community facilities, such as affordable housing, while simultaneously expanding and integrating public transport services, creating good quality seamless, accessible connections between homes, workplaces, and key urban amenities.

Zoning & Land Use Reforms

Reforming restrictive zoning regulations is essential to enable high-density, mixed-use development near public transport. Updated zoning frameworks, including spatio-temporal zoning, can support a wider range of housing options, promote walkable neighbourhoods, and better align land use with sustainable transport goals. Streamlining permitting procedures and updating building codes and design standards can further accelerate the delivery of good quality compact, transit-oriented development.

People-Centered Streets Policies

Designing streets to prioritise pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport users - when integrated with nearby housing and land use, it enhances safe, easy and attractive access to homes, services, and amenities. Reforming parking rules - such as setting maximum limits - through effective management and regulation can also free space for people-friendly uses, creating safer, more accessible streets and housing alongside public transport.

Conclusion

Delivering on SDG 11.2 is essential for the realisation of integral and adequate housing for all, ensuring that cities and human settlements are inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. By improving good quality access to public transport, expanding infrastructure and quality services, reforming land use, and promoting transit-oriented, mixed-use developments, cities can reduce urban sprawl, enhance access to essential services, and transform housing patterns. Advancing these measures will be critical for accelerating progress toward SDG11.2 and public transport throughout the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport. Maintaining momentum in tracking and reporting progress on public transport access beyond 2030 will be vital to strengthen coordination and collaboration among Member States and the public transport sector, mobilise resources for public transport projects at all levels, and build awareness and capacity on best practices. This approach will elevate the visibility of public transport in SDG discussions and sustain efforts to ensure active and public transport is at the centre of people-centered urban mobility and liveable cities throughout the UN Decade.



→ Hong Kong

CASE STUDY:

A model of transit oriented planning in Curitiba, Brazil

Curitiba, Brazil, is a leading example of transit-oriented development, where urban growth is aligned with public transport. In response to rapid population growth and congestion, the city adopted a linear planning model that concentrates high-density, mixed-use development along transport corridors. By integrating land use and mobility, services and housing are located near public transport, reducing car dependence and promoting walkability.

A key feature is its BRT system, introduced in 1974. With dedicated lanes and efficient operations, it carries millions daily while reducing car use, fuel consumption, and emissions. Curitiba's long-term vision, strong governance, and focus on affordable, accessible public transport make it a global model for sustainable, and liveable urban development.

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CASE STUDY:

The rail + property model of Hong Kong

Hong Kong is one of the few cities where public transport is profitable, largely due to its LVC approach. The MTR Corporation acquires land at pre-development prices and later sells or leases it at market value, capturing the increase in land value.

This model is reinforced by the Rail + Property programme, which integrates transport infrastructure with urban development. LVC is used by MTR, the public transport operator, to cover railway construction, operation and maintenance; between 2013 - 2015, it contributed 44% of MTR's profits. Supportive land-use planning and strong land administration have been key to this success. Given land scarcity, planning guidelines promote high-density, mixed-use development around rail stations, ensuring efficient land use and alignment with public transport.

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CASE STUDY:

Transport authorities integrating transport provision in Casablanca, Morocco



→ Casablanca
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Since 2009, Casa Transports has led the implementation of Casablanca's urban mobility plan, aiming to promote sustainable development by prioritising integrated mass public transport and transforming mobility infrastructure to improve access for residents.

As an innovative governance model, Casa Transports operates as a publicly financed company involving multiple stakeholders, ensuring strong coordination and stable funding. A dedicated fund supports transport investments and covers initial operating deficits. The organisation acts as a key interface between the city and partners, overseeing the integrated expansion of tram and BRT networks and the restructuring of bus services. It also advances multimodal integration through initiatives such as contactless ticketing and mobility hubs.



→ Casablanca

CASE STUDY:

City of Medellín, Colombia improving inclusivity through connectivity and mobility

Medellín, Colombia, has leveraged public transport as a driver of social inclusion and urban transformation. Since the launch of Metro de Medellín in 1995, the city developed an integrated multimodal network - including metro lines, bike sharing, BRT, trams, as well as, Metrocable aerial cable cars and hillside escalators designed to overcome challenging topography. Beyond mobility, transport projects were linked to broader urban renewal initiatives, creating over 1.6 million square meters of public space, including parks, promenades, and libraries, improving safety, reducing poverty, and enhancing overall quality of life.

Central to Medellín's success was the adaptation of transport solutions to local conditions and active community participation. The Metrocable cut arduous two-hour hillside commutes to around 30 minutes, while escalators and trams improved accessibility in steep areas, helping to connect residents living in informal settlements on the hilly outskirts, particularly benefiting residents of disadvantaged neighbourhoods by expanding access to jobs, education, and essential services. Programs like Cultura Metro strengthened community engagement through education, cultural initiatives, and inclusion efforts, ensuring that public transport acted not just as infrastructure, but as a catalyst for equitable urban change. Coordinated planning, technical innovation, and community involvement combined to make Medellín a global example of how public transport can transform cities.

The experience of Medellín demonstrates how multimodal transport solutions, adapted to local conditions and combined with inclusive urban development, can strengthen social inclusion, reduce spatial inequalities, and improve quality of life by connecting formal and informal transport networks. The case also illustrates how transport systems can connect historically isolated informal settlements with the wider urban fabric, demonstrating the importance of integrating formal public transport networks with locally adapted mobility services and last-mile connections.



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