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How Can the World Bank Integrate Climate Action and Disability Inclusion in Transport?

The climate crisis disproportionately affects marginalized communities, including persons with disabilities. Adopting a disability-inclusive approach to climate action can improve the effectiveness of both climate change adaptation and mitigation.

In 2023, BIC published a report examining the link between climate and disability and outlining how the World Bank should integrate disability inclusion into climate action at the project and policy levels. This policy brief builds on that report and provides sectoral guidance on how the Bank can integrate disability inclusion into its approach to Paris alignment in the transport sector. As the Bank's investments in transportation continue to rise,[1] it should capitalize on opportunities to scale up electric public transportation systems such as Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). These systems and related infrastructure should be universally accessible for persons with disabilities. Expanding accessible systems will increase inclusion, improve access to services and job opportunities, and reduce transport emissions. Climate change also poses significant vulnerabilities and risks to transportation systems, requiring targeted adaptation to strengthen climate resilience.

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[1] Annually, the World Bank produces a project level climate finance document. The amount of climate finance for transport has been steadily increasing since Fiscal Year (FY) 2019; however, there was a slight decrease in FY23. See here for climate finance data for FY19, FY20, FY21, FY22, and FY23.

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The expansion of robust public and active[2] transport networks presents an opportunity to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs). However, to maximize these potential emissions reductions, transport systems must be accessible for persons with disabilities. When transport systems are designed to target the needs of the most marginalized, transport availability improves for the entire population. Below, we provide recommendations for the Bank to integrate climate action and disability inclusion in mitigation and adaptation, along with further general recommendations.

Mitigation

- **Integrate disability inclusion into transport decarbonization.** As part of its Paris alignment strategy, the Bank is committed to supporting a shift to public transport. However, many public transport systems remain inaccessible, and persons with disabilities may find themselves either excluded or reliant on low-occupancy vehicles to meet their mobility needs.[3] While physical accessibility may be one of the main barriers, our work with partners in Kumasi, Ghana identified cultural and attitudinal barriers that restrict persons with disabilities full access to and usage of public transport. For instance, persons with disabilities in Kumasi shared that due to cultural and attitudinal barriers some drivers will refuse to allow them to board their buses. As a result, they are more reliant on private vehicles or taxis, which increase household costs, vehicle density, and emissions. As the Bank supports borrowers in decarbonizing transport systems, it should prioritize the development of universally accessible, electric public transport networks. This approach should include training and capacity building for transport operators on the mobility needs of persons with disabilities, and public awareness campaigns to reduce stigma; both support a cultural shift to increase awareness of persons with disabilities and their mobility needs. Electric vehicles (EVs) offer an additional opportunity to reduce local air pollution and accelerate the shift away from fossil fuels.[4] Improved air quality can reduce rates of heart disease, stroke, lung cancer, and other infections and diseases associated with air pollution and poor air quality, which persons with disabilities are more likely to be exposed and vulnerable to.[5] New electric public transport networks should be physically and financially accessible, and free of stigma and discrimination to increase ridership amongst persons with disabilities.[6]

- **Adopt a holistic, disability-inclusive approach to the transport system.** As the Bank supports the development of public and active transport networks, it is critical to assess inclusivity and accessibility across the entire system, beyond only the portion of the system being financed: "even if new corridors are constructed with more attention to disability, they can end up as islands within an inaccessible transport

[2] "Active transportation is a human-powered mobility, such as cycling, walking, or rolling (using mobility-assistance devices). When safe, direct infrastructure is provided, active mobility can directly replace vehicle kilometers traveled, making these modes effective at reducing vehicle emissions, bridging the first- and last-mile gap, and improving individual and public health." World Bank. *The Path Less Traveled: Scaling Up Active Mobility to Capture Economic and Climate Benefits (English).* Mobility and Transport Connectivity Series, (Washington DC, World Bank Group, 2023), http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099112923115517791/P500661086fdc80740ad42070ad301d0b66 & "Active Transportation and Micromobility," US Department of Energy, accessed July 9, 2024, - https://afdc.energy.gov/conserve/active-transportation.

[3] Luis Artieda, Mackenzie Allan, Ramón Cruz, Sonal Shah, & Victor Santiago Pineda, *Access and Persons with Disabilities in Urban Areas* (New York: Institute for Transportation and Development Policy, 2022),https://itdp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Full-Report-jun21.pdf

[4] Muneeza Mehmood Alam & Yoomin Lee, Cleaner Vehicles and Charging Infrastructure Greening Passenger Fleets for Sustainable Mobility (Washington DC, World Bank Group, 2021), https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/c05dc9e13171bb63f0fab91cbe6b80b1-0190062021/original/TDI-paper-Cleaner-Vehicles-and-Charging-Infrastructure-October-2021.pdf. See also: Erika Garcia, Jill Johnston, Rob McConnell, Lawrence Palinkas, & Sandrah P Eckel, California's early transition to electric vehicles: Observed health and air quality co-benefits, (Los Angeles: Science of the Total Environment 867, 2023), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2023.161761, for a study that analyzed the health and air quality benefits associated with electric vehicles in California.

[5] Michael Brauer, Narantuya Davaakhuu, Maria Consuelo Escamilla Nuñez, Michael Hadley, Daniel Kass, Mark Miller, Dorairaj Prabhakaran, Karen Silwa, Ta-Chen Su, Ilonca C.H. Vaartjes, Rajesh Vedanthan, Kelsey Armstrong-Walenczak, & Jeremiah Mwangi, *Clean Air, Smart Cities, Healthy Hearts: Action on Air Pollution for Cardiovascular Health*. (Global Heart. 2021), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8428302/.

[6] Luis Artieda, Mackenzie Allan, Ramón Cruz, Sonal Shah, & Victor Santiago Pineda, *Access and Persons with Disabilities in Urban Areas* (New York: Institute for Transportation and Development Policy, 2022), https://itdp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Full-Report-jun21.pdf

network."[7] In Bogotá, the Bank is financing the development of the city's metro; in addition to alignment with universal access standards, the Bank should also prioritize the seamless integration of Metro Lines 1 and 2, enabling persons with disabilities to fully access and benefit from these interconnected networks.[8] A fully accessible transport system will increase the number of users, therefore maximizing emissions reductions.

- **Apply universal access features to active transport infrastructure.** As the Bank develops active transportation infrastructure such as sidewalks and bike lanes, it must align these investments with universal access standards.[9] This should include, but not be limited to, adhering to standards on minimum sidewalk width for wheelchair users, barrier-free sidewalks and crossings, and wide cycling lanes.[10] Safe and accessible active transport infrastructure "can directly replace vehicle kilometers traveled, reduce vehicle emissions, bridging the first- and last-mile gap, and improve individual and public health."[11]

Adaptation

- **Revise risk assessment criteria. Risk assessments should be more holistic and prioritize avoiding risks and maximizing social and environmental benefits.** The Bank's Transport Sector Note states that "the risk assessment should be used to prioritize climate hazards that need to be addressed by classifying the hazards that pose the highest potential risk to the operation's success."[12] The current approach is focused on mitigating potential negative environmental or climate impacts; in the case of the Bogotá Metro Line 2 Project, BIC found that the risk assessment did not analyze the risks to persons with disabilities or their needs. Risk assessments for this and other similar projects should include a social inclusion dimension that analyzes the operation's potential risks to persons with disabilities, how they interact with the transport system, how climate change may adversely impact their mobility, and how transport systems can be designed to be more inclusive. Expanding risk assessments in these ways would transform them into tools that maximize both social and climate co-benefits.

- **Adaptation interventions should be inclusive and accessible.** Interventions designed to increase the resilience of the transport sector should take into account how they are accessible for persons with disabilities. Our work with partners in Bogotá and Kumasi highlighted that the current transport systems in both cities are not adequately equipped to handle climate impacts and extreme weather events, such as flooding. Flooding in both cities can isolate persons with disabilities until it has been managed. Any interventions designed to increase the resilience of the transport system should be universally accessible. For example, where flooding risks require elevated platforms, buses should align with platform height or incorporate mechanisms that allow level boarding.[13] The design of adaptation interventions should consider all persons with disabilities.

[7] Ibid.
[8] We partnered with local CSOs in Colombia to monitor the World Bank-financed Support to the Bogota Metro Line 1 Section 1 Project and the World Bank-proposed Support to the Bogota Metro Line 2 Project, which has since been dropped by the World Bank. In April 2026, the Bank introduced the restructured Support to the Bogota Metro Line 2 Project MPA Phase 1 project, which will go to the Board in July.
[9] "The concept of universal access means unimpeded access for people of all ages and abilities in different situations and under various circumstances, as set out in GIIP." World Bank, *Environmental and Social Framework,* (Washington DC, World Bank, 2016), https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/837721522762050108-0290022018/original/ESFFramework.pdf#page=59&zoom=80.
[10] "Universal Design: Streets," American Society of Landscape Architects, accessed July 11, 2024, https://www.asla.org/universalstreets.aspx#:~:text=Universally%20designed%20streets%20have%3A,14%20feet%20(4.2%20meters) & Luis Artieda, Mackenzie Allan, Ramón Cruz, Sonal Shah, & Victor Santiago Pineda, *Access and Persons with Disabilities in Urban Areas* (New York: Institute for Transportation and Development Policy, 2022), https://itdp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Full-Report-jun21.pdf
[11] World Bank. The Path Less Traveled: Scaling Up Active Mobility to Capture Economic and Climate Benefits (English). Mobility and Transport Connectivity Series (Washington DC, World Bank Group, 2023), http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099112923115517791/P500661086fdc80740ad42070ad301d0b66.
[12] World Bank. *Transport Sector Note on Applying the World Bank Group Paris Alignment Assessment Methods (English),* (Washington DC, World Bank Group, 2023), http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099802104072399820/IDU042c63ab700a4904fdb09fea073c99ff21977
[13] Ann Frye Obe, *Disability Inclusive Public Transport- Practical Steps to Making Public Transport Disability Inclusive,* (London: High Volume Transport Applied Research, 2019).

- **Collect real, disaggregated data on disability and include disability metrics in adaptation projects.** The Bank should collect real, project-level data on the number of persons with disabilities who benefit from each adaptation project, in line with the World Bank Group Corporate Scorecard indicator on "beneficiaries with enhanced resilience to climate risks." This project-level data would help drive decision-making and strengthen the Bank's approach to supporting the design and implementation of inclusive adaptation projects. It would also clarify how climate impacts, including increased frequency of extreme weather events, like heatwaves, affect persons with disabilities and identify the supports necessary for them to benefit from adaptation investments.

- **Define "vulnerable groups."** The Bank's Transport Sector Note presents two factors used to assess an operation's risk to climate hazards. One assesses "whether the assets, systems, beneficiaries, and/or vulnerable groups might be exposed to these hazards."[14] The Bank should define "vulnerable groups" to include persons with disabilities.

General

- **Increase transparency and engage stakeholders.** The Bank's Paris alignment process thus far has been closed off to the public. The Bank should engage with stakeholders, particularly persons with disabilities, around instrument and sector notes, and universally-aligned activities. Persons with disabilities have knowledge and expertise that should be incorporated into the Paris alignment process to improve accessibility for all people and maximize emissions reductions.

- **Mainstream disability inclusion in climate policies.** Persons with disabilities have routinely been left out of climate action, both at the international and national level, including the Paris Agreement and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). At the Bank, key climate policies, including the Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) and Action Plan on Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience (Action Plan), do not address how climate change disproportionately affects persons with disabilities, nor do they include a single reference to persons with disabilities. Any future iterations of these policies or other related policies or strategies on climate and the environment should include language on persons with disabilities. When working with clients to increase the ambition of their NDCs and Long-Term Strategies, the Bank should emphasize the importance of adopting a disability-inclusive approach. In addition, the Bank should mainstream disability-inclusion in its own guidance, particularly in Country Climate Development Reports (CCDRs). CCDRs present countries with strategies and recommendations for low-carbon resilient development and are expected to feed into the design of future projects, country strategies, and Paris alignment. It is important that CCDRs recognize how climate change disproportionately affects persons with disabilities and include disability-inclusive recommendations.

- **Develop an inclusive adaptation and mitigation checklist.** The Bank should develop a checklist that can be used by teams during project design to assess the inclusivity of universally aligned activities.

[14] World Bank. *Transport Sector Note on Applying the World Bank Group Paris Alignment Assessment Methods (English),* (Washington DC, World Bank Group, 2023), http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099802104072399820/IDU042c63ab700a4904fdb09fea073c99ff21977

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