

BETTER ACCESS TO URBAN OPPORTUNITIES: ACCESSIBILITY POLICIES FOR CITIES IN THE 2020S

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Summary for policy-makers

The world has entered the 2020s facing three intertwined crises that demand immediate attention: the COVID-19 pandemic, a new rise in poverty and inequality, and the climate emergency. The urgency is particularly great in cities, where people and economic activities are concentrated, requiring a critical rethinking of whether urban areas are meeting people's needs – and how policies could help transform them for the better.

This paper focuses on **key near-term opportunities for national governments to improve urban accessibility** – to ensure that people can not only move around efficiently, but can access the resources, services and opportunities they need to thrive. Local governments will lead many of these efforts, but to succeed, they

for public transport systems, and many measures adopted by governments could further entrench carbon-intensive economic systems. The pandemic could also exacerbate inequality and make cities less resilient.

It is not too late for national governments to include measures that promote urban accessibility in COVID-19 recovery packages. They can also seize opportunities that arise in fiscal, economic and sectoral policies or in infrastructure budgets. Six policy areas merit particular attention:

1. Realigning national transport policies and budgets: National governments play a central role in shaping urban mobility patterns and are major funders of both high- and low-carbon transport infrastructure. Many COVID-19 stimulus and recovery packages have also included significant transport investments. Governments should seize these opportunities to promote transformative change. Priorities include expanding established sustainable travel, such as walking,

issue also gets little attention in national policy-making, leading to a fragmented regulatory environment both within and across countries. Promoting sustainable freight solutions suited to dense urban environments should be a critical aspect of urban transport planning – a task for national and local governments to tackle together. Priorities include integrating freight and logistics planning into transport and land use plans; investing in and incentivising the use of urban consolidation centres; facilitating the sharing of data and best practices; and providing preferential access for low-emission freight vehicles.

The confluence of COVID-19, the poverty and inequality crisis and the climate emergency poses enormous challenges. Though some countries have made important investments in urban accessibility, some investments and policy choices could actually set countries back. But it is not too late to act: By the opportunities laid out above, helping steer market forces in the right direction and supporting the transformative work being done by local governments, national leaders can make a significant contribution both to climate action and to urban accessibility.