



## Global Dialogue on Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic and Economic Crisis: Building Back Better Aligned to the SDGs and the Paris Agreement

→ [wri.org/covid-recovery-dialogue](https://wri.org/covid-recovery-dialogue)

# Key Takeaways from 5<sup>th</sup> dialogue: Cities and Transport in the COVID Recovery

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- 1. Healthier, greener, more livable cities must be placed at the core of the COVID recovery.** Cities are being hit hardest by the COVID crisis, with lower-income and other disadvantaged urban residents facing higher rates of infection and deaths. Cities are also facing severe strain because of the economic crisis, including major impacts on cities' budget revenues. At the same time, cities have also experienced some benefits during the crisis that could be built upon: cleaner air, more biking and walking, and increased neighborhood engagement. There is a political opportunity now for fundamental shifts that we have missed in the past, and some cities, like Bogotá, Milan and Paris, are seizing the moment to implement greener, low-carbon strategies.
- 2. In the recovery, cities offer abundant, promising opportunities to respond with speed and impact.** The concentration of people, infrastructure and economic activity in cities means that they can move rapidly to decarbonize and become resilient in line with the Paris goals. Within cities, there are numerous shovel-ready projects — like building efficiency retrofits, nature-based solutions for water supplies, extension of pipe and sewer networks, and public transport upgrades — that if designed well can make cities greener, more livable, equitable and more resilient to future climate and pandemic threats. Recovery investments in clean, connected, and resilient urban development offer a triple benefit to the economy, public health and climate change.
- 3. Cities' challenges during the COVID crisis highlight the social dimension of the crisis and amplify existing vulnerabilities.** We have not adequately prioritized social inclusion as a serious aspect in climate, environment, and long-term planning in cities. Recovery plans and projects in cities will need to come with well-designed policies that protect

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livelihoods and provide safety nets, such as income support, food distribution, workforce training, social housing and access to clean transport.

4. **The city is only as strong as its weakest link; we must integrate informal workers and settlements into our immediate and long-term planning and solutions.** Sheltering-in-place, social distancing, and handwashing are key tenets of the public health response to the virus, but for the billions of urban poor, these guidelines are essentially impossible without the space and services to do so. Without investment in slums, informal settlements, informal workers and the urban poor, vulnerability will remain rooted within city systems. When residents of informal settlements have opportunities to guide decision making, outcomes are better. The World Bank is deploying a geographically targeted approach to determine areas within cities that are especially vulnerable and how sustainable infrastructure improvements could contribute to protecting lives in the short term, improving livelihoods in the long term, and contributing to a low-carbon future.
  - **Shifts in mobility have been at the center of the COVID crisis, and we need mobility to be central to recovery.** Beyond the climate impacts involved, this is a social issue that we must address — who has access to mobility and who does not.
  - **Public transport is the backbone of mobility in cities, and urban equity is at risk if public transport systems collapse.** Access to mobility is access to the economy, and public transport is crucial for future cities to thrive. But cities have been forced to drastically reduce services and occupancy, shuttering revenues. Transport budgets will need to be strengthened, and this is the perfect time to highlight this issue. So too, improvements in and expansion of public transport systems provide a low-carbon opportunity for economic stimulus that supports local jobs.
5. **This is also the time to make space for non-motorized transport – biking and walking.** The lockdown is a mobility challenge for all of us, and we cannot backtrack from urban access regulations and shift toward personal vehicle usage. For example, a 1% decline in transit use in Manhattan would translate into a 12% increase in car traffic. The pandemic is changing the paradigm; this is a moment to claim land from the car. Urban planning must play a role in rethinking public spaces, and we must put biking and walkability into long-term planning frameworks. The city of Bogotá, Colombia, provides an example of action taken quickly, converting car lanes and bus corridors into dedicated biking lanes and enabling continued mobility during the COVID crisis. The new bike lanes brought new challenges, so Bogotá reduced the city-wide speed limit as part of its Vision Zero commitment.
6. **Cities, national governments and financial institutions should reprioritize or repurpose existing projects, providing a framework for efficient, low-carbon recovery.** Some cities with long-term planning frameworks and stakeholder processes have reprioritized or repurposed those plans during the pandemic. It will also be critical to bridge the current gap between recovery plans decided at the national level and initiatives that are local and urban. Although cities will be dependent on national policies and investment, recovery packages have not, with some exceptions, included mention of cities.
7. **Cities will use their own resources for the recovery, but they will also depend on transfers from national governments and there is a clear need to ensure cities have direct access to funding from international sources.** Cities' municipal revenues are decreasing significantly as cities need to reprioritize spending toward health infrastructure and urban sanitation, and city budgets need to be strengthened. While cities will continue to use their own resources, it is clear that they will also increasingly depend on intergovernmental transfers, funding from MDBs, and investments by the private sector.

Assistance is needed in unlocking funds and ensuring that cities can access them directly and efficiently. For example, EBRD is providing support for recovery projects in cities through their Green Cities Program to support climate action planning; the Cities Climate Finance Gap Fund will support the early-stage preparation of low-carbon and climate-resilient urban infrastructure projects in cities of the Global South, potentially prioritizing projects relevant for a COVID recovery; and the Cities Climate Finance Leadership Alliance (CCFLA) brings together key players for city-level climate action on the framework needed to attract investment and improve cities' access to finance, to address the power gap between the subnational and national levels as well as the technical assistance needed to prepare financially viable projects.