Key Takeaways from the Freedom of Mobility Forum's 2023 Debate

AMSTERDAM – On March 29, 2023, the Freedom of Mobility Forum held its first live digital debate on the topic: "In a decarbonized world, will freedom of mobility be affordable to a happy few only?"

Six panelists - Måns Nilsson, Yamina Saheb, Temilade Salami, Devesh Shah, Carlos Tavares and Benjamin Welle - from various regions across the world brought their unique perspectives on the facts, challenges and solutions related to the topic.

Below are the key takeaways from the debate:

Mobility is a basic need to be provided to everyone

Mobility is a basic human need, as it allows people to access opportunities, employment, food, education, health services and more. As such, infrastructure, public transport and vehicles are all important parts of our mobility ecosystems.

However, global access to mobility is still unequal. In 2021, the United Nations estimated that over 1 billion people did not have adequate access to an all-weather road(1). In some of the poorest parts of the world, public transportation can be out of reach for some, costing as much as 20% of their income(2).

Not only do existing transportation systems remain insufficiently accessible today, but they are also relatively unsafe. The World Health Organization reports that there are about 1.3 million road fatalities per year and, in a region like Africa, it is the number one killer of young people, due to a lack of adequate public transportation systems and safe conditions for driving, walking and cycling(3).

Gender can also be a factor of inequality in access to mobility. Women are less likely to own a vehicle than men in developing or underdeveloped countries. Therefore, affordable, accessible and interoperable solutions are necessary to ensure the highest number of people can experience freedom of mobility from point A to point B.

Decarbonization, while not an individual need, is a global imperative

Transportation of people and goods is the second largest contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions, behind only the electricity and heat sector[(4)]. This sector grew faster than any other end-use sector between 1990 and 2021 and it is expected to keep growing in the future[(5)].

Science tells us that decarbonization is a global need, with objectives requiring a minimum 3% annual reduction in total CO2 emissions from transportation by 2030, according to an IEA report on Transport[(6)].

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Sixth Assessment Report indicates that human activities, mainly through emissions of greenhouse gases, have already caused a warming of the global surface temperature of 1.1° C above 1850–1900 levels[(7)], showing that in order to meet our goals, we must act more aggressively on our ways of living.

Transformations in mobility patterns need to include changes in both transportation means and the energy sources that are used to power transportation devices, such as, for example, the use of clean energy for electrification of both individual cars and public transport. Although their challenges vary widely, motorized countries as well as low- and middle-income countries are currently striving towards a shared electric mobility system.

Global efforts are currently seeking to progressively phase out internal combustion engine vehicles through new regulations being introduced in several countries together with financial incentives towards electric vehicles. However, electrification comes with its own technical, environmental, social and financial challenges, including the issue of battery recyclability, as well as the price and availability of raw materials. One of the possible directions could be to support innovation rather than simply a single solution, to allow, for example, development of lighter batteries to equip more affordable vehicles that can access a denser charging network infrastructure and, thereby, limit range anxiety.

In motorizing countries, the informal transport sector (consisting of forms of collective transport, provided by individuals or private entities, which are unofficial, not legally organized or regulated, and not publicly financed) is key

to ensuring accessibility and affordability, but it is also more difficult to tackle from a policy perspective.

Global objectives and local implementation are the way forward to address both individual needs and the global imperative

Solutions to decarbonization should take into consideration the needs and realities of different countries, regions, age groups, etc. There are solutions that can address both decarbonization and affordability at the same time and that can enable us to plan holistically and inclusively.

These solutions include:

- thoughtful city planning and organization to optimize people's movements
- reimagined public transportation
- reducing excess transport
- creating new mobility ecosystems
- fostering multimodality
- thoughtful shift to electric mobility.

Various stakeholders are encouraged to collectively develop solutions that are inclusive of the differences in perspectives and needs that exist across the world, and then enable local adaptations and implementations that serve the needs of specific communities, such as those in rural areas.

This approach coincides with evolving behaviors and trends among young people, both in western societies and in the Global South, who want to be able to choose from a large ecosystem of options that go beyond car ownership (buses, three wheelers, car sharing, carpooling, etc.).

This is just the beginning!

The debate marked the start of a continuous discussion on the Freedom of Mobility Forum website throughout the year. New content will be published each month on the topic of affordability linked to freedom of mobility, featuring interviews, articles, videos, and more. It will give visitors the opportunity to gather insights from a range of voices through a comprehensive and inclusive approach, so that all stakeholders can make up their own minds.

NOTES:

(1, 2) www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/media_gstc/FACT_SHEET_Inequalities.pdf
(3) https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/road-traffic-injuries
(4) Global GHG emission shares by sector | Statista, 2023

(5, 6) Transport – Analysis - IEA, 2022
(7) https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-cycle/