

The future is public transport

ICTUR spoke with Alana Dave about the ITF's 'People's public transport policy', which will be published in January 2020.

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How has the ITF's approach to climate change and public transport developed?

At the 2010 ITF Congress, a resolution was adopted on developing a trade union response to climate change in transport¹. This set out a number of political principles around the issue and committed ITF to what we call a 'Reduce – Shift – Improve' framework: *reducing* the movement of goods and people, *shifting* the modes of transport, and *improving* the energy efficiency of the sector. The resolution contained really important commitments, for instance to take a science-based approach to emission reduction and to contribute to the scale of transformation in transport necessary in order to effectively reduce emissions and address the climate emergency.

The ITF's public transport policy fits within that political resolution. We've developed an alternative model of public transport, recognising that we cannot address environmental issues separately from the wider social and employment issues. The core demands of the policy concern public ownership, public financing, decent work, gender equality, more worker control of technology, and transport and energy democracy.

We feel it is necessary for unions to go beyond traditional, bread-and-butter workplace issues, and address all of the different aspects of a new model of public transport. Just Transition is not only about reskilling, retraining, numbers of jobs - that's all important, but it needs to be linked a long-term vision of transformative change in transport. The policy proposals provide a platform for linking current issues in public transport to that long-term vision of change, as well as a platform for building alliances with other organisations that might be able to support this kind of policy and these demands.

There is sometimes an assumption – from unions but also outside the union movement – that public transport is an 'easy' sector, because it's a sector that stands to benefit from progressive climate change policies. On one level that might be true, because it's not controversial that there needs to be a massive expansion of public transport in order to reduce emissions in cities. But how that expansion takes place, what kind of employment it generates, what democratic participation and control it allows workers or citizens or passengers - all of that is heavily contested.

The policy paper states that 'trade unions must contest power not only in workplaces but also in

the public sphere where decision-making takes place'. What challenges do public transport sector workers face in exercising collective bargaining rights to pursue this agenda?

One of the biggest issues is that, globally, large parts of the public transport workforce are in the informal economy. In many developing countries, in many cities, up to 85 percent of the passenger transport workforce are informal, and are denied fundamental workplace rights: they are not defined as employees, they don't have a clearly defined employment relationship, labour law doesn't cover them, there are no clear collective bargaining rights, there are no contracts.

One of our main concerns therefore is how to organise informal workers, how to win some of those workplace rights, and in the long-term how to formalise employment in public transport so that those rights are guaranteed through labour law and other institutions that formal workers would have access to.

For example, 'Bus Rapid Transit' (BRT) systems are being introduced in Africa, Asia and Latin America. These are formalised public transport systems but are developed without consideration for the impacts they can have on the informal workers who rely on providing those services for their livelihoods. The ITF is beginning to look with unions at the labour impacts of these systems and to put together a platform of rights and demands that can be negotiated with local authorities, governments or employers – wherever the power lies. In Kenya and Senegal we're beginning to see the impacts of this work. We are making visible a large section of the workforce that has been otherwise completely excluded from any formal labour protection or collective bargaining rights. A lot of the funding for these BRT programmes also comes from international financial institutions, and we've engaged them on the need to address work and employment issues. At the upcoming World Bank's Transforming Transportation conference in January 2020, the ITF will have a parallel session on decent work challenging the assumption that sustainable transport is possible without decent work. It should be a primary objective of the social investment in public transport.

There will also be a tripartite ILO meeting on urban passenger transport in 2020, and one of the priorities of the ITF is to focus on the position of informal labour, and how ILO Recommendation No. 204 (2015) concerning the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy is implemented in

the context of urban transport. That's a big opportunity for us to establish guidelines that are recognised in practice, in respect of collective bargaining rights in urban transport.

How do environmental modernisation reforms in the public transport sector impact on workers?

In several countries, we can see that the labour impacts are really being ignored in these reforms. In the Philippines for example, the modernisation of the 'jeepney' sector [requiring the phase-out of jeepneys aged 15 years or older] has been heavily opposed by different unions, because of the massive impact that it's going to have on workers and the lack of consideration about a just transition for the workforce. We have two affiliates in the Philippines, PISTON [Pinagkaisang Samahan ng mga Tsuser at Operators Nationwide] and the National Confederation of Transport Unions [NCTU]. They have somewhat different positions regarding strategies to the modernisation, but not fundamentally different in terms of the need to defend the livelihoods of informal workers – and there's also been a lot of joint activity. Unions acknowledge the need for modernisation – this isn't simply outright opposition. Rather, modernisation needs take into account of the employment aspects of the industry and the reskilling that's necessary, as well as the knowledge and experience that workers have and could contribute to shaping the modernisation of the sector. But unions are often excluded from any kind of negotiations or consultations around the modernisation agenda which means that there is no genuine transformation and existing inequalities are perpetuated.

[As reported in IUR 25.1, in 2017 PISTON took strike action over jeepney modernisation. The President of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte labelled the union a communist front, guilty of 'committing rebellion', and threatened to deploy the military to end the strike. PISTON's leader, George San Mateo, reported receiving death threats and was arrested. On 25 October 2017, Edwin Pura, one of the leaders of a local chapter of PISTON, was shot dead in Gubat, Sorsogon.]

How important is the energy sector for decarbonisation of the transport sector?

Our position is that in order to decarbonise transport we need a major transformation of the energy sector. The transport industry is heavily dependent on fossil fuels. So we've linked our demand for the public ownership of public transport to the demand for public ownership and democratic control of energy. We're also part of the network of Trade Unions for Energy Democracy². Given the scale of emission reduction and decarbonisation that's necessary, this can only take place if there is a completely

transformed energy sector under public ownership – not driven by profits or private sector interests. Although we're not organising in the energy sector, as transport unions we need to have a whole economy approach and energy is central to what's possible in our sector. For example, the level of impact we can achieve through the electrification of public transport is directly linked to the use of renewable energy. The two demands go hand in hand.

The public transport policy paper also refers to a necessary reduction in individual car use, which inevitably has implications for auto manufacturing, including a just transition for workers in that sector. How is the ITF engaging on impacts in those sectors, for instance, through cooperation with IndustriALL?

Due to capacity issues, coordination on that level has been a bit of a missing link in our work on urban transport. We haven't looked at the issue cross-sectorally in terms of the auto industry. But I agree that there needs to be a combined strategy in order to strengthen union coordination and unity. It's very important that divisions do not emerge between different categories of workers .

Beyond public transport, has the ITF begun to look at policy approaches to climate change in the aviation industry?

In urban transport we're far advanced, but we're only just beginning to look at what industrial transformation and just transition looks like in aviation, maritime and road freight. Up until now, we've had the broad political framework [established in the resolution of the 2010 ITF Congress]. Now we're concentrating on what that framework looks like in the context of different transport sectors. We will be working on that for the duration of next year and those strategies are going to be put in place.

Obviously in aviation this is controversial and difficult. But there are already some ITF affiliates in different countries beginning to grapple with these issues. For example, there was an interesting project at Copenhagen airport where the aviation union looked at emissions in the airport and the impact these have on the health of workers in the airport, particularly ground staff. They managed to negotiate an emission reduction scheme with the airport management. So there's some workplace activity – but in terms of overall growth of the aviation industry, new runways and all of those bigger questions, that's something the ITF will be working on within the reduce-shift-improve framework.

One of the biggest issues is that large parts of the public transport workforce across the world are in the informal economy and denied fundamental workplace rights

1 'Resolution 1: Responding to Climate Change', ITF 42nd Congress, Mexico City, 5-12 August 2010
 2 For more information, see the TUED website: <http://unionsforenergydemocracy.org>