



Cairo

North Africa and the Middle East

A promising region for public transport

Mohamed Mezghani, Director, Knowledge and Membership Services Department, UITP

Most countries in the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) have seen significant and sustained economic development for several years now. This trend has been accompanied by an increase in the purchasing power of households and better levels of mobility. Its impact is being felt through a jump in motorisation rates, causing congestion and environmental pollution in and around major cities. Faced with this situation, the public authorities in the region's countries are increasingly aware of the need to develop and organise public transport in order to control car traffic and ensure mobility for all inhabitants. This explains the large number of investment projects that are underway or planned in the MENA region.



MENA - your views.....

“UITP is based in Europe for historical reasons, from a time when Europe was the world leader in the public transport sector. But over the years other countries and continents have sometimes leapfrogged the ‘old’ continent. In today’s global society, Europe, its countries and companies, can play an important role if they can communicate on the same level as these countries. This is particularly true for those in the MENA region as many of them border the Mediterranean sea, a sea that is no longer a barrier between different peoples now that IT has brought us closer together.

Being strongly present in many parts of the globe is consistent with the original spirit of UITP. It will create a network for exchanging, doing business, and sharing experiences between different members”.

Raffaele Caltabiano, General Manager, T&T – Telematica & Trasporti, Italy

“The rapidly growing urban population in most MENA countries implies large-scale investment in public transport to match the parallel increase in mobility needs.

Looking to existing systems, we discover specific solutions applied by local authorities. The light rail system in Tunis and the coupled traffic scheme is a good example of what can be done in the historic centre of a north African town. Even in car-based cities such as Dubai we will see how public transport will help to solve mobility problems. Exchanges of experience and dialogue between MENA members or with other UITP members can result in tailor made solutions, whilst acknowledging that the range of solutions far outstrips the available finances.”

Thierry Duquenne, Chief Engineer, Public Transport Mobility Studies, AED – DIPT, Belgium

“The fact that - with some exceptions - public transport systems in the MENA region are scarcely developed provides a very unique market situation with challenging possibilities for the industry.

At the crossroads between Europe, Africa and Asia, the European service and supply industry can convince with new and sophisticated products and solutions at competitive prices.

In this way the MENA region can serve as a state of the art showcase for new technological achievements for large corporations just as much for small and medium sized companies in today’s age of globalization.

UITP’s ability to substantially support this ongoing process and dialogue in the MENA region and in other parts of the world is highly valuable for all members of UITP – operators and industry alike.”

Robert Huber, Executive Vice-President AESYS, Germany

“In my eyes the UITP is a worldwide operating knowledge platform for everything related to PT. This platform is of great value for anyone who is involved in the world of PT: organising authorities, operators and manufacturers. The way the knowledge platform works can best be described by the following two statements:

- for and through the members

- the more you put in, the more you get out!”

Coen Volp, Director, Department of Roads and Transport, Province of Gelderland, Netherlands

“Globalisation and diversification are features of the world we live in. The public transport sector is not unaffected by this phenomenon. Urban public transport operators, however, have traditionally focused almost exclusively on their own geographic areas.

But if we wish to evolve, to improve, and broaden our business vision, we need to look to the emerging economies.

For TMB (Barcelona Metropolitan Transport), the UITP globalisation process has played and continues to play an essential role in opening up to an area as important and close to Europe as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

Metro de Barcelona is working actively in the Algiers Metro development project. Knowledge of the large number of projects planned or underway in countries in the MENA region, and most specifically in Algeria, has enabled us to broaden our aims, both in developing our own capacities and in terms of exploring business opportunities.

This will ensure that a European operator as traditional as TMB will be prepared to meet the challenges posed by the globalisation of the urban public transport sector.

If we Europeans do not take advantage of the window of opportunity provided by the economic growth of the MENA area, others undoubtedly will.”

Albert Busquets Blay, Director General, International Affairs Development, Transports Metropolitans de Barcelona, Spain



The extension of two metro lines in Tehran and the creation of four new lines are part of Iran's ambitious programme to build 500 km of regional and urban rail transport between now and 2017

Sustained economic growth and strong urbanisation

UITP considers the MENA region as a set of 18 countries bordered to the West by Morocco, to the East by Iran, to the North by Syria and to the South by Yemen. This gives the MENA region a population of around 300 million inhabitants, growing rapidly at a rate of +1.8% per year. The majority of the population is under 30 years of age. Population densities vary considerably from country to country: from 3 to 2000 inhabitants/km². The region contains two mega-cities in Cairo (16 million inhabitants) and Tehran (11 million) and large cities including Algiers, Amman, Alexandria, Beirut, Casablanca, Damascus, Dubai, Isfahan, Riyadh, Tunis and Tripoli. In total, there are 30 cities with over 500,000 inhabitants. Compared to other developing regions, the MENA region is heavily urbanised: on average, over 60% of its population is urban. Economic growth is rapid and sustained (+5.1% on average) and based on revenue from oil and tourism. However, there are marked disparities between countries: GDP per inhabitant varies between USD 400 and 27,000.

Projects in abundance

Public transport has been traditionally regarded as the mode of transport for disadvantaged populations and suffers from a negative image. Social success goes hand in hand with the purchase of one or even several cars in wealthy families. Some countries have gone as far as encouraging motorisation within households. For example, Tunisia launched its "people's car" concept, to enable the middle classes to acquire a low-cost motor vehicle. However, despite rapid growth in motorisation, particularly in countries around the Persian Gulf and in Lebanon, the majority of people do not own a car and have to walk or use public transport. One or two isolated exceptions aside, the authorities in the region's countries have not sufficiently developed services in order to cope with this demand. In the absence of political will to sup-

port and structure the sector, an informal sector of shared taxis and minibuses has sprung up. In some regions, these informal services provide the only form of public transport. Providing flexible routes and low fares, shared taxis are very popular (particularly in the Near East), but present huge problems in terms of road safety, pollution and unfair competition vis-à-vis regulated and scheduled public transport.

Beyond Egypt's old tramways in the regions of Cairo and Alexandria - vestiges of British colonisation - the last two decades have seen the development of various systems running on reserved rights-of-way, and which are examples of regional good practice. For example, Cairo and Tehran each have two metro lines covering 62 and 23 kilometres respectively. Tunis has a network of five light rail lines totalling 32 kilometres. In Saudi Arabia, organising transport for 2.5 million pilgrims to Mecca and other sacred sites mobilises a fleet of 22,000 buses and coaches. However, whilst these are concrete examples that do relieve local mobility problems, they are just the tip of the iceberg in terms of public transport projects and investment taking place in MENA countries.

Iran has without doubt the most ambitious programme: over 500 kilometres of urban and regional rail links planned between now and 2017. Plans involve extending the Tehran metro (4 new lines) and building new systems in Isfahan, Mashhad, Shiraz, Karaj and Ahvaz. Most of these projects are under construction or at an advanced stage of development. The increase in petrol prices on the international market is providing Iran with ample resources for funding its projects. The same goes for other Gulf countries. For example, Dubai will be starting construction work very soon for its own automated metro system (2 lines, 69 km, gradually coming on line as of 2009). The bus network will be redeployed in parallel to ensure overall system integration. The neighbouring emirates of Abu

Tunis is building 12 kilometres of light rail to supplement the five existing lines



Dhabi and Sharjah are now laying the organisational and regulatory foundations for future public transport development, but also have their own ambitious plans. In Saudi Arabia, the capital city Riyadh (5 million inhabitants) has plans for a light rail system (23km), as does Medina (10km). On top of investments in heavy infrastructure, the introduction of new technologies (electronic ticketing, real-time bus positioning, passenger information) is either ongoing or planned in Kuwait City, Dubai and Amman.

In North Africa, Algiers has resumed building work on its new metro system (three lines, 56km, first section on line in 2008) and is also planning two light rail lines. Cairo is continuing to extend its metro system (97km in operation from 2015) while Alexandria has plans to develop a regional rail network. This is also the case in Tunis, where the construction of a RER style network (70km) to tackle urban sprawl is in the pipeline. Extensions to its light rail network are also nearing completion. In Morocco, rail projects are under consideration in Rabat and Casablanca. Morocco also has urban networks operated by foreign companies (e.g. ALSA, RATP).

Finally, in the Near East, Damascus is planning a light rail network (15km as a first step) as well as a rail link to the city's airport. In Jordan, a light rail line between Amman and Zarqa (26km) is due to open in 2008.

A context favourable to public transport

This list is far from being exhaustive and demonstrates that there is no shortage of public transport projects in the MENA region. Whatever the level of development, there is greater awareness of the need to develop public transport. Yet there are many challenges. In low-income countries - Yemen and Palestine for example - public transport development is all about making mobility available to all. In mid-income countries (Egypt, Iran, Tunisia, etc.), transport capacity needs to be augmented to keep pace with

demographic and urban growth. In the region's affluent countries (Gulf states), where petrol and car prices are relatively low, it is important in order to provide an alternative to the private car and to convey a positive image of public transport.

The context is therefore increasingly favourable to public transport, and will become even more pronounced as a result of:

- deeper economic integration between the region's countries (Arab Maghreb Union, Gulf Cooperation Council),
- higher rate of urbanisation due to rural exodus,
- greater demand for mobility, reinforced by economic development and changing behavioural patterns,
- worsening traffic congestion and environmental pollution through increased motorisation, compelling a switch to the alternative - public transport
- the need for countries living off oil revenue to prepare for "life after oil".

However, infrastructure development is not an end in itself. In order to give substance and meaning to the expected results, it is vital to develop a suitable institutional and regulatory framework that will attract investment and entrepreneurs and, at the same time, safeguard the public service dimension.

This is already underway in some of the region's countries, and certainly bodes well for public transport!

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On top of its bus network, Mashhad (Iran) has six ongoing rail transport projects totalling 65 kilometres

Alongside its light rail system, running on exclusive way in photo, Cairo is building 34 kilometres of metro line between now and 2015

