



Mohamed Mezghani, Head of International Association of Public Transport (UITP MENA) office in Dubai

# CHANGING MINDSETS

The Roads and Transport Authority (RTA) is working with the International Association of Public Transport (UITP) in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to promote Dubai and its projects by participating in the 58th UITP World Congress and Mobility & Transport Exhibition, which will be held in Vienna, Austria, from June 7 until 11, 2009. This Congress provides an opportunity to share information, and benefit from the experiences from the lessons of others companies & authorities. The idea is to focus on the positive aspects and overcome obstacles. This is especially important as Dubai prepares to host the 59th UITP World Congress and Mobility & Transport Exhibition in 2011, after it won the right to do so despite tough competition from Singapore and Melbourne

By Amal Monther

"The fact that Dubai was chosen as the destination for the 59th Congress is both a privilege and a responsibility," said Mohammed Mezghani, Head of UITP's MENA office located in Dubai. He stressed the importance of holding such an event in Dubai, as the entire city will be transformed into a world capital of public transportation during the 59th UITP World Congress and Exhibition. Dubai will attract numerous manufacturers, developers, contractors and others from the industry. This will ultimately contribute to the country's economy, and will prove once again that Dubai remains an attractive destination for investment.

Mezghani sees this as a tremendous responsibility: "The choice of Dubai to host the Congress places great responsibility on us and the RTA. Together we will handle the organisational process; we must give it our best shot and we must rise to the challenge".

Speaking about the standards by which a venue is selected to host the Congress, Mezghani said that the first issue that is taken into account is how developed the city is in terms of public transport, and whether different means of public transportation are available in that city. In the case of Dubai, there is the availability of public transportation, advanced technology as well as an excellent road network. The available means include the Dubai Metro, modern buses, taxis, water taxis and water buses.

There are various aspects of participation in the Congress, and this includes presentations and lectures delivered by experts during the Congress sessions. The focus of the UITP MENA office is now on representing Dubai in the best way possible at the exhibition and Congress held in Vienna. The office, therefore, provides facilities and services for registration of members who wish to participate in both the conference and the exhibition which are open to all.

The UITP MENA office in Dubai, in coordination with the RTA, is also gearing up to host the Congress & Exhibition in Dubai in 2011. "The preparations are still in its initial stages. We will be promoting 2011 at the Vienna event itself. We will monitor the event in Vienna very closely, in order to put on a good show when it is Dubai's turn to host the event. We have designed the logo, and will offer, through our pavilion in Vienna, publications and press releases to promote Dubai and the event to be held here. We will also distribute Dubai souvenirs to the guests, in addition to a holding press conferences," Mezghani said.

### OBJECTIVES

"Everyone will benefit; from the manufacturers to the developers, financiers, public transportation companies and the authorities and the people in general, who are after all

## The biggest challenge is to convince people to use public transportation

the users of public transportation. On the scientific level, such exhibitions will increase healthy competition between manufacturers," said Mezghani, who is optimistic about the future of public transport.

The exhibition to be held on the sidelines of the Congress will cover an area of 16,000 square meters, and will showcase buses, trains, ticketing systems, public transportation technology and other projects. Manufacturers will exhibit their latest products, and everyone will have the opportunity to view firsthand the latest developments in the world of public transportation. This event will also be a good chance for learning and benefiting from the experiences of others; it may even be possible to solve public transportation problems through the sharing of information. The most important issue is to draw attention to public transportation. The exhibition provides a platform for promoting the use of mass transit, in the presence of the media, as well as ministers, businessmen, financiers and developers.

Mezghani stressed the importance of having a UITP MENA office in Dubai. He believes the objective of UITP is to inform its partners within the region about Dubai's current developments in public transport. This is in line with the UITP's main goal, which is to promote public transportation worldwide. To achieve its objectives, UITP MENA conducts several activities and events in Dubai. These include working sessions and training for its members and partners – transportation and communications companies, departments and agencies all mainly concerned with public transportation. Topics such as planning transportation systems, financing; implementing new projects are covered and resources are made available for these projects. Besides, the training also includes sessions on pricing systems and ticketing, and the types of buses to be used. Although the UITP has a training division in the region, delegates are sometimes sent abroad for training with a view to benefit from the experiences of other countries.

The UITP MENA office is located on the second floor of the RTA Public Transport Agency building; but as Mezghani explains,

this office belongs to the UITP and not the RTA.

The UITP currently has 3,100 members from 90 countries. Mezghani summarises UITP's objectives thus: "To encourage decision-makers and professionals in the world of public transportation to adopt our ideas, to convince them that public transportation is the ideal solution, and to promote public transportation across the world." In his view, public transportation is the only solution for the problems of congestion and traffic jams.

Mezghani said that the UITP is keen on protecting the environment. "The environment is one of our priorities, and we have a long-term goal which is that our modes of transport use clean energy and be eco-friendly."

"The biggest challenge we face in this region is the same one the rest of the world is facing – the global financial crisis and its impact on the world economy," Mezghani said. He fears the crisis will have an impact on investment and project financing. He also foresees another challenge: convincing the authorities that public transportation must be dealt with as a matter of priority.

Mezghani noted that it was important to change the way people and the authorities concerned in the region think, particularly in relation to public transportation and their willingness to stop the use of private cars. He said: "We need the support of others, such as the media and the decision-makers. We will, of course, do whatever we can. However, it is difficult to estimate the rate of success. Changing people's way of thinking usually takes a long time."

Speaking about the UITP, Mezghani said that it was launched in 1885 in Brussels, Belgium, and held its first conference in 1886 and subsequently once every two years. The association started its activities in Europe at that time, and began organising events and activities in other regions such as Asia, America and the Middle East. It then went on to establish a branch in the Middle East and North Africa at which point its activities in the region took off in 2005. In 2006, it opened an office in Dubai.

"Dubai has always led the way and other cities [in the region] have followed," Mezghani said. He is also working hard on increasing awareness of the UITP in the region, taking advantage of his education in the field of industrial engineering and transportation planning, and his more than 20 years of experience in the region. He said that he enjoyed working in this field as it is closely tied to people's lives.

Mezghani concluded by saying: "If I could strengthen the close bonds and cooperation between the UITP, the RTA and public transportation specialists in the region, I will be very happy indeed."