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Urban Transport Trends and Policies in China and India: Impacts of Rapid Economic Growth

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Abstract

This paper provides a comparative overview of urban transport in the world's two most populous countries: China and India. Cities in both countries are suffering from severe and worsening transport problems: air pollution, noise, traffic injuries and fatalities, congestion, parking shortages, energy use, and a lack of mobility for the poor. The urban transport crisis in China and India results from continuing population growth, urbanization, suburban sprawl, rising incomes, and skyrocketing motor vehicle ownership and use. This paper critically assesses government policies in each country and suggests a range of specific improvements. It advocates a slowdown in the massive roadway investment in recent years and a shift in emphasis to expanding and improving public transport, cycling, and walking facilities. While continued growth in motor vehicle use is inevitable, China and India should restrict motor vehicle use in congested city centres and increase taxes, fees, and charges to reflect the enormous

social and environmental costs of motor vehicle use. At the same time, much stricter regulations should be imposed on manufacturers to produce cleaner, more energy-efficient, quieter, and safer cars, motorcycles, buses, and trucks. Mitigating the many social and environmental impacts of rising motorization is obviously important for the future well-being of Chinese and Indian cities. It is also crucial for the future of the rest of the world. Unless the problems of motorization in China and India can be effectively dealt with, the world faces sharp increases in greenhouse gases, accelerating climate change, and rapid depletion of a range of non-renewable resources.

Notes

1. Population numbers of the Chinese cities cited in this article are lower than those reported in official Chinese statistics. The extensive rural populations within the official administrative boundaries of each city have been excluded, so that the population figures used here include only urban residents. The urban populations cited in this article include both officially registered urban residents and the estimated number of unofficial residents, those without a residence permit (Hukou), referred to in China as the ‘floating population’.

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