

Are transport infrastructures the main horizon for urban mobility in Africa?

For decades, transport policies in Africa have focused primarily on infrastructure projects, such as the construction of roads, facilities or public transport networks (Porter, 2007; Wood, Kębłowski & Tuvikene, 2020). Following the implementation of several mass-transit networks in African cities, it has been observed that these account for only a marginal share of daily journeys (the TER and BRT in Dakar have reached a ceiling of around 70,000 passengers per day, as has the BRT in Cape Town, and 110,000 for the tramway in Rabat). Furthermore, these costly projects are not always within the reach of states whose borrowing capacity is increasingly limited and whereas international aid is declining, resulting in costly services for local populations.

This session proposes to examine the possible futures for urban mobility systems in African cities; how can they be improved and developed other than by building new infrastructure? What other solutions, organisational methods and relationships between stakeholders could be envisaged to ensure the daily movement of urban populations in satisfactory conditions of safety and comfort? This questioning also includes digital infrastructure, which is increasingly asserting itself as an essential and tangible component of mobility systems: far from being immaterial, the deployment of digital tools relies on the construction and implementation of devices and infrastructure in cities, of which data centres are only one facet (Piras, 2025).

Other related questions may also be addressed in this session, such as the renovation and renewal of existing infrastructure, the consideration of environmental and climatic constraints, and the training of professionals in charge of urban mobility, given that this sector has been largely dominated by engineers and civil engineering professionals.