

9th Asia Smart City Conference “Yokohama Declaration”

Building smart cities aiming for carbon neutrality through city to city collaboration
under the influence of COVID-19

Cities should take the lead as we face a global paradigm shift, and the challenges and issues we face are going through a shift as well. Cities are in a position to work with citizens and the private sector to overcome this difficult situation while producing innovative and practical urban solutions and enhancing knowledge sharing through co-creation among cities. More than half of the world’s population lives in cities today. As the percentage of people living in cities is expected to reach 80% by 2050, cities also need to recognize that they are a key contributor to climate change. According to the UN Environment Programme, cities are responsible for 75% of global CO2 emissions, with transportation and buildings among the largest contributors. During the ongoing pandemic, cities are recalibrating and exploring new ways to achieve sustainable development while addressing the challenges associated with COVID-19. It is essential to build a new modality and a new city. This was the universal voice of the 9th Asia Smart City Conference (ASCC).

This year, ASCC was organized in the context of a fundamental global paradigm shift. The conference was held with an expanded online format on a digital platform to attract a wider audience interested in smart cities in Asia and beyond. Based on the global challenges cities face, the main theme of the conference was ***“Building smart cities aiming for carbon neutrality through city to city collaboration under the influence of COVID-19.”***

During the conference, discussions were held on climate change, which can be attributed as a main cause of many recent global challenges. The entire world is being impacted by extreme weather conditions such as droughts, heat waves, heavy rain, floods, and landslides, and these phenomena become more frequent in Asian countries. In order to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius—the threshold suggested by the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC)—**achieving carbon neutrality by the mid-21st century is essential**. Along with many leaders of the world Prime Minister Suga officially declared that Japan will go carbon neutral by 2050 in his policy speech on October 26th, 2020.

Many countries in Europe and some in Asia are increasingly integrating green growth policies and initiatives in response to COVID-19 and to recover from various global challenges that focus on protecting and regenerating the natural environment by

reducing greenhouse gas emissions and promoting more comprehensive resilience policies along with digitalization. Carbon neutrality has become an essential step for cities as we need to combat climate change and COVID-19. In turn, this presents major opportunities for innovation and growth.

Based on this background, specialized sessions were organized by the Asia Development Bank (ADB) and the Asia Development Bank Institute (ADBI), the Tokyo Development Learning Center (TDLC) of the World Bank, and the City of Yokohama. The discussions highlighted topics related to integrated urban development, shared knowledge on innovative technologies, and explored directions for future initiatives. These conversations encouraged participants to recognize the importance of co-creation, city-led forward-looking initiatives, and adoption of new modalities and technologies. The following ideas emerged from the conference:

1. ASCC participants reaffirmed their commitment to international targets such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the New Urban Agenda under HABITAT III, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Paris Agreement under Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the UNFCCC. More cities have started to adopt carbon neutrality upfront as a fundamental city management policy. Cities should proactively engage citizens and private businesses by enabling platforms for participatory planning alongside public-private collaboration for innovative solutions that promote inclusiveness and an improved quality of life for livable cities. The Cities as a laboratory or “Urban Lab” approach should be considered to identify the changing dynamics of cities and the needs of their citizens.
2. Smart cities in Asia, especially those in emerging economies, still face fundamental urban challenges in providing clean water, disposing of wastewater and solid waste, supplying stable energy, and developing effective transportation systems. For cities, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed existing faults such as poor physical infrastructure, unequal access to core urban services, inadequate delivery system, and suboptimal densities resulting in overcrowded cities. There is a recognizable need to revisit urban strategies and revise the urbanization process and practices to build back better, more livable cities after the pandemic. The importance of improving urban services and infrastructure and the effective use of technologies and digital solutions were discussed. Additionally, challenges such as lack of planning regarding initial and ongoing running costs of services, the shortage of capacity building opportunities in building sufficient workforce, and the digital divide among citizens were also discussed.

3. City management expertise has been treated as tacit knowledge, as each city has substantively different sets of geopolitical parameters. The conference emphasized the growing ICT capacity that makes “open” and “big” data more available to cities and the private sector. It was also recognized that the pace of change for cities to adopt smart solutions is quickening as cities have started to adopt low cost/high impact smart solutions and “leapfrog” technologies to address their most pressing urban development issues. These trends provide opportunities to establish business modalities such as CMaaS (City Management as a Service). This approach makes elements of expertise in city management transferrable.
4. The conference recognized the power and potential of the private sector in achieving development goals to co-create sustainable cities and a circular economy. In emerging economies, the private sector has started to take leading roles in area-wide urban development and the introduction of innovative smart urban solutions. City leaders as well as relevant international institutions should provide platforms to facilitate collaboration and engage citizens through this new movement.
5. The importance of knowledge hubs such as the Y-PORT Center and other venues for mutual learning were discussed. We will continue to strengthen peer-to-peer learning through digital platforms such as the Asia Smart City Alliance (ASCA), pursue further city collaboration among our development partners, and utilize these opportunities as ideal venues to exchange ideas, experiences, and innovations and make them available to concerned parties.