For Immediate Release

Regional conference at AUB to issue policy recommendations for sustainable transport in the Arab world

Beirut, Lebanon- 21/05/2014 – Academics and members of the public and private sectors from Lebanon and the region met at AUB on May 21, 2014 to share and discuss research studies on sustainable transport in the Arab world, to propose policy recommendations that would help minimize the effects of the transport sector on climate change.

Organized by the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) at AUB, the all-day conference brought together researchers and academics from Lebanon, Cairo, the United Kingdom, the Gulf, and the United Nations. Conference participants are expected to issue recommendations by the end of the day.

"This regional conference will shed light on sustainable transportation policies in the Arab world, and the resulting economic, environmental, and health impacts of shifting towards more sustainable transport systems," said Nadim Farjallah, the research director of the Climate Change and Environment in the Arab World Program at IFI.

Farjallah, who is associate professor of hydrology and water resources at AUB, noted in his welcoming address, "The transport sector is responsible for creating 20 percent of the world's greenhouse effect. Still, it is a vital sector to the economic development of any country, and as such, the development of 'sustainable' transportation systems has become an important topic of debate."

The sustainability of the transport sector was first put in the spotlight on the international level in 1992 in the United Nations' Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) "Agenda 21."

Sgouris Sgouridis, associate professor at Masdar Institute of Science and Technology (MI) and head of the Institute Center for Smart and Sustainable Systems (iSmart), presented five thoughts inspired by the experiences of building sustainable transportation infrastructure across the world. In particular, he highlighted the unseen significance of infrastructure in day-to-day modal choices, the importance of electrification, dealing with concurrent infrastructure options, and the optimization of energy resource availability.
"The transportation system is consuming approximately 25 percent of the total primary energy and exhibiting the least energy efficiency," he said.

Meanwhile, the recommendations resulting from the study "Sustainable Transportation in the Arab World: International Benchmarking on Sustainable Transport Policies and their Impacts," by Issam Kaysi and Farid Chaaban both from AUB, classified short-, medium- and long-term strategies that consisted of: imposing stricter fuel and vehicles standards; effective enforcement;

imposing fuel taxes; effective land use planning; and offering reliable alternative modes of transport.

Taxation is the answer, argued Alexandra Irani, research and data analyst at the United Nations Development Program in Lebanon, and Ali Chalak, assistant professor in applied economics at AUB's Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences.

"Endorsing tax amendments is crucial to developing a hybrid-electric vehicle (HEV) market in Lebanon and to achieve the consequent emission reductions and savings," she said. "This would result in a 30.5 percent reduction in fuel consumption and a 20.5 percent CO2 emission reduction per car per year."

The study entitled "Economic Impacts of Adopting a Sustainable Transport System in Beirut" by Mazen Omran, head of the modeling unit at Dar Al Handasah Beirut, and Johnny Ojeil, from Birmingham University and Youssef Fawaz, addressed the potential impact of sustainable transport systems on the value of time, vehicle operating costs, number of accidents, carbon emissions, while also touching on health implications. Their paper also provided linkages in terms of the influence that a sustainable transport system has on business efficiency, labor markets and labor flexibility, arguing whether a sustainable transport system will reduce the cost in general to all stakeholders and users, attracting investors and international corporations to Beirut as a first choice of destination.

Johnny Ojeil, a transport planner and director of the multinational consultancy firm Arup, covered the main aspects required in policy terms to achieve the successful delivery of a sustainable transport system, highlighting good practice while showing the impact of car-borne societies. His presentation also drew on the one-dimensional transport issues related to Beirut in particular and Lebanon in general with its consequences in terms of negative impact on climate change, the environment, health, economic prosperity and the general well-being of a fully functional society.

"Commuters' Behavior towards Upgraded Bus Services in Greater Beirut: Implications for Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Social Welfare and Transport Policy" by Maya AbouZeid, assistant professor of civil and environmental engineering at AUB, Ali Chalak , Hani Al-Naghi, a senior transport planner at the engineering consultancy SETS International, and Alexandra Irani explored reducing green house gases through combining behavioral interventions with other measures, most notably technological innovations.

Danyel Reiche, assistant professor of comparative politics at AUB, and Robert Wittkuhn research assistant for AUB's political studies department, highlighted transportation issues in their "Sustainable Transportation and Mega Sporting Events in Arab Countries: the Case of Qatar."

Sustainable urban transport systems with priority on enhancing the mobility of people rather than vehicles was the crux of "Getting to Campus: Sustainable Public Transportation and Relocating the American University in Cairo" by Richard Tutwiler, director of the American University of Cairo's Research Institutefor a Sustainable Environment (RISE), Hagar Eldidi and Yumna Kassim, both research associates at RISE, and Andrew Petrovich, AUC senior researcher.

"Jeanne d'Arc Street: A Model Pedestrian-Friendly Street for All of Beirut" by Cynthia Myntti, AUB professor of public health practice, and Mounir Mabsout, AUB professor of civil

engineering, went through the challenges of a model, pedestrian-friendly street for all of Beirut to begin in 2014, describing the evolution of the project and highlighting the challenges of working with policy makers in Lebanon.

An overview and benchmarking of policy options on sustainable transportation in the region was presented. The economic and social impacts of switching to sustainable transportation were addressed as well with case studies from the region.

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full service 420-bed hospital.

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