

Asian cities set to benefit most from green growth as US retreats

As Donald Trump pulls the US out of the Paris climate accord, a report points to \$1.5tn in increased growth and millions of jobs heading to Asia's cities



Nanjing Green Towers will be the first 'vertical forest' built in Asia. Photograph: Stefano Boeri Architetti

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Asian cities will gain by about \$1.5 trillion (£1.1tn) a year by 2030 if predictions on green and sustainable growth are proved correct, with tens of millions of new jobs created, and cities across the region seeing improvements in their liveability and environment.

But achieving those goals, and the attendant growth, would be dependent on governments and businesses investing in sustainable cities, and targeting green growth above high-carbon infrastructure.

The report, from the non-profit Business and Sustainable Development Commission (BSDC), found that Asian cities would be among the biggest beneficiaries of the move to achieve the global sustainable development goals. It points to improved air and water, better-designed buildings and public spaces, investment in low-carbon transport, and better use of physical resources, with less waste.



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Protests in Tokyo after the US withdrew from the Paris climate agreement.

Photograph: The Asahi Shimbun/Getty Images

Mark Malloch-Brown, former UN deputy secretary-general and chairman of the BSDC, predicted that businesses would continue to invest in low-carbon growth and not take fright at the [withdrawal of the US](#), the world's second biggest carbon emitter, from the [Paris agreement on climate change](#).

“I suspect [President Trump] will be surprised how unpopular this decision will be with business,” Malloch-Brown said. “This tilts things back in a way that is not just disruptive for business, but potentially highly dangerous for all of us as citizens. Therefore he may be even more surprised to find how few take the chance to march

backwards with him.”

Trump may be surprised how few take the chance to march backwards with him

Mark Malloch-Brown

The report found that affordable housing in China, closely followed by other developing countries, was the biggest single economic opportunity. Across the Asia-Pacific region the construction of affordable housing was expected to be worth \$505bn by 2030. This would have huge knock-on benefits in reducing consumption, better health, cutting greenhouse gases and staving off dangerous climate change.

“Improving the design and construction of houses will reduce household operating costs and reshape the world’s energy consumption patterns and environmental conditions for years to come,” the report’s authors noted.

Electric vehicles, meanwhile, are projected to make up at least 35% of all car sales in Asia by 2040, transforming cities and reducing air pollution. Shared transport business models, such as carpooling, are also forecast for strong growth.



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Electric cars, like this one in Beijing, could become more common in the region. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

Ho Ching, chief executive of Temasek Holdings in Singapore and one of the commissioners of the report, said cities should aspire to an “ABC world”: the “active” traits of a robust economy and good life opportunities for citizens; a “beautiful” environment with cohesive and inclusive communities; and “clean” surroundings,

characterised by fresh and unpolluted air, clear waters, and measures to combat climate change.

The BSDC forecast that 230m new jobs would be created in cities and across the economies of Asia by 2030 in sustainable goods and services, with benefits from improved agricultural methods to renewable energy and better access to healthcare. By 2030, this would represent an economic boost of \$5tn a year, the study found.

Monday's report is one of a [series of projections](#) that have been appearing since January, examining the prospects for sustainable development around the globe. For the growth to be realised, governments and businesses across the region would need to cooperate in stepping up efforts to make their activities more environmentally sound: reducing pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, investing in cleaner fuels and using resources more efficiently.



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Although the potential prize may be large, the report also found that governments, businesses and others would need to invest \$1.7tn a year in order to reap the greatest potential benefits.

The BSDC's commissioners are made up of business, organised labour and civic society leaders, with a remit to examine the potential economic and social effects of achieving the international [sustainable development goals](#).

Paul Polman, chief executive of Unilever and one of the commissioners, said of the latest report: "the opportunities for businesses serving consumers in Asia are obvious: strategies that sustainably meet the demands of the growing middle-class, while tackling urgent environmental and social challenges, will be successful in

unlocking market value. Aligning these strategies with the global goals is not just good for society and the environment, but makes strategic business sense.”