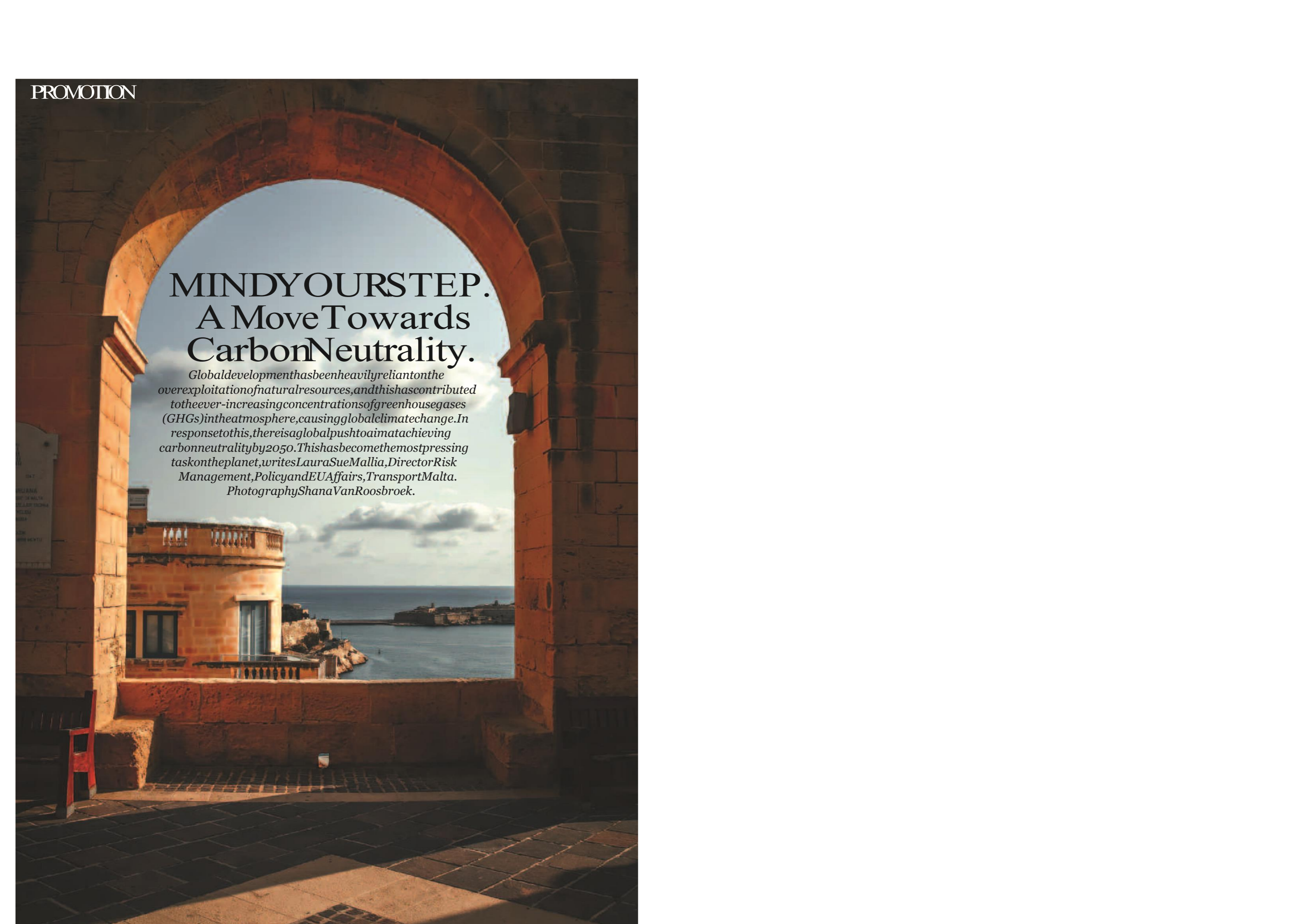


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MIND YOUR STEP. A Move Towards Carbon Neutrality.

Global development has been heavily reliant on the overexploitation of natural resources, and this has contributed to the ever-increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere, causing global climate change. In response to this, there is a global push to aim at achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. This has become the most pressing task on the planet, writes Laura Sue Mallia, Director Risk Management, Policy and EU Affairs, Transport Malta. Photography Shana Van Roosbroek.



made on the transport sector. Emissions reduction can take many forms, mainly technological or behavioural. A significant amount of GHG emissions is the result of the private car culture that has almost become a status symbol. The aim is, therefore, to encourage people to change their mode of transport to lower-emission solutions. In this respect, the electrification of transport is a promising approach to begin to address this and the resultant improvement in air quality. Government is strongly supporting this transition with the allocation of €2.5 million to promote the purchase of battery electric vehicles (BEV), plug-in hybrid electric vehicles, and range extender electric vehicles through grants for the registration of a new or a used vehicle. However, this will not solve other issues such as congestion emanating from the high number of vehicles that are continuously registered for use on our roads.

To overcome this, we encourage the use of alternate modes of transport such as public transport, shared transport, walking, cycling, and other forms of micromobility. Supporting this, EU funding has been approved through the Malta Recovery and Resilience Plan for the electrification of public transport. This, combined with free public transport that will be extended to all groups of society as from October 2022, has the potential to significantly reduce emissions.

Another large-scale project which is currently ongoing and which, when completed, will reduce air pollution by berthed cruise ships by over 90% is the Shore-to-Ship project. This will provide an electricity supply from shore to berthed ships rather than having these ships leave their engines on and thus contributing to increased emissions and reduced air quality. In addition, in understanding and maximising the opportunities that our Islands provide in facilitating connections by sea, the ferry landing sites are being upgraded to further encourage their use. The shifting from land to sea transport, and thus reducing congestion in the dense Inner Harbour Region, has been very positive and, encouraging where ferry patronage has increased consistently in recent years.

Ultimately, achieving more sustainable transport systems require a behavioural change. This however is extremely challenging in a society where car ownership and car dependence are high. In view of this, the Sustainable Mobility team within Transport Malta is taking a varied approach ranging from the planning, promotional and awareness, implementation, and educational perspectives.

TOWARDS CARBON NEUTRAL

The team is continuously engaged in awareness-raising and promotional campaigns with the aim of reaching all segments of society. Recently, in acknowledging that children are the leaders and change catalysts of tomorrow, an increased effort has been made to reach students through a series of initiatives targeting primary to tertiary educational institutions. This is being complemented by additional activities with all groups of society. A national awareness campaign is currently being designed which aims to educate the public on the available alternatives to the private car as well as highlight the environmental, economic, and health benefits of each. From a planning perspective, Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs) coupled with Sustainable Urban Logistic Plans (SULPs) aim to promote more sustainable transport alternatives for both citizens and visitors by providing specific, tried and tested solutions to improve the mobility system of the region and attract both residents and visitors to sustainable modes of transport and practices. Solutions here can be varied and can extend the use of existing technology to address current problems such as for example, an exploration of the use of drones for the delivery of commercial packages which could help cut back on CO₂ emissions.

The National Transport Strategy and Master Plan which include a holistic vision for investments within the transport sector over the period to 2025 is currently undergoing a midterm review which will see it extended to 2030 and, which will take stock of the status and progress toward implementation of the various measures. The Master Plan will also be aligned to a wider policy framework such as the EU's Cohesion Policy for 2021-2027 as well as its Climate Target Plan for 2030. This gives us a wealth of opportunities to address our planetary emergencies, through efforts on various segments including biodiversity, transport, energy, cities, and food systems. Our best ally in this journey is nature itself.

From a personal level, there is ample opportunity for the rethinking of our mobility needs. By carrying out the same activities differently, we can reduce our need to travel and thus reduce emissions. Teleworking and online shopping are common examples. In addition, short-distance trips can easily be shifted to active modes. However, rethinking the way we travel does not translate into shifting all trips from being done by car to using the public transport, cycling, or walking but rather introducing the concept of multi-modality where trips are better planned and may even be more conveniently done, by bus, or on foot or a combination of both, taking the bus and walking the remaining distance.

In achieving greater sustainability in transport, for the benefit of both our planet and our society, Transport Malta will continue to promote, implement and encourage the uptake of cleaner transport with initiatives being in line with the latest technologies and research. ■■