As China’s most productive megacity region, the Yangtze River Delta is one of the world’s key growth engines. An ambitious programme of infrastructure renewal has made the YRD more commutable, increasing the available talent pool, aiding circulation of goods and services, supporting supply chains, and driving diversification in real estate markets.

However, with greater interdependency comes greater exposure to risk. Estimates suggest over 20 million Shanghai residents live in areas vulnerable to extreme flooding. Even smaller scale shocks, be they environmental, political or economic, have the potential to reverberate further when cities are highly integrated. Measuring very real commercial, environmental and social benefits against elevated risk is a key consideration in the development of any successful city cluster.

As clusters increase in number and influence over the course of the century, such dilemmas will require longsighted, ethical resolutions. Over two days, World Built Environment Forum Summit Shanghai 2020 will consider the nature and scale of the challenge. To conclude, we will seek consensus on how public and private sectors can together maximise the enormous potential of the 21st century’s people and places.
Monday 18 May 2020

08:00 Registration, networking and refreshments

09:00 Multimedia summit opening

09:10 Welcome to World Built Environment Forum Summit Shanghai 2020

Opening keynote address and panel discussion

09:15 Keynote address: The geopolitical context and the continued effects of urbanisation and population growth
The advent of supercities and clusters – otherwise described by 2019 summit keynote speaker Parag Khanna as “megacity archipelagos” – is arguably the defining feature of 21st century urbanisation. As ever-closer relationships between cities of economic and strategic importance develop across the world, the development of 19 megacity clusters across China can be instructive in questions of effective policy for stimulating growth.

24 of the world’s 31 existing megacities and each of the top 40 fastest growing cities are situated in the global south – as are the world’s 10 fastest growing national economies. C40 Cities date suggest 570 cities, with a combined population of over 800 million, are at severe risk of flooding and storm surges. The session will consider the relationship between urbanisation and growth and consider how resilient, climate-proofed clusters can catalyse already growing economies, while relieving strains on space and liveability in growing metropoles.

10:15 Clustering for competitive advantage in the global race for talent and investment
Following on from the keynote address, this session will focus on how China has successfully managed the challenge of rapid urbanisation through effective policymaking, and:

- How the world’s most populous megacities can manage their ageing populations
- The potential of 5G to transform notions of connectivity
- Routes to greater transparency for investor confidence
- The importance of rural development policy in rapidly urbanising regions
- What can be learned from the world’s other megacities?
- Managing the relationship between interdependency and vulnerability

11:30 Networking refreshment break
12:15 Harnessing the innovation economy for a better built and natural environment

Solutions to the challenges facing the built and natural environment can only be found by incubating the entrepreneurial character of the world’s most-successful cities. This session will look at how effective urban policy can attract and inspire talent, how talent can in turn help to transform the urban realm, and the consequent long-term dividends for investors, businesses and citizens.

13:30 Networking lunch and exhibition

15:00 Adaptive, smart and resilient: Funding and delivering next-generation and “system-of-systems” infrastructure

The pressure exerted on existing infrastructure by the demands of the modern urban environment are severe. The next-generation of infrastructure solutions must promise more than functionality: project value is increasingly measured in terms of resilience, carbon neutrality and social purpose, as well as resilience to extreme climate events such as flooding, requiring investors and developers to evolve new approaches to risk assessment and mitigation.

New and emerging technologies are ever more useful in helping the sector to realise the expectations of all stakeholders, from investors to end users. Asset performance can be optimised and futureproofed through better collection and application of critical data. Digital twin projects such as Virtual Singapore seek to treat the city’s infrastructure network as an interdependent “system-of-systems”; separate infrastructure assets, like the cities of a cluster, must be integrated to work effectively. This session will look at how that can be achieved.

16:15 Networking refreshment break

17:00 Multi-tier clusters: Smart secondary cities

Shanghai remains the engine room of the YRD economy; the role of the cluster’s remaining seven cities is to be supportive of, rather than competitive with, the world’s fifth largest by GDP. Such is the lot of many Tier 2 cities worldwide: the global economy remains dependent on the fortunes of a network of megacities; secondary cities are incentivised to develop complementary identities in order to succeed in the global marketplace.

But the challenges faced by Tier 1 cities – including overheated real estate markets and liveability concerns – can, in the right circumstances, make Tier 2 cities seem more attractive to investors, corporations, entrepreneurs and next generation talent. This session will look at how effective city clustering can empower smaller cities through collaborative policymaking, improved connectivity, and innovative real asset finance, development and pricing models. Further consideration will be given to whether small cities enjoy, or have potential to enjoy, any advantage over larger counterparts in the optimisation of liveable urban space and essential services.

18:00 Chair’s summary and close of Day 1, followed by catered networking reception
Tuesday 19 May 2020

09:00 Chair's opening remarks

Opening keynote address and panel discussion

09:10 The Belt and Road Initiative: Towards a transcontinental cluster
Many of the principles underpinning the world’s city clusters find larger expression in the rationale of the Belt and Road Initiative: inclusive growth and improved living standards can be best achieved through the mutual and reciprocal exchange of talent, expertise, services, goods and capital. According to the World Bank, in the five years since its launch in 2013, BRI related projects to the value of CN¥ 4 trillion (US$ 575 billion) have been initiated. Funding from the Chinese private sector alone totals more than CN¥ 560 billion (US$ 80 billion).

A renewed commitment to high quality, green project standards and “zero-tolerance” for corruption (President Xi, April 2019) has further encouraged potential investors. Nonetheless, the immense scope of the project is reflected in the funding challenge. This session and follow-up panel discussion will look at the progress of the project against its stated aims, with further consideration given to how, for the fast-growing economies of South and South East Asia, BRI stands to open up a gateway to the world.

10:15 Panel discussion: Belt and Road Initiative
To follow from the above, with further focus on how BRI can advance Sustainable Development Goals:
- Promoting sustainable industry
- Availability of affordable, clean energy
- Safety and sanitation in rapidly expanding cities
- Water security in areas of scarcity

11:30 Networking refreshment break

12:15 The role of green, social and sustainability bonds in unlocking project finance
Projections indicate that the global market value of green bonds will reach US$180 billion in 2019, with the highest rate of value growth occurring in Asia Pacific. China alone accounts for almost one-fifth of global market share. Simply put, Asia is taking a global lead on environmental finance.

Growth in the green bond market has been mirrored, albeit on a smaller scale, by encouraging developments in the social and sustainability bond markets. The climate emergency has necessitated new and creative approaches to project finance; this session will look at how ethical and impactful investment can drive a greener global economy. Further consideration will be given to the potential of emerging financial technologies, such as blockchain, to build investor trust.
13:30  Networking lunch and exhibition

Plenary

15:00  A time for action

As understanding of the social and economic potential of city clusters grows, so too does the importance of effective and ethical urban planning, policymaking and practice. All agencies share a responsibility to represent the interests of the people upon whom the continued prosperity of city clusters will depend. This closing session will seek consensus as to how professionals of the built and natural environment can most effectively champion best practice approaches to investment, development and governance.

16:15  Summit closing address and handover to 2021