Private Benefits of Personal Motorised Transport

Regional Fact Sheet — Latin American & Caribbean | FIA - 2026

1. Global findings at a glance

Cars and motorcycles are the backbone of personal mobility worldwide. The report draws on evidence across all continents to document the private benefits of car and motorcycle use, and to make the case for a more balanced policy debate that goes beyond external costs.

Continued global growth, driven by emerging economies

The **global passenger car fleet grew by +16%** between 2018 and 2023, reaching 1.25 billion vehicles. **Motorcycles grew even faster at +25%,** to 726 million. Growth was concentrated in lower- and middle-income regions: South Asia (+33%), East Asia (+32%) and South-East Asia (+30%) led on passenger cars, while Sub-Saharan Africa recorded the steepest motorcycle growth (+56%). This follows a well-documented **S-shaped relationship** between income and motorisation: where incomes rise and constraints are modest, people rapidly adopt first motorcycles, then cars. In emerging economies, two-wheelers serve as a transitional pathway: a strong signal of demand for individual motorised mobility even before car ownership becomes widespread.

Superior access to services, activities and employment

Private motorised transport generally outperforms public transport in providing access to essential services and jobs, across all continents and income contexts. The gap is largest in rural areas and smallest in dense metropolitan areas with well-developed networks. Key global benchmarks from the study:

- **Car access is a driver of employment and economic opportunity.** 50× more jobs accessible by car than by public transport in US metropolitan areas; 10× in Europe, 15× in China, 5× in Canada and Australia. Access to a car is a significant predictor of employment outcomes. A meta-analysis of 93 studies finds a **positive association** between car ownership and individual employment probability, particularly among welfare recipients and in areas with limited public transport alternatives. In lower-income countries, improved transport infrastructure and access to private motorised transport are strongly linked to better job matching, productivity and structural economic transformation. In Africa, each kilometre closer to a main road increases the probability of having a job by 2.1–2.6%.

- **Healthcare accessibility**. Globally, under universal motorised transport availability, 60% of the world's population would live within 10 minutes of a healthcare facility.

Substantial and measurable consumer value

The economic value of car travel is large, and larger than what people actually spend on it. Households consistently devote a significant share of their income to private transport, which itself signals that the benefits of car ownership are worth at least as much as the costs. Where researchers have been able to estimate the full consumer value, the evidence suggests that willingness to pay exceeds actual spending, meaning the true value of car mobility is systematically higher than what expenditure data alone would suggest.

The cost of limited access: mobility deprivation and quality of life

The importance of private mobility is further evidenced by what happens in its absence. In high-income countries, 15–40% of the population does not fully benefit from car access (due to income constraints, age or health) with direct consequences on mobility, employment and wellbeing. In the US, transportation insecurity is the most commonly experienced form of material hardship, cited by 19% of Americans, ahead of food insecurity (16%) and housing insecurity (9%). In rural areas, carless households earn 64% less than car-owning counterparts. In the Global South, the shares without adequate transport are higher still, and the link between road infrastructure and poverty reduction is well established.

The accessibility paradox

Private motorised transport consistently provides the best individual accessibility, but the best overall accessibility is found in cities with dense land use, good public transport and room for active modes. The explanation lies in land use: car-oriented development encourages urban sprawl, reducing proximity and ultimately lowering accessibility for everyone, including car users. This does not diminish the private benefits of car ownership; it underscores that maximising those benefits at a societal level requires a balanced transport policy combining private motorised transport, public transport, active modes and density.

Latin America & Caribbean – Key mobility trends, 2018–2023

Vehicle stock, accessibility and motorcycles as a mobility equaliser

1 Vehicle stock trends



115.8M
Passenger cars, 2023
Up from 100.4M in 2018 (+15.3%)

+35.3%
Motorcycle growth
50.9M → 68.8M, 2018–2023

9.2%
Share of global passenger-car fleet

9.5%
Share of global motorcycle and moped fleet

0.42 → 0.49
Motorcycle-to-car ratio, 2018–2023
Two-wheelers gaining

Country highlights

Mexico: +3.7M motorcycles & mopeds (+90.8%)

Honduras: +82.6%

Guatemala: +81.3%

Colombia: +37.4%

Passenger cars dominate, but motorcycles are gaining ground across the region.

2 The public transport gap

1 Curitiba

5 to 23
Accessibility gap: private transport vs public transport



- Smaller near city centre at rush hour
- Wider outside peak periods and in peripheral areas

2 Brazilian public transport

- Long journeys
- Waiting times
- Perceived safety concerns
- Strenuous commutes

3 Opportunity gap

- Low-income groups rely more on public transport to reach jobs
- But have worse access to public transport
- Higher-income residents reach more opportunities

Private vehicles provide an accessibility advantage > Where public transport is weaker

3 Motorcycles as a mobility equaliser

1 Why motorcycles grow

- Lower-cost access
- Greater flexibility
- Greater reach
- Daily mobility

2 Growth signal

0.42 → 0.49
Motorcycle-to-car ratio, 2018–2023

Two-wheelers gaining ground

3 Trade-off

Mobility solution

Higher road safety exposure

Need for targeted safety measures

Motorcycles help close mobility gaps, but stronger road safety measures remain essential.

2. Latin American & Caribbean: regional deep dive

Vehicle stock trends, 2018–2023

Latin America and the Caribbean combines a large and growing passenger-car fleet with one of the fastest-expanding motorcycle and moped markets in the world.

115.8M
Passenger cars, 2023
Up from 100.4M in 2018 (+15.3%)

+35.3%
Motorcycle growth
50.9M → 68.8M, 2018–2023

0.49
Moto-to-car ratio, 2023
Up from 0.42 — two-wheelers gaining

Country / territory	Car change 2018-2023*	Car change %	Moto change 2018-2023*	Moto change %	Moto/car change %
Aruba	+6,739	+8.7%	+626	+24.5%	+14.5%
Bolivia	+150,005	+18.4%	+310,976	+63.5%	+38.1%
Brazil	+7,087,881	+13.0%	+6,051,542	+22.3%	+8.3%
Cayman Islands	+8,363	+28.7%	+176	+64.2%	+27.6%
Chile	+699,849	+17.9%	+30,822	+13.2%	-4.0%
Colombia	n.a.	n.a.	+3,158,229	+37.4%	n.a.
Costa Rica	+114,335	+11.8%	+39,891	+12.7%	+0.9%
Cuba	+2,930	+1.7%	+87,316	+39.4%	+37.0%
Curaçao	-19,868	-22.2%	+119	+10.2%	+41.6%
Dominican Republic	+414,656	+29.9%	+879,089	+36.6%	+5.1%
Ecuador	+231,249	+19.3%	+286,823	+49.2%	+25.1%
Guatemala	+100,962	+12.9%	+1,104,324	+81.3%	+60.5%
Honduras	+82,776	+22.9%	+621,361	+82.6%	+48.6%
Jamaica	+99,554	+18.5%	-29	-0.1%	-15.8%
Mexico	+5,749,831	+17.8%	+3,704,334	+90.8%	+62.0%
Nicaragua	+23,006	+13.5%	+148,728	+30.7%	+15.1%
Panama	+35,617	+5.5%	+8,820	+25.2%	+18.8%
Paraguay	+453,474	+116.1%	+167,164	+20.9%	-44.1%
Peru	+166,899	+9.7%	+1,358,182	+38.8%	+26.5%
Suriname	+6,693	+4.2%	-187	-0.5%	-4.5%

The regional passenger-car stock increased from 100.4 million vehicles in 2018 to 115.8 million in 2023 (+15.3%), broadly in line with the global passenger-car growth rate. The region accounted for 9.2% of the global passenger-car fleet in 2023.

Motorcycles and mopeds grew much faster, from 50.9 million to 68.8 million vehicles (+35.3%). This was one of the strongest regional growth rates globally and increased the region's share of the global motorcycle and moped fleet to 9.5%.

The motorcycle-to-car ratio increased from 0.42 in 2018 to 0.49 in 2023. This indicates that two-wheelers are gaining ground relative to passenger cars, reflecting their role as a more accessible form of private motorised mobility in contexts where car ownership remains less affordable for many households.

At country level, Mexico was a major contributor to this trend, adding 3.7 million motorcycles and mopeds between 2018 and 2023 (+90.8%). Honduras (+82.6%) and Guatemala (+81.3%) also recorded very rapid growth, while Colombia contributed significantly to the regional increase (+37.4%).

Access to services and employment: the public transport gap

Latin America provides a strong illustration of the private accessibility benefits of cars and motorcycles, especially where public transport coverage, travel times and perceived safety remain problematic.

- In Curitiba, the accessibility gap between private transport and public transport ranges from 5 to 23 depending on location and time of day. The gap is smaller around the city centre during rush hour, but wider outside peak periods and in peripheral areas. This confirms that private vehicles provide a systematic accessibility advantage in many urban contexts.
- The report also highlights a wider mismatch in Brazilian public transport. Public transport services are described as involving long journeys and waiting times, particularly in peripheral areas and for leisure activities, while travel conditions are often perceived as unsafe and commutes as strenuous. These factors help explain why cars and motorcycles are viewed as more convenient and comfortable options where households can afford them.
- In São Paulo, higher-income residents have access to significantly more opportunities than lower-income residents. Cars and motorcycles can improve individual accessibility in the short run, partly offsetting unequal access to opportunities. However, the report also makes clear that compensating for weak public transport through private motorised transport is not a sustainable long-term solution.

- Low-income groups in major Brazilian cities rely more on public transport to reach jobs, yet have systematically worse access to public transport than higher-income groups.

The motorcycle as mobility equaliser

The rapid growth of motorcycles and mopeds should be framed primarily as an affordability and accessibility issue. In many parts of the region, two-wheelers offer a lower-cost route to private motorised mobility than passenger cars, while still providing greater flexibility and reach than weak or incomplete public transport networks. This makes motorcycles important for daily mobility and access to opportunities, but it also increases road safety exposure. The report notes that two-wheelers are unsafe and associated with many accidents and injuries. For the region, the policy implication is therefore twofold: motorcycles are part of the private mobility solution for many households, but their rapid expansion also strengthens the case for road safety measures targeted at two-wheeler users.