

MEGA CITIES

Travelers flying into São Paulo, Brazil, are immediately struck by the city's endless stretch of skyscrapers that reach as far as the eye can see. Visitors may wonder why there are so many buildings and how so many people can live there. Researchers study enormous cities like São Paulo to answer these questions, among others.

São Paulo is among the 25 cities in the world that have been deemed megacities. A megacity is an urban area with a population of more than 10 million. In 2008 the total population of the world's 25 megacities reached approximately 280 million.

According to the United Nations, a historic milestone was achieved in 2007—more of the world's people now live in cities than in rural areas. By 2050, more than 75 percent of the world's people will live in cities. The world's rural population, in contrast, is expected to decrease by some 28 million, with most of this urban growth occurring in developing countries.

The Megacity Challenges Study In 2007, researchers at GlobeScan published a report on the challenges several megacities around the world face. The study focused on megacities that serve as critical economic centers, such as São Paulo. Because these

megacities are major economic centers, people flock to them in search of work. Providing jobs, services, and a workable infrastructure are crucial to a good quality of life in a megacity. With such large populations, megacities face many challenges, including overcrowded public transportation and traffic congestion, increasing electrical consumption, growing demand for health care services, and crime.

Transportation According to the GlobeScan report, maintaining transportation links to, from, and within the city is the biggest challenge megacities face. In order to stay connected to the global economy, cities need to keep their infrastructure of roads, ports, and airports in working order. In a survey of city leaders, the GlobeScan researchers found that leaders are concerned not only about how they will provide transportation to their growing population but also about what the environmental impact of the old public transportation systems will be. As a consequence, cities are looking for greener transportation alternatives. However, new public transportation systems are extremely expensive, and many cities struggle with financing the round-the-clock maintenance on their old transportation systems.

Electricity Sources of energy are crucial to keeping a megacity thriving. Yet in many regions of the world, the demand

With a population of about 17 million, São Paulo is one of the largest megacities in the world.

WORLD'S LARGEST CITIES

1	Tokyo, Japan	34,450,000
2	Mexico City, Mexico	18,066,000
3	New York City, USA	17,846,000
4	São Paulo, Brazil	17,099,000
5	Mumbai, India	16,086,000

Source: *The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 2008*

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for electricity is greater than the supply. Researchers at GlobeScan found that city leaders would prefer to use renewable energy sources such as wind energy. However, fossil fuels such as natural gas are much cheaper.

Health Care How the world's megacities will provide health care to their growing populations is also a major concern to city leaders. They wonder how they will afford to take care of their people. For example, although Mumbai is India's richest municipality, it can care for only 20 percent of its population. On the other hand, even with the world's largest concentrations of hospitals, New York struggles with the high cost of health care and an increasing elderly population with diabetes and heart disease.

Crime According to the megacity leaders surveyed, organized crime and terrorist threats are top on the list of challenges their cities face. To fight crime, many cities have installed surveillance cameras on street corners. Researchers found, however, that community involvement reduced crime more effectively than cameras did. For example, the Chicago metropolitan area cut its crime rate 58 percent within a ten-year period by holding monthly community meetings with the law enforcement officers assigned to their neighborhoods.

What do you think?

1. What challenges do megacities face?
2. Which challenge do you think megacities should spend more money on?

