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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

INLAND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

(Sixty-sixth session, 17-19 February 2004
agenda item 4)

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF THE COMMITTEE

Note : At its sixty-sixth session (17-19 February 2004), the Inland Transport Committee adopted the "Strategic Objectives of the Committee" as prepared by its Bureau (ECE/TRANS/156, para. 13).

The Strategic Objectives are being circulated in the present document with the aim of making them available for information and perusal to a wider audience, including also the various subsidiary bodies of the Committee.

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STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF THE COMMITTEE

1. General

1. The terms of reference of the Inland Transport Committee (ITC) of the UNECE are established in document ECE/TRANS/97 and were defined at its fifty-fifth session (1993), following major geopolitical changes in Europe. It should be recalled that the UNECE now totals 55 member States, of which 15 are members of the EU, 2 are members of the European Economic Area, 12 are candidates to join the EU, 2 are associated to the EU and 2 others have a special status with the EU. Moreover, half of its members could be considered as countries with transition economies. It therefore appears that the ITC is the only forum where common norms can be applied to both sets of countries, those part of the EU sphere as well as the others.

2. In the field of land transport, the ITC plays a crucial role since it fulfils a need not met by other international organizations: the development of a set of regulations for all land transport at the pan-European level with the participation of all its members. Such a regulatory framework includes Agreements and Conventions which serve as the basis for the national jurisdictions of member States. These legal instruments aim at establishing efficient and coherent transport infrastructure networks, facilitating border-crossing as well as harmonizing safety and environmental rules, technical standards and traffic rules.

3. The ITC has already achieved substantial tangible results: the E-road network, the railway, inland waterway and combined transport networks, the extension of these networks to the Caucasus and Central Asia, Regulations concerning the Construction of Vehicles, the creation of the World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations, the regulation of Road Traffic and Road Transport, as well as of the Transport of Dangerous Goods, the TIR Convention, etc. In addition, the ITC elaborates Recommendations and Resolutions and facilitates exchanges of best practices.

4. As a subsidiary body of the United Nations, the ITC plays a determining role internationally.

5. Owing to the wide range of its terms of reference, the ITC has always had to establish priorities. In the past, on the basis of decision O (45) of the Commission, the ITC had determined the following priority areas: construction of vehicles, transport of dangerous goods, road safety, transport infrastructure and combined transport. The Committee completed this list by adding customs questions relating to transport. More recently, further to recommendations in the 1997 UNECE Plan of Action, the Committee refined the formulation of its Programme of Work by establishing priorities for each work element.

6. Current or future important changes such as European integration, new technologies, the growth in trade and the new expectations of society pose new challenges for the Committee that make it necessary to reconsider its priorities and its strategy.

7. A transport policy should serve economic and social development. It should therefore take three types of consideration into account:

- Accessibility and fluidity;
- Safety and security;
- Respect for the environment and health.

8. Out of these three types of goals, the first (accessibility and fluidity) emerges both as the most “traditional”, but also perhaps as the most neglected. The many problems of network capacity (congestion of traffic and bottlenecks, interoperability, under-utilization of rail and inland waterway networks, management of flows, etc.) are of key importance.

9. It is therefore indispensable that the ITC pays special attention to addressing these problems and to solving them.

10. A strategic vision also entails paying attention to new problems as they arise, to new technical or technological options and to the trends that will shape transport operations in the future, as well as to the identification of possible solutions applicable in member countries.

11. As an example, several issues may be noted that could become major problems for the future, or may change the course of our work today:

- The development of Europe-Asia transport links;
- The use of telematics and intelligent transport systems (vehicles, infrastructure);
- Population ageing;
- European integration;
- The emergence of cleaner propulsion technologies, taking into account new energy sources;
- Impact of electronic trade on transport;
- Transport security;
- Charging for infrastructure usage;
- Globalization (in French: mondialisation) of the world economy and implications for transport.

In response to these challenges, the Committee could focus, for example, on the following missions:

- Creation, improvement and unification of international transport legislation and also monitoring its implementation;

- Development of road infrastructure, in particular east-west and north-south transport corridors;
- Possibility of increased facilitation of transport operations;
- Possibility of elimination of existing barriers to cross-border transport (visa problems, customs, fees, etc.).

Such actions would then be defined in a strategic plan, taking into account priorities and means available.

12. The ITC will take these questions into consideration in its strategy to the extent that they fall within its competence and it can contribute added value to activities carried out in other international fora.

2. Resources and Methods

13. The Inland Transport Committee has permanent and ad hoc groups. The secretariat services are provided by the Transport Division. The secretariat, whose number of staff is limited, must manage the whole of the activities of the ITC and of its subsidiary bodies as well as the Agreements and the Conventions.

14. Taking into account the urgency and magnitude of the problems and their technical complexity, the work of the Committee and its subsidiary bodies requires:

- a larger capacity of relevant services to ensure the material support for meetings (documentation, meeting rooms, interpretation, translation);
- greater availability of delegates;
- a strengthening of human resources in the Transport Division, including maintaining the two Regional Advisers;
- the adaptation of the budgetary framework of the UNECE and its member countries.

15. These aspects require also that some thought should be given to the methods of work, the efficiency and priorities on the one hand, and possibilities of finding new resources on the other.

16. As far as methods of work are concerned, it is suggested that:

- It is desirable to adopt a report at the end of each meeting. However, if that is not possible, a list of decisions should be agreed upon instead, particularly when dealing with legal issues;
- Reports could be shorter, and concentrate more on essential matters;
- Discussions could be limited to decisions and conclusions concerning the subjects dealt with;

- The late distribution of documents in all working languages should be avoided at all costs since it often leads to postponement of consideration or decision-making because it makes it impossible for the delegates to prepare for the meeting;
- Recourse to groups of experts preparing a subject and meeting informally would make it possible to progress more rapidly; only their report would be considered and adopted in plenary;
- Some questions could be adopted as an “A item” - i.e. without a presentation or discussion - during meetings of Working Parties or the ITC.

It is also necessary:

- to pay more attention to priorities;
- to determine clear and precise terms of references of bodies, which should be limited in time;
- to abandon, even temporarily, some of the topics on which no progress can be made, either because of lack of political agreement or because of lack of interest or because of lack of necessary facilities;
- to establish more often ad hoc groups for specific topics rather than addressing subsidiary bodies.

17. The efficiency of the Inland Transport Committee would certainly improve as a result of better coordination and more intensive cooperation:

- Internally (UNECE), for cross-sectoral questions or problems common to several Working Parties;
- Externally, with other international organizations (EU, ECMT, ...) or NGOs (technical questions) and the Coordinating Department of CIS countries;
- Intensification of work of UNECE in countries in Central and Eastern Europe as well as in CIS through the establishment of a system of information and analytical, consultative and training centers on key issues;
- Developing cooperation between UNECE and International Financial Institutions with a view to ensuring support for major projects including, in particular, investment projects in transition economies.

18. Coordination and cooperation with ECMT, UNESCAP and the Coordinating transport meeting of CIS countries seem particularly necessary, in order to:

- Define roles better with a view to making them complementary;
- Share the same strategic vision;
- Take into account the work and decisions of ECMT;
- Convene joint meetings at the levels of the Bureau and of the Working Parties;
- Carry out joint activities.

19. Where resources are concerned, new directions should be explored:
- To prompt more often member States to make experts temporarily available to the UNECE Transport Division;
 - To explore the possibility of allocating the proceeds of the sale of publications and documents to ITC activities;
 - To develop partnerships in order to organize some specific activities and help in the preparation of technical documents.
20. Lastly, it seems desirable for the role of the Inland Transport Committee that the importance of its work and its achievements be better known.

3. Measures to be taken

21. The Committee should build on its existing strengths in areas of norms and standard setting and follow better the implementation and monitoring of them.
22. The list of “major problems for the future” - cf. paragraph 11 - should encourage the Inland Transport Committee to develop a real strategy for action.
23. With this objective in mind, the Working Parties will consider new emerging trends and issues in their work whenever possible. However, in some instances, they may not be in a position to include some of these problems, in their work: either they fall outside their respective fields of competence or concern areas which go well beyond them, or else the working methods employed are such that concern is only with today’s problems.
24. The Bureau will dedicate part of its time to elaborating a strategy basing itself on the work of its subsidiary bodies and the expertise of the respective Chairpersons.
25. It would seem to be indispensable first of all to organize a consultation with ECMT, the relevant services of the European Commission and the coordinating transport meeting of the CIS countries so as to define a common strategic vision, to distribute the roles to avoid any duplication, and to ensure the necessary exchanges of information.
26. The strategic objectives of the Committee should be updated by the Committee when necessary.
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