

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COUNCIL**

Distr.
LIMITED
E/ESCWA/EDGD/2009/IG.1/INF.1
2 February 2009
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: ARABIC

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Committee on Transport
Tenth session
Beirut, 31 March - 2 April 2009

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

INFORMATION NOTE*1. Background information*

The tenth session of the Committee on Transport represents a continuation of efforts made by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) to complete the development of the Integrated Transport System in the Arab Mashreq (ITSAM) and follow up implementation of its components in accordance with ESCWA resolution 279 (XXIV) of 11 May 2006 and with a view to facilitating trade and transport between the countries of the region and achieving regional integration. At this session, a review will be conducted of the progress made in the field of transport since the ninth session of the Committee, which was held in Beirut from 26 to 28 February 2008.

The principal components of ITSAM comprise the following: (a) Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq; (b) priority routes M40 and M45; (c) Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq; (d) Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in the field of Maritime Transport in the Arab Mashreq; (e) national committees for the facilitation of transport and trade; (f) road safety; (g) ITSAM methodological framework; (h) the related geographical information system; (i) multimodal transport; and (j) institutional frameworks and legislation.

The Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq was adopted on 14 April 2003 and entered into force on 23 May 2005. Eight ESCWA member countries have ratified it to date, namely Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. Implementation of the Agreement has begun in a number of countries, in accordance with the plan of action devised by ESCWA and adopted by the Committee on Transport. The Agreement is considered to be one of the fundamental bases of ITSAM, as it increases road linkages both between the countries of the region and between the region and the rest of the world, and provides direct linkages to international railway networks in Africa, Asia and Europe. This has been the case since the Arab Economic and Social Development Summit (Kuwait, 19-20 January 2009) approved the launch of the project on the rail network linking Arab countries (the Project). ESCWA played a major role in devising the draft plan for the Project, in collaboration with the League of Arab States. The aim of the Project is to extend the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq to all Arab countries. In this regard, the numbering of rail axes and the technical specifications used in the draft plan for the Project are the same as those used in the Agreement on international railways in the Arab Mashreq; horizontal axes linking countries of the Arab Mashreq and the Arab Maghreb were given the same numbers. Similarly, numbers given to vertical axes in Arab countries in Africa complement those given to vertical axes in Arab countries in Asia.

Representatives of member countries attending the session will therefore be expected to submit a written intervention on the progress made in their countries in implementing the Agreement, in accordance with the plan of action that was adopted by the Committee on Transport at its seventh session (Beirut, 17-19 April 2006).

A brief report with regard to the follow-up on establishment and activation of the national committees for the facilitation of transport and trade in the countries of the ESCWA region will also be presented at the session for information and appropriate action. The ESCWA secretariat will, in this regard, propose a detailed questionnaire for discussion and adoption with a view to following up on progress made in member countries.

The Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in the field of Maritime Transport in the Arab Mashreq, which was adopted on 12 May 2005 and entered into force on 4 September 2006, has to date been ratified by eight ESCWA countries, namely Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Arab Emirates. A review will be made of progress made since the ninth session, as well as developments in the field of maritime transport in a number of member countries. A discussion on the means necessary to effectively activate and implement the Memorandum nationally and internationally will be held. Member countries are invited to include proposals for this in their interventions.

Participants will discuss action taken in the field of road safety, upon recommendation of the Committee on Transport at its ninth session (Beirut, 26-28 February 2008), and will follow up on the recommendations of the workshop on Establishment of Regional Partnership for Road Safety in the Arab Mashreq (Doha, 21-22 October 2008), which was held in collaboration with the Global Road Safety Partnership, the Ministry of Interior in Qatar and Royal Dutch Shell.

ESCWA will seek to tackle all transport-related aspects through its programme of work. Moreover, as at previous sessions of the Committee on Transport, it will seek to identify a particular transport-related issue in the Arab Mashreq for general discussion. At this session, the special topic will be the harmonization of institutional frameworks and legislation in the transport sector in the ESCWA region. In this regard, ESCWA, in cooperation with the Ministry of Transportation in the Syrian Arab Republic, organized an expert group meeting in Damascus on 12 and 13 November 2008. The document E/ESCWA/EDGD/2009/IG.1/3, which reviews the major recommendations of the expert group meeting, will be presented at the session for information and recommendation if necessary.

2. Provisional agenda

The provisional agenda of the tenth session of the Committee on Transport is set forth in document E/ESCWA/EDGD/2009/IG.1/L.1.

3. Participants

In view of the numerous transport-related issues and activities at ESCWA, arising from the many transport modes and systems in the region, member country representatives will suggest the establishment of a delegation comprising specialists in a variety of fields, including road, rail and maritime transport, road safety, facilitation of transport, and customs. It will also include specialists in transport-related institutional frameworks and legislation. In accordance with United Nations practice, member countries are responsible for the travel and subsistence expenses of their representatives at such intergovernmental meetings. A number of representatives of relevant regional and international organizations will also be invited to attend as observers.

4. Date and venue

The tenth session of the Committee on Transport will be held in Beirut from 31 March to 2 April 2009. Registration will begin at 9 a.m. on Tuesday, 31 March 2009, and the inaugural meeting will be held at 10 a.m. on the same day. The session will conclude in the afternoon of Thursday, 2 April 2009. The details of the location of the venue will be conveyed to participants in due course.

5. Accommodation and transportation

In order to facilitate the movement and transportation of participants during the session, ESCWA suggests that participants should make reservations at the hotel in which the session will be held (to be decided later) or at one of the hotels in Beirut with which the ESCWA secretariat has made arrangements for discounted rates. A full list of such hotels can be found at http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/events/h_list2008.pdf. In order to receive the discount, participants should contact the reservation section at the hotel of their choice directly to book their room and indicate that they are involved in the tenth session of the ESCWA Committee on Transport.

6. Entry visas

Participants may obtain entry visas from the Lebanese embassy in their country. If necessary, ESCWA can assist in obtaining visas, provided that a copy of the passport containing all the necessary information is submitted to ESCWA by 10 March 2009 at the latest.

7. Correspondence

All session-related correspondence should be addressed to:

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