

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Working Group on Dry Ports

3rd meeting

Bangkok, 13 and 14 November 2019

Item 5 of the provisional agenda*

Development of intermodal transport corridors and multimodal transport operations in Asia and the Pacific

Development of intermodal transport corridors and multimodal transport operations in Asia and the Pacific

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The planning and operationalization of international intermodal transport corridors is essential to the delivery of regional transport projects that can enhance the region's economic vitality, address its mobility requirements for people and goods, bring hinterland areas into mainstream economic development and minimize the environmental impact of the transport sector.

In order to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the matters of transport corridor development should be considered in a holistic manner, with due coordination of the development of infrastructure elements (such as railways, roads, seaports and dry ports) and the establishment of favourable institutional, regulatory and legal frameworks, ensuring the efficient operation of intermodal transport corridors and transport operations along them.

In this context, the present document contains a review of the main decisions taken recently by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and its subsidiary bodies, with emphasis placed on the need for further intermodal integration of transport modes and on the secretariat's continuing activities aimed at promoting this holistic approach to transport connectivity by addressing matters of infrastructure and operational connectivity in respect of intermodal transport corridors and intermodal and multimodal transport operations.

The Working Group may wish to consider the possibility of developing a harmonized legal framework for multimodal transport operations in Asia and the Pacific.

I. Introduction

1. The Third Ministerial Conference on Transport, held in Moscow in December 2016, stressed the key role of transport in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in light of its particular functions of providing people, industry and agriculture with access to economic and social opportunities and combating climate change. It also considered transport as an

* ESCAP/DP/WG/2019/L.1.

enabler for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and recommended that, in the implementation of the Regional Action Programme for Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific, phase I (2017–2021), priority be accorded to the following issues, among others: (a) comprehensive corridor plans and connections between national transport infrastructure development plans; and (b) the harmonization of construction standards, technical norms of transport means, transport policies and regulations on the basis of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network, the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network and the Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports.¹

2. Further, in adopting the Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific,² the Conference also emphasized the following needs: (a) developing integrated intermodal transport and logistics systems, incorporating road, railway, water and air transport, that support sustainable development; and (b) promoting safe, smart and environmentally sound intermodal or multimodal transport corridors with seamless physical and operational connectivity.

3. It is increasingly recognized at the global level that implementing the 2030 Agenda entails revisiting the traditional ways of addressing transport connectivity and development issues. As stressed by the General Assembly in its resolution 72/212, in developing transport systems, emphasis should be placed on low-carbon-based and energy-efficient modes of transport and an increased reliance on interconnected transport networks for seamless door-to-door mobility and connectivity of people and goods. Implementing the 2030 Agenda will also require integrated infrastructure and transport facilitation perspectives, as the productivity of infrastructure and returns on infrastructure investments are heavily affected by the regulatory and operational regimes within which transport infrastructure exists. In addition, it will require significant changes in the scope and format of existing intergovernmental cooperation in the sphere of transport which, traditionally, has been unimodal in its approach and has dealt separately with infrastructure and operational issues.

4. Highlighted in the present document are the main decisions taken recently by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and its subsidiary bodies, with emphasis placed on the need for further intermodal integration of transport modes and on the secretariat's continuing activities aimed at promoting this holistic approach to transport connectivity by addressing the matters of infrastructure and operational connectivity in respect of intermodal transport corridors and intermodal and multimodal transport operations.

II. Recent decisions and recommendations of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies

5. At its fifth session, held in Bangkok in November 2018, the Committee on Transport noted that member States were increasingly adopting corridor-based initiatives in their approach to connectivity.³

¹ E/ESCAP/MCT(3)/12.

² E/ESCAP/MCT(3)/11.

³ ESCAP/CTR/2018/8, para.7.

6. As Governments strove to enhance the region's economic vitality, address its mobility requirements for people and goods and bring hinterland and rural areas into mainstream economic development, the Committee shared the view that the planning and operationalization of international intermodal transport corridors offered a pertinent approach to the delivery of regional transport projects that could minimize the environmental impact of the transport sector. However, to ensure that related development followed a shared vision, issues of technical standards, operating practices, investment requirements and the alignment of national initiatives with regional priorities needed to be discussed. In that context, the Committee considered the proposal to set up a group of experts on transport corridors to provide necessary policy guidance, and instructed the secretariat to conduct further consultations with all relevant stakeholders to define the functioning, modalities and scope of work of that group of experts, including potential sources of funding to cover its establishment and activities.⁴

7. At its seventy-fifth session, held in Bangkok in May 2019, the Commission recognized that the Intergovernmental Agreements on the Asian Highway Network, the Trans-Asian Railway Network and Dry Ports were major building blocks in the realization of the vision of an international integrated intermodal transport and logistics system for the region.⁵

8. The Commission further recognized the important role of dry ports in achieving seamless transport connectivity and highlighted the need to further facilitate multimodal transport. In that context, the Commission was informed of the implementation of the projects to strengthen the institutional framework for dry port development in Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Thailand and Viet Nam, as well as the projects to enhance the efficiency of intermodal transport operations in Asia, financed by the Governments of the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation, respectively. In addition, the Commission took note of the planned activities aimed at improving the international legal framework for multimodal transport.⁶

III. Development and operation of intermodal transport corridors

9. Over the past decade, great progress has been made in the identification and development of national and international corridors. A non-exhaustive list of international corridors in Asia includes the following: the new Eurasian Land Bridge economic corridor; the China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor; the China-Central Asia-West Asia economic corridor; the China-Indochina Peninsula economic corridor; the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar economic corridor; the China-Pakistan economic corridor; the corridors of the Asian Development Bank regional economic cooperation programmes for Central Asia, South Asia and the Greater Mekong subregion; the Economic Cooperation Organization corridor; the Europe-Caucasus-Asia transport corridor; the international North-South transport corridor; the Chabahar corridor; and the international transport and transit corridor of the Ashgabat Agreement.

⁴ Ibid., para.24.

⁵ ESCAP/75/36, para. 158.

⁶ Ibid., para 164.

10. Despite the lack of a precise definition of the concept of an intermodal corridor, it can be pragmatically defined through several key physical and economic characteristics, including the following:

- (a) One or more routes that connect economic centres within and across countries;
- (b) One or more modes of transport;
- (c) A set of dry ports that provides for the interconnection of modes of transport and the development of logistics centres and growth centres.

11. Intermodal facilities such as dry ports are key to the efficiency of such corridors inasmuch as they act as points of convergence, where multiple interactions between transport modes, operators and service providers can be synchronized. At the same time, these facilities offer benefits to a broad spectrum of stakeholders with different interests, such as port operators and local or national authorities, who can use them to implement a range of economic, social and environmental policies.

12. Thus, the development and operation of dry ports, especially dry ports of international importance, can be more efficiently addressed if considered holistically alongside and as an integral part of matters relating to international intermodal transport corridors. With this in mind, the secretariat attaches priority importance to the development of international transport corridors and is implementing a series of related activities.

13. In December 2017, ESCAP completed a project on the comprehensive planning of Eurasian transport corridors. In its study report on the comprehensive planning of Eurasian transport corridors to strengthen intraregional and interregional transport connectivity, prepared under the project, the secretariat assessed the quality of road and rail infrastructure along the three major Eurasian transport corridors: (a) the Eurasian northern transport corridor, linking North-East Asia and Northern Europe via Kazakhstan, Mongolia and/or the Russian Federation; (b) the Eurasian central transport corridor, linking East Asia and Southern Europe via Central and West Asia; and (c) the Eurasian southern transport corridor, linking East Asia and South Asia via South-East Asia.⁷ Between September 2018 and August 2019, the secretariat also implemented a project on strengthening transport connectivity between the Republic of Korea and Europe through the Eurasian transport corridors, exploring the further extension of the above-mentioned transport corridors to the Korean Peninsula.

14. Since August 2018, ESCAP has been implementing a project on enhancing the efficiency of intermodal transport operations in Asia through the development of coordination arrangements that support balanced economic, social and environmental impacts. The project explores good practices on transport corridor management and the development of recommendations for the management arrangements of several transport corridors in Asia.

⁷ ESCAP, *Comprehensive Planning of Eurasian Transport Corridors to Strengthen the Intra- and Inter-regional Transport Connectivity: Study Report 2017* (Bangkok, 2017).

IV. Enhancing the efficiency of multimodal transport operations

15. In Asia and the Pacific, the lack of intermodal integration and transport facilitation represents one of the main causes of the high transport costs and delays in the region. At the same time, there is great potential to advance in both these areas by building upon the progress in establishing intergovernmental cooperation on the regional transport networks.

16. The Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports contains an overall institutional framework for the development of interconnections between the international transport networks through intermodal transport facilities (dry ports). The Working Group on Dry Ports, established under this Agreement, provides a relevant intergovernmental platform for the collective definition and implementation of related policies and actions, including the development of multimodal transport in the Asia-Pacific region.

17. However, an absence of clear understanding about the nature and lack of harmonized legal rules and regulatory frameworks covering door-to-door multimodal transport operations results in their limited development. This prevents transport operators from utilizing the potential of more environmentally friendly modes of transport such as, for example, railway and inland waterway transport.

18. The secretariat has aimed to fill this apparent gap through several activities on intermodal transport facilitation, thus far utilizing the subregional approach.

19. Under the project on the development of seamless rail-based intermodal transport services in North-East and Central Asia for enhancing Euro-Asian transport linkages, implemented by the secretariat from 2015 to 2017, two studies were conducted:

(a) A study on the documentation and procedures that explored several major intermodal transport routes connecting the countries of North-East Asia and Central Asia, with a focus on the transport and customs documentation and procedures required for transport operations along these routes;

(b) A study on information technology for intermodal transport that was focused on the exchange of information between the actors involved in intermodal transport chains and proposed approaches for further development and increased efficiency of the information exchange process.

20. Utilizing the overall approach and recommendations of the above-mentioned ESCAP study on information technology, a project was initiated by the joint stock company Russian Railways in 2018 as part of the project activity of the International Union of Railways Asia-Pacific Regional Assembly. In September 2019, a pilot project on multimodal sea-rail cargo transportation from ports in Japan or the Republic of Korea to a destination point in the Russian Federation was launched, using electronic data exchange at all stages. For this pilot transportation project, a new information technology has been designed that determines procedures and operations to provide a thorough electronic data exchange for door-to-door service.⁸

⁸ International Union of Railways, “UIC Asia-Pacific Regional Assembly workshop on development of multimodal freight traffic ‘sea to rail’”, 13 November 2018.

21. In the context of creating a favourable operational environment for multimodal transport operations, and taking into account the interest of the member States with regard to activities aimed at improving the international legal framework for multimodal transport, as reflected in the account of proceedings of the seventy-fifth session of the Commission,⁹ the secretariat also prepared an information document on the harmonization of legal frameworks for multimodal transport operations in Asia and the Pacific for consideration by the Working Group.¹⁰

V. Issues for consideration by the Working Group

22. The Working Group on Dry Ports may wish to review the present document and consider the above-mentioned policy issues. In particular, the Working Group may wish to take the following actions:

- (a) Discuss the measures that could be taken to ensure the coordinated development of dry ports and intermodal transport corridors, of which dry ports are integral components;
- (b) Issue recommendations on ways to increase the efficiency of multimodal transport operations along transport corridors, including through the introduction of streamlined procedures and the application of information technology;
- (c) Consider the possibility of developing a harmonized legal framework for multimodal transport operations in Asia and the Pacific;
- (d) Provide further guidance to the secretariat on the areas where the Working Group believes that the secretariat's support may be most useful in promoting the development and efficient operation of intermodal transport corridors in the region.

⁹ ESCAP/75/36, para.158.

¹⁰ ESCAP/DP/WG/2019/INF/1.