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INLAND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Working Party on Rail Transport
(Fifty-fourth session, 3-5 October 2000,
agenda items 2 (b), 7, 8 (f) and 9)

INFORMAL MEETING ON RAIL TRANSPORT (GENEVA, 15 JUNE 2000)

Report of the meeting

1. ATTENDANCE

The meeting was convened by the ECE secretariat following the various request made by the Working Party on Rail Transport at its fifty-third session (TRANS/SC.2/192, paras. 6, 8, 26, 49, 55 and 69), The meeting was chaired by Mr. György Szabo (Hungary), Vice-chairman of SC.2, and was attended by delegates from UIC, UN/TER and CER. The Commission of the European Communities (CEC) and the Organization for Co-operation between Railways (OSZhD) apologised for not being able to attend.

2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The provisional agenda was adopted.

3. CUSTOMS QUESTIONS AFFECTING TRANSPORT

The Working Party, following the recommendation of the Inland Transport Committee (ITC), had requested the participants at this informal meeting to develop a programme of work in co-operation with the Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport (WP.30), with a view to achieving practical solutions to the problems at the borders (TRANS/SC.2/192, para. 6).

The secretariat reported on the exchange of ideas held with the WP.30 secretariat, and on the step-by-step approach followed by the SECI project on this issue. It was agreed that WP.30 should be approached only once a concrete list of problems (and possible practical solutions) is developed. In particular, the following problems were mentioned:

- Lack of homogeneity of consignment notes for CIM and SMGS regimes.
- Lack of certain documents (e.g. bills)
- Lack or breaking of seals for wagons in transit.

It was also agreed that this question should be examined first in Central and Eastern Europe, and then extended to other regions.

The UN/TER delegate briefed on the conclusions of the recent UN/TER meeting on border crossing, and stressed the need to develop bilateral agreements. He also announced that UN/TER was developing recommendations for different types of trains, to be discussed later with the different authorities involved in border-crossing procedures.

The informal meeting agreed on the following recommendations to the Working Party:

- Ask the secretariat to examine the problems linked to the different consignment notes and develop proposals to harmonize them, with a view to facilitating electronic data exchange in the future.
- Prepare a list of concrete problems at the borders for presentation to WP.30. A draft list should be prepared by the secretariat, based on SECI and UN/TER experience, and it should probably include the acceptance of electronic waybills by customs services.
- Examine the current situation concerning bilateral agreements and the possibilities to encourage its integration into multilateral ones.

4. WORKING HOURS OF RAILWAY PERSONNEL AND ITS IMPACT ON THE OPERATION OF INTERNATIONAL THROUGH TRAINS

The Inland Transport Committee, at its sixty-first session, had recommended the Working Party to examine the question concerning working hours of railway personnel and its impact on the operation of international through trains. The purpose of the informal meeting would be to develop a programme of work on this topic (ECE/TRANS/128, para.132 and TRANS/SC.2/192, para.8).

The participants agreed that this question seems to refer mainly to locomotive crews. However, it was agreed that, in fact, working hours do not represent a significant barrier for the operation of international services, due to the fact that locomotive crews rarely operate abroad. Working hours, although possibly different from network to network, are known and international services (as national services) are planned accordingly.

The informal meeting examined the EU's Directive proposal that intends to cover some sectors and activities (including transport) currently excluded from the scope of the Directive 93/104/EC on the organization of working time. It was felt that this proposal would mainly affect

road transport, as working conditions for rail personnel are probably already in line with these requirements.

Furthermore, the participants stated that working conditions for rail personnel were typically defined at the national level by a three-layer regulatory system:

- National legislation, covering all sectors, and specific legislation and rules concerning railways.
- Local rules established at particular border-crossing points, as the result of co-operation between neighbouring railways.
- Safety considerations, which probably impose the most stringent rules.

Nevertheless, it was agreed that this situation could change in the future, if rail reform efforts succeed, as crews would be allowed to work on foreign networks, and would have to respect different safety rules, including working-hours limitations. Thus far, railways had solved this problem by establishing bilateral agreements, but it must be kept in mind that these agreements refer to a quite limited number of operations. According to these considerations, the informal meeting agreed to recommend the Working Party not to consider this item as relevant for consideration as long as there are no changes in the current legal framework.

5. MONITORING OF RESOLUTION NO. 248 (BORDER CROSSING STOPPING TIMES OF SHUTTLE TRAINS)

Following the request of the ITC, the Working Party had decided to monitor the implementation of ITC resolution No. 248. In this resolution, the ITC invites the ECE member Governments to intensify their efforts in order to limit overall to 60 minutes (30 minutes for each of the neighbouring countries) the waiting time of shuttle trains at borders (ECE/TRANS/128, annex 1).

The informal group felt that a precise definition of the “shuttle train” concept would be necessary. It was agreed that it refers to international block freight trains, running from one origin to one destination on a regular, periodic basis.

Following the request of the Working Party (TRANS/SC.2/192, para.26), the secretariat had approached the countries in order to identify shuttle trains to be included in a monitoring system. Unfortunately, there had not been any precise answer to this. The participants agreed that shuttle trains could be monitored within the same general monitoring system that the Working Party was intending to put in place in a number of border crossing stations (TRANS/SC.2/192, para. 31).

Concerning this monitoring system, the secretariat informed the participants that all the countries affected (Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland and Turkey) had been contacted, in order to check data availability. In accordance with the comments received, the informal group decided:

- To keep all the border-crossing stations initially identified.
- To simplify the train categories, and to add precise definitions for all of them. The following minimum categories should be maintained: block trains, shuttle trains, empty trains.

- Data request should refer to a short period of time (2 weeks) of the year, within which detailed data could be collected, rather than referring to the full year. This should make it easier for the countries to collect any additional data that could be needed, and would make sure that actual stopping times (and not only scheduled stopping times) will be collected.
- The secretariat should produce a new information request form including the modifications above and circulate it among the countries concerned.

6. COLLECTION OF DATA ON INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRAFFIC CONDITIONS ON THE AGC NETWORK

The secretariat briefed on the progress made in this area (particularly on the imminent publication of the 1997 Yellow Book and the collection of data on 1995 traffic on the AGC), and presented the conclusions of the Workshop on Railway Census held on 13 June 2000 with the participation of UN/TER, UIC, and Eurostat. According to these conclusions:

- The rail census could possibly first be made for year 2005.
- The existing UIC infrastructure database could serve as a basis, particularly for the selection of rail sections. The secretariat, the UN/TER and UIC agreed to hold a meeting in Paris with the purpose of comparing the sections used by each database.
- A number of infrastructure parameters was identified for collection, based on the AGC Agreement, and including some additional items that had proved to be of interest according to UIC's and UN/TER's experience.
- Traffic data should be collected on both, peak and average figures for each section, separating freight from passenger trains. Data collection on the number of passengers or tons transported was considered as not feasible under the present circumstances (unless precise statistical systems were put in place for that purpose).

7. SAFETY IN LONG RAIL TUNNELS

The informal meeting recalled the decision of the ITC (ECE/TRANS/132, para. 43), to establish a multidisciplinary group of experts on this question. The group will concentrate first on road tunnels and, as necessary, continue later with safety issues in other tunnels, and will first meet in Geneva on 10-11 July 2000. The informal group asked the secretariat:

- To brief the Working Party on the progress made by the group of experts.
- To approach the English and French delegates to SC.2 in order to collect information on the legislation/rules adopted after the accident occurred in the Channel Tunnel.

Additionally, the delegate from UIC informed the participants that the UIC Infrastructure Committee had started some work on this question and agreed to brief on this at the next session of the Working Party.

8. BARRIERS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMBINED TRANSPORT

The secretariat briefed on the discussion held by the Working Party on Combined Transport at its last session (TRANS/WP.24/87, paras. 26-30), and particularly on its decision to analyse combined transport services on the same corridors that SC.2 will monitor for border-crossing.

The delegate of UN/TER presented the conclusions of the Seminar on Combined Transport held in Ljubljana on 10-12 May 2000, and pointed out that some speakers had been quite critical about the quality of the services provided by the railways. He also mentioned that a critical barrier for further development of CT in the region was the lack of a coherent, well-defined network of Combined Transport terminals. Some countries had identified an excessive number of terminals (many of them lacking any significant traffic), and some of the terminals actually used were not those identified in international agreements such as AGTC.

It was agreed that improvements could only be achieved by getting the different actors (Governments, railways and CT operators) together. Accordingly, it was agreed to submit the following approach to the consideration of SC.2 and WP.24:

- SC.2 and WP.24 should hold a common session on this issue in April 2001. The meeting should include detailed presentations from the various actors on the current situation and their proposals to improve it.

- The common session should address the problem in its totality, i.e. including questions such as CT costs and competitiveness for different traffics, or the minimum quality requirements for terminals' equipment.

- The common meeting should agree upon a draft resolution to be then submitted to the ITC.

- With a view to facilitating an open, constructive discussion at the common session, the secretariat should convene a preparatory meeting including railways and combined transport operators, as well as some governmental experts.

9. OTHER BUSINESS

The participants asked the UN/ECE secretariat to produce a report of the session based on the decisions that were agreed upon, and to present these conclusions to the Working Party at its forthcoming session.
