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FACILITATION OF BORDER CROSSING IN INTERNATIONAL RAIL TRANSPORT

**MONITORING OF PROGRESS MADE IN THE FACILITATION OF
BORDER CROSSING IN INTERNATIONAL RAIL TRANSPORT**

Note by the secretariat

1. The Programme of Work of the Inland Transport Committee for 2006-2010 adopted at its sixty-eight session (ECE/TRANS/166/Add.1, Item 2.5) requires the Working Party on Rail Transport to monitor harmonization of requirements concerning international railway transport including rail safety and facilitation of its operations. The present document is submitted for consideration by the Working Party in compliance with that mandate.
2. At its sixtieth session, the Working Party asked the secretariat to prepare a note reviewing the most important international activities, initiatives and programmes aimed at monitoring and improving border crossing operations and stopping times in international rail transport. This information was compiled by the secretariat and is being circulated for consideration by the Working Party.

I. ECE

3. In 1999, the ECE Inland Transport Committee adopted a Resolution on the Reduction of Border Stopping time of shuttle trains in international traffic (Resolution No.248), which invites the ECE member Governments to intensify their efforts to limit overall to 60 minutes (30 minutes for each of the neighbouring countries) the waiting time of shuttle trains at borders. The Committee further asked the Working Party on rail Transport to ensure the implementation and monitoring of the resolution, and to report to it on the progress made.

4. Since 1994, the Working Party on Rail Transport has been annually monitoring the progress made in the facilitation of border crossing in international rail transport through the indicators reproduced below (TRANS/SC.2/180, para. 38 and TRANS/SC.2/182, para. 29). Accordingly, a number of Governments had submitted information concerning:

- (a) Average delay of passenger and goods trains at main border crossings;
- (b) Progress made (in minutes) subsequent to the implementation of measures taken by Governments (e.g., for customs, police, sanitary and phytosanitary controls) and railways (e.g., for technical controls) for passenger and freight trains to reduce the delays during border crossing;
- (c) Other measures that are envisaged in future to eliminate delays during the crossing of borders;
- (d) Succinct reports on bilateral and multilateral contacts which have taken place between Governments and railways of neighbouring countries in order to improve the crossing of borders in international rail traffic.

5. The information received by the secretariat was reproduced and presented to regular sessions of the Working party in the past. In 1999, about 20 member countries submitted the data on facilitation of border crossing in international rail transport.

6. 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 shuttle trains to be included in a monitoring system were defined and the data request referred to 2 weeks of the year, within which detailed data on actual stopping times (and not only scheduled stopping times) were collected. Train categories included in the monitoring system were block trains, shuttle trains, and empty trains.

7. The Working Party, at its fifty-fourth session (3-5 October 2000), considered inter alia questions related to the annual monitoring on the progress made in the facilitation of border crossing in international rail transport. The Working Party approved border crossing stations as defined in Annex 3 of its report (TRANS/SC.2/194) and asked the Governments to submit information referred to in the monitoring system, therein for the period 7-20 February, to those countries where the following border stations are located: Ruse, Kulata, Svilengrad (Bulgaria), Promachon (Greece), Lököshaza (Hungary), Curtici and Giurgiu Nord (Romania), Suzemka (Russian Federation), Kapikule (Turkey) and Zernovo (Ukraine). The data on stopping times of shuttle trains on these border-crossing stations were regularly collected from 2001 to 2005, when the Working Party decided to cease this exercise.

8. In the framework of the Joint ECE-ESCAP Project on Developing EURO-ASIAN Transport Linkages (EATL), regular assessment and monitoring of progress at the major border-crossing points along the Euro-Asian transport routes is envisaged as a permanent process in the project outline.

9. In the course of preparations for an International Conference on Facilitation of Railway Border Crossing Procedures, ECE and OSJD initiated an exercise aimed at collecting the data and information on border stopping times and obstacles in international passenger and freight rail transport. Although ad-hoc in nature, the questionnaire provided some additional insight into non-physical obstacles and border stopping times in 7 countries in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. This information will be used in the course of developing an Action Plan which the Conference is expected to endorse.

II. SPECA

10. The United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) was launched in 1998 to strengthen sub regional cooperation in Central Asia and its integration into the world economy. The members of SPECA are Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The Project Working Group on Transport and Border Crossing is a subsidiary body within the governing structure of the SPECA. ECE and ESCAP provide overall support to the Programme.

11. At its 12th session, Project Working Group on Transport and Border Crossing (PWG-TBC) discussed, inter alia, development of the database on road and rail routes of international importance in the SPECA region, as well as the database on border crossing. Following the session, the SPECA countries were addressed with a request to provide the information for the database on border crossing. The data base on border crossing points along a corridor/route will contain information on work/operations executed, time norms and the total duration in factual time and norms for border stopping operations.

III. BORDER CROSSING FACILITATION PROJECT IN THE SECI (SOUTH-EAST EUROPEAN CO-OPERATIVE INITIATIVE) REGION

12. In the context of the SECI activities on rail transport, the Ad hoc Working Group on the Reduction of Border Stopping Times of Shuttle Trains, in its seventeen sessions, made progress on the improvement of bilateral agreements regarding rail transport between SECI countries. The objective was to contribute to improvement of rail border crossing traffic on the axis Sopron – Bucharest – Sofia –Thessaloniki/Istanbul. Border crossing stations which have been considered by the WG were: Rousse (Bulgaria)–Giurgiu (Romania), Kulata (Bulgaria) – Promachon (Greece), Svilengrad (Bulgaria) – Kapikule (Turkey), Lököshaza (Hungary) – Curtici (Romania). Activities included the modification of numerous operational items at border crossing stations in order to reduce overall transport time of passenger and goods trains. Agreement was also reached on a monitoring system of rail traffic at border stations, and the definition of a “block train”. At its fourteenth meeting, work started on performance indicators for border crossing procedures. After 2005 however, the activities of this Group ceased.

IV. INTERNATIONAL UNION OF RAILWAYS (UIC) - ACTION PLAN BORDER CROSSING (ABC PROJECT)

13. In 2001 the UIC-East/West Task Force had launched the ABC Project which lasted until 2003. The Project includes the examination and optimization of 38 railroad border crossings in Eastern and South East Europe as well as development and optimization-methodology. Based on the methodology used in previous Project “Facilrail”, one of the objectives of the ABC Project was to drastically reduce the loss of time and costs for operators and users of rail infrastructure associated with long border crossing procedures. In addition, the project explored the possibilities for transferring the required controls and operations to more time efficient locations (for example origin and destination terminals), and formation of train compositions oriented towards market demand without unnecessary border stopping.

14. ABC sensitive border points identified through this Project were: Brest – Terespol; Czop – Cierna nad Tisou; Mockawa – Trakiszki; DOSTYK – Alashankou ; Soukhebaatar – Nauchki; Zabaikalsk – Manzhourija ; Vicsany – Vadoul-Siret; Medyka – Mostiska; Kristeshti/Jijiia – Ungeny ; Zamyn-Uud – Erlian; Dandoun – Sinydjou; Braniewo – Mamonowo ; Zahon – Czop (Batevo – Epereshke).

V. WORLD BANK – TTFSE 2 (TRADE AND TRANSPORT FACILITATION IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE) AND TPPF (TRANSPORT PROJECT PREPARATION FACILITY PROJECT)

15. The Trade and Transport Facilitation in Southeast Europe Program is a regional endeavor gathering eight countries, the World Bank, the Governments of the United States of America, of the Netherlands, of France, and of Austria among others. This program was identified by a SECI working group. Under the second TTFSE II programme, a railway Corridor and Border Crossing Study was commissioned and completed in 2004. One of the objectives of the study was to improve the competitiveness of rail transport in the Balkan region by reducing the border crossing stopping times for freight and passenger transport trains on the main railway corridors. For this study, the data were collected on 7 border crossing points in Romania and 4 in Bulgaria.

16. Within the Transport Project Preparation facility Project (TPPF) covering 5 Western Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FYROM and Serbia and Montenegro) there was a component that undertook an assessment of the institutional and infrastructural needs of railway border crossings in the region. The overall objective of the TPPF Railway Border Crossing Project was to improve the competitiveness of rail transport in the Balkan Region by reducing the border crossing stopping times for transit freight and passenger trains through identifying the required investment and capacity building actions that will facilitate the efficiency improvements in the short and medium run. The 15 rail crossings in the region were initially identified in the REBIS Report. From a sample of these identified rail border crossing points, data on average number of passenger and freight trains per day and processing time per passenger and freight train were collected by TPPF.

VI. TER UNECE- FACILITATION OF RAILWAY BORDER CROSSING PROCEDURES

17. UNECE TER Project is a sub-regional cooperation established in 1990 by the Governments of the Central, Eastern and South Eastern European countries coordinated and supported by UNECE acting as the executing agency. Among TER activities, harmonization of border control procedures takes a prominent place, and the Project had undertaken the work on monitoring the developments and progress achieved in facilitation of border control in Central and Eastern Europe. In the course of years, a set of actions was agreed to be implemented to enable the permanent monitoring process, conducted by the Project, in close cooperation with UIC and the European Commission – Justice and Internal Affairs.

18. Thus, a new reporting system for the evaluation of the situation and developments at border crossing was agreed. The countries were supposed to provide the Project office with the situation at the border crossings on their territory for particular month. The reporting system covers all border crossings situated on TER network overlapping with the Pan European Corridors, and the countries were also invited to add 1-2 border crossings of high priority. The TER – Central European Initiative (CEI) in 2005 established the Common Task Force on facilitation of border crossing procedures. Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine took part in this Task Force. The TER monitoring exercise comprises the data on average time spent by passenger and goods train at border crossings; progress made (in minutes) as a result of implementing measures taken by Governments (e.g. customs, police, sanitary controls) and railways (e.g. new technologies implemented in border stations) to reduce delays or time spent during border crossing; information on new bilateral agreements concluded or contacts between Governments and/or railways of neighbouring countries, and other measures envisaged to eliminate delays.

VII. SEETO – SOUTH EAST EUROPEAN TRANSPORT OBSERVATORY

19. The European Union is funding a Technical Assistance to CARDS countries (EuropeAid/116965/C/SV/Multi) aiming at establishing the SEETO organization and its processes. SEETO is being developed by the European Union with the assistance of two well-established consulting companies, GOPA of Germany and TRADEMCO of Greece. The Technical Assistance is carried out by the Joint Venture of GOPA GmbH, Germany, and Trademco S.A., Greece which formed a team of national and international experts. In its South East Europe Core Regional Network Development Plan (2007 to 2011) a set of Monitoring and Evaluation Indicators was developed for the core network. Data included in this monitoring comprise information on waiting times/crossing in minutes for passenger and freight trains.

VIII. UIC/OSJD Joint working group for border crossing

20. Objectives of this working group are to study border crossings in Europe and Asia with transshipment between standard gauge track and broad gauge track and between broad gauge tracks. Within the activities, the bilateral groups established within the working group aim at assessing the reasons for excessive stopping time at borders and monitor implementation of the remedial actions taken to improve the situation.

IX. ECMT

21. The ECMT Council of Ministers of Transport adopted a Resolution No.99/2 on Removal of obstacles at border crossings for international goods transport (Ministerial meeting in 1999). This Resolution, building on previous Resolutions No. 50 and No. 94/5, recommends a series of measures in regard to railways, authorities responsible for funding and Ministries of Transport to reduce time and simplify border crossing procedures in international railway transport. For monitoring the implementation of the Resolution, the ECMT utilized the data and information obtained through the monitoring exercise carried out by the ECE.

X. CONCLUSIONS

22. This simple review of the several most known data and information collection activities clearly shows the importance attached to border crossing procedures and stopping times in international rail transport. Physical and non-physical impediments to faster border crossing operations and simplified procedures are still very much considered as main obstacles which reduce the competitive position of railways vis-à-vis other transport modes.

23. A considerable number of activities on collection of border crossing data and information illustrated in this review, as well as numerous other smaller-scale ad hoc exercises, also point out that a consistent, permanent and readily available monitoring system does not exist at the Pan-European level. Many of these information collection activities do not overlap either in geographical scope or in chronological coverage. However, their piecemeal ad hoc implementation, often linked to a particular project, does not allow a broader view to be established regarding the situation on railway border crossings, for example on a major rail corridor or a network. Also, it makes almost impossible implementation of coordinated measures which would lead to a significant reduction of border stopping times at a larger number of border crossing points simultaneously.

24. A well designed, comprehensive, and systematically applied border crossing monitoring system especially on critical border crossing points, which would be easily available to policy-makers, rail operators, international organisations and other stakeholders in international railway transport, appears to be needed. In order to provide reliable and systematic information source for creating conditions which could bring about the necessary improvements in border crossing operations at the Pan-European level, international organizations might need to take a lead towards considering the establishment of such a system.
