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DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FIELD OF INLAND TRANSPORT IN AFRICA

Note by the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Transport and Communications Commission has at previous sessions indicated its interest in the question of African transport in carrying out the Commission's mandate from the Economic and Social Council to examine and advise the Council on the question of international organization in the field of inland transport in various regions. At its Second Session in April 1948 the Commission recommended to the Council that the Secretary-General be requested to make a study of the needs for and problems concerning a regional organization or organizations in the field of inland transport in Africa, and that he be authorized to seek the information required to make the study. Similar studies had been authorized by the Council with respect to Asia and the Far East and to the Americas. The Commission expressed the opinion that the Secretary-General should address an enquiry to the Governments concerned as was done in the case of Asia and the Far East and the Americas, and that the enquiry should include the question of whether Africa should be considered as one or two regions. (document E/789). The Council at its Seventh Session in August 1948 decided not to act on the recommendation of the Commission (document E/AC.6/SR.21). During the Council's discussion some delegates had objected to the making of the study on the ground that Africa was not a region from the point of view of transport (document E/AC.6/SR.21). The Transport and Communications Commission at its Third Session in March 1949 took note in its Report of the Council's decision and drew attention to its own previous recommendation that the question of whether Africa should be considered as one or two regions from the point of view of transport be included in the proposed enquiry by the Secretary-General. (document E/1311)

Since the Third Session of the Transport and Communications Commission there have been several international developments, both within and without the framework of the United Nations which bear either directly or indirectly on the problems of African transport and on the question of international machinery for dealing with them. This refers particularly to (1) the placing of the question of establishing an Economic Commission for Africa on the agenda of the Tenth Session of the Economic and Social Council which will be held in February-March 1950, immediately preceding the Fourth Session of the Transport and Communications Commission, (2) the Central African Conference on Transport held at Lisbon 24-31 May 1949, which inter alia recommended the establishment of a permanent inter-territorial transport Council, (3) the Third African Congress on Touring.

/These developments,

These developments, together with some background material, are summarized below for the information of the Commission.

II. UNITED NATIONS ACTIVITY IN THE FIELD OF AFRICAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Provisional Agenda of the Tenth Session of the Economic and Social Council contains an item entitled "Study of economic situation of and desirability of establishing an Economic Commission for Africa". The item was proposed by the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA), a non-governmental organization with consultative status in category (a), on the basis of a resolution adopted at the fourth Plenary Assembly of the Federation, meeting in Rome 5-11 September 1949 (reproduced in United Nations document E/1555, 28 October 1949).

Similarly several delegations to the Fourth Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, held October-December 1949, drew attention in the Second Committee, which deals with economic and financial questions, to the fact that, unlike other under-developed areas, Africa had not been the subject of regional economic arrangements by the Economic and Social Council, nor had the Secretary-General been invited to make studies of its economic problems and needs. They emphasized the urgency of making such studies. (documents A/C.2/SR.114, 9 November 1949; A/C.2/L.32, 11 November 1949.)

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF TRANSPORT IN AFRICA

Geographical factors have greatly hampered the development of African transport. Jungles, tropical, humid climate, prevalence in many regions of the tsetse fly, etc. are conditions extremely unfavourable to railroad and road construction while there is at the same time a deficiency of good natural waterways. Dependence on imported fuel furthermore increases the cost of mechanical means of transport, while the uneven distribution of the population makes it difficult to carry on profitable transportation services.

Despite the unfavourable conditions for their development, railways are the most important means of transport in Africa since the principal goods to be carried are bulky mining and agricultural products which require cheap, long-distance, all-season transport services. Construction of roads has generally come later than that of railroads. Roads have frequently been constructed as feeders to railroads although they have in other cases been constructed in pioneer areas for the purpose of opening them up. While a few of the large rivers such as the

/Nile,

Nile, the Zambesi, the Congo, the Gambia, the Niger and Benue are navigable, this is usually the case in only certain reaches.

Even where navigable rivers cross national boundaries, they have been little used for international transport. The railways as now constructed similarly do not constitute an international system. The railway systems in the various countries and territories have been constructed independently of those in other countries and territories and have very different technical standards while six principal gauges are in use. Since World War II, however, greater co-operation has been shown between the Governments and Administrative authorities in planning improved communications systems between territories.^{1/}

IV. REGIONAL INTER-GOVERNMENTAL ACTIVITY IN THE FIELD OF INLAND TRANSPORT IN AFRICA

Inter-governmental activities in the field of inland transport in Africa have been concerned mainly with two areas, (1) Central and South Africa, (2) British and French West Africa. Before passing to the more recent developments in this respect, it might be mentioned that a South African Transport Conference was convened in 1936 by the South African Government and discussed questions relating to rail, road, and air transport. This was to have been followed by another meeting in 1940 and the South African railways were to have acted as a permanent Secretariat. These plans were interrupted by the war. Since the war, prior to the 1949 Lisbon Conference, British, Belgian and Portuguese authorities had been studying the development of railway connections between the Central African territories of these countries.

With reference to West Africa an Anglo-French Communications Conference was held in Dakar in May 1947 at which agreements were reached for improving communications between the British and French West African territories by road and rail and recommendations were made for improving the system of transport regulation for the Niger River.

Conference on Central African Transportation Problems, Lisbon, May 1949. The most comprehensive step taken to date was the inter-governmental Conference of

^{1/} For a fuller discussion of the characteristics of transport in Africa see "Geographical Factors in the Development of Transport in Africa" by R.J. Harrison Church, in the Transport and Communications Review, Vol. II, No. 3, July-September 1949, published by the Transport and Communications Division, United Nations.

European colonial powers of Central Africa (Belgium, France, Portugal, United Kingdom) and the Union of South Africa which met at Lisbon from 24-31 May 1949 at the invitation of the Portuguese Government. The United States of America was represented by observers. The Conference was preliminary to a Plenary Conference to promote the development of an adequate transportation system in the region, to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa in October 1950. In addition to the Governments represented at the Lisbon Conference the following Governments and administrations are to be invited to send representatives to the Plenary Conference: Southern Rhodesia, East African High Commission, High Commission Territories in South Africa, Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, General Government of Angola, General Government of Mozambique, the Administration of the Belgian Congo and the Administration of French Equatorial Africa. The United States is to be invited to send observers.

The decisions of the Lisbon Conference covered the following:

- (1) agenda, time and place of the Plenary Conference,
- (2) recommendations for consideration by the Plenary Conference,
- (3) recommendations to Governments for immediate action prior to the Plenary Conference,
- (4) establishment of an interim organization.

The Final Act of the Lisbon Conference in the preamble indicates the recognition by the Governments concerned "that the development of the economic resources of Central Africa is essential to the social and economic advancement of the peoples of this region" and further "that a sound and co-ordinated development of port and transport facilities is basic to such development; that such development must be directed to the benefit of the region as a whole; and that decisions regarding such development must be taken with that consideration in mind." The Conference resolved "that the Governments should co-operate in the development of Central African port and transport facilities on a regional basis and work together to that end." The Plenary Conference would be convened in order to carry out this policy of co-operation. The area within the scope of the Conference was defined as comprising Angola, Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate, Belgian Congo, British East Africa, French Equatorial Africa, Mozambique, Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, Southern Rhodesia, South West Africa, Swaziland and the Union of South Africa.

The Agenda of the Plenary Conference contained in the Final Act of the Lisbon Conference is as follows:

- (i) To receive and consider plans for the development of inter-territorial and international port and transport facilities.
- (ii) To make recommendations for the correlation and co-ordination of the plans submitted to it.
- (iii) To consider and recommend the priorities to be allocated to the developments, in respect of their urgency from a regional viewpoint and of the availability of supplies and finance.
- (iv) To receive a report on the improvements effected in port and transport facilities and operations since the Lisbon Conference was held.
- (v) To examine proposals designed to facilitate the movement of inter-territorial and international traffic.
- (vi) To consider the setting up of a permanent organization for co-ordinating and advising on the development and operation of inter-territorial and international transport in the area within the purview of the Conference.
- (vii) Other business.

In addition it was resolved that the Governments represented at the Lisbon Conference should consider adding to the Agenda of the Plenary Conference the question of inter-territorial and international railway tariffs. (Appendix IX to the Final Act).

Among the questions referred to the Plenary Conference under item (i) of the Agenda are long-term port and railway projects, a number of measures for the development of road traffic on an international as well as a local basis including the development of international highways, standards of construction and maintenance for vehicles, uniform traffic regulations, etc. Appendices III, IV, V, VI containing conference resolutions on these questions are annexed to the present paper.

Proposals for facilitation of inter-territorial and international traffic under item (v) of the Agenda are contained in Appendix VII to the Final Act which is also annexed hereto. These proposals are based on provisions in the Congo

Basin Treaty^{1/} and would somewhat extend the geographical scope of those provisions.

The permanent organization referred to in item (vi) of the Agenda would consist of a permanent inter-territorial Council composed of one delegate from each country or administration and a permanent secretariat, financed jointly by Member Governments and Administrations and housed at a central point. Appendix VIII containing the proposed structure and functions of the permanent organization is annexed to the present paper.

Recommendations of the Lisbon Conference to Governments for immediate action included a request to "examine their railway rating systems with a view to establishing whether the development of the territories served is being retarded or likely to be retarded by the railway tariff structure in operation" (Final Act, para. 7).

As an immediate measure in order to improve the existing transport facilities in the region, the Lisbon Conference recommended that the Government of Portugal should be urged to proceed with the extension and improvement of the port of Beira in Mozambique and the Government of Southern Rhodesia with the construction of a rail connection with Lourenço Marques (Final Act, para. 8 and Appendix II).

It was recommended that during the period between the Lisbon and Johannesburg Conferences an interim organization be established at Pretoria, South Africa. The functions of this organization should be to receive and collate all relevant information concerning the development of inter-territorial and international port and transport facilities and especially improvements effected since the Lisbon Conference (Final Act, para. 4 and Appendix I). The participating Governments agreed to inform each other through the interim organization of all changes related to inland transport and to take no action of inter-regional concern without prior consultation with the affected countries (Final Act, para. 5).

^{1/} Convention between British Empire, Belgium, France, Italy, Japan, Portugal, and the United States of America, revising the General Act of Berlin, 26 February 1885, and the General Act and Declaration of Brussels, 2 July 1890 - signed at Saint-Germain-en-Lage, 10 September 1919.

V. ACTIVITY BY NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Third International Congress of African Touring. This Congress was held in Nairobi, British East Africa, 4-8 October 1949 under the auspices of the International Touring Alliance (AIT) which has an African Section. Previous Congresses had been held at Costermansville, Belgian Congo in 1938 and at Algiers in 1947.

The Third Congress was attended by representatives of twenty-three countries and territories, including Belgium, France, Great Britain, United States and nearly all African countries and territories, i.e. Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Belgian Congo, Ethiopia, Egypt, British East Africa, French Equatorial Africa, French Somaliland, French West Africa, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Northern Rhodesia, Tanganyika, Uganda, Union of South Africa, and Zanzibar. The Congress was also attended by representatives of the AIT which sponsored it, the Central African Council, International Union of Official Travel Organizations, and the International Road Federation.

The work of the Congress is discussed in document E/CN.2/70 on "Travel Questions", prepared for the Fourth Session of the Transport and Communications Commission. At present it may be noted that the Congress adopted several resolutions recommending measures to improve transport facilities in Africa, inter alia the development of trans-African Road Routes, the establishment by all African Governments and administrations concerned of a permanent Road Planning and Co-ordination Committee, and periodical meetings between the railways and other transport undertakings of Africa on a regional and an inter-regional basis.

ANNEX

Extracts from Appendices to
Final Act of the Conference on Central African
Transportation Problems, Lisbon,
24-31 May 1949
Appendix III

Be it Resolved: That each Government and Administration should prepare and submit to the Plenary Conference to be convened in Johannesburg for its consideration information on the following matters:

Railways

- (i) Full statistics relating to existing systems and capacity;
- (ii) Plans for the further development of existing routes;
- (iii) Proposed routes showing gauge to be used;
- (iv) Connections with other systems;
- (v) Estimates of capacity of proposed routes;
- (vi) Economic conditions and prospects in the country to be traversed;
- (vii) Forecasts of tonnages of exports and imports and types of commodities;
- (viii) Internal traffic;
- (ix) Diversion of traffic, if any, from other routes;
- (x) Internal effect of construction of new lines, e.g. change of gauge, braking systems, etc.

Ports

- (i) Full statistics relating to existing ports including details of existing capacity;
- (ii) Proposals for new construction and equipment, including details of potential capacity;
- (iii) Forecasts of tonnages of exports and imports;
- (iv) Diversion of traffic, if any, from other routes.

Roads

- (i) Full statistics relating to mileage and standards of existing international road systems;
- (ii) Diversion of traffic, if any, from other transport systems.

Inland Waterways

- (i) Full statistics relating to existing systems;

/(ii) Proposals

- (ii) Proposals for development;
- (iii) Diversion of traffic, if any, from other transport systems.

Maps

All Statements should be accompanied by suitable maps and, where feasible by suitable photographs.

APPENDIX IV

Be it Resolved: That the following long-term port and railway projects should be considered by the Plenary Conference to be convened in Johannesburg:

1. The suggested connection from the Rhodesia Railway system to the East African system and the port of Mtwara. In this connection the Government of the United Kingdom is invited to conclude the necessary surveys and reconnaissances before the Plenary Conference;
2. The suggested connection from the Rhodesian system to Lourenço Marques via Parfui;
3. The suggested connection from the port of Nacala to the Rhodesian Railway system at Broken Hill;
4. The suggested construction of an additional port on the west coast together with a rail connection with the hinterland.

APPENDIX V

WHEREAS the Conference recognizes that to cater adequately for road traffic, international as well as local, suitable construction and maintenance standards as well as vehicle use regulations and traffic codes are necessary;

Be It Resolved: That the Plenary Conference to be convened in Johannesburg should consider:

1. The introduction of a system of designation by the Governments concerned of "international highways" in accordance with plans co-ordinated on an international basis;

2. The setting up of minimum standards of construction and maintenance as may be dictated by varying degrees of road and vehicle use, which should be applied by Governments along international highways;

3. The preparation of uniform traffic regulations and traffic codes (including traffic signs appropriate to the African territories) and standards of highway amenities, to be commended to the Governments for general adoption;

4. Measures for ensuring the full and free interchange of the results of research, experimentation and experience in highway and road transport matters.

5. The fiscal regime to be applied to the international highways in respect to the circulation of vehicles, the supply of petrol and fuel oil, the facilities to be granted for the establishment of repair workshops along the roads, and telephone communications - as well as the taxes and charges for such services as may be available.

APPENDIX VI

Be It Resolved: That the possibility of further utilization of the Zambesi River for Transport should be considered by the Plenary Conference to be convened in Johannesburg.

APPENDIX VII

Be It Resolved: That the Plenary Conference to be convened in Johannesburg should examine the following proposals designed to facilitate the movement of inter-territorial and international traffic;

(a) That goods in transit should not be subjected to undue delay or to the payment of special taxes except those normally imposed for the maintenance of roads, railways or inland waterways, or to any form of discrimination;

(b) That existing customs facilities should be simplified;

(c) That steps should be taken to avoid unnecessary delay in the transit of passengers and that they should be free from the necessity to obtain visas for the purpose of crossing a country;

(d) That the right to pass through a country under a different sovereignty in respect of persons, luggage and goods shall be freely afforded by Governments and Administrations. Governments, in adopting measures for the proper enforcement of police customs and health regulations should take into consideration the necessity of facilitating and expediting the transit of inter-territorial traffic;

(e) That carriages, wagons and rolling stock generally may be permitted to pass freely from one transport system to another by agreement between the Governments or Administrations concerned;

(f) That reasonable facilities should be given to the nationals of one country who by reason of their duties in connection with inter-territorial transport systems are obliged to reside in a neighbouring country.

APPENDIX VIII

WHEREAS consideration of the statements and information submitted to the Lisbon Conference by the delegations has led the Conference to the conclusion that, if the transport problems of the territories with which the Conference is concerned are to receive adequate and co-ordinated consideration, an inter-territorial transport council on a permanent basis should be established;

Be It Resolved: That the Lisbon Conference recommends that the Plenary Conference to be convened in Johannesburg should consider the establishment of a permanent inter-territorial council on the following basis and with the following functions:

(i) The Council should be composed of one delegate from each country or administration who should be an expert in transport matters;

(ii) The Council should have the power to co-opt further experts for the consideration of particular problems as required;

(iii) The Council should meet from time to time as may be required;

(iv) The Council should have a permanent secretariat financed jointly by member Governments and Administrations; it should be housed at some convenient central point;

(v) The Council should:

(a) consult upon problems of transport brought to its notice by member Governments and Administrations and advise upon their solution. The member Governments and Administrations would be empowered to bring to notice any problem affecting transport within, or to or from their own territories, whether of a short term nature such as the congestion of a particular port or railway line, or of a long term nature involving, for example, expected future transport requirements; in any question in dispute preference should be given to the claims of the land-locked territories;

(b) consider the systematic preparation and tabulation of information concerning inter-territorial transport facilities in Africa, and to prepare estimates of future requirements for the information of member Governments;

(c) advise, as requested by member Governments and Administrations, upon the prima facie practicability of any designated inter-territorial route.