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Working Party on Rail Transport

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Item 7 (b) of the provisional agenda

FUTURE ACTIVITIES OF THE WORKING PARTY

Rail transport of passengers with mobility handicaps

Note by the secretariat

I. MANDATE

1. At its seventieth session, the Inland Transport Committee (ITC) considered the secretariat's proposals on the possible continuation by the ITC of the work on transport of people with reduced mobility, carried out previously in the framework of ECMT (for details, see document ECE/TRANS/2008/10). ITC agreed that the work on transport of people with reduced mobility should continue and be intensified in 2008 through the organization of a Workshop on accessibility during a session of one of the Working Parties concerned (ECE/TRANS/200, para. 116).

II. INTRODUCTION

2. The Working Party may wish to consider whether it will address rail transport of people with reduced mobility in its future work. In the SC.2 context, the relevant issue to consider would be passenger accessibility of heavy rail systems. This note reviews briefly a few initiatives

concerning the matter at hand that have taken place in parts of the ECE region in order to provide delegates with some background information.

III. THE EUROPEAN UNION FRAMEWORK

3. The European Commission (EC) has developed an Action Plan called “Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities: A European Action Plan 2004 – 2010”.¹ The plan sets a clear objective of including disability issues in the relevant Community policies and implementing specific measures in key areas with the aim of “enhancing the economic and social integration of people with disabilities”.

4. The Commission has identified the priority areas for the first phase of their Action Plan, which are grouped under the following four headings:

- (a) Access to, and remaining in, employment.
- (b) Lifelong learning in support of employability, adaptability, personal development; and active citizenship of people with disabilities.
- (c) Using the potential of new technologies, which play a crucial role in ensuring equal opportunities and mobility in the economy, in empowering people with disabilities.
- (d) Accessibility of the public built environment, which is a pre-condition for participation in the workplace and mobility in the economy and society.

5. Accessible public transport systems are crucial to enable disabled people to live independently and to take control of their own lives. The Commission’s White Paper: “European Transport Policy for 2010: A Time to Decide”,² also recognizes that accessible public transport is an integral part of accessibility in the wider sense (EC 2001).

6. Several directives and regulations have been implemented which are aimed at making public transport systems more accessible to disabled people. These include specific directives as well as regulations on various modes of transport, and more general directives.

7. Passenger rail transport is affected by two directives on procurement procedures (2004/17/EC and 2004/18/EC), one directive on the interoperability of the trans-European high-speed rail system and conventional rail system (2004/50/EC) and a proposed directive on international train passengers’ rights and obligations (COM 2004/143). The first two directives specify that contracting authorities should ensure that accessibility criteria for people with reduced mobility are taken into account. Directive 2004/50/EC includes a technical specification for interoperability, aiming to enhance accessibility of train stations and trains. In addition, the requirements of the Technical Specification for Interoperability for Persons with Reduced Mobility will, from its implementation, become the new standard against which rail vehicles capable of operating on the Trans-European Network will be assessed. The proposed directive (COM 2004/143) defines the right to assistance for passengers with reduced mobility, including boarding, changing of service and disembarking.

¹ <<http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/cha/c11414.htm>>

² <http://ec.europa.eu/transport/white_paper/documents/doc/lb_texte_complet_en.pdf>

8. The Technical Specification for Interoperability (TSI) connected to Rail Interoperability Directive (2004/50/EC)³ covers conventional and high speed rail infrastructure and passenger rolling stock. It also deals with some other issues such as, for example, ticketing equipment. The objective of the TSI is to improve the accessibility of rail transport for people with reduced mobility. This includes the accessibility of the public areas of the infrastructure (including stations).

9. The European Union has also launched a comprehensive project aiming to develop policy on accessibility of public transport systems in all 27 EU member states and two EFTA countries (Iceland and Norway), aiming to promote social integration and the active participation in society of the disabled and elderly people. As part of the Euro-Access project, Transport Ministries in the 29 countries mentioned above were requested in 2007 to answer a project questionnaire, in order to help provide a structured inventory of the policies and legal framework in the field of accessibility of public transport. The inventory would provide a good platform for recommending policies for the different member states and as a basis for future EU legislation on the issues. The Euro-Access project <<http://www.euro-access.org>> is covering all surface public transport: train, bus, metro, tram, taxi etc., local as well as long distance and international transport (e.g. intercity train and coach services). The policies and the legal frameworks surveyed include all kinds of measures aimed at making public transport accessible: physical measures (the vehicles, infrastructure, terminals, “the whole journey”), economic measures (concessionary fares, economic incentives), requirements when public transport services are contracted out, and measures concerning rights to transport services.

10. The first publicly available output of the Euro-Access project is a draft report entitled “Accessible public transport: A view of Europe today – policies, laws and guidelines” and dated 20 February 2008 <http://www.euro-access.org/deliverables/EuroAccess_D1-v0.1.pdf>. This report, awaiting approval from the European Commission, reviews current policies and actual or proposed rail regulations some of which are relevant to national and international rail transport.

11. There are significant benefits and costs associated with the provision of accessible passenger rail services. On one hand, improved accessibility increases the number of disabled and elderly passengers and therefore generates higher revenues for rail operators. The ageing of the population projected for EU countries implies that both passenger traffic and revenue growth would be significant if train services, including international services, were more accessible. On the other hand, the improved quality of service entails extra costs (rolling stock, train stations, staff training, etc). The social cost-benefit ratio and net income (profit or loss) of rail operators associated with passenger accessibility have not been estimated but preliminary considerations indicate that they would vary across countries and individual operators, given specific characteristics of national heavy rail systems.⁴

IV. OTHER PARTS OF THE ECE REGION

12. Aside from the EU, transport of people with reduced mobility has become an important policy issue in the North American part of the ECE region where, according to some sources,

³ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2004/l_220/l_22020040621en00400057.pdf>

⁴ See for example European Cooperation in the Field of Scientific and Technical Research (1999), Passengers’ Accessibility of Heavy Rail Systems (Final Report), Brussels: European Communities, pp. 213-20 <<http://www.cost.esf.org/index.php?id=800>>.

about one-quarter of the population has some kind of mobility impairment at any point in time. Approximately two-thirds of this group consist of the elderly persons aged 65 or more. Proportions may well be similar in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and South-Eastern Europe (SEE), although demographic trends differ considerably across countries. However, the issue has been comparatively less prominent in the EECCA and SEE at the policy level.

13. Rail accessibility in the United States and Canada is characterized by similar policy objectives, technological approaches and regional imbalances in service levels as in countries of the European Union. While similar, North American technical norms for accessible infrastructure are not identical with EU norms. EECCA and SEE countries tend to adopt EU norms with a time lag although investments in barrier-free infrastructure and rolling stock remain at comparatively low levels.⁵

V. CONCLUSIONS

14. The issue of passenger accessibility of heavy rail systems has become increasingly important and can be expected to be addressed by government regulations in a not too distant future. The Working Party may wish to address the matter at hand as follows.

15. First, a forward-looking workshop could be organized by the secretariat in cooperation with the ITF and UNECE Population Unit and take place during the next SC.2 session in 2009. The Workshop would focus on selected aspects of passenger accessibility of rail systems (such as international approaches to rail accessibility, costs and benefits of accessible rail transportation, implications of demographic trends, ITS applications for improving rail transportation for elderly and disabled travellers), with a broad participation of government experts, rail companies, academic researchers and representatives of major NGOs that deal with the matter at hand.

16. Second, the Working Party may wish to consider addressing passenger accessibility in international rail transport in the longer term by developing terms of reference for a subsidiary expert group with a mandate to elaborate a resolution with recommendations on accessible rail transportation for member governments and, if appropriate, to draft relevant amendments to the AGC Agreement. Whereas regulations may well vary from country to country, people with mobility handicaps ought to be entitled to the same level of service when they cross international boundaries.

⁵ For instance, the regulations for building and operating elevators inside railway stations are governed in the EU by the EC Lift Directive 95/16 and Norm EN 81. In the US, Norm A 17 is applicable. Some 95 per cent of all elevators in the world comply either with the EC or US standards. E.g. in Russia “EN 81 is called PUBEL but has exactly the same wording.” A. von Knobloch and T. Zessin, “Inclined and vertical elevators – experiences, costs and technological developments,” a paper presented at the 11th International Conference on Mobility and Transport for the Elderly and Disabled Persons, Montreal, 2007
<<http://www.tc.gc.ca/pol/en/transed2007/pages/1136.htm>>