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Annual themes on Intermodal Transport

Follow-up to the 2013 workshop on weights and dimensions of intermodal transport units (ITU)

Note by the secretariat

I. Mandate

1. This document has been prepared in line with the output/activities of cluster 6: Intermodal transport and logistics of the programme of work of the transport subprogramme for 2014–2015 (ECE/TRANS/2014/23) as adopted by the Inland Transport Committee on 27 February 2014 (ECE/TRANS/240, para. 100).
2. As decided by the Working Party at its last session and in line with the road map on the future work and operation of the Working Party (ECE/TRANS/WP.24/133, paras. 29–38; ECE/TRANS/WP.24/125, paras. 21 and 40–41), a follow-up workshop to the 2013 themes: “Weights and dimensions of intermodal transport units” was held in Paris on 6 and 7 February 2014.
3. A summary report of this workshop is below.

II. Attendance

4. The workshop was hosted by the International Union of Railways (UIC) and was held on 6 and 7 February 2014 at Paris. It was attended by 18 experts from the Governments of Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Slovakia and Turkey. Representatives of the following non-governmental and industry groups attended: European Association for Forwarding, Transport and Customs Services; Groupement européen du transport combiné; International Bureau of Containers; International Union of Combined

Road/Rail Transport Companies; UIC; Allianz for Rail (Germany) and Norbert Dentressangle Group (France).

III. Conclusions

5. Moderated by Mr. Henri Maillard, former Chair of the Working Party, the workshop reviewed the interoperability requirements for road, rail and inland water transport of various intermodal transport units (ITUs). The pallet-wide 45-foot European container providing a loading space for 33 Europallets was examined on the basis of concrete examples.

6. The workshop noted that the safe transport by road of such rectangular ITUs would require an additional permissible loading length of around 15 cm, beyond the current 13.60 m loading length for road semi-trailers. Rail transport ITU was possible without major technical difficulties on standard container wagons, though with a loss of capacity and operational safety due to loading gaps between such units. Standard inland water vessels could also transport such containers. Optimal stowage of such ITUs (i.e. four wide) would, however, require a widening of the hold to 10.20 meters which would only be possible for newly-built vessels and with modified safety regulations.

7. While international road transport of 45 foot European containers is at present not permitted in the EU, the Government of France intended nevertheless to transmit proposals, via its national standardization organization AFNOR, to the European Standards Organization (CEN) for a possible standardization of such ITUs.

8. The workshop also reviewed various proposals to improve the aerodynamics and road safety of ITUs which will necessarily increase the overall length of ITUs or road transport vehicles. It felt that the environmental impacts and energy effects of such devices on road transport operations had not yet been studied thoroughly and under realistic circumstances. Also the impact of such devices, foldable or not, on intermodal transport had not yet been analysed.

9. Concerning the present exception of a 44 tonnes gross weight as maximum permissible weight of ITUs for intermodal transport hauls to and from terminals, the workshop felt that such an exception should be applicable to all ITUs and not only for ISO containers. In many EU countries such allowance is already provided.

10. The workshop also noted that for European intermodal transport as part of port hinterland operations, ISO standard and high-cube containers were the benchmark and could be carried without difficulty on intermodal transport services by road, rail and inland waterways. The possible realization of an universal standard for maritime and inland transport units (53 ft-16.15 m long, 8.6 ft-2.6 m wide and 9.6 ft-2.9 m high) would depend to a large extent on the needs of the transport industry for such high-volume units.

11. On 7 February 2014, the workshop visited the Quai de la Bourdonnais on the river Seine next to the Eiffel tower. Every morning, twenty-six tailor-made containers were shipped by reach-stacker from an inland water barge onto seven trucks that ensured their final distribution to eighty supermarkets in inner Paris (at a distance of 4 to 7 km). After, empty containers from these supermarkets are reloaded onto the barge which was then pushed back downstream to an inland water port 30 kms outside of the city centre. The project is supported by the city of Paris and the French Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy and contributes to decreasing the congestion on roads and to reducing atmospheric emissions and noise.