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UN/CEFACT RECOMMENDATION 33

**Establishing a Single Window to enhance the efficient exchange of information
between trade and government**

DOCUMENT FOR INFORMATION[*/]

Summary

This Recommendation was formally approved by the UN/CEFACT Heads of Delegation in September 2004, after an extensive review process by various industry, governmental and international organizations.

A Draft of the Recommendation (TRADE/CEFACT/2004/MISC.7) was previously submitted to the 10th UN/CEFACT Plenary session in May 2004.

The Recommendation was developed by the International Trade Procedures Working Group (ITPWG– TBG15) of the UN/CEFACT International Trade and Business Processes Group (TBG).

Additional information regarding Single Window and their implementation can be found in document TRADE/CEFACT/2005/26, which contains the Annexes to this document.

[*/]   The UNECE Trade Development and Timber Division has submitted the present document after the official documentation deadline due to resource constraints.

1. Introduction

1. In many countries, companies[1] involved in international trade regularly have to prepare and submit large volumes of information and documents to governmental authorities to comply with import, export and transit-related regulatory requirements. This information and documentation often has to be submitted through several different agencies, each with their own specific (manual or automated) systems and paper forms. These extensive requirements, together with their associated compliance costs, can constitute a serious burden to both governments and the business community and can also be a serious barrier to the development of international trade.

2. One approach to address this problem is the establishment of a Single Window whereby trade related information and/or documents need only be submitted once at a single entry point. This can enhance the availability and handling of information, expedite and simplify information flows between trade and government and can result in a greater harmonisation and sharing of the relevant data across governmental systems, bringing meaningful gains to all parties involved in cross-border trade. The use of such a facility can result in improved efficiency and effectiveness of official controls and can reduce costs for both governments and traders due to a better use of resources.

3. The Single Window is, therefore, a practical application of trade facilitation concepts meant to reduce non-tariff barriers to trade and can deliver immediate benefits to all members of the trading community.

2. Scope

4. Within the context of this Recommendation, a Single Window is defined as a facility that allows parties involved in trade and transport to lodge standardized information and documents with a single entry point to fulfil all import, export, and transit-related regulatory requirements. If information is electronic, then individual data elements should only be submitted once.

5. In practical terms, the Single Window aims to expedite and simplify information flows between trade and government and bring meaningful gains to all parties involved in cross-border trade. The Single Window is generally managed centrally by a lead agency, enabling the appropriate governmental authorities and agencies to receive or have access to the information relevant for their purposes. In addition, participating authorities and agencies should co-ordinate their controls. In some cases, the Single Window may provide facilities for payment of relevant duties, taxes and fees.

6. A Single Window does not <u>necessarily</u> imply the implementation and use of high-tech information and communication technology (ICT), although facilitation can often be greatly enhanced if Governments identify and adopt <u>relevant</u> ICT technologies for a Single Window.

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[1] Companies include exporters and importers, freight forwarders, shipping agents, customs brokers, transporters, carriers and other parties directly involved in the movement of goods.

3.   Benefits

7.   The implementation of a Single Window can be highly beneficial for both Governments and trade. For Governments it can bring better risk management, improved levels of security and increased revenue yields with enhanced trader compliance. Trading communities benefit from transparent and predictable interpretation and application of rules, and better deployment of human and financial resources, resulting in appreciable gains in productivity and competitiveness.

8.   The value of such a facility for governments and traders has taken on increased importance in the new security environment with its emphasis on advance information and risk analysis.

4.   Environment

9.   The introduction of a Single Window will often first require a feasibility study and needs analysis to determine its potential scope, the level and nature of demand, data and other information requirements, legal issues, options for implementation (including possible phases of implementation), potential for and nature of a pilot implementation, the cost of implementation under the different scenarios, other resources required (human, technical, etc), potential benefits and risks, time frame, implementation and management strategy.

10.   The most important prerequisites for the successful implementation of a Single Window facility are the political will of the government and the relevant governmental authorities and the full support and participation of the business community. The basic legal framework, including the introduction of privacy laws and rules providing privacy and security in the exchange of information, will also have to be developed.

5.   Use of International Standards

11.   When implementing a Single Window, governments and trade are strongly encouraged to consider the use of existing recommendations, standards and tools that have been developed by intergovernmental agencies and international organisations such as UNECE, UNCTAD, WCO, IMO, ICAO and the ICC. The use of standards and available tools will help ensure that the systems developed to implement the Single Window are more likely to be compatible with similar developments in other countries, and could also help in the exchange of information between such facilities over time.

6.   Recommendation

12.   The United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), being aware, that the establishment of a Single Window facility, as described in this document and the attached guidelines, can harmonise and simplify the exchange of information between government and trade and considering that this will bring real benefits to both governments and trade, recommends that governments and those engaged in the international trade and movement of goods:

> ➤ Actively consider the possibility of implementing a Single Window facility in their country that allows:
>   - parties involved in trade and transport to lodge standardized information and documents with a single entry point to fulfil all import, export, and transit-related regulatory requirements. If information is electronic, then individual data elements should only be submitted once.
>   - the sharing of all information in respect of international trade transactions, which is supported by a legal framework that provides privacy and security in the exchange of information;
>   - such a single entry point to disseminate, or provide access to, the relevant information to participating governmental authorities or authorised agencies and, where appropriate, to co-ordinate the controls of the various governmental authorities;
>   - the addition of facilities to provide trade related government information and receive payment of duties and other charges.
>
> ➤ Proceed with the setting up of a Single Window facility at the national level through a collaborative effort with all relevant governmental authorities and the business community;
>
> ➤ Give full consideration to the guidelines attached to the present recommendation in the establishment of their Single Window facility.

13.   UN/CEFACT invites governments to share and report to the UNECE Secretariat, where appropriate, the experiences and activities leading to the implementation of a single window facility in their respective countries.

ANNEX

GUIDELINES FOR ESTABLISHING A SINGLE WINDOW

Issued as a complement to UN/CEFACT Recommendation 33

1. INTRODUCTION

These Guidelines, which are complementary to UN/CEFACT Recommendation Number 33 on the Establishment of a Single Window, are designed to assist governments and trade in planning and establishing a Single Window facility for international import, export and transit-related regulatory requirements. They provide an overview of the main issues that have to be addressed, some of the tools available and the steps to be taken.

2. WHAT IS A SINGLE WINDOW?

As specified in UN/CEFACT Recommendation Number 33, the Single Window concept covered in these Guidelines refers to a facility that allows parties involved in trade and transport to lodge standardized information and documents with a single entry point to fulfil all import, export, and transit-related regulatory requirements. If information is electronic, then individual data elements should only be submitted once.

3. WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON MODELS FOR A SINGLE WINDOW?

Although there are many possible approaches to establishing a Single Window, three basic models were discerned from the review undertaken by the UN/CEFACT International Trade Procedures Working Group (ITPWG/TBG15) of various systems that are currently in place or being developed[2]. However, before considering these models, it is important to point out that:
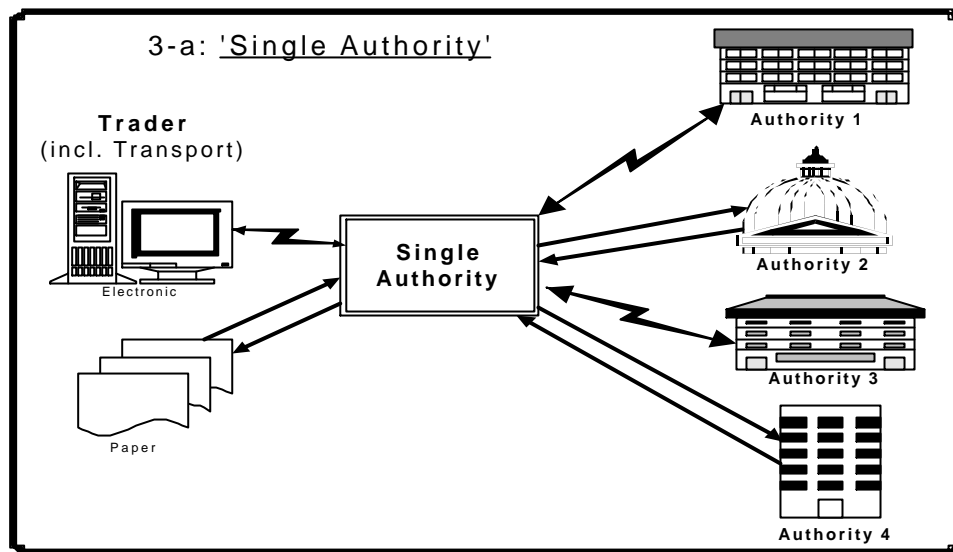
- Although many business and trade practices are common to all countries, each country will also have its own unique requirements and conditions.
- A Single Window should represent a close cooperation between all involved governmental authorities and agencies, and the trading community;
- A Single Window does not <u>necessarily</u> imply the implementation and use of high-tech information and communication technology (ICT), although facilitation can often be greatly enhanced if Governments identify and adopt <u>relevant</u> ICT technologies for a Single Window.
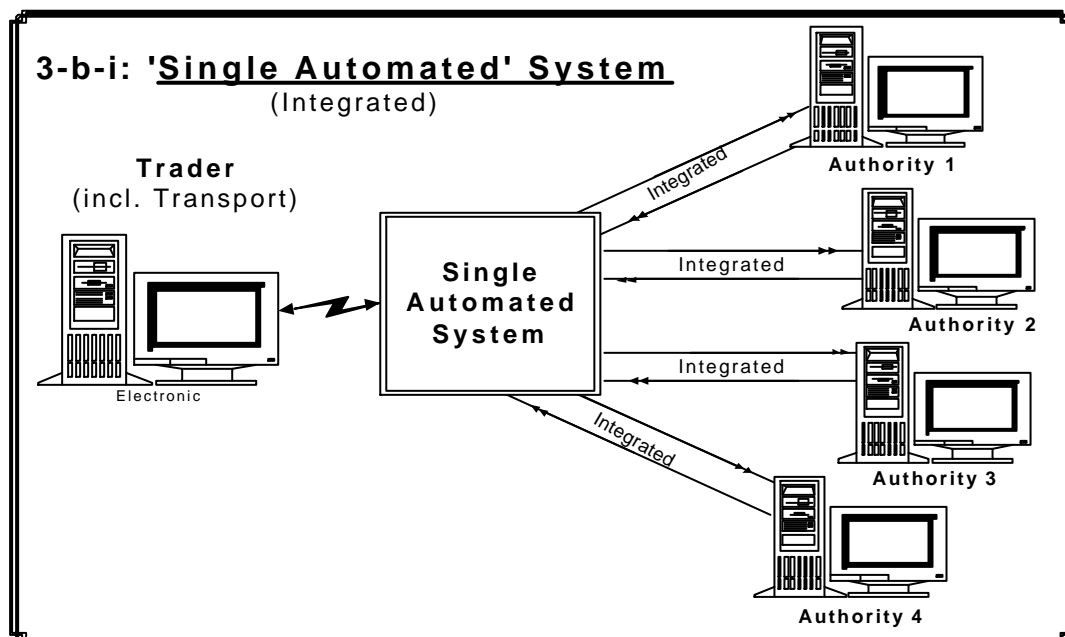
The three basic models for the Single Window are:

a) **A Single <u>Authority</u>** that receives information, either on paper or electronically, disseminates this information to all relevant governmental authorities, and co-ordinates controls to prevent undue hindrance in the logistical chain. For example, in the Swedish Single Window, Customs performs selected tasks on behalf of some authorities (primarily for the National Tax Administration (import
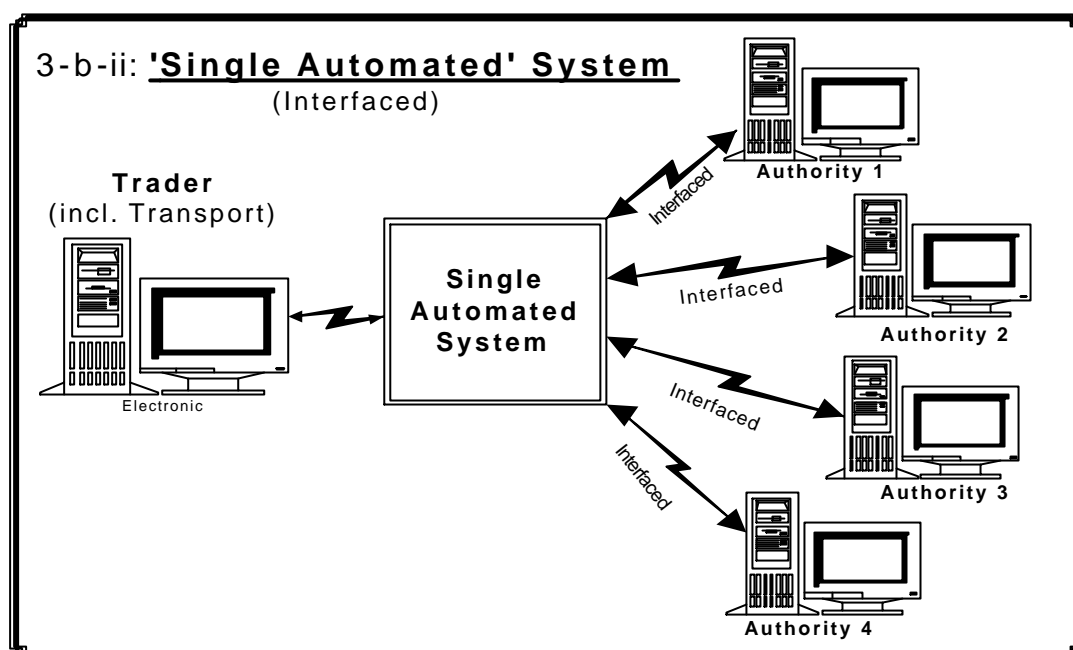
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[2] In preparing these Guidelines, the UN/CEFACT International Trade Procedures Working Group (ITPWG/TBG15)reviewed the operation or development of the Single Windows in Australia, The Czech Republic, Finland, Japan, Mauritius, The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Singapore, Thailand, United Kingdom and the United States of America.

VAT), Statistics Sweden (trade statistics), the Swedish Board of Agriculture and the national Board of Trade (import licensing)).
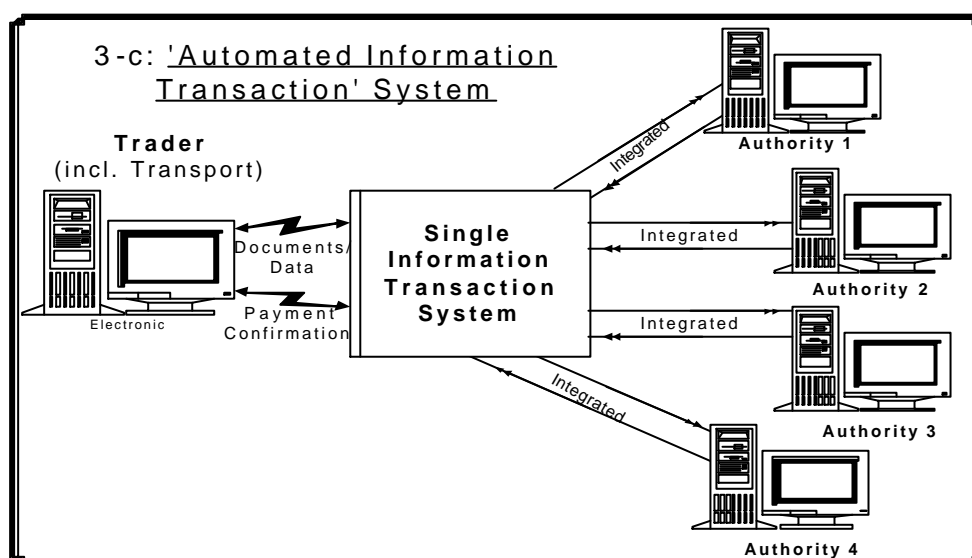

3-a: 'Single Authority'

b) **A Single Automated System for the collection and dissemination of information** (either public or private) that integrates the electronic collection, use, and dissemination (and storage) of data related to trade that crosses the border. For example, the United States has established a program that allows traders to submit standard data only once and the system processes and distributes the data to the agencies that have an interest in the transaction. There are various possibilities:

   i.   Integrated System: Data is <u>processed</u> through the system

   ii.   Interfaced System (decentralised): Data is <u>sent</u> to the agency for processing

   iii.   A combination of i and ii.

3-b-i: 'Single Automated' System (Integrated)

3-b-ii: 'Single Automated' System (Interfaced)

c) **An automated Information Transaction System** through which a trader can submit electronic trade declarations to the various authorities for processing and approval in a single application.

3-c: 'Automated Information Transaction' System

In this approach, approvals are transmitted electronically from governmental authorities to the trader's computer. Such a system is in use in Singapore and Mauritius. Moreover, in the Singaporean system, fees, taxes and duties are computed automatic ally and deducted from the traders' bank accounts. When establishing such a system, consideration could be given to the use of a master dataset, which consists of specific identities, which are pre-identified and pre-validated in advance for all relevant transactions[3].

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[3] For further information on master data sets, see UN/TRADE/CEFACT/2002/32/Rev 2 - "Facilitation Recommendation on Providing Guidance to Implementers of Electronic Business" - especially Appendix 3 on Simple e -business. See Annex D for a full listing of existing international recommendations, standards and tools.

3.1   Lead Agency for a Single Window

The appropriate agency to lead the establishment and operation of a Single Window will vary from country to country depending on legal, political and organisational issues[4]. The lead agency must be a very strong organisation with the necessary vision, authority (legal), political backing, financial and human resources and interfaces to other key organisations. In some cases, because of their pivotal role, the information and documentation they receive and their key position at borders, Customs or port authorities can be the agency best suited to lead a Single Window development and implementation. They can also be the 'entrance' points to receive and coordinate the flow of information related to the fulfilment of all cross-border regulatory requirements.

However, the lead organisation does not necessarily have to be a governmental organisation; it can be a private entity such as a Chamber of Commerce or a semi-state organisation such as a Board of Trade. However, private organisations sometimes lack the legal authority to issue and accept information and documents and the power to enforce rules. Therefore, in such a scenario, it may be necessary for the private organisation to seek the explicit formal support of a governmental organisation that has such power at its disposal.

One example of a public-private partnership that led to the establishment of a Single Window was the Mauritius Network Services Ltd, in Mauritius. This is a tripartite joint-venture company involving public and private sector representatives and a foreign technical partner (see Annex A in document TRADE/CEFACT/2005/26 for further details).

Of the twelve Single Windows reviewed in the development of these Guidelines, the majority were lead by Customs. The distribution is as follows:

- Customs (including Ministry of Finance): 7
- Port authorities: 2
- Other governmental authorities: 1
- Public/private partnership: 2

4.   WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF ESTABLISHING A SINGLE WINDOW?

A Single Window can simplify and facilitate to a considerable extent the process of providing and sharing the necessary information to fulfil trade-related regulatory requirements for both trader and authorities. The use of such a system can result in improved efficiency and effectiveness of official controls and can reduce costs for both governments and traders due to a better use of resources.

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[4] The lead agency might only have a coordination role (e.g. in the Netherlands) or it might be necessary to set up some sort of agreement that defines the functions and responsibilities of the stakeholders and the organisation or (a private or private/public) company that is running the single window. This relationship could be subject to periodic assessment.

4.1 Benefits for Government

A Single Window can lead to a better combination of existing governmental systems and processes, while at the same time promoting a more open and facilitative approach to the way in which governments operate and communicate with business. For example, as traders will submit all the required information and documents through a single entity, more effective systems can be established for a quicker and more accurate validation and distribution of this information to all relevant government agencies. This will also result in better co-ordination and co-operation between the governmental authorities involved in trade-related activities.

Risk management techniques for control and enforcement purposes can also be enhanced through a Single Window facility that collects all data in a systematic way, resulting in more secure and efficient trade procedures. Further, the implementation of a payment system within a Single Window ensures rapid and accurate payment to governmental authorities and agencies for required duties and any other charges.

A Single Window that provides up-to-date information regarding tariff rates and other legal and procedural requirements will reduce any unintentional errors and increase trader compliance. In addition, the collection and co-ordination of the required information and trade documentation through a Single Window will reduce the use of both human and financial resources, thus enabling governments to re-deploy resources previously used for administrative tasks to areas of greater concern and importance.

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Benefits for government

- **More effective and efficient deployment of resources**
- **Correct (and often increased) revenue yield**
- **Improved trader compliance**
- **Enhanced security**
- **Increased integrity and transparency**

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4.2 Benefits for trade

The main benefit for the trading community is that a Single Window can provide the trader with a single point for the one-time submission of all required information and documentation to all governmental agencies involved in export, import or transit procedures.

As the Single Window enables governments to process submitted information, documents and fees both faster and more accurately, traders should benefit from faster clearance and release times, enabling them to speed up the supply chain. In addition, the improved transparency and increased predictability can further reduce the potential for corrupt behaviour from both the public and private sector.

If the Single Window functions as a focal point for the access to updated information on current trade rules, regulations and compliance requirements, it will lower the administrative costs of trade transactions and encourage greater trader compliance.

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Benefits for trade

- **Cutting costs by reducing delays**
- **Faster clearance and release**
- **Predictable application and explanation of rules**
- **More effective and efficient deployment of resources**
- **Increased transparency**

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5. SERVICES PROVIDED BY A SINGLE WINDOW

A Single Window can provide a wide variety of services and facilities depending on its design and coverage[5]. A short summary of the services provided by a selected sample of existing Single Windows is provided below. More complete descriptions, including additional details on benefits, implementation model and financial models, are provided in Annex A (see document TRADE/CEFACT/2005/26).

Mauritius: The Single Window in Mauritius allows the submission of customs declarations, their processing and their return by electronic means through TradeNet, a proprietary system developed by Mauritius Network Services Ltd. in collaboration with Singapore Network Services Ltd. (which now operates under the name 'Crimson Logic'). The system is an EDI-based network application that allows the electronic transmission of documents between various parties involved in the movement of import and export goods, namely the Customs & Excise Department, Freight Forwarders, Shipping Agents, Customs Brokers, the Cargo Handling Corporation, the Ministry of Commerce, Operators within the Freeport, and Importers and Exporters. Banks will also be connected to TradeNet in the future to allow for the electronic payment of duties and taxes via the Mauritius Automated Clearing and Settlement System (MACSS) of the Bank of Mauritius.

TradeNet has also provided the Customs & Excise Department with an opportunity to embark on a major computerisation project, by way of the implementation of the Customs Management System (CMS), that links with it in the processing, approval, and clearance of customs declarations.

Source for further information:
http://mns.intnet.mu/projects/tradenet.htm

Sweden: The Swedish Single Window system, known as "The Virtual Customs Office" (VCO), allows for electronic Customs declarations and applications for import and export licenses and licenses for strategic products. It can be integrated into the trader's business system and can automatically update the system with changes in exchange rates, tariff codes and duty rates. The Single Window also includes all trade-related regulations and can provide traders with automated updates on changes via Internet and/or SMS-services. The VCO also offers interactive training courses and the possibility to customize and create personal virtual

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[5] In preparing these Guidelines, the UN/CEFACT International Trade Procedures Working Group (ITPWG/TBG15) reviewed the operation or development of the Single Windows in Australia, The Czech Republic, Finland, Japan, Mauritius, The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Singapore, Thailand, United Kingdom and the United States of America.

customs offices, which contain all information and processes that each trader uses and finds relevant to its needs and wants.

Import and export declarations can be processed both via Internet and UN/EDIFACT. All services are pooled on a single VCO web page, currently more than 150 e-services are available. The information and procedures on the VCO supports ten different languages.

The system currently involves the Swedish Customs (lead agency), the Swedish Board of Agriculture, the National Board of Trade, the National Inspectorate of Strategic Products and the Police.
Source for further information:
http://www.tullverket.se/TargetGroups/General_English/frameset.htm

Netherlands: The Single Window at Schiphol Airport allows for the electronic submission of the cargo manifest by airlines to Customs. Information is supplied by trade to Customs via the so-called VIPPROG system, which was developed by Customs. The VIPPROG system is an EDI based network application that allows the electronic transmission of the Freight Forwarding Message, a standard message defined by IATA that is available in the SITA system of IATA. The information from SITA is transmitted via the privately owned community system 'Cargonaut', when the airline has given an authorisation to 'Cargonaut' to provide customs with the information. Customs pays Cargonaut a fee for use and maintenance of the community system.

The Single Window is based on cooperation with other enforcement agencies that has resulted in the establishment of a so-called "cargo clearance point"(CCP) in 1994. It was established to improve the handling of goods by various enforcement agencies. This CCP is based on a covenant between Customs, ten other enforcement agencies and trade. The other enforcement agencies include the Marechaussee (immigration), the Health Care Inspectorate, various divisions of the Inspectorate General of Transport, Public Works and Water Management, the Inspectorate for Health Protection and Veterinary Public Health, National Inspection Service for Livestock and Meat and the Plant Protection Service. The CCP is managed by Customs.

In order to be able to give the other enforcement agencies the relevant information they need to perform their tasks, these agencies provide Customs with risk-profiles on the basis of which Customs analyses the information and passes it on, either electronically or on paper, to the other agencies. The other agencies inform Customs in return if they want to check the goods. If more than one agency (including Customs) wants to check the goods, the CCP co-ordinates the checks of all the agencies involved. The aim is to prevent multiple checks that will unnecessarily disrupt the logistical process.

United States: The Single Window system being developed and implemented in the United States is known as the International Trade Data System (ITDS). The ITDS vision is to use a secure, integrated government-wide system to meet private sector and Federal requirements for the electronic collection, use, and dissemination of standard trade and transportation data. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) will integrate ITDS requirements into a joint Automated Commercial Environment/International Trade Data System (ACE/ITDS) system in an effort to avoid parallel, separate, and potentially duplicative systems.

ITDS has identified the following major stakeholder groups: Participating Government Agencies (PGAs), the trade, oversight bodies, and CBP.

Participating Government Agencies (PGAs) have international trade missions including (a) control over admission or export of cargo, crew, and conveyances, (b) regulation of compliance with federal trade laws such as tariffs and quotas, licenses, and operating authorities, (c) promotion of international trade through activities such as export assistance, and (d) collection and reporting of statistical information about international trade and transportation. For ITDS purposes, agencies can be categorized as follows:

➤ **Border Operations Agencies** – have responsibility for the import, export, and transit trade processes related to cargo, conveyance and/or crew. Border Operations Agencies may also have license and permit, statistical, or trade promotion responsibilities. Border Operation Agencies sometimes are referred to as admissibility and export control agencies.

➤ **License and Permit Agencies** – use ACE as the primary means for recording and maintaining license and permit information. License and Permit Agencies may also have statistical or trade promotion responsibilities.

➤ **Statistical Agencies** – use ACE to extract trade or transportation data, usually not at the transaction-level, to support needs for their own statistical analysis. Statistical Agencies may also have trade promotion responsibilities.

➤ **Trade Promotion Agencies** – use ACE to facilitate U.S. trade by making available basic import and export information, such as rules and regulations, to the trade, service providers, and the public.

Sources for further information:
http://www.itds.treas.gov
http://www.cbp.gov

6.   PRACTICAL STEPS IN PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING A SINGLE WINDOW

Implementing a Single Window is a significant undertaking, involving many stakeholders and requiring commitment from many players in both government and business. It is essential, therefore, that a systematic approach be adopted from the outset. Some of the key steps involved are discussed briefly below and are presented in more detail in Annex B (see document TRADE/CEFACT/2005/26). However, the implementation approach will likely be heavily influenced by the political, social and cultural conditions and traditions in a given country.

Developing the Initial Concept for the Single Window: Serious work on the establishment of a Single Window in a country often starts with the preparation of a concept or briefing paper based on preliminary research, most probably prepared by the lead governmental authority or agency, or a private organisation likely to be heavily involved in the eventual implementation of the project.

Making the Initial Decision to Examine the Feasibility of a Single Window: In the framework of an open partnership between government and trade, a meeting would typically be organised for high-level representatives from all relevant trade related organisations[6], and governmental authorities and agencies to

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[6] Typical trade related organisations that could be involved include the National Chamber of Commerce, Importers and/or Exporters Association, Confederation of Industry, Business Associations, etc. When the Single Window has a payments component, banks and other financial institutions must be involved.

discuss the Single Window concept (or concept paper). The object of such a meeting is to get agreement on the project concept and to launch a feasibility study that would include a detailed needs analysis and technological assessment.

Presuming a positive decision is reached to proceed with the feasibility study, the meeting should establish a Project Management Group made up of senior representatives of the key agencies that would be directly involved in implementing and utilising the Single Window. The meeting should also establish a Task Force with appropriate technical and managerial representatives of key agencies in order to carry out the organisational and implementation work required for the project.

Undertaking the Feasibility Study: The feasibility study is a key element of the overall Single Window development. The study should determine the potential scope of the Single Window, the level and nature of demand, possible scenarios for implementation (including possible phases of implementation), potential for and nature of a pilot implementation, the cost of implementation under the different scenarios, other resources required (human, technical, etc), potential benefits and risks, time frame, implementation and management strategy. Some of the key areas that should be covered in the feasibility study are presented in Annex C (see document TRADE/CEFACT/2005/26).

Consideration of the Feasibility Study Report: The findings of the feasibility study should be considered and approved (or otherwise) by the Task Force and eventually submitted for consideration by the Project Management Group. Sufficient time should be allowed for this process, as it is essential to have the maximum input and agreement before the report is finalised. Following this, the agreed preferred Single Window option and the accompanying implementation scenario chosen should then be presented to the wider government and trade community, possibly through a national symposium on the establishment of a Single Window.

Implementation: Whether a pilot, phased or full implementation approach is chosen, it is essential to initiate a clear project management approach throughout the project implementation. The project management plan, which must be formally agreed by both the Project Management Group and Task Force, should contain a set of clearly defined interrelated tasks and event milestones that can assist the Task Force and the Project Management Group to plan, execute, monitor, evaluate, and adjust the project implementation. Key elements of the project implementation plan are listed in Annex B, Section 5 (see document TRADE/CEFACT/2005/26).

7. STANDARDS AND TOOLS AVAILABLE TO ASSIST IN IMPLEMENTING A SINGLE WINDOW

When implementing a Single Window, governments and trade are strongly encouraged to consider the use of recommendations, standards and existing tools that have been developed over the past by intergovernmental agencies and international organisations such as UNECE, UNCTAD, the WCO, IMO, ICAO and the ICC. Some of the instruments in this category are described in Annex D (see document TRADE/CEFACT/2005/26).

The use of standards and available tools will help ensure that the systems developed to implement the Single Window are more likely to be compatible with similar developments in other countries, and they could also help in the exchange of information between such Single Window facilities over time. In addition, the use of existing tools and best practices should help reduce the overall cost of implementation, as the project will be drawing on work already completed by international standards organisations.

8.   KEY FACTORS IN ESTABLISHING A SUCCESSFUL SINGLE WINDOW

The successful introduction and implementation of a Single Window concept depends to a considerable extent on certain pre-conditions and success factors that vary from country to country and from project to project. This final section of the Guidelines lists some of the success factors gleaned from a review of the operation and development of Single Windows in various countries undertaken by the UN/CEFACT International Trade Procedures Working Group (ITPWG/TBG15). The list of factors is not arranged in any particular order, as the situation in different countries and areas of operation can vary considerably. It is noted that although several of the points have already been mentioned in the Guidelines, they are repeated here for completeness and emphasis.

8.1 Political will
The existence of strong political will on the part of <u>both</u> government and business to implement a Single Window is one of the most critical factors for its successful introduction. Achieving this political will requires proper dissemination of clear and impartial information on objectives, implications, benefits and possible obstacles in the establishment of the Single Window. The availability of resources to establish a Single Window is often directly related to the level of political will and commitment to the project. Establishing the necessary political will is the foundation stone upon which all the other success factors have to rest.

8.2 Strong Lead Agency
Related to the need for political will is the requirement for a strong, resourceful and empowered lead organisation both to launch the project and see it through its various development stages. This organisation must have the appropriate political support, legal authority, human and financial resources, and links with the business community. In addition, it is essential to have a strong individual within the organisation who will be the project champion.

8.3 Partnership between Government and Trade
A Single Window is a practical model for co-operation between agencies within government and also between government and trade. It presents a good opportunity for a public-private partnership in the establishment and operation of the system. Consequently, representatives from <u>all </u>relevant public and private sector agencies should be invited to participate in the development of the system from the outset. This should include participation in all stages of the project, from the initial development of project objectives, situation analysis, and project design through to implementation. The ultimate success of the Single Window will depend critically on the involvement, commitment and readiness of these parties, to ensure that the system becomes a regular feature of their business process.

8.4 Establishment of Clear Project Boundaries and Objectives

As with any project, establishing clearly defined goals and objectives for the Single Window at the outset will help guide the project through its various development stages. These should be based on a careful analysis of the needs, aspirations and resources of the key stakeholders, and also on the existing infrastructure and current approaches to the submission of trade-related information to government. As stated previously, this analysis should involve all key stakeholders from both government and trade. A Single Window should generally be perceived as part of a country's overall strategy to improve trade facilitation.

8.5. User Friendliness and Accessibility

Accessibility and user friendliness are also key factors for the success of a Single Window project. Comprehensive operating instructions and guidelines should be created for users. Help Desk and user support services, including training, should be established, especially in the early implementation phase of the project. The Help Desk can be a useful means for collecting feedback information on areas of difficulty and bottlenecks in the system, and this information can be a valuable tool in its further development. The need for and value of practical training courses for users cannot be over- emphasised, especially in the early implementation phase of the project. It is also important to address the multilingual requirements in some countries.

It is essential that the design of the system be attuned to the real ICT capacities of the country or region in which it will operate. Keeping in view potential future technological developments in this area, the maximum number of users should be able to utilise the Single Window from the moment it is launched. In some cases, this may dictate the use of a paper-based system or a dual paper/on-line approach, designed around the limited on-line access capacities of a given geographical area.

8.6 Legally-enabling Environment

Establishing the necessary legal environment is a pre-requisite for Single Window implementation. Related laws and legal restrictions must be identified and carefully analysed. For example, changes in legislation can sometimes be required in order to facilitate electronic data submission/exchange and/ or an electronic signature system. Further, restrictions concerning the sharing of information among authorities and agencies, as well as organisational arrangements for the operation of a Single Window, may need to be overcome. Also, the legal issues involved in delegating power and authority to a lead agency need to be examined.

8.7 International Standards and Recommendations

The implementation of a Single Window generally entails the harmonisation and alignment of the relevant trade documents and data sets. In order to ensure compatibility with other international systems and applications, these documents and data models must be based on international standards and recommendations. This is true even if the Single Window is designed to operate without using electronic data communications.

Whenever electronic data interchange is involved, the harmonisation, simplification and standardisation of all data used in international trade are an essential requirement for smooth, automatic operation of the Single Window. The harmonisation of data used by different participants in their legacy systems can be one of the biggest challenges for automated Single Window implementation. UN/CEFACT trade facilitation

recommendations (such as UN/CEFACT Recommendations Number 1 and 18) contain valuable information for Single Window implementation of the system.

8.8. Identification of Possible Obstacles

It is possible that all players in government and/or trade may not welcome the implementation of a Single Window. In such cases, the specific concerns of opponents should be identified and addressed as early as possible in the project. Identified obstacles should be considered individually, taking into account the local situation and requirements. Clearly, cost can be a major obstacle but this must be balanced against future benefits as described in Section 4. However, it is important to be clear about the financial implications of the project so that the decision regarding full or phased implementation can be made. Legal issues also constitute a significant potential problem area.

8.9 Financial Model

A decision on the financial model for the Single Window should be reached as early as possible in the project. This could range from a system totally financed by government (e.g. the Netherlands) to an entirely self-sustainable model (e.g. Mauritius). Also, possibilities for public-private partnerships should be explored, if this is deemed a preferred approach. Clarity on this point can significantly influence decision-makers to support the implementation of the system.

8.10 Payment Possibility

Some Single Windows (e.g. Thailand) include a system for the payment of government fees, taxes, duties and other charges. This can be a very attractive feature for both government and trade, and is especially important when the system is required to generate revenue. However, it should be noted that adding payment features often requires a considerable amount of additional work with harmonisation and especially security.

8.11 Promotion and Marketing

Promotion and marketing of a Single Window is very important and should be carefully planned. The promotion campaign should involve representatives from all the key government and trade stakeholders in the system, as these parties can provide valuable information on the expectations of the user community and help to direct the promotion and marketing messages. A clear implementation timetable should be established and promoted at the earliest possible stage of a Single Window project, as this will assist in the marketing of the project and will help potential users to plan their related operations and investments according to this schedule. Marketing should clearly identify the benefits and cost savings as well as specific points relating to the increased efficiency derived from the implementation of a Single Window operation.

8.12 Communications Strategy

Establishing a proper mechanism for keeping all stakeholders informed on project goals, objectives, targets, progress (and difficulties) creates trust and avoids the type of misunderstanding that can lead to the undoing of an otherwise good project. Within this context, it is extremely important to handle stakeholders' expectations properly, and it is worth remembering the business adage of promising less and delivering more (rather than the other way round). It is also important to remember that stakeholders often do not expect miracles: solving simple practical problems can generate significant goodwill to carry the project through difficult patches along the development path.

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