

Salle XIX

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE 60th Anniversary Session, Geneva 25-27 April 2007

Item 8: Promoting sustainable development in the ECE region: some decisive factors
(b) Secure transport development: a key to regional cooperation

<p>Secure Transport Development: a Key to Regional Cooperation Friday 27 April 14.30-17.15 hours</p>
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Concept Note

It is widely accepted that efficient and secure transport links are a key factor for socio-economic development of countries. Mobility is an essential part of everyday life of people. Transport of goods is vital to the economy: it is an essential part of the production and distribution processes. In an increasingly interrelated world, efficient and secure international transport links are a most basic, most strategic pre-condition for economic cooperation and integration of countries as well as for reducing economic and social disparities between them. They are particularly important for landlocked countries and for countries located at long distances to and from major markets.

For historical reasons, however, transport links in many ECE member countries are far from being efficient and secure. Despite some progress made in the last ten years, they are still lagging behind transport links in other ECE member countries. For example, the number of km of motorways per million people in the twelve new European Union members, on average, is about 4 times lower than in the fifteen other EU members. The situation is likely to be much worse in the CIS. In addition to insufficient and low quality infrastructures, international transport in the region also suffers from border procedures and controls that are long, cumbersome and not necessarily secure. This situation hampers economic cooperation in the region and affects negatively the economic and social development of those countries themselves.

Much remains to be done to bring the capacity and quality of transport links in those countries in line with those in other ECE member countries. In view of the large infrastructure development needs and the considerable financial outlays they require, a careful and coordinated plan is called for, including the establishment of priority links and the identification of priority projects along those links. This requires a particular cooperation effort from the countries concerned.

ECE Member States, acting together under ECE auspices, concluded four major infrastructure agreements -AGR, AGC, AGN and AGTC-, establishing commonly agreed infrastructure networks for road, rail, inland water and combined transport respectively. However, these are long-term networks, with no priorities or deadlines. Countries implement them out of sometimes meagre national budgets, in competition with other priority needs such as health or education.

In order to implement those networks in a faster and more coordinated manner, 21 Central, Eastern and South-Eastern European countries have elaborated a TEM and TER Master Plan, which has identified their priority road and rail transport links and, on the basis of a common methodology, evaluated and prioritized a number of projects along those links.

The European Commission (EC), for its part, has now incorporated to the Trans-European Networks (TEN-T) a number of transport links in the 10+2 new EU Member States and is considering ways and means for developing the five trans-European transport axes that were identified in the EU High-Level Group chaired by Ms. de Palacio.

As to Euro-Asian transport links, a joint ECE-ESCAP project funded by the UN Development Account, in which 18 countries in the Euro-Asian region, including China, have participated, has agreed on priority Euro-Asian transport routes and, on the basis of a methodology similar to that used for the TEM and TER Master Plan, evaluated and prioritized projects along those routes.

In order to ensure a coordinated development of efficient and secure transport links in the ECE region, it seems useful to review the actual situation in the region. What are the challenges in terms of integrating national transport networks into a pan-European network? What are the challenges in terms of harmonization of border regulations? What are the challenges in terms of proper financing? What are the challenges in terms of developing environmentally sound transport systems? Are there, existing institutional mechanisms in place that will allow these challenges to be addressed?

In the light of these challenges, some questions to be asked are:

- 1) Many ECE member countries are struggling to develop transport links. What are the challenges they are facing?
- 2) Given the scarce resources available, regulatory and border crossing facilitation measures can contribute to make a better use of existing infrastructures and reduce or delay the need for new infrastructure development. Are measures taken sufficient?
- 3) Rehabilitation, upgrading and maintenance may provide more cost efficient solutions than new construction projects. Is this approach sufficiently explored?
- 4) The development of transport links in the ECE region is a trans-boundary issue, which requires international cooperation and coordination. Are the existing multilateral mechanisms appropriate for such cooperation? How can EC and ECE better cooperate and coordinate their efforts?
- 5) Priority international transport links in Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe as well as priority Euro-Asian transport links have been identified. Priority projects along those links have been evaluated and prioritized. There is also an assessment of the cost. What are the financing prospects? Is there an appropriate international financial framework? What are the criteria for benefiting from international financing?
- 6) Private sector can play a major role in financing transport links. What are the conditions for its involvement? What is the experience of leading countries in this area?