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Item 3 of the provisional agenda

European Agreement on Main International Railway Lines

International Railway Passenger Hubs

Note by the secretariat

I. Background

1. The European Agreement on Main International Railway Lines (AGC) was created to facilitate and develop international railway traffic in the ECE region through a coordinated development and construction plan for the railways. Such a plan is essential to meet the future needs of railway traffic. This was of key importance when the agreement was established to facilitate the breaking down of barriers at borders within the ECE region. It sets out the main railway lines of major importance and the technical characteristics of these lines.
2. Subsequent to the completion of the AGC, member States chose to complement this agreement with the creation of the European Agreement on Important International Combined Transport Lines and Related Installations (AGTC). This agreement is of importance as it provides the bridge between the rail sector and other transport modes. In particular it identifies the rail lines to be used for combined transport and the key terminals and other facilities necessary to allow for freight that has travelled on rail to make its last mile journey on other modes of transport.
3. The technical parameters of the AGC have recently been updated to reflect different line categories, primarily to include high speed rail networks not originally foreseen in the AGC.
4. In addition, and in parallel, the Convention on the facilitation of border crossing procedures for passengers, luggage and load-luggage carried in international traffic by rail has recently been completed to further facilitate the movement of passengers across borders.

5. While the technical parameters, the facilitation of border crossings and the identification of combined transport lines and terminals have been identified through this framework a gap remains on the passenger side. In no European wide legislation is there a tool to identify key international passenger terminals and their requirements. Furthermore, the importance of the development of international passenger rail transport was highlighted in ITC Resolution No.264.

II. The development of international rail passenger hubs

6. If international passenger transport by rail is to grow, especially in the post-COVID-19 situation, it is important that services to customers are offered in a harmonised manner ideally at a specific list of internationally recognised passenger hubs and terminals.

7. The identification and categorization of such hubs and terminals according to internationally recognized parameters would further facilitate the growth of high speed and conventional speed international rail passenger services. It would provide easier interchange between international and national intercity services, between these services and local trains and between these services and urban interconnections with other transport modes. This would further facilitate rail transport becoming the preferred mode of travel in the pan-European region on medium to long distance routes whilst at the same time providing better connectivity to, and within city centres.

8. These passenger hubs would need to:

- be identified along the AGC network; and
- work towards meeting a clearly defined set of minimum services that they offer to passengers (e.g. ticket offices, harmonised signage, waiting facilities, etc.).

9. By providing passengers with a common, agreed set of minimum services within a selection of services, they have a degree of certainty that will attract further journeys to the railways. This is especially true for international journeys where, all too often, passengers are apprehensive about arriving at a new station because of what they will find. This is in sharp contrast to arriving at a new airport where signage and services are often very similar, irrespective of the size of the airport, facilitating access and reducing the burden for travellers whilst still allowing for local customisation.

III. The form of the instrument

10. For the categorisation of hubs to take place effectively, member States may wish to insert them into a legal context at the same level as freight terminals in the AGTC or the railway lines themselves in the AGC. As such, member States may wish to consider as possible alternatives:

- The creation of an annex to the AGC including the list of international passenger railway hubs and the technical characteristics that they should be working towards achieving.
- The preparation of a new Convention, protocol to the AGC, or other legal instrument including the list and technical requirements.
- An alternative option for this activity.

IV. Next steps

11. If this is a subject of potential interest to member States, the Working Party may wish to consider whether a Group of Experts could be tasked with the preparation of such an instrument or provisions. Possible Terms of Reference for this Group of Experts are set out in Annex I.

Annex

Terms of reference

Group of Experts on “International railway passenger hubs”

Scope of issues and achievements expected

1. The Group of Experts will focus its work on the following issues:
 - (a) Identify the technical and service parameters necessary for the definition of an “International railway passenger hub or hubs”;
 - (b) Identify which stations on the AGC network should be defined as an “International railway passenger hub” and its type as appropriate;
 - (c) Identify what legal instrument or tool should be used to define and implement these “International railway passenger hubs” and draft the necessary legal provisions;
 - (d) Propose a way forward in the form of a report to the Working Party on Rail Transport for consideration.

Methods of Work

2. The Group of Experts should take into consideration legal instruments, standards and guidelines already in place for the identification of different station types by the European Union Agency for Railways, OSJD, UIC, rail operators and infrastructure managers as well as industry experts. It should also look at good practice examples from other sectors with a particular focus on the aviation sector.
3. The Group of Experts will be established and function in accordance with the UNECE Guidelines for teams of specialists approved by the Executive Committee of UNECE on 31 March 2010 (ECE/EX/2/Rev.1). At its first meeting, the Group of Experts will adopt a work plan, clearly defining its objectives and activities, including a time schedule for their implementation.
4. The Group of Experts is expected to meet twice in 2021, at least twice in 2022 and at least twice in 2023 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, before concluding its activities with the transmission of a report to the Working Party on Rail Transport at its seventy-seventh session (November 2023, Geneva).
5. Preparation of documents (at least 4 per session), translation of documents and simultaneous interpretation of its sessions in English, French, and Russian shall be provided by UNECE for all sessions held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.
6. Participation in the Group of Experts is open to all concerned United Nations member countries and experts. Concerned intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as concerned railway administration authorities and companies, passenger associations and related entities are invited to participate and provide expert advice in compliance with United Nations rules and practices.

Secretariat

7. ECE will provide secretariat services for the Group of Experts.
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