



Economic Commission for Europe**Inland Transport Committee****Eighty-third session**

Geneva, 23–26 February 2021

Item 7 (g) of the provisional agenda

Strategic questions of a horizontal and cross-sectoral policy or regulatory nature:**Analytical work on transport****Operationalization of Euro-Asian Transport Corridors and
Summary of deliberations of the informal consultations on
next steps in this area****Note by the secretariat*****I. Mandate**

1. The Inland Transport Committee at its eighty-second session (in February 2020) “Called upon WP.5,¹ in close cooperation with WP.24,² to continue its work on the operationalization of Euro-Asian Transport corridors and other corridors and requested them to present their common proposals through the ITC Bureau, to the eighty-third ITC session in 2021”.³

2. At its session in November 2020, the Bureau “Took note of information and perspectives on enhancing transport connectivity and linkages with other regions, as included, inter alia, in ECE/TRANS/WP.5/2020/1, ECE/TRANS/WP.5/2020/2 and ECE/TRANS/WP.5/68. The Bureau also took note of the planned informal consultations on next steps in the operationalization of Euro-Asian transport corridors, which were to be jointly organized with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) on 26 November 2020. In this regard, “it requested the secretariat to prepare a concise substantive report of the event’s deliberations and submit it to the Committee’s eighty-third session for its information”. The Bureau decided to refer the matter to the Committee for its consideration and further guidance.

II. Background

3. At its thirty-second session, held in September 2019, WP.5 invited the secretariat “To consult relevant working parties such as Working Party on Intermodal Transport and

* This document was scheduled for publication after the standard publication date owing to circumstances beyond the submitter’s control.

¹ The Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics

² The Working Party on Intermodal Transport and Logistics

³ ECE/TRANS/294, para. 52



Logistics (WP.24), Road Transport (SC.1) and Rail Transport (SC.2) on their ideas for the operationalization of the international corridors”.⁴ The secretariat was asked to submit to the thirty-third WP.5 session, in September 2020, as a working document “A compilation of the contributions from countries including the feedback from the sister working parties on possible ways forward and recommendations to the thirty-third WP.5 session”.⁵

4. In response to this request, the secretariat in consultation with WP.24, SC.1, SC.2, the Working Party on the Standardization of Technical and Safety Requirements in Inland Navigation (SC.3/WP.3) and the Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport (WP.30) prepared document ECE/TRANS/WP.5/2020/1 which provides a consolidated set of inputs from relevant ECE Working Parties on operationalization of international corridors. Inter alia, the document concluded that while Euro-Asian corridors are practically operational, they would benefit from further operationalization efforts to make them truly competitive for the inter-continental transport of high-value and time sensitive cargo. The document also stressed that countries involved would benefit from corridor-based action, including through the development of corridor specific work plans and operational targets, the attraction of specific cargo types and volumes, regionally agreed key performance indicators etc.

5. At its thirty-third session in September 2020 “The Working Party took note of the proposals from the secretariat contained in this document (ECE/TRANS/WP.5/2020/1) to enhance transport connectivity in ECE region and linkages with other regions and sub-regions. The Working Party decided to continue considerations of the issues related to Euro-Asian and Euro-African connectivity in accordance with its mandate and requested the secretariat to cost-effectively explore the possibilities to invite additional participants representing Governments, private sector and the scientific community, as well as representatives from other regions, to present their views at the next session of WP.5”.⁶

6. “The Working Party furthermore invited the secretariat to provide additional details on the proposals and feedback from the ECE members on the operationalisation of the Euro-Asian Transport Links (EATL), in particular from those countries most concerned by the individual corridors, at its next session in 2021”.⁷ “In this regard the secretariat indicated it stood ready to organize informal consultations with Governments and other stakeholders concerned ahead of the thirty-fourth session of the Working Party”.⁸

7. The virtual informal Consultations on the next steps in the operationalization of Euro-Asian transport corridors co-organized on 26 November 2020 (from 10 a.m. to 1.30 p.m.) by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Sustainable Transport Division and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) were thus a direct follow-up to the discussions that took place in the framework of the thirty-third session of the Working Party. Moreover, the consultations were fully in accordance with the mandate provided by the Inland Transport Committee at its eighty-second session (in February 2020) as referred to under section I, para. 1 of the present document.

III. Purpose of the consultations

8. Bearing in mind the aforementioned mandates and the conclusion of ECE/TRANS/WP.5/2020/1 which among other issues indicated “the potential of establishing, under WP.5 auspices, a pilot Corridor Management mechanism which would focus its efforts on improving coordination among a selected group of stakeholders from EATL countries on specific EATL corridors or parts thereof”, the informal consultations held on 26 November 2020 aimed at:

⁴ ECE/TRANS/WP.5/66, para. 40

⁵ ECE/TRANS/WP.5/66, para. 40

⁶ ECE/TRANS/WP.5/68, para. 17

⁷ ECE/TRANS/WP.5/68, para. 18

⁸ ECE/TRANS/WP.5/68, para. 19

- Providing an inclusive platform for inter-governmental dialogue on receiving concrete inputs/ideas about the next steps in the operationalization of the Euro-Asian transport corridors;
- Taking stock of the existing inter-governmental/public-private sector stakeholder coordination mechanisms in the region and explore whether there is scope to improve/expand/strengthen those.
- Exploring whether at regional/sub-regional levels Governments in the region are ready to strengthen corridor-based action and identify practical means to do so including through the setting up of appropriate, corridor-wide agreed interoperability priorities and operational targets, developing corridor work plans, creating conducive conditions for the attraction of additional cargo flows and specific commodity types, etc.

IV. Proceedings

9. The informal consultations gathered no less than 155 registered participants (public/private sector representatives and academia) coming from 32⁹ EATL and non-EATL countries including from Europe, Asia, the Middle East and North Africa.

10. Participants acknowledged that Governments, and the private sector in the Euro-Asian region, have continuously worked in the framework of the [Euro-Asian Transport Linkages Group of Experts](#) on addressing the physical and non-physical inter-operability obstacles to international transport present in the region and that these efforts have resulted inter alia in a steady increase of railway container volumes, a rise in the number of container block trains, a reduction by half of transit times and overall, more competitive rates and time schedules

11. Bearing the above in mind, the participants:

(a) Considered that further, concrete steps, should be undertaken towards the full operationalization of transport corridors between Europe and Asia. Any further operationalization efforts should give countries and populations living across the corridors the decisive say in what they want and need in order to increase their connectivity in a sustainable manner

(b) Noted that there is no “one size fits all” solution to the challenges at hand and that each corridor or even specific segments of the corridors face their own challenges and inefficiencies.

(c) Acknowledged that in order to untap its full potential, the Euro-Asian inland transport sector requires economically viable and multi-modal transport corridors. Only when these remaining gaps and challenges are addressed collectively and through a corridor-based perspective can Euro-Asian inland transport links fully meet the requirements of modern supply chains: reliability, safety and customer service as well as economic, environmental and climate related sustainability.

(d) Agreed that the objective should be to increase the number of container and mixed block trains or truck caravans¹⁰ as a result of the creation of an efficient, climate

⁹ Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, China (People’s Republic of), Croatia, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Mongolia, Netherlands, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Kingdom, United States of America, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

¹⁰ For environmental sustainability reasons, a number of countries, including Austria and the EC suggested to delete reference to truck caravans. However given the importance of the road transport industry for the region and since truck caravans (escorted by customs or law enforcement officers) are in many parts of the world still common practice mainly for security reasons of trucks transiting (prevention of theft of cargo or vehicles/prevention of smuggling or unauthorised interruption of the transit process etc.) the reference was left in. Moreover, many such initiatives/pilots took place in recent years, held by e.g. the International Road Transport Union (IRU) and the secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO).

friendly and environmentally sound transportation process. And that in this regard, a pilot corridor management approach could be instituted on a particular corridor, or some of its segments, based on best practices from the ECE region, with the objective of effectively linking all logistics process stakeholders and participants resulting in a safe, reliable and customer focussed service.

(e) Recognized that the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics (WP.5), which for almost two decades has served as the parent body to the UNECE's work on Euro-Asian Transport Links, in close cooperation with the Working Party on Intermodal Transport and Logistics (WP.24) is well placed "To continue its work on the operationalization of Euro-Asian Transport Corridors and other corridors".¹¹

V. Inputs received from the Governments, as possible next steps

12. The Governments of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, Ukraine and Kazakhstan¹² expressed their interest to provide feedback on and contribute towards the development of a corridor management mechanism proposal clearly defining its principles, role for each stakeholder (and the secretariat) as well as a draft institutional set-up, etc.

13. The Governments of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, Ukraine and Kazakhstan¹³ expressed their readiness to participate in the pilot implementation of such a corridor management mechanism (possibly on the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars, Baku-Poti and Baku-Batumi sections of EATL Rail Route 3 and/or other segments or routes) including the preparation of a concrete and prioritized list of actions and activities to be undertaken under a concrete time schedule.

14. With regard to paragraphs 12 and 13, the Government of Georgia stressed the importance of elaborating an official document ahead of the thirty-fourth session of the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics outlining the following:

- The draft Terms of Reference of a Corridor Management mechanism to be put in place for EATL rail route 3 or segments thereof under the auspices of WP.5 for an initial pilot period of 2 years (2021–2022).
- A detailed business conduct plan for EATL rail route 3 including a draft 2-year work plan based on priorities mentioned in the outcome document.
- A cost plan and fundraising strategy for EATL rail route 3 should funding be required.

15. The Governments of China and Mongolia expressed their full support for the coordination role of UNECE and OSCE and for the continuation of this work and initiative.

16. The Ministry of Transport of the Russian Federation and JSC Russian Railways noted the importance of involvement of relevant UNECE Inland Transport Committee working parties into the ongoing activities on operationalization of EATL as well as the need for active participation of business community representatives in this work. Furthermore, it noted that the possibilities of a closer cooperation between UNECE and UNESCAP, the Organization for Security Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Organization for Cooperation of Railways (OSJD) and other international organizations on the operationalization of Euro-Asian Transport Links (EATL) and improving efficiency of land routes, linking Europe and Asia should be a matter of mutual consultations subject to ITC decision in accordance with their mandates and ITC decisions

17. The Government of Uzbekistan requested the support for the initiative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan to create a Regional Center for the Development of Transport and Communication Connectivity under the auspices of the United Nations, which has been put forward during the seventy-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly and

¹¹ In accordance with the mandate provided by the Inland Transport Committee at its eighty-second session, see: [ECE/TRANS/294, para. 52](#)

¹² On 15 December 2020, the Government of Kazakhstan informed the WP.5 secretariat in writing of their interest to join the initiative.

¹³ Idem

would create a platform for discussion and prompt resolution of emerging issues that hinder the development of the transport sector and develop new initiatives.

18. The Government of Austria suggested that any further work in EATL operationalization considers and addresses environment, energy and climate change related aspects as well as issues pertaining to supply chain resilience, reshoring and trade/transport flow diversification between Europe and Asia.

19. UNECE longstanding partners in the field of Euro-Asian Transport Links operationalization efforts, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Union of International Railways (UIC) reconfirmed their interest for continuous cooperation on these issues.

VI. Conclusions

20. The above outlined possible next steps as proposed by Governments were included into an outcome document compiled by the Chair and the secretariat of the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics (WP.5) during and immediately after the informal consultations.

21. The secretariat suggested to host further informal meetings with the five pilot countries in the course of 2021, in order to make progress on the proposed steps in section V, paras. 12–14. This will then serve as further technical inputs by the Governments into a working document for consideration by the WP.5 at its thirty-fourth session in September 2021.

22. All presentations made by speakers, statements delivered by Governments and inputs received from non-governmental organizations and academia have been made available on the event webpage: <https://unece.org/transport/events/consultations-next-steps-operationalization-euro-asian-transport-corridors>

VII. Guidance by the Committee

23. The Committee may wish to consider the above information, in particular the specific proposals made by the five Governments, and provide further guidance.
