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**Economic Commission for Europe**
**Inland Transport Committee**
**Working Party on Rail Transport**
**Group of Experts on International Railway Passenger Hubs**
**First session**

Geneva, 7–9 July 2021

**Report of the first session of the Group of Experts on  
International Railway Passenger Hubs**
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## **I. Attendance**

1. The Group of Experts on International Railway Passenger Hubs (GE\_HUBS or the Group) held its first session from 7 to 9 July 2021 as a hybrid meeting, taking place simultaneously online and in-person in Geneva.
2. The session of the Group of Experts was attended by representatives of the following countries: Albania, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Serbia, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine, and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The representative from Shift2Rail of the European Union was present.
3. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations were present: Intergovernmental Organization for International Carriage by Rail (OTIF) and Organization for Co-Operation Between Railways (OSJD). A representative of the ECE Trans-European Railway Project (TER) also attended the session.
4. The following non-governmental organizations were represented: European Passengers' Federation (EPF) and International Union of Railways (UIC).
5. Representatives of the following organization, private sector group or academia attended the session: TRA Consulting, Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies, Network Rail Infrastructure Limited, and University of the Philippines-Diliman.

## **II. Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)**

*Document:* ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2021/1

6. The Secretary to the Group presented the agenda and noted that document ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2021/6, identified in the agenda, had not been issued.
7. The Group of Experts adopted the draft agenda for the first session of the Group of Experts on International Passenger Railway Hubs as contained in ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2021/1.

## **III. Election of Officers (agenda item 2)**

8. The Group elected Mr. Hinne Groot from the Netherlands as Chair the Group of Experts and Mr. Benn Hall from the United Kingdom as Vice-Chair of the Group.

## **IV. Background to the Group (agenda item 3)**

*Document:* ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2021/4

9. An initial presentation was provided by the secretariat setting out the terms of reference and mandate for the group as well as providing some statistical information on international passenger transportation by rail with reference to documents ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2021/4. The Group thanked the secretariat for the presentation on rail data and requested that, for the next session, a comparison be provided of point-to-point passenger journeys with the road and aviation sectors where data is available. Poland noted that the work of the Group as identified in paragraph 1 (d) of the Terms of Reference should not be limited to East-West journeys and should also include North-South travel within the region. The Group accepted this proposal.
10. The Netherlands presented the work undertaken within the framework of the European Union that they sponsor in conjunction with Austria. The presentation covered the joint declaration of European Union (EU) Ministers and the work that is being developed within the platform. Emphasis was put on the complementarity of the work in the EU and within this Group.
11. OTIF presented its activities in international passenger transport. OTIF welcomed the creation of the Group and its activities, noted the importance to not duplicate activities that

are ongoing in other areas and highlighted that no such duplication was evident with their work which focused on carriage rather than hubs.

12. OSJD proceeded to present its work on international passenger transport by rail with a focus on its documents related to passenger rail carriage. OSJD welcomed the creation of the Group and committed to actively participate in the work going forward.

13. UIC presented its recently formed Station Managers Global Group (SMGG), UIC station sector and its activities. A number of complementary activities were highlighted and UIC confirmed that it is willing to actively participate in the activities of the Group by facilitating the participation of infrastructure managers in the activities of the Group to share best practice as well as offering the SMGG as a potential source of (pre) studies, analyses, benchmarks.

14. TRA Consulting presented a passenger focused view showing the evolution of the market but also what some operators are doing to meet the needs of their customers.

15. Following the presentations, the Shift2Rail Joint Undertaking took the floor to point to its work in this area and share a link to where the information can be found.<sup>1</sup> The Group welcomed its suggestion to provide a more detailed presentation at the next session of the Group. EPF explained that the work of the Group should also focus on the demand side and understand the needs of the user. In this respect EPF identified the importance of access to staff in stations, information dissemination for passengers (including in multiple languages), harmonizing signage, and providing assistance when things go wrong. The consideration to identify different classes of stations was also raised.

16. The Group thanked delegates for the presentations and interventions undertaken under this agenda item and welcomed the support of all the speakers to the work of the Group. It reiterated the importance of the work that needs to be done in this group to understand the needs of passengers and thus to facilitate the accessibility of passengers to stations and hubs when travelling across borders by rail. It encouraged all parties to actively contribute to the discussions on the core aspects of the Terms of Reference.

17. The Group of Experts asked delegates to continue to update the Group on progress in their respective areas at upcoming meetings. Furthermore, the Group agreed to rename this agenda item “Information on Other Complementary Activities Across the ECE Region”.

## **V. Programme of Work (agenda item 4)**

*Document:* ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2021/3

18. The secretariat presented the draft programme of work as contained in document ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2021/3. Experts discussed the contents of this document. The comment by Poland, discussed under agenda item 3, on the importance including North-South journeys in the analysis of legal instruments, was noted and it was agreed to add reference to this under paragraph 3 of document ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2021/3. The secretariat also noted that some of the dates (months) referred to in the document needed updating.

19. The Group adopted the draft programme of work as set out in ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2021/3 as amended by discussions in the meeting.

## **VI. Identification of stations on the AGC network to be defined as an international passenger railway hub (agenda item 5)**

*Document:* Informal document SC.2/HUBS No.1 (2021)

20. The secretariat opened discussions by outlining the key requirements for this agenda item in relation to the identification of the hubs, accompanied by a presentation on the work done by ECE on identifying the various networks under the purview of ECE legal agreements

<sup>1</sup> [https://projects.shift2rail.org/s2r\\_ip\\_TD\\_r.aspx?ip=3&td=6fb2d44f-0c6f-44df-b999-ce0b95e9c890](https://projects.shift2rail.org/s2r_ip_TD_r.aspx?ip=3&td=6fb2d44f-0c6f-44df-b999-ce0b95e9c890).

through the use of GIS. This was followed by a presentation from the TER project manager on the relevant activities of TER in relation to the activities of the Group with particular emphasis on the identification of nodes in the TER region.

21. Discussion on the identification of stations then commenced focusing on: the need to ensure that there is a well understood definition of what an international passenger railway hub is, on the criteria for the definition of the hubs themselves and the manner in which the list of potential hubs will be compiled. At some point, the UIC Terminology Platform may bring its support on this definition.

22. On the criteria for the definition of stations, the Group discussed UIC leaflet 180 on the classification of stations and its criteria (reproduced as Informal document SC.2/HUBS No.1 (2021)). UIC noted that this document needed updating but that it could form the basis of a discussion on classification.

23. In carrying out this work it was noted that it will be important to ensure that the sector is not locked into a set of stations but works towards ensuring that they can be modified in the future. The importance of connectivity with other services was also highlighted. Furthermore, it was highlighted that experts may wish to add stations and hubs to this list that may not be directly on the network identified in Annex 1 of the European Agreement on Main International Railway Lines (AGC) but would still be of international importance. In this respect the examples of a number of existing and planned airport stations across the continent were referred to.

24. Finally, delegates pointed to the need to have a clear understanding on why hubs should be put on the list with a focus on major or capital cities. The need for close cooperation with other international institutions and with other groups of the Inland Transport Committee was also highlighted with delegates thanking UIC for offering to work and collaborate on this specific agenda item.

25. The Group welcomed the initiation of discussions on identifying international passenger railway HUBS and requested that the secretariat prepare a document for the next session, with the support of experts, setting out proposals for a definition of international passenger railway hubs, a criteria for the identification of such hubs and an initial list of potential stations to be classified as these hubs. These proposals would be discussed at the second meeting of the Group.

26. The Group thanked Mr. Christopher Irwin of the European Passengers' Federation for agreeing to sponsor this agenda item.

## **VII. Identification of the technical and service parameters necessary for the definition of an international passenger railway hub (agenda item 6)**

*Document:* Informal document SC.2/HUBS No.2 (2021)

27. The secretariat introduced discussions on agenda item 6 by explaining that AGC and European Agreement on Important International Combined Transport Lines and Related Installations (AGTC) both have key technical and service parameters within their agreements but that there is no information relating to passenger stations or hubs, hence the need for the activities under this agenda item. The secretariat proceeded to share a presentation on possible preliminary parameters and how to prepare them.

28. In particular, the presentation highlighted how the technical parameters should be passenger focused and identified four high-level categories under which the parameters should be considered:

- Easy accessibility
- Safe and secure
- Appropriate levels of service in the hubs
- Attractiveness to use.

29. In addressing potential components of these four categories, the Group continued earlier discussions on ensuring that there are procedures, services and/or infrastructure in stations and hubs to provide assistance when there is disruption to services negatively affecting passengers.

30. Delegates discussed the importance of the language issue in facilitating accessibility and how an additional language should be made available in all identified hubs. One delegation suggested that the additional language should be English.

31. Delegates highlighted the importance of basing this analysis also on work that has already been carried out before by other entities. In particular, when reviewing signage and language options, UIC referred to its document IRS (International Railway Solutions) 10181 on user information in passenger stations (reproduced as Informal document SC.2/HUBS No.2 (2021)). The Group may wish to consider this document as a key input and basis for further work on signage under this agenda item.

32. The Group welcomed the initiation of discussions on identifying technical parameters for international passenger railway hubs and requested that the secretariat prepare a document listing possible technical parameters to be submitted to the next meeting of the Group for discussion.

33. The Group asked that potential volunteers who may wish to sponsor this agenda item inform the secretariat after the meeting.

## **VIII. Identification of the legal instrument or tool to be used for international passenger railway hub (agenda item 7)**

34. The secretariat introduced this agenda item with a presentation on the possible approaches to creating a legal instrument or tool for international railway passenger hubs. The presentation highlighted the preliminary options of: amending AGC to add references to stations; the creation of a new Convention; the preparation of a Protocol to AGC; or the development of softer tools such as non-binding regulations. The Group initiated discussions on the advantages and disadvantages of these options based on the presentation and on the experiences related to the new annex to the TIR Convention presented by the Secretary of the ECE Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport. Poland suggested that the simplest and fastest option may be to concentrate efforts on amending AGC by adding a new annex on hubs, following a similar approach to the new annex of the TIR Convention. This approach would also be in line with efforts in the ITC Strategy to 2030 to review and update the conventions and legal instruments under its purview.

35. The Group of Experts noted the discussion on the possible legal instrument or tool to be used for international passenger railway hubs and asked the secretariat to draft a document setting out the different options with their advantages and disadvantages.

## **IX. Analysis of the legal framework governing international passenger transportation (agenda item 8)**

*Document:* Informal document SC.2/HUBS No.3 (2021)

36. The secretariat introduced this agenda item noting that there was a significant legal framework in place across the ECE region and that a detailed analysis would be necessary to identify the entire framework. As an introduction, the secretariat provided a presentation on the “Convention on the Facilitation of Border Crossing Procedures for Passengers, Luggage and Load-Luggage carried in international Traffic by Rail” which opened for signature in April 2019. To date there is only one signatory – Chad.

37. The delegation from the Russian Railways noted that significant work had been done to prepare this Convention and that the Russian Federation was very close to being the second signatory, as all the preparatory national documentation had been completed. Furthermore, the Russian Railways noted that OSJD had prepared a compendium of legal agreements relating passenger rail transport (reproduced as Informal document SC.2/HUBS No.3 (2021))

and that this would be a fundamental input into the analysis. It was also highlighted that when preparing the analysis, the framework should also consider Annex 9 of the Harmonization Convention. The Netherlands pointed out that the analysis should also cover the relevant European Union legislation on the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) and urban nodes.

38. The Group noted the importance of the analysis of the legal framework governing international passenger transportation and asked the secretariat to draft a document listing relevant international agreements based also on information provided by OSJD. The Group asked that Informal document SC.2/HUBS No.3 (2021) be provided in three languages as a key input for discussion at future sessions.

## **X. Measures to support international rail carriers in pandemics (agenda item 9)**

39. This agenda item was opened by the representative from TRA Consulting who presented some of the initiatives that had been put in place to support rail carriers during the pandemic. The presentation was supplemented by an intervention from the United Kingdom on the difficulties experienced there as a result of the fixed-cost nature of their franchising system and the extra requirements for border controls resulting from new health measures.

40. The Group welcomed the introduction of the discussion on the measures to support international rail carriers in pandemics and asked the secretariat to prepare a short questionnaire for experts to complete, on behalf of their countries, on support that is currently being provided to carriers.

## **XI. Other business (agenda item 10)**

41. There was no other business discussed at the first session of the Group.

## **XII. Date of next session (agenda item 11)**

42. The Group of Experts noted that the second session of the Group would be held from 13 to 15 December 2021 in the Palais des Nations in Geneva. The secretariat noted that the meeting would probably also be available in hybrid form with in-person and online participation possible. Further details relating to this would be made available to experts by the secretariat closer to the date.

## **XIII. Summary of decisions (agenda item 12)**

43. The Group of Experts adopted the draft list of decisions and asked the Chair and Vice-Chair, with the support of the secretariat to draft the report of the session.