Economic and Social Council

Economic Commission for Europe

Inland Transport Committee

Working Party on Transport Statistics

Seventy-second session
Geneva (hybrid format), 9–11 June 2021

Report of the Working Party on Transport Statistics on its seventy-second session

Contents

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I. Attendance

Document: ECE/TRANS/WP.6/181

1.   The Working Party on Transport Statistics held its seventy-second session from 9 to 11 June 2021 in Geneva. Due to travel restrictions the meeting was conducted in a hybrid/online format, with three informal sessions conducted via WebEx and two formal sessions on 11 June conducted via Interprefy. According to the decision taken at its seventy-first session (ECE/TRANS/WP.6/189, para. 31) the session was chaired by Mr. M. Scrim (Canada).

2.   The Working Party was attended by the following countries for some or all of the sessions: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia; Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, and Uzbekistan.

3.   The European Commission (DG MOVE and Eurostat) was represented.

4.   Representatives of the following United Nations departments and specialized agencies attended: United Nations Statistics Division, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), and United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

5.   Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations were present: International Transport Forum (ITF), Central Commission for navigation on the Rhine (CCNR).

6.   The following non-governmental organization was represented: International Union of Railways (UIC).

II. Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)

Document: ECE/TRANS/WP.6/180

7.   The Working Party adopted the provisional agenda prepared by the secretariat.

III. Big data for transport statistics (agenda item 2)

Documents: ECE/TRANS/WP.6/2021/4; ECE/TRANS/WP.6/2021/11

8.   This agenda item took place during the morning of the first formal session on 11 June and was introduced by the Deputy Executive Secretary of UNECE.

9.   Germany presented their work on using floating car data (FCD) from the German Automobile Club to estimate origin-destination matrices for the whole of Germany. Challenges involved in this exercise include the difficulty in tracking vehicles across international borders; ensuring data quality control; and the lack of a pre-existing robust dataset to compare any results with. Nevertheless, the pilot project was encouraging in that it allowed identification of trips according to purpose (work/education, shopping and leisure), and together with electronic road pricing information can provide detailed results that are useful for transport statistics production. Commercially available FCD have a much greater degree of detail and accuracy but have a correspondingly high cost.

10.   The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland discussed using Mobile Network Operator (MNO) data to estimate cycling and walking levels on a daily basis, of particular interest during the COVID-19 pandemic. The presenter highlighted that their daily data were being used in primetime COVID-19 briefings given by the prime minister or other senior minister. At the start of the pandemic, a number of data sources were considered for this task, including cameras using Artificial Intelligence, automated traffic counters, activity apps such as Strava, local authority data or even data collected through bike share schemes,

but the MNO data were considered to be the most reliable. This led to the cycling estimates becoming a residual of MNO data with observed other modes of travel (i.e. train usage and car traffic) subtracted. The limitations of this method are the high uncertainty generated, and that it cannot split the results to a local level. Looking beyond the pandemic, future data production will likely include MNO data in combination with traffic counters, camera and local authority data.

11.   Sweden presented their ideas for considering integration of new data sources into their commodity flow survey, which occurs every four-six years. The current system surveys 12,000 workplaces and thus has a high cost, with some use of administrative data. Possible data sources that may complement the survey include the movement of freight from transport administration systems; fleet management systems; automatic identification systems (AIS, for ship locations); and registers maintained by rail and aviation traffic regulators. In order to see what freight companies thought about using these data, a survey was conducted in 2019 which showed differing views in different sectors; for example, logistics providers feared that data sharing would threaten their business model, whereas the commodity owners were generally much more positive. Sweden's strategy is thus to conduct pilot projects using these new sources in sectors where freight flows are stable, such as steel and paper. Complete automation of this survey is not expected to occur in the near term, but small-scale pilot projects may increase.

12.   United States of America shared their experiences from their Spotlight series investigating short-term trends in the transport sector, including impacts of COVID-19. Sources utilized include persons screened at airports, container port activity, trucks crossing international borders, as well as daily travel estimates from connected vehicles and phone data. The Bureau of transportation Statistics produces multiple outputs for various levels of expertise, including products that a large proportion of the general public will be able to understand easily.

13.   Russian Federation presented the use of new technologies to run trains coupled virtually, in order to increase the tonne-km run per day by up to 12%. This suggested a new indicator with which to measure rail traffic. A second presentation covered changes to rail freight logistics for energy products as a result of increasing interest in environmental protection.

14.   After the country presentations, the United Nations Statistics Division discussed ongoing work of the U.N. Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics. This highlighted existing projects that are of most relevance to transport statistics, such as task teams on measuring rural access, mobile phone data and AIS data, as well as cross-cutting topics such as access to privately-held data and privacy preserving techniques. Delegates would be welcome to join any of the existing groups, or even set up a task team on transport statistics specifically if there were demand.

15.   In order to facilitate future online discussions and experience sharing, the UN Statistics Division separately presented the Global Network of Data Officers and Statisticians Yammer group, which allows dialogue between national statisticians and those within international organisations.

16.   After presentations by Germany, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Sweden, United States of America, Russian Federation and the United Nations Statistics Division, the Working Party agreed to continue to share best practices on big data, both in future sessions and throughout the year with webinars and other activities where appropriate.

IV.   Development of a global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals (agenda item 3)

Documents: ECE/TRANS/WP.6/2021/1; ECE/TRANS/WP.6/2021/8

17.   The Working Party heard an update from the UNECE statistics division on their Sustainable Development Goal monitoring activities. This included progress on made on the second edition of the Roadmap for Statistics for SDGs publication, and the SDGs dashboard

of interactive indicators appropriate to the UNECE region, including 3.6.1 on road safety and 9.1.2 on modal split. The secretariat also described the recent publication, Measuring and Monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals[1], which utilised a nexus approach of working across different divisions within ECE.

18.   The secretariat updated delegates on the status of road safety statistics collection, with the questionnaire having been sent out in March and most countries having already replied. The secretariat congratulated the countries who had provided 2020 data already, and those who had increased the level of detail compared to the last collection cycle. Data for Eurostat countries had been received from Eurostat bilaterally.

19.   A delegate from DG MOVE updated on developments of road safety statistics in the European Union, including tracking the impact of COVI-19 on road fatalities. The update included details on further use of the MAIS 3+ (Maximum Abbreviated Injury Score higher than three) for a more comparable way to track injuries across countries.

20.   UN- Habitat presented their work on tracking SDG indicator 11.2.1 on the proportion of the urban population with convenient public transport access, including their publication of open-source data for 10,000 cities across the globe.

21.   Another delegate from DG MOVE described the European Commission approach to European-specific Sustainable Development Goal indicators, which included regional specific indicators on the proportion of zero-emission passenger cars in new registrations, as well as the CO_2 emissions per km for new passenger cars, while using a supporting indicator of total CO_2 emissions of all passenger cars. These indicators are a useful way to track changes to the environmental impact of the passenger car fleet, which is not covered in the global list of Sustainable Development Goal indicators.

22.   Following this the secretariat encouraged a debate around what additional indicators could be used to track sustainable transport in the ECE region, based on indicators having an existing data availability and a clear interpretation. The indicators chosen by the European Commission would seem to be a good start. The delegate from Germany highlighted that existing indicators did not fully capture the social dimensions of sustainable transport; therefore, a useful addition may be the cost of transport for different income groups. The delegate from Czechia stressed that the methodology for the choosing and calculation of the indicators should be confirmed with member States first.

23.   The Working Party agreed to further explore transport-related SDG indicators that are specific to the ECE region, building on the work of Eurostat and other regional organisations, and these indicators may be collated into an informal publication, the methodology for which will be confirmed with member States.

V.   Statistical activities and challenges faced by member States (agenda item 4)

24.   This item was covered in various other agenda items.

VI.   Urban Transport Statistics (agenda item 5)

A.   Tram and Metro Statistics

Document: ECE/TRANS/WP.6/2021/5

25.   The secretariat presented progress in collecting and disseminating city-level tram and metro statistics on an annual basis and showed the benefits of collecting data on a quarterly basis.

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[1] https://unece.org/unece-and-sdgs/publications/measuring-and-monitoring-progress-towards-sustainable-development-goals.

26.   Spain presented their work on short-term urban public transport systems, for metros and buses in seven Spanish cities which are published 41 days after the reference period. Each operator signs a confidentiality waiver in order for the data to be published.

27.   The secretariat then described the potential value in a short-term collection of tram and metro data. This would be a significant reporting burden on the secretariat and on member States if conducted regularly throughout the year. However, the secretariat thinks that it is viable to automate this collection process for a majority of countries, where data are available through an Application programme Interface (API) or in a standard, machine-readable format.

28.   The Working Party agreed to the continuation of collecting statistics on trams and metros on an annual level. The Working party encouraged its members to publish short-term urban public transport data in machine-readable form where possible.

B.   Tracking final leg deliveries

Document: ECE/TRANS/WP.6/2021/10

29.   For this agenda item, the secretary of the Working Party on Intermodal Transport and Logistics (WP.24) presented the findings from a recent workshop on changes to urban logistics. Switzerland presented the results of their last light utility vehicle survey in 2013 and the preparations for the next one in 2023 (further details of which are available in ECE/TRANS/WP.6/2021/10). The results showed the strong growth in this sector over time, and even though it is conducted once every ten years, inter-year estimates seem to be satisfactory as well.

30.   Canada discussed activities at Statistics Canada around this topic, highlighting that light goods vehicle deliveries were of growing importance before the pandemic, and are likely to keep growing in the future. Eurostat shared their experiences relating to their Task Force on light utility vehicles, which has been active since 2018. There are no plans to introduce a regulated data collection on light utility vehicles; the taskforce's aims are to discuss the most important areas of data collection for each country, to consider the range of vehicles to be included under light utility vehicles; and to consider which variables to be considered in a light utility vehicle survey.

31.   The Central Commission for Navigation on the Rhine discussed the results of their study on using inland waterways for urban freight logistics. There are a limited number of examples of putting this into practice, but the results suggest that this can be successful when correctly implemented, as is already the case in cities such as Paris and Venice.

32.   The Working Party took note of updates from Canada and Switzerland on tracking final deliveries and light utility vehicles, as well as the work of the UNECE Working Party on Intermodal Transport and Logistics (WP.24), Eurostat's task force on light duty vehicles, and CCNR's report on the use of inland waterways for urban freight logistics. It agreed to keep this item on the agenda.

VII.   Data collection, methodological development and harmonization of transport statistics (agenda item 6)

Document: ECE/TRANS/WP.6/2021/7

33.   Eurostat provided an update on the new system of collecting data through the Eurostat/ITF/UNECE common questionnaire. The new system will be excel/questionnaire based rather than collecting data through a web interface. Switzerland highlighted that having separate excel files for each year will make revision of time series time-consuming. The Working Party took note of the new system for common questionnaire data collection.

VIII. Traffic censuses in the Economic Commission for Europe region (agenda item 7)

Documents: ECE/TRANS/WP.6/2019/3, ECE/TRANS/WP.6/2019/11

34.   The secretariat presented plans for the 2020 round of E-Road and E-Rail censuses, in particular the desire for data in a Shapefile format where possible. The data on traffic volumes on the AGR and AGC networks, respectively, should be sent for the E-Road census by 1 July 2021, and the E-Rail data by mid-2022 (data for Eurostat countries to be transmitted through them). The secretariat highlighted the importance of Shapefiles to allow visualization of the data in map format. The secretariat noted that 2020 traffic volumes would be substantially reduced in most countries due to the pandemic. While this would make like-for-like comparisons with 2015 less valid, quantifying the COVID-19 impact of travel is useful in its own right. The Working Party encouraged member States to provide data for 2019 in addition, if available, in order to have a better understanding of how COVID-19 affected traffic volumes.

IX. Dissemination of transport statistics by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (agenda item 8)

35.   This agenda item was discussed under other agenda items.

X. Implementation of the Inland Transport Committee Strategy to 2030 and the Programme of Work 2020–2021 (agenda item 9)

Documents: ECE/TRANS/WP.6/2021/3, ECE/TRANS/WP.6/2021/6

36.   The deputy secretary of the Inland Transport Committee provided updates on how the Inland Transport Committee Strategy to 2030 is being implemented, and the next steps expected from the Working Party. The secretariat also mentioned that despite the United Nations running on a single-year budget cycle since 2019, it was still considered to be more prudent to maintain the system of biennial programmes of work and evaluations.

37.   The Programme of Work 2020-2021, and the updated terms of reference for the Working Party, were approved. The practice of conducting biennial planning and evaluations will continue.

XI. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Inland Transport Committee and its Subsidiary Bodies (agenda item 10)

38.   An update was given on relevant activities occurring at the ITC session of February 2021, including the ITC Strategy to 2030.

XII. Statistical activities of international organizations of interest to the Working Party (agenda item 11)

39.   The Working Party took note of information provided by DG MOVE, EUROSTAT, ITF and UIC.

A. European Commission (DG MOVE)

40.   The representative of DG MOVE informed the Working Party about recent developments in European union transport policy, such as the European Green Deal and the

Sustainable and Smart mobility Strategy, which has aims such as by 2030 at least 30 million zero-emission cars will be operational on European roads, and for high-speed rai traffic to double.

41.   The presentation also outlined uses of statistics and further data needs, such as the potential use of origin-destination pairs, higher frequency data, and better aligned definitions across modes to enhance modal comparisons.

B.   European Commission (Eurostat)

42.   The Working Party was informed about the current activities of the European Commission (Eurostat). The representative presented a brief overview of their publications on transport statistics "Energy, transport, and environment statistics" which contains indicators about transport and environment of the 28 European Union member States and the "Eurostat regional yearbook" which contains a regional analysis of the number of passenger cars relative to the total number of inhabitants (the motorisation rate) and a similar analysis for public transport equipment (covering motor coaches, buses and trolley buses). The presentation also covered the planned upcoming working groups on transport statistics, and transport statistics in the context of the pandemic, through the European Statistical Recovery Dashboard.

C.   International Transport Forum

43.   The representative of the ITF informed the Working Party about their recent statistical outputs, such as their Statistics Brief articles, short-term fourth quarter 2020 data, and investment levels in the transport sector. The next ITF statistics meeting will take place 7–8 October 2021 in Paris, with virtual attendance possible as well.

D.   International Union of Railways

44.   The Working Party was informed about the current activities of UIC. This includes their regular data collection activities for monthly and annual data, and the presentation showed for example that while passenger traffic in Europe dropped 46% during the pandemic, freight traffic only dropped 9%.

XIII.   Election of Officers (agenda item 12)

45.   No candidate was proposed for vice-chair.

XIV.   Other business (agenda item 13)

A.   Date of next session

46.   The Working Party was informed that the next session is provisionally planned for 15–17 June 2022.

B.   Gender statistics

Document: ECE/TRANS/WP.6/2021/2

47.   The ITF led a discussion around the importance of gender considerations in transport statistics. Known differences between males and females, such as differing road accident rates and public transport usage, were shared. A great many unknowns remain due to lack of travel surveys (either not happening at all, or only very infrequently), in many member States. Both the ITF and the secretariat hoped that evolutions in the use of big data may lead to better

data in the future. Slovenia agreed that this topic is important but shared that from their experiences with big data a gender breakdown may not be easily made. Ireland did not expect there to be better gender breakdown in their data in the near term.

XV. Summary of decisions (agenda item 14)

48.   As agreed, and in line with the decision of ITC (ECE/TRANS/156, para. 6), the main decisions were summarized and agreed, as amended, at the end of the session. The Chair, in cooperation with the secretariat, prepared this report.

49.   The Working Party adopted its list of decisions which, as per recent EXCOM decision, would be subject to a 72-hour silence procedure in the event of technical connection difficulties of member State representatives.

50.   Following the special procedures to take decisions in formal meetings with remote participation adopted by EXCOM on 5 October 2020, the decisions made at the session were circulated through all Geneva Permanent Representations for approval by silence procedure of 72 hours by the participating delegations of the session. The silence procedure closed on Thursday, 23 June 2021 at 18:00 (CET) and concluded without objections. The decisions of the above meeting are thus considered adopted. Related information is available on the UNECE website under www.unece.org/info/about-unece/executive-committeeexcom/silence-procedure.html.