



# Economic and Social Council

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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Inland Transport Committee

#### Eighty-fourth session

Geneva, 22-25 February 2022

Item 14 of the provisional agenda

**Round table theme: “On the road to sustained and full recovery: Post-COVID-19 initiative for inland transport and the role of the Committee”**

## **Concept note on the 2022 ITC roundtable “On the road to sustained and full recovery: Post-Covid-19 initiative for inland transport and the role of the Committee”**

Note by the secretariat

### **I. Introduction**

1. The Inland Transport Committee (ITC) during its eighty-third (25-28 February 2020) and eighty-fourth (23-26 February 2021) plenary sessions took a leadership role in helping build consensus on the important role of transport in leading global recovery from the pandemic and strengthening resilience against future crises, among others by endorsing a Ministerial Resolution entitled “Enhancing resilient inland transport connectivity in emergency situations: an urgent call for concerted action” (ECE/TRANS/304, Annex I).
2. Despite strong and consistent efforts by member States, recovery efforts have not yet led to the desired return to pre-pandemic levels of growth and sustainable development. The challenges remain formidable, and progress is patchy and unevenly distributed worldwide, further challenging the implementation of the 2030 agenda and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.
3. The present ITC Roundtable will bring together key worldwide stakeholders for a strategic discussion on the new course of action that is needed in order to make measurable progress in successfully addressing the continuing crisis (ECE/TRANS/2022/28).
4. In the immediate wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, under the auspices of the ITC Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics (WP.5), an Informal Multidisciplinary Advisory Group Meeting on Transport Responses to COVID-19 has been established gathering transport, customs, and health officials as well as representatives of WHO, WCO, WTO, ICAO and IMO which has so far convened four times, in June and September 2020 and 2021 respectively. The deliberations of the Advisory Group have resulted in a four main dimensions of possible follow-up activities as listed below. Speakers at the round table are invited to shed light and share their views on these proposals.



## II. Discussion on possible further action by the inland transport sector

5. Considering the lack of a harmonized approach among countries and among transport sub-sectors in responding to the pandemic, the lack of coordination and cooperation between various stakeholders nationally, regionally, and internationally, and the absence of emergency and contingency plans the below list of areas for possible follow up were identified by the Advisory Group:

### (a) At international transport sector regulatory level:

- Develop a comprehensive concept for international contingency management and planning for the ECE region providing a list of detailed steps/ actions to be taken by the rail, road, inland waterways, and intermodal transport sectors in case of contingency situations/ external shocks such as pandemics or other types of international emergencies.
- Continue to support ongoing transport document digitalisation efforts but at the same time prioritise a human-centred approach and promote among Governments, private sector operators and other global supply chain stakeholders the perspective that transport workers play a key role in keeping supply chains up and running and need to be recognised as such, in particular at times of international emergencies.
- At the level of the existing administrative/ regulatory framework surrounding inland transport but also maritime and aviation sectors evaluate how the many “temporary” measures (temporary extension of validity of permits and documents or temporary exemptions and facilitations measures) that have been taken by Governments in the inland transport sector in response to the COVID-19 outbreak can be turned into nationally/ regionally or internationally accepted and agreed protocols and emergency plans that could enter into force the moment a new pandemic or emergency situation would materialise This would avoid the loss of valuable lessons learnt from the current pandemic.

### (b) At the level of existing legal instruments:

- If deemed appropriate by the respective mode-specific Working Parties, conduct stress-tests on the various ECE Conventions for the inland transport sector to identify where amendments can/should be made in order to make these legal instruments more “pandemic/ contingency-resilient” (i.e. TIR/ eTIR, CMR/eCMR and the Harmonization Convention) and/ or to turn these instruments into tools that can help Governments to mitigate the impact of possible future external shocks/ contingency situations.
- Related to infrastructure agreements: ECE infrastructure agreements, namely the European Agreement on Important International Combined Transport Lines and Related Installations (AGTC), the European Agreement on Main Traffic Arteries (AGR), the European Agreement on Main International Railway Lines (AGC), and the European Agreement on Main Inland Waterways of International Importance (AGN) defining and elaborating core inter-modal, road, rail, and inland waterway networks in the ECE region and beyond could serve as the backbone for the identification of those critically important routes and nodes that need to remain open under any circumstances, including during international emergencies and pandemics.
- Related to border crossing facilitation agreements: in the framework of the Harmonization Convention for instance criteria could be defined for land border crossings that need to stay open at any time in order to enable the international transport of essential cargo and supplies, including in case of pandemics and international emergencies.
- Related to health certification of transport crews: introduction of electronic health certificates or (at the outset of a pandemic) health declarations for crew, transport workers and/ or passengers, which could be attached to existing United Nations

transport conventions and their e-applications (eTIR; eCMR etc.). Establishing links between the eTIR carnet for instance or any other digitalised transport document and an e-health certificate for international transport crews could be advantageous in terms of risk mapping, contact tracking and tracing which are essential at the outset of a pandemic.

**(c) At the level of digitalization and automation:**

- Continue to support transport/trade documents' digitalisation: raise awareness globally and, if possible, accelerate the digital implementation of the already existing digital transport legal instruments in the inland transport sector: such as TIR/eTIR, and CMR/eCMR.
- Digitalisation and automation are widely recognized as effective pandemic mitigation tools since direct human contacts in clearance processes are no longer needed. Online training modules on the use of these digital instruments could be developed and deployed across the world with the support of the relevant ECE Working Parties (WP.30, SC.1, SC.2, WP.24 etc.).
- Transport sector digitalization efforts should be coordinated, and e-solutions should be integrated across the different transport sub-sectors including inland transport, maritime and aviation sectors.

**(d) At the level of continued sectoral and inter-sectoral dialogue on pandemic preparedness:**

- Have pandemic / emergency preparedness as a recurrent agenda item for the forthcoming sessions of mode-specific WPs (SC.1, SC.2, SC.3, WP.24 and WP.30).
- Continue to organize focussed multisectoral meetings as necessary (involving the maritime and aviation sectors also for instance) to share experience, and regularly review and discuss cooperation across modes to prevent international spread of communicable diseases through transport and enhance regional and inter-regional coordination to facilitate border-crossings.
- Build further on and strengthen the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP) initiative, jointly led by ECE and WHO Europe which in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic has established a Task Force composed of representatives of member States, international organizations, civil society, academia and other stakeholders.
- Consider developing resource materials, databanks or pandemic preparedness good practice repositories gathering experiences from transport authorities in the ECE region and beyond in responding to the COVID-19 crisis. Consider consolidating such efforts at a cross-sectoral level.

### III. Objectives of the ITC Roundtable

6. Speakers from Governments and International Organizations are invited to share their experiences in developing and implementing pandemic recovery measures and discuss possible further steps for Governments and the Committee to support a sustained and full rehabilitation of the international transport system and better preparedness for international emergency situations in the future. Interventions will be expected to shed light on:

- (a) The state of affairs of the transport sector in light of the pandemic, including maritime, aviation and inland transport.
- (b) ECE supported initiatives aimed at mitigating the impact of the pandemic across specific modes (inland water transport, intermodal transport, and dangerous goods transportation).
- (c) National and international experiences in addressing transport related contingency situations.

(d) Identifying and defining follow-up actions aimed at strengthening the resilience of the transport sector towards future international contingencies.

## Annex

### Draft Programme

Roundtable theme: “On the road to sustained and full recovery: Post-Covid-19 initiative for inland transport and the role of the Committee”

Hybrid session with interpretation

February 2022, 10 a.m.–1 p.m., Palais des Nations, Geneva

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<i>10 a.m.–10.10 a.m.</i>	<i>Opening statements, welcome speeches</i>
10.00–10.30 a.m.	<b>Taking stock of UNECE supported regulatory measures aimed at mitigating the impact of the pandemic (inland water transport, intermodal transport, and dangerous goods transportation)</b>
10.30–11.30 a.m.	<b>Current actions and future plans by Governments and international organizations to support sustained and full recovery – national and international experiences</b>
11.30–11.45 a.m.	<i>Coffee break</i>
11.45 a.m.–12.45 p.m.	<b>Strengthening inland transport sector resilience, a possible role for the Committee</b>
12.45 – 1 p.m.	<b>Closing statements</b>

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