

# **STUDY ON EFFICIENT OPERATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL PASSENGER TRAINS ALONG THE TRANS-ASIAN RAILWAY NETWORK**



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## List of abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CAGR	Compound Annual Growth Rate
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
ECO	Economic Cooperation Organization
EEC	Eurasian Economic Commission
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
OBOR	One Belt One Road
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Social Development
OSJD	Organization for Cooperation Between Railways
OTIF	Intergovernmental Organization for International Carriage by Rail
PRM	Persons with reduced mobility
RZD	Russian Railways
TARN	Trans-Asian Railway Network
UIC	International Union of Railways
WHO	World Health Organization

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study gives an overview of existing railway passenger services along the Trans-Asian Railway Network (TARN) and an analysis of the legal and institutional framework with a view to provide recommendations for further strengthening operations of passenger trains along the Trans-Asian Railway network.

The intercountry railway passenger transport in ESCAP region is extensively developed, however, the density of services (except for 1520 mm area) is low. There are no direct journeys from non-capital cities and the existing routes are not linked to one another.

There is lack of coordination among railway administrations on service management of international passenger trains. Fares for international journeys are higher than for separate segments by countries. .

Also, the border crossing formalities for international passenger transport by rail are not harmonized, however, in this regard the TARN member countries could accede to recently adopted UN ECE Convention on the Facilitation of Border Crossing Procedures for Passengers, Luggage and Load-luggage Carried in International Traffic by Rail.

From the users' point of view, advance information and awareness on procedures concerning international train journeys are more important than difference in them. In this regard there are no official/ public resources that provide necessary information on railway routes, services, regulations, and description of the procedures for different intercountry routes in the region.

Furthermore, there is insufficient regional application of existing regulatory framework in some aspects of international passenger trains such as accessibility, border crossing and immigration procedures, and ticketing.

There is also lack of appropriate framework in other aspects that are important for rail customers passengers' rights and obligations. International benchmark provides availability of good practical cases and pilot projects, such as advance information for foreign passengers on all procedures related to train journey, special commercial offers linked to international passenger transport, accessibility maps, etc.

All these factors decrease competitiveness of international railway passenger transport along the TARN.

More intercountry passenger trains could change the density of international services in the region. Unlike present dominance of such trains within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), future passenger trains could also be operated in Southeastern and Western Asia as countries of these regions are considering introducing high-speed railways for international

connections that would increase importance of streamlined border crossing formalities and related requirements.

COVID-19 pandemic struck while the study was being completed. Given, the deep impact pandemic is having and would have on railway passenger transport, the study report briefly mentions on the implications of the pandemic and makes few policy recommendations for decision-makers in TARN member countries, primarily on coping with asynchronous re-establishment of services.

At the time of finalizing this study, the pandemic is still not contained and therefore a more detailed study to understand its complete impact on range of issues in railway passenger transport is warranted.

Based on the existing legal framework and analysis of major challenges for rail administrations and for rail users – the study proposes recommendations to further strengthen international passenger transport in the region that includes developing a common strategic vision for international railway passenger transport for the region duly adopted by TARN members.

This could include such areas as: development of international rail passenger links as a part of regional connectivity in ESCAP countries; promotion of seamless international passenger journeys; improvement and promotion of international rail-based passenger intermodal services; coordination of actions/initiatives on rail passenger transport among different international organizations (coordination of visions and strategies regarding passenger services; promotion of e-ticketing, electronic interoperability and use of digital technologies; promotion of rail passenger services, harmonization of tariffs and their affordability); and development of touristic services and products in ESCAP region focusing on sustainable and accessible rail tourism with comfortable connections to other transport modes and services.

## **I. BACKGROUND.**

For a more sustainable transport sector in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a shift to more environmentally friendly modes of transport, such as railways, is crucial. In this direction, proactive policy initiatives are required to encourage energy efficient and environment friendly modes of transport such as railways whose potential remains underutilized.

Already, during the last few years there has been a rapid increase in the volumes of freight and passenger being transported by rail, a trend likely to continue. Therefore, efficient railway transport has acquired a renewed urgency to meet the growing demands of mobility in a sustainable manner.

Demographic evolutions, lifestyle changes as well technological advancement in railways towards more energy efficient systems would continue to increase demand for railway passenger transport. Many countries in the region are also developing high speed or semi-high-speed railway networks to meet the growing need for passenger transportation.

A study conducted by ESCAP in 2013 found many intercountry passenger trains in operation, some of them between: Azerbaijan – Russian Federation; Azerbaijan – Georgia; China – Democratic Republic of Korea; China – Russian Federation; China – Mongolia; China – Viet Nam; Democratic Republic of Korea – Russian Federation; Kazakhstan – Russian Federation; Kazakhstan – Kyrgyzstan; Mongolia – Russian Federation; India – Pakistan, India – Bangladesh; Thailand – Malaysia; Thailand – Lao People’s Democratic Republic.

The existence of extensive intercountry passenger trains in the region and their further potential indicates a need for a good understanding among the railway authorities on the challenges in running such trains efficiently and ways to address them.

## II. CURRENT OPERATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL PASSENGER TRAINS ALONG THE TRANS-ASIAN RAIL NETWORK.

### KEY MESSAGES.

1. Current density of international passenger train services in the ESCAP region is relatively low (higher in 1520 mm gauge area). There are no direct journeys from non-capital cities and the existing routes are not linked to one another
2. Night trains prevail (in 16:1 proportion to daytime services), and this is desirable from environmental point of view. The revival of night services in Europe caused by anti-aviation ecological movements requires new services to be established, while the ESCAP region already has this “greener” opportunity that can be further developed by both spread of night services network and upgrade of rail traction type to sustainable modes.
3. As of now there are no high-speed services for international connections, so that border crossing control and related international procedures may take much time. Further promotion of international passenger trains, such as new high-speed services, requires harmonized and simplified border crossing and customs formalities.

### A. Existing intercountry passenger trains and services.

The international railway passenger services in ESCAP region have following features:

- prevalence of overnight services due to longer distances
- higher concentration of international train services in the Russian Federation, Central Asian countries and in China
- relatively small number of connections apart from capital cities and small density of international passenger network
- number of services in countries with 1520 mm gauge
- higher tariffs on direct international services in comparison to the same route services purchased by country segments
- different classes of services along the Trans-Asian Rail Network proposed by different

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