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**Project Working Group on Transport and Border Crossing (PWG-TBC)**

18<sup>th</sup> Session  
4-5 April 2013  
Almaty, Kazakhstan

**Transport infrastructure projects, activities and initiatives  
at national and international level**  
(Item 4.1 of the Agenda)

*Note by UNESCAP*

**UNESCAP regional transport activities with focus on SPECA countries**

1. Acting on the Bangkok Declaration on Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific, the work of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) secretariat in the transport infrastructure sector has focused on the realization of the vision of an international integrated intermodal transport and logistics system in Asia with priority given to the development and upgrading of the Asian Highway (AH) and Trans-Asian Railway (TAR) networks, including intermodal interfaces to link them with water and air transport networks.
2. These networks have been formalized through two intergovernmental agreements which entered into force in 2005 and 2009, respectively and which have provided the necessary institutional background for a coordinated and rationale planning of regional infrastructure. The status of signatories concerning accession, signature, ratification and/ or approval of the two agreements by SPECA countries has remained the same since 2009 (Annex 1 and Annex 2).

**The Asian Highway (AH)**

3. The AH intergovernmental agreement has been the basis of ESCAP secretariat's work to promote and facilitate the development and upgrading of the network, notably through four Working Group sessions in which SPECA member States and other States have actively

participated<sup>1</sup>. The 5<sup>th</sup> session of the Working Group on AH is expected to take place in 2013 and should be another opportunity to consider potential amendments to the network and to discuss latest progress in policies and issues related to international road transport.

4. To support the development of an efficient regional road network, the ESCAP secretariat is implementing a project on “Promotion of Investment in the Asian Highway Network: Prefeasibility Studies of Priority Sections”. Under this project, technical assistances are being provided to four developing member countries including ~~to~~ Kyrgyzstan to undertake prefeasibility studies of selected priority routes and promote investment in the AH. As part of the project activities, national capacity building workshops to undertake prefeasibility/investment studies have been delivered in these countries.

5. With the objective of creating awareness of investment opportunities in member countries and promoting investment in the priority projects along the AH, the ESCAP secretariat will also organize a second “Asian Highway Investment Forum” (tentatively scheduled to be held in July 2013 in Seoul) where potential investment opportunities in the AH network will be showcased<sup>2</sup>. The outcome of the prefeasibility studies mentioned above will also be presented at this occasion.

6. Overall, notable progress has been made in the development and upgrading of the AH in conformity with the Intergovernmental Agreement’s classification and design standards as approximately 10,000 km of AH in the SPECA countries have been upgraded since 2004 to a higher a higher class standard. There are however still over 3,000 km of AH routes that need to be upgraded (Annex1).

### **Trans-Asian Railway**

7. Some of the notable developments in 2012 for the Trans-Asian Railway having a direct impact on SPECA member countries were: (a) ongoing construction of a missing link between Georgia and Turkey which, when finalized in 2013, will establish an important rail corridor between Istanbul and Azerbaijan (and, for that matter, the whole Caucasus region), while at the same time providing access to the Mediterranean ports of Iskenderun and Mersin; (b) progress made by the railways of Iran on the Qazvin-Rasht-Astara missing link which will complete the North-South transport corridor project that will eventually link the Baltic Sea to the Persian

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<sup>1</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Working Group on the Asian Highway was held on 27-28 September 2011 in Bangkok, which was attended by 4 SPECA countries (Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan).

<sup>2</sup> The first Asian Highway Investment Forum was held in Bangkok on 16 November 2007.

Gulf via Moscow, Baku and Tehran; (c) new attention to a 268-km line from Kashi (China) to Andizhan in eastern Uzbekistan through Torugart, Arpa and Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan with the signing in 2012 of a Memorandum of Understanding between China and Kyrgyzstan to stipulate the definition of technical designs. Meanwhile preparation for a feasibility study has already started<sup>3</sup>; (d) plan by the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to start running container block-trains over the 3,700-km route between the port of Bandar Abbas (Iran) and Almaty (Kazakhstan).

8. Other important projects are also taking place on developing rail routes of international importance that have not yet been officially designated as part of the TAR network. Two such projects are the (a) ongoing construction of a rail line from Uzen (Kazakhstan) to Gorgan (Islamic Republic of Iran) through Gyzylgaya-Bereket-Etrek (Turkmenistan) and the recently completed new cross-border rail link between China and Kazakhstan via Zhetigen and Khorgos. Both links will considerably enhance the movement of trade and facilitate access to ports in China and the Islamic Republic of Iran. New links are also being considered in Afghanistan where historically no rail network has been developed. The situation changed in 2010 with the completion of a 75-km single-track rail link from the border with Uzbekistan at Khairaton to Mazar-i-Sharif. Meanwhile, work is being implemented on the construction of a 205-km link between Sangan in eastern Iran and Herat in western Afghanistan. Further, long term plans are also under way to link the main cities located in the north and south of Afghanistan with their neighbouring countries, i.e. Islamic Republic of Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Pakistan.

9. To support the use of the TAR network, the ESCAP secretariat conducted a capacity building project to support countries in gaining better understanding of shippers' requirements for efficient services, thereby capitalizing better on their transport infrastructure, in particular rail assets. Under the project, the secretariat conducted a survey of railway authorities to assess current marketing and sales practices. The results of the survey were presented at a Seminar on "Promoting the use of the Trans-Asian Railway through improved awareness of commercial requirements" in 23-24 October 2012.

10. The secretariat will continue to implement activities to promote the future development and operationalization of the TAR network. In particular, in November 2013, the secretariat will convene the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the Working Group on the Trans-Asian Railway network.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/2012/06/18/railway-communications-for-the-development-of-trade-relations-of-kyrgyzstan>

**The Project Working Group may wish to**

- Encourage those SPECA countries that have not yet done so to take measures towards ratification, acceptance, approval of or accession to the Intergovernmental Agreement on the TAR network and the AH network; this is of particular importance as only countries that are Parties can propose amendments to the Agreement and thereby reflect their infrastructure development;
- Request SPECA countries that are Parties to the Agreements to consider proposing amendments to the AH and TAR networks at the next meeting of each respective Working Group in order to reflect latest development in infrastructure development and planning; it must be noted that countries that are not Parties can suggest amendments through a country that already is a Party<sup>4</sup>.
- Invite SPECA countries to exchange information with the secretariat on the latest status of key regional road and rail infrastructure projects and to prepare updating data on Asian Highway in view of the upcoming Working Group meeting.

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