

## INTRODUCTION

The Asian Highway is a significant regional transport cooperation initiative aimed at enhancing the efficiency and development of the road transport infrastructure in Asia. The key objectives are to promote international and bilateral trade and tourism in order to encourage regional economic and social development. The initiative is one component of the Asian land transport infrastructure development (ALTID) project, first launched by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) at its forty-eighth session in 1992.

The Asian Highway network (figure 2) now comprises more than 141,000 kilometres of roads, passing through 32 member States.

A new phase of the Asian Highway began with the entry into force of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network<sup>1</sup> on 4 July 2005. Currently, 20 member States are Parties to the Agreement:<sup>2</sup> Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Georgia, India, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, Uzbekistan, and Viet Nam.

The Agreement was adopted in November 2003 by the Intergovernmental Meeting to Develop an Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network. The Agreement was opened for signature at the sixtieth session of the Commission, held at Shanghai, China, in April 2004. It has so far been signed by 28 member States, a clear indication of the importance of developing the regional transport network in Asia. Member countries can join the Agreement through accession.

The main obligations of the Contracting Parties within the Agreement are to: (a) adopt the Asian Highway network as a coordinated plan for the development of highway routes of international importance; (b) bring the network into conformity with the Asian Highway classification and design standards; and (c) place Asian Highway route signs along the network.

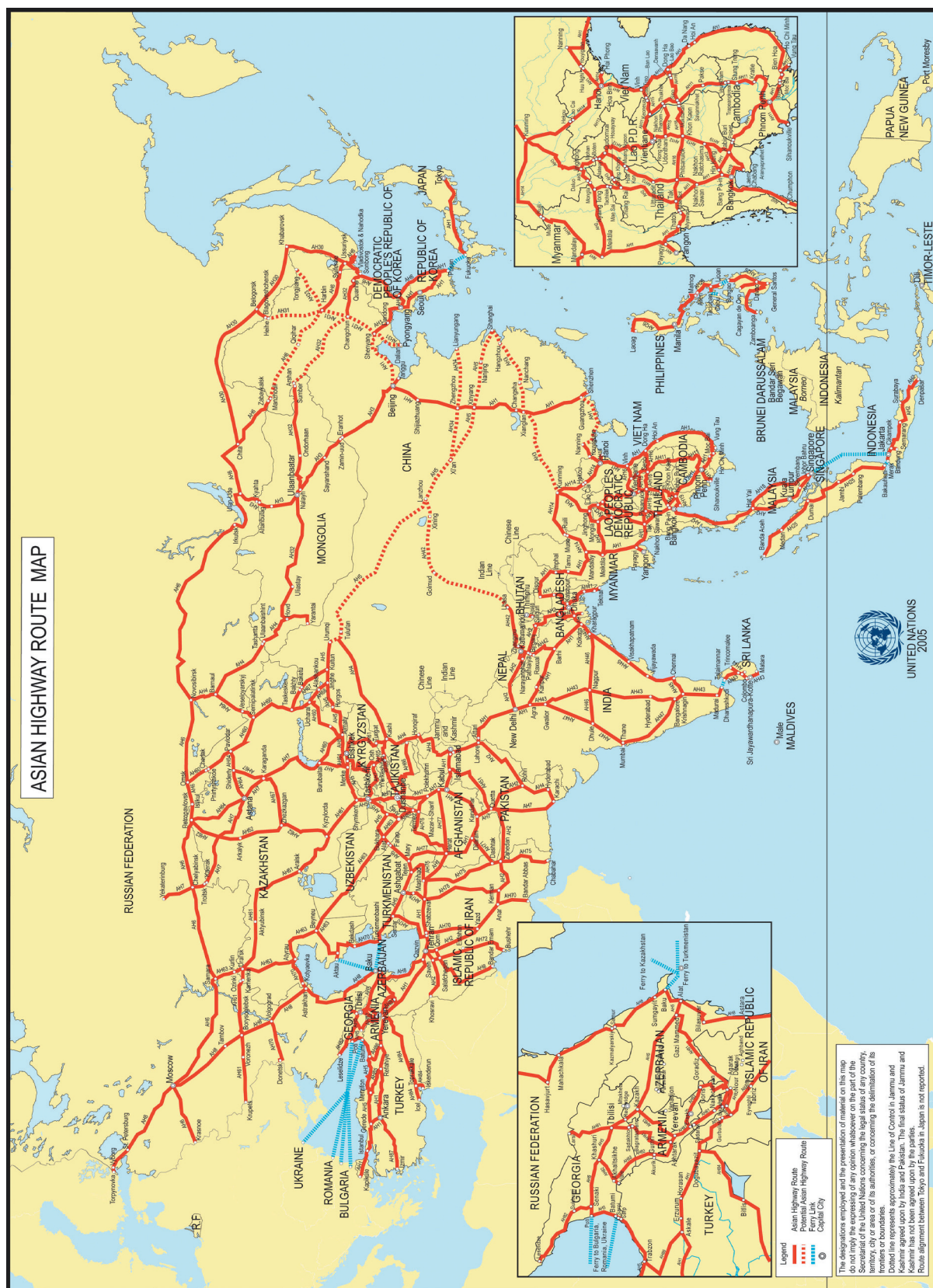


**Figure 1. Part of the Asian Highway network**

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.unescap.org/ttdw/common/tis/AH/AH-Agreement-E.pdf> for the full text of the Agreement.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://untreaty.un.org/ENGLISH/bible/englishinternetbible/partI/chapterXI/subchapB/treaty171.asp> for updated status.

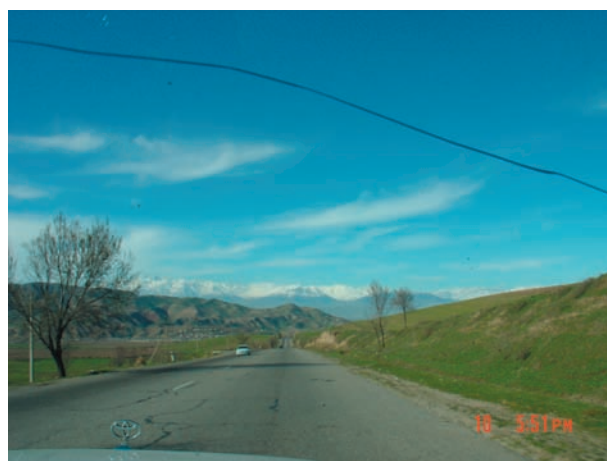


### Figure 2. Asian Highway network

The Agreement also provides for the establishment of a Working Group on the Asian Highway to consider its implementation and any proposed amendments. The first meeting of the Working Group, which also provides a regional forum for the exchange of information and experiences in the development of a regional highway, was held in Bangkok on 14 and 15 December 2005.

Resolution 60/4 of 28 April 2004 on the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network, concerning financial and technical support, was adopted at the sixtieth session of the Commission held in Shanghai, China. In the resolution, the Commission invites international and regional financing institutions, as well as multilateral and bilateral donors, to provide financial and technical support for the development of the Asian Highway network and related infrastructure, particularly taking into account the special needs of landlocked developing countries.

Currently, 15.8 per cent of the 141,000 km of the Asian Highway network is below the agreed minimum standards. Upgrading and improving the network to the requirements of international transport is one of the important obligations of a Party within the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network. While some States are capable of mobilizing the resources to fulfil the obligations of the Agreement, other States will need development assistance from multilateral and bilateral donors as well as international financial institutions in order to meet those obligations.



**Figure 3. Examples of Asian Highway sections requiring investment**

In the context of these funding constraints, ESCAP implemented a project with funding provided by the Government of Japan to review the status of development as well as identify investment needs and priorities for the development of the Asian Highway network.

The project employed a simple methodology to assess the status of the Asian Highway network and the investment requirement, and to identify priority projects. Information related to the status of national highway networks, ongoing and planned investment along the Asian Highway, national policies and priorities, and a list of priority projects were collected from each member State. Designated government representatives acting as focal points for the Asian Highway in member States provided information in the form of country reports.



Taking a subregional approach, inputs received from member States were used to prepare subregional overviews of the status of development, investment needs and development priorities for the: (a) South-Asia, (b) North, Central and South-West Asia, and (c) South-East Asia subregions. Three subregional expert group meetings were organized for: (a) South Asia (including Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran), (b) North, Central and South-West Asia, and (c) South-East Asia (including Mongolia). Representatives of member countries and donors discussed the subregional overviews, national policies and plans for the development of the Asian Highway as well as priority investment projects of common national and subregional importance.

For the first time, the project facilitated interaction and dialogue among member countries and international financing institutions, bilateral donors and subregional organizations on financing the development of the Asian Highway.

Following the identification of priority projects at the subregional meetings, member countries provided a project profile template containing further detailed information on the priority projects with the objectives of promoting investment and highlighting these identified projects for interested bilateral and multilateral donors or private sector investors.

This publication consolidates the outcomes of three subregional expert group meetings, and provides subregional overviews of the status of the Asian Highway in the four subregions: (a) South Asia; (b) Central and South West Asia; (c) South-East Asia; and (d) North-East Asia. Chapter I outlines the current status of the Asian Highway with respect to its conformity with Asian Highway classification and design standards. Chapter II presents an assessment of ongoing and committed investment along the Asian Highway in member States and the investment needs for the development of the Asian Highway. It also presents a consolidated list of identified priority investment projects emanating from the three subregional expert group meetings and consultations with member States. Chapter III explains the importance of intermodal connectivity. The conclusions are presented in chapter IV. Project profiles of selected priority projects are included in the annex.

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