

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

**REPORT OF THE POLICY-LEVEL EXPERT GROUP MEETING
ON THE ROAD NETWORKS CONNECTING CHINA, KAZAKHSTAN,
MONGOLIA, THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION
AND THE KOREAN PENINSULA**

Bangkok, 10-12 October 2001



UNITED NATIONS

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background

The Asian Highway project was initiated with the objective of assisting member countries in developing road transport infrastructure, both within Asia and between Asia and Europe, thereby promoting regional development and opening new opportunities for international trade and tourism. As part of the Asian Highway project for developing international road transport linkages between North-East Asia, Central Asia, the Caucasus and Europe, the secretariat completed a study on the road networks connecting China, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, the Russian Federation and the Korean peninsula. The study has identified potential Asian Highway routes in these countries.

Following the completion of the study, a Policy-level Expert Group Meeting was suggested to consider the Asian Highway routes proposed by the participating countries for inclusion in the Asian Highway network; to review the technical standards of the routes; and to introduce the proposed formalization of the Asian Highway network.

B. Organization of the Meeting

The Policy-level Expert Group Meeting on Road Networks Connecting China, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, the Russian Federation and the Korean Peninsula was organized by the Transport, Communications, Tourism and Infrastructure Development Division of ESCAP. It was held from 10 to 12 October 2001 in Bangkok.

C. Attendance

The Meeting was attended by representatives of China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Tumen Secretariat. Mr H. Nishimura, Manager, Central Consultants Inc., also attended as an observer. The list of participants and the programme of the Meeting are given in annexes I and II, respectively.

D. Opening of the Meeting

The Meeting was inaugurated by the Director of the Transport, Communications, Tourism and Infrastructure Development Division of ESCAP. In his opening address, the Director warmly welcomed the participants. He noted that adequate and efficient access to the global market was a prerequisite for the socio-economic development of countries, and stressed the importance of developing transport infrastructure to provide access to markets. Recognizing the growing demands for improved regional transport, ESCAP was implementing the Asian Land Transport Infrastructure Development (ALTID) project with support and cooperation from member countries. The Director further mentioned that the Asian Highway project was an important part of ALTID and had been instrumental in developing international highway routes which already transited 26 member countries. Following this Policy-level Expert Group Meeting, the Asian Highway would include routes covering 29 countries. The Director mentioned that an ESCAP Ministerial Conference on Infrastructure would be held in Seoul, 12-17 November 2001 and that the development of the Asian Highway would be one of the important issues to be discussed. In addition an expert group meeting for all Asian Highway member countries was planned for 2002 which would complete the formulation of the Asian Highway network. He expressed his hope that the Meeting would provide valuable contributions to both of those events.

The Director thanked the Government of the Republic of Korea for its generous financial assistance, and concluded by wishing the participants success in their deliberations and a pleasant stay in Bangkok.

II. SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

A. Introduction to the ALTID project

The Chief of the Land Transport Section introduced ESCAP and the ALTID project which, comprised the Trans-Asian Railway, the Asian Highway and land transport facilitation. After outlining the implementation strategy of the ALTID project, he briefed the Meeting on the progress to date, including several studies that had been completed for the formulation of the Asian Highway network. Lastly, he introduced some of the issues that would be discussed at the forthcoming ESCAP Ministerial Conference on Infrastructure, to be held in Seoul, 12-17 November 2001.

B. Asian Highway network development and introduction to the study

The secretariat briefly outlined ESCAP activities in the development of the Asian Highway network and introduced the objectives and activities of the current study, outlining the work being undertaken and planned for the periodic revision of the Asian Highway network. That included completion of the formulation of the Asian Highway to cover the whole of Asia, revision of the design standards, extension of the Asian Highway database and formalization of the networks.

C. Transport development in the Tumen River Area

The Team Leader of the UNDP Tumen Secretariat outlined the transport development strategy of the Tumen River Area Development Programme (TRADP). The geographic coverage of the Tumen transport corridor was described with maps showing the Primorsky region (Russian Federation), Yanbian prefecture (China), and the Rajin Sonbong zone (Democratic People's Republic of Korea). Details of the current TRADP activities were provided including the development of transport infrastructure in the land, sea and air transport sectors, and other initiatives to strengthen cooperation in transport facilitation, including bilateral talks on cross-border problems. He suggested several areas for increased cooperation and coordination between TRADP and ESCAP, particularly with respect to activities related to the implementation of priority transport projects in the subregion, promotion of the transport network, including the work being implemented under the ALTID project, and the development of a transport facilitation agreement for the subregion.

D. Statements from the country representatives

Representatives from each of the countries attending the Meeting presented the details of recent developments in the highway sector of their countries with particular reference to proposed international routes, brief details of which are provided below. Following each statement, the floor was opened for questions and clarifications.

China

The representative of China informed the Meeting that the Tenth Five-year Plan of national economic and social development had recently been issued. For the highway sector the goals were primarily to support economic growth and spread its benefits to wider hinterlands through the development of transport networks and services. Two particular priority areas in the plan were to improve commercial and personal mobility and to establish a national and international trunk network to serve economic globalization. In that regard, the importance of cooperation with neighbouring countries was emphasized. It was noted that infrastructure projects, such as the Asian Highway network, would expand opportunities for regional economies to cooperate and integrate. In that process, subregional infrastructure projects, in particular, would be important to the region's development.

At present, China's highway network was estimated to be about 1.4 million kilometres, including 16,300 kilometres of expressways and about 20,000 kilometres of other high-grade (Class I) highways. All levels of the government have embarked on major highway investment programmes. Two core high-grade highway systems were the National Trunk Highway System and the Western Development Inter-Provincial Corridors. He mentioned that the National Highway 107 (Beijing-Guangzhou-Shenzhen) was first proposed to be included in the Asian Highway network by China in 1987. Since then, the secretariat and the Government of China have been discussing other potential routes. Based on the national study, the representative proposed 11 possible alternatives for consideration. Those Asian Highway routes would link China to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Kazakhstan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Thailand and Viet Nam. He also stressed that the proposed Asian Highway alternatives of China were subject to the approval of the Chinese Government and the final inclusion needed to be confirmed by official documents.

In closing, the representative noted that China would give high priority to the Asian Highway projects in China and actively cooperate with other countries to improve transport mobility and efficiency; to improve road safety; to develop logistical systems, particularly for container transport from ports to the hinterland; and to develop a market economy in the construction and operation of infrastructure and the provision of transport services.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

The representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea expressed his thanks to the secretariat for its efforts to support the development of infrastructure in the region. He noted that his government is focusing on road transport as an important transport mode. In the beginning of 2000, the government called on the people to develop a prosperous nation through the development of priority sectors, including transport. Subsequently, an expressway linking Nampo with Pyongyang was completed. At present a road construction programme in the countryside was being implemented as part of a national campaign. The representative stated that the present Meeting was of interest to his government because it involved the development of road networks at the regional level. In that regard, he noted his government's participation in the Tumen River Area Development project.

Mongolia

The representative of Mongolia informed the Meeting that his government had been involved in the Asian Highway project since 1993. He noted that owing to the geographic position of Mongolia, the sparsely distributed population and the limited reach of the railways, road transport was the primary means of transport for passengers and freight. During the last few years, a number of policies relating to the road network had been developed with support from the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, the Kuwaiti Fund and the Government of Japan. For example, in January 2001 the “Millenium Road” project, which comprised both East-West and North-South roads, was approved by the Parliament. He proposed to include the East-West link of the “Millenium Road” to the Asian Highway network, by realigning the current route A-83 that would connect Changchun, China and the Tumen River Area. The representative also proposed one North-South link to connect the city of Novosibirsk in the Russian Federation through Hovd in Mongolia with the city of Urumqi in China and requested China and the Russian Federation to investigate the potential for this subregional connection.

Republic of Korea

The representative of the Republic of Korea outlined the national system of classification of roads, which were based mainly on comprehensive technical standards. He noted that two types of roads, the national expressways and the national highways, met the agreed Primary, Class I and II Asian Highway standards and other roads in the country conformed with the Asian Highway design standards. As of 1997, the total length of the road network in the Republic of Korea was estimated to be 84,968 kilometres. At present, road transport was the dominant mode for both passenger and freight traffic (in passenger-km and tonne-km). With the rapidly increasing number of motor vehicles in the country, there was still a strong demand for additional road infrastructure.

The representative further outlined the status of the transport links between the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea and mentioned that Munsan-Kaesung, Chulwon, and Kosung crossing points were of particular importance. He suggested a slight change in the alignment of the proposed Pusan-Seoul route and agreed to the proposed Pusan-Pohang-Kangreung route along the eastern coast of the Republic of Korea. The representative noted that two corridors had been identified: the “West Coastal Axis” corridor linking Tokyo-Seoul-Beijing, and the “East Coastal Axis” corridor, which stretched from Niigata (Japan) – Pusan (Republic of Korea) – Vladivostok (Russian Federation).

Russian Federation

The representative of the Russian Federation informed the Meeting of the extensive development of the road transport sector over recent years. He noted that the political and economic reforms, which had been introduced in the country, had substantially influenced the transport system, particularly the road sector. Traffic had grown at a rapid rate, creating new challenges including congestion in and around large cities. Given that situation, the government had decided in 1995 to adopt a special programme to develop its national

highway system. The total length of the road network was estimated to be 1 million kilometres. Road construction had concentrated in the European part of the country. However in the new 10-year national highway programme launched in June 2001, more attention is being given to the development of the Asian part of the Russian Federation, including Siberia and the Russian Far East.

It was further pointed out that the development of international road networks on the territory of the Russian Federation was given the highest priority. Two corridors of particular interest and which were highly relevant to the Asian Highway were the “North-South” corridor, linking Scandinavia with the Caucasus and Central Asian subregion, and the East-West corridor linking Eastern Europe and the Far East through the Russian Federation. Those corridors included both road and rail transport options, which provided customers with a choice. He stated that the existing links with neighbouring countries would form the basis of the Asian Highway routes in the Russian Federation. In parallel with infrastructure development, it was noted that serious consideration was being given to the development of border-crossing facilities, and that the government was actively perusing ways of harmonizing customs procedures with neighbouring countries.

In closing, the representative noted that his government supported the ESCAP’s ALTID project, and was interested in developing projects that would provide opportunities for increased trade with all its neighbours, particularly those in the far eastern areas.

E. Asian Highway routes

The secretariat presented an overview of its study on the road networks connecting China, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, the Russian Federation and the Korean peninsula. This included the proposed Asian Highway routes in the member countries, illustrated on a subregional Asian Highway route map and suggested a numbering system for the routes. The secretariat also informed the Meeting that as the present study was limited to six countries, the route numbering would be further reviewed by an expert group meeting for all Asian Highway member countries in 2002.

F. Design standards

The secretariat introduced the provision of Asian Highway design standards, which

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