



**Economic and Social  
Council**

Distr.  
GENERAL

ECE/AC.21/2001/4  
EUR/00/502609/4  
24 July 2001

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

---

**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

**WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION**

Regional Office for Europe

Special session of the Economic Commission for Europe;

Ministerial Level Regional Meeting for the World Summit on Sustainable Development

(24 and 25 September 2001)

**PROGRESS REPORT ON THE FOLLOW-UP WORK TO THE HIGH LEVEL  
MEETING ON TRANSPORT, ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH  
(Geneva, 4 May 2001)**

**A. INTRODUCTION**

1. The Agenda 21 adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1991 identified transport as a key priority for action at national and international levels. Over the past ten years, the concern over the long-term sustainability of transport developments has been constantly increasing in Europe, in line with the steady growth of transport volumes and the number of motor vehicles in the region. Today, the challenge is to develop sustainable transport systems that allow transport to continue to play its role in fostering growth and integration in the region, while addressing environmental and health concerns.

2. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) has repeatedly emphasized that close intersectoral cooperation which involves all actors concerned is a key element for bringing about sustainability. The importance of an intersectoral approach to address this issue was last confirmed at the fifty-sixth session of the Commission 14 May 2001.

3. In 1997 the UNECE initiated an integrated approach to transport related problems at the pan-European level. This process led to a Regional Ministerial Conference on Transport and the Environment held in Vienna at which a Vienna Declaration and the Programme of Joint Action on Transport and the Environment<sup>1</sup> was adopted by consensus.

4. The World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe (WHO Euro) is also stressing the major role of intersectoral action, and the responsibility that different sectors of economy share with the health one in promoting and protecting health<sup>2</sup>. In 1999, the Third Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health organized by WHO/Euro further expanded intersectoral work by adopting the London Ministerial Declaration and the Charter on Transport, Environment and Health<sup>3</sup>.

5. As a follow-up to the London Charter, the High-level Meeting on Transport, Environment and Health (Geneva, 4 May 2001) decided upon further steps to achieve transport sustainable for health and the environment. The High-level Meeting considered a Synthesis Report<sup>4</sup> prepared by the UNECE and WHO/Euro secretariats recommending in particular to start negotiations on a new international legal instrument, i.e. a Framework Convention on Transport, Environment and Health. The Synthesis report recommended in parallel to further develop a number of existing international instruments and their implementation as well as to strive for a closer cooperation between other relevant organizations and projects. Furthermore, the UNECE and WHO/Euro secretariats proposed to streamline the London and Vienna processes with a view to rationalize work at the international level in the fields of transport, environment and health<sup>5</sup>.

6. The High-level Meeting decided to take the final decisions on the above issues at a second High-level Meeting to be convened in 2002 prior to the Rio + 10 World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2-11 September 2002). It requested that further preparatory work be carried out at the international level by a tripartite task force to be established within the framework of the Vienna and London follow-up processes. It also requested that a progress report on this tripartite process be submitted to regional ministerial meetings, such as the regional preparatory meeting for the Johannesburg summit (Geneva, 24-25 September 2001).

---

1 ECE/RTCE/CONF./2/FINAL; ECE/RTCE/CONF.3/FINAL

2 Health21 – The Health for All policy framework for the WHO European Region, 1999 World Health Organization – European Health for All Series No. 6

3 EUR/ICP/ECHO 02 02 05/0 Rev.4

4 Overview of Instruments Relevant to Transport, Environment and Health and Recommendations for Further Steps; Synthesis Report (ECE/AC.21/2001/1 – EUR/00/502609/4/1). ([www.unece.org/poja](http://www.unece.org/poja) or [www.who.it/ht/the.htm](http://www.who.it/ht/the.htm))

5 Conference Room Paper, 25 April 2001, Rationalization of Work at the International Level in the field of Transport, Environment and Health

7. The cooperative efforts of UNECE and WHO/Euro to move ahead towards transport sustainable for health and the environment constitute one of the most concrete regional initiatives to implement the Agenda 21.

**B. ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE HIGH LEVEL MEETING**

8. The Synthesis Report prepared by the UNECE and WHO secretariats provides an assessment of trends and driving forces in transport development as well as of impacts of transport on human health and the environment. It expresses serious concerns on the long-term sustainability of the present mobility trends characterized notably by the continuing increase of transport, particularly road transport.

9. The report concludes that, in spite of the important steps already taken by Governments, the economic burden to the society caused by environmental and health impacts of present transport patterns calls for further action.

10. While the progress made within the European Union in the context of so-called Cardiff process in integrating environment and sustainable development consideration into the other sectors, including transport, is recognized, there is still a lack of such a development in the Eastern European countries, in particular in the Newly Independent States. The report identifies the lack of a European-wide strategy fostering integration of the transport, environment and health sectors and stronger cross-sectoral cooperation and synergies in terms of policies and legislation and pinpoints a number of other “gaps” in the existing policy instruments.

11. Coherent, integrated and long-term solutions need to be found, which assure the commitment and involvement of all relevant actors at the international, national, regional and local levels, in particular in relation to decision-making processes, monitoring and impact assessment. Filling gaps in the scope and implementation of the existing legal instruments and policy responses alone does not seem to be sufficient in this respect. An overarching approach appears to be required to bring together all actors involved and use the synergies of international actions that aim to promote similar goals in Europe and within national administrations.

12. Urban areas, where most transport activities take place and where the exposure of the population to transport-related impacts is the highest, represent a particularly important area for further action. Areas where value could be added to present activities include also land-use planning, traffic-demand management and market creation for more sustainable transport. Further impetus also needs to be given to the development and promotion of public transport and to a modal shift from motorized transport to cycling and walking. Finally, the regulation of overall noise reduction, particularly in urban areas throughout Europe, would fill a gap in the existing international legislation.

13. The report concludes that the most appropriate and effective normative approach for addressing these key challenges at the pan-European level seems to be the establishment of a Framework Convention which allows for progressive specification of commitments among those parties that are ready and able to move ahead. A Framework Convention may also be used to foster a broad consensus around the relevant facts and the appropriate international and national response. Furthermore such an approach is in line with recent developments in international law, addressing also issues where subsidiarity is of specific concern, and allows, for example, policy directions to be developed on the basis of best practices to be applied at both national and local levels.

#### **C. DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE HIGH LEVEL MEETING ON TRANSPORT, ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH**

14. The High-level Meeting on Transport, Environment and Health (Geneva, 4 May 2001) was attended by more than hundred delegates from 40 UNECE and WHO/Euro Member countries representing the transport, environment and health sectors as well as many intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

15. The Meeting was of the opinion that the commitments made by the Ministers in Vienna and in London should be honored. There was also a broad support for more effective work towards achieving transport sustainable for health and the environment. Political action was seen, as a necessity for making things move, however, there was still insufficient agreement on what would the most adequate action to be taken. The Meeting was in favor a two-track approach consisting of implementing the already existing instruments as well as of initiating further steps.

16. The Meeting felt that a decision on whether to start negotiations of a Framework Convention on transport, environment and health could only be taken once further clarifications were made. There seemed however to be an agreement on the merits of an overarching international framework to foster integration of transport, environment and health.

17. The Meeting decided in particular to undertake further preparatory work to be able to decide whether to start negotiations of a Framework Convention, including the specific task of identifying the possible elements of such an instrument. This work shall be carried out at the international level, by a tripartite Task Force to be established within the framework of the London and Vienna follow-up processes, as soon as possible.

18. The Meeting also endorsed rationalization of the existing international institutional mechanisms established under the Vienna and London follow-up processes and prioritisation of the related work as proposed by the UNECE and WHO/Euro secretariats.

#### **D. THE WAY FORWARD**

19. As requested by the High-level Meeting, the governing bodies of the Vienna and London follow-up processes, the Joint Meeting on Transport and Environment (JMTE) and the London Charter Steering Group, decided to establish a Joint UNECE–WHO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Transport, Environment and Health, at least until the second High-level Meeting to be convened in summer 2002, by extending the already existing Joint Ad Hoc Expert Group on Transport and the Environment to include health experts.

20. The Joint UNECE – WHO Expert Group will:

(a) act as a Task Force to carry out further preparatory work to facilitate the decision on whether to start negotiations on a Framework Convention to be taken at the second High-level Meeting on Transport, Environment and Health including the specific task of identifying the possible elements of such an instrument. Consideration should be given to the existing legal instruments as well as to other legal aspects relating to a possible framework convention.

(b) carry out preparatory work for facilitating the rationalization of the existing international institutional mechanisms established under the Vienna and London follow-up.

21. The Expert Group will be open to representatives of UNECE and WHO/Euro member countries of the three Ministries concerned. National focal points for transport and the environment, national contact points for health, lead actors and other experts of POJA and London Charter and representatives of international organizations and non-governmental organizations will be invited to participate as observers.

22. The expert group will meet at least twice before the second High-level Meeting. As much as possible, the meetings of the expert group should be held back-to-back to other relevant meetings. It will be serviced jointly by the UNECE and WHO/Euro secretariats with contributions from UNEP Regional Office for Europe and will be supported by a Bureau with an equal representation of the three Ministries as well as of the Eastern and Western sub-regions of Europe.

23. The timetable for work to be undertaken by the Joint UNECE – WHO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Transport, Environment and Health is in the Annex:

**Annex**

**Timetable For Work To Be Undertaken By The Joint UNECE – WHO Ad Hoc Expert Group On Transport, Environment And Health**

- 6-7 June 2001:** Adoption of the Terms of Reference of the Expert Group by the Joint Meeting on Transport and the Environment (6 June 2001) and by the London Charter Steering Group (7 June 2001).
- 24-25 September:** Secretariats submit a progress report on the work carried out to the regional preparatory meeting for Rio +10 summit (Johannesburg, September 2002).
- 26-27 November:** First meeting of the Expert Group.

**2002**

- 25-26 February:** Second meeting of the Expert Group, adoption of proposals and recommendations for the High-level Meeting.
- July:** Second High-level Meeting on Transport, Environment and Health, to be held at the Ministerial level, to:
- (a) endorse the Vienna mid-term review and the evaluation of the implementation of the London Charter;
  - (b) finalize the rationalisation of the London and Vienna follow-up processes; consolidation of institutional mechanisms and priorities for future action;
  - (c) decide whether to start negotiations on a Framework Convention on Transport, Environment and Health.
-