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**Preparatory work for the organization of demonstration runs
of container trains on Euro-Asian routes**

Transmitted by the Government of the Russian Federation

Russia's geographical position means that it has a natural integrating role to play in the Euro-Asian subcontinent. It is located at the crossroads of many trade routes which have become established over the years in Eurasia.

Most of the terrestrial transport links between the countries of Europe and Central, East and South-East Asia gravitate towards Russian territory, its transport system, and above all its major railway routes, which have the capacity to handle large flows of goods efficiently and offer combined goods transport operations.

In this context the Russian transport system, and first and foremost its railways, have a huge role to play as a transit network for export and import goods for many States in Europe and Asia.

The transit-carrying potential of the Russian railways enables them to handle international goods transport operations reliably over the length and breadth of the Euro-Asian region.

In recent years the Russian Ministry of Railways has played an active part in the implementation of the Asia land transport infrastructure development (ALTID) project, which is being carried out under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

At the current stage of the ALTID project, as applied to the main international trans-Asian routes, preparatory work is being undertaken to organize demonstration runs of container trains over the following five routes in the Trans-Asian Railway northern corridor:

Route I: from the port of Vostochny (Russian Federation) to Europe using the railways of the Russian Federation, Belarus and Poland.

Route II: from the port of Lianyungang (China) to Europe using the railways of China, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Belarus and Poland.

Route III: from the port of Tianjin (China) to Europe using the railways of China, Mongolia, the Russian Federation, Belarus and Poland.

Route IV: from the port of Pusan (Republic of Korea) to Europe through:

Variant IV-1: railways of the Republic of Korea, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (from the border with the Republic of Korea to Sinuiju), China, Mongolia, the Russian Federation, Belarus and Poland.

Variant IV-2: railways of the Republic of Korea, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (from the border with the Republic of Korea to Tumangang), the Russian Federation, Belarus and Poland.

Variant IV-3: railways of the Republic of Korea, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, China, the Russian Federation, Belarus and Poland.

Route V: from the port of Rajin (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) to Europe through:

Variant V-1: railways of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Belarus and Poland.

Variant V-2: railways of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, China, the Russian Federation, Belarus and Poland.

The Russian Federation is equally interested in the organization of runs of trains along all five routes.

Because of its geographical location, Russia has a key role to play in the practical organization of container train runs, since all the routes pass along the major Trans-Siberian Railway, which was completed 100 years ago and whose one-hundredth anniversary we celebrated last year.

The Trans-Siberian Railway is a major two-track railway line, largely electrified, stretching some 10,000 kilometres. Its technical capacity enables it to handle up to 100 million tons of goods per year, including up to 140,000 twenty-foot containers in international transit.

The infrastructure of the Trans-Siberian Railway is undergoing continuous modernization. Vital improvements in railway stations on the borders with Mongolia, China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea have been carried out, approaches to seaports have been upgraded, and container terminals are being modernized to meet international standards for the handling of 40-foot containers.

The Russian Federation is ready as of now to organize train runs along all five routes.

In 1998 the Russian Federation organized a demonstration run of a container train along a route running from the port of Nakhodka in Russia's Far East to Brest on the Belarus-Polish border. The total duration of the journey was 9.5 days.

At present fast container block trains serve the route from the port of Nakhodka to the countries of western Europe. Up to three block trains leave each day.

In November 2001 a ministerial conference on infrastructure development in the countries of Asia and the Pacific was held in Seoul (Republic of Korea). A memorandum of understanding on the implementation of the ESCAP project for demonstration runs of container trains along the Trans-Asian Railway northern corridor was signed at the meeting by representatives of all the countries along the northern corridor, except for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, as well as three international organizations - the Organization for Cooperation between Railways, the International Union of Railways and ESCAP.

In June 2002 the first meeting of the Steering Committee on the planning and implementation of demonstration runs of container block trains along the Trans-Asian Railway northern corridor was held in Vladivostok. The Steering Committee was set up under the above-mentioned memorandum of understanding.

The meeting was attended by representatives of railway administrations from Belarus, Kazakhstan, China, the Republic of Korea, Mongolia, Poland, Russia and Finland, European and Asian shippers and freight forwarders, the Organization for Cooperation between Railways and the International Union of Railways.

The participants exchanged views on the development of container transport by rail between Asia and Europe. It was decided to instruct the Steering Committee to study the following issues: the transfer of containers at border stations, the number of containers to be carried on each train, the quality of services to be provided, criteria for the selection of freight forwarders and tariff matters. It was also decided to encourage customs and border agencies in the participating countries to become involved in the work of the Steering Committee.

On 5 June 2002 a fast container block train travelled from Nakhodka-Vostochnaya to Buslovskaya, spending 9 days, 20 hours and 58 minutes on the journey. The train covered over 10,000 kilometres at an average of 1,039 kilometres a day.

Our partners in Poland and Germany, like ourselves in the Russian Federation, are ready to run demonstration container trains along all five routes in the northern corridor.

It is hoped that our partners in the east - China, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea - will also soon be ready for these train runs.

In the autumn of 2001 a test run of a train was carried out along the route through Kazakhstan - route II. However, the train carried only 26 containers being dispatched from China to western Europe - around 50 per cent of the target.

For this reason China and Kazakhstan need to carry out additional work on the organization of the flow of goods containers to western Europe.

It should be pointed out that trains travelling from the port of Nakhodka to the Russian-Finnish border all carry a full load - no less than 50 forty-foot containers on each train.

The issue of running container trains through Mongolia from China to Russia and western Europe, and from China to Russia and western Europe, is under discussion.

During the first half of 2003 the Steering Committee will hold a second meeting to discuss running trains along the northern corridor. The meeting will be held in China or Mongolia. It is likely to consider in greater detail, and to agree on, schedules and conditions for the running of demonstration container trains across China and across Mongolia.
