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INLAND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE
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agenda item 18(c))

COMBINED TRANSPORT

Proposals regarding the scope of work of the Working Party on Combined Transport

Note by the secretariat

A. BACKGROUND

1. At its thirty-eighth session, the Working Party on Combined Transport (WP.24) considered documents TRANS/WP.24/2002/11 and TRANS/WP.24/2002/12 on the future organization and scope of work. The Working Party also considered how to align and improve the harmonization of work with other intergovernmental organizations, in particular the European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT).
2. The Working Party expressed support of reconsidering the organization and working methods for its sessions, including the possibility of organizing back-to-back or joint sessions with the ECMT Working Group on Combined Transport in one and the same location, with a view to facilitating the participation of Governments in both UNECE and ECMT sessions.
3. The Working Party requested the secretariat to prepare a document on this issue and to transmit it, together with its programme of work, for the consideration of the Inland Transport Committee at its present session.

B. SCOPE OF WORK

4. During recent years, new manufacturing and transport concepts, such as logistics and reverse logistics, outsourcing, supply and demand chain management, just-in-time delivery and inventory optimisation, but to mention a few, have changed transport processes resulting in smaller and, at the same

time, an increasing number of shipments. In parallel, transport volumes have, in general, increased as a result of increased global sourcing in the manufacturing sector. In the UNECE region, the transport sector has simultaneously experienced a preference for certain transport modes, which has led to a shift in the modal split. These combined developments have resulted in saturation of certain infrastructures and, at the same time, under-utilization of other infrastructures, raising public concerns about the environment and mobility limitation, and have raised a question about the sustainability of transport

5. According to forecasts, it seems likely that the trends towards a volume increase in transport as well as a further development in demand oriented transport chains and reverse logistics will lead to a continued increase in the number of shipments. Therefore, if nothing is done at policy level concerning the present trend in the modal split and the practices of the transport and logistics industries, the problems and public concerns about the environment and mobility will increase.

6. UNECE member States and intergovernmental bodies, such as the UNECE, the ECMT and the European Commission, have for some years considered the issues raised above. Solutions, ranging from implementing restrictions or taxation for certain modes of transport and subsidizing other modes of transport, developing transport alternatives, requiring the use of new technology reducing pollution as well as using information technology (IT) to optimize transport have been all considered and to a certain extent implemented by Governments. Also the various industry sectors involved in transport and logistics have seen the necessity to react to the problems described, developing private transport networks and integrated logistics solutions, often utilizing IT to optimize such solutions.

7. With the aim of finding sustainable and equitable solutions to the present situation, Governments and industries, in close cooperation, should intensify efforts to identify impediments for the optimal use of already existing infrastructures and transport modes, as well as to develop and promote alternative techniques that can integrate infrastructures, thereby providing alternatives, which can alleviate some of the present problems.

8. It also seems to be important that the UNECE region links its infrastructure networks with those of other world regions in order to provide for alternatives to the existing trade routes, thereby alleviating some of the traditional bottlenecks in the transport chain, such as for instance the road network around some of the major European deep-sea ports.

9. In this context, the role of Governments and intergovernmental organizations could be to provide for a framework for international integrated transport infrastructures and regulations in order to facilitate seamless transport structures. Combined transport and the AGTC network is such a framework, which provides solutions to some of the issues raised above. However, combined transport is part of the larger concept of intermodal and multimodal transport and is an element in the logistics chain, which also includes the important element of terminals. As there is often no clear borderline between these issues, the Working Party on Combined Transport has over time dealt with issues beyond pure combined transport, such as for instance the issue of civil liability and the publication of a glossary on terminology.

10. The Working Party is of the view that, in order to fully evaluate the benefits and provide solutions for Governments in the UNECE region concerning the needs for integrated transport and logistics infrastructures and frameworks, the Working Party should enlarge its scope of work not only to consider combined transport, this being one very important element, but also to consider intermodal and multimodal transport as well as logistics needs.

11. The Working Party invites the Committee to endorse this enlargement of the scope of work. If endorsed by the Committee, the Working Party will in the course of 2003 define the areas of work to be considered and prepare a refocused programme of work for 2004-2008 for the endorsement of the Committee at its next session.

12. In this context the Committee may also wish to note that the ECMT Working Group on Combined Transport is also in a process of re-considering its own scope of activities, in the context of a broad review of its role. This review is examining ways of improving further the good relations between UNECE and ECMT, building on the agreed division of labour, with ECMT as a political body and UNECE as a legislative/technical body. It is worth considering whether some synergies could be achieved between the two Working Groups, in particular given that the delegates for the sessions of the two groups are often the same. In developing the a refocused programme of work for 2004-2008, the Working Party will coordinate the scope of the work with the ECMT secretariat in order to ensure the necessary alignment of issues and division of work.

C. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

13. The Working Party has also considered how its organization of its work could be further enhanced, in particular how the participation of UNECE member States could be increased.

14. The Working Party agreed that solutions should be sought to provide for fast reactions to problems arising and to provide for flexibility in the work process. This could be realized, for instance, through the establishment of expert groups and ad hoc groups to consider and develop in detail specifically defined issues. However, the Working Party recalled that it should be ensured that all UNECE member States should be able to participate in the work being undertaken by such groups. In this context, the issue of interpretation/translation poses a specific problem.

15. The Working Party considered how to further increase the participation in its session and work of more UNECE member States. In this context, it was pointed out that a large number of delegations, theoretically, participate both in the UNECE and ECMT sessions. In general, this means that these delegations participate in two UNECE sessions in Geneva and two ECMT sessions in Paris per year. The Working Party felt that it was increasingly difficult for delegates to be able to attend this number of meetings and to cover the travel and accommodation costs in this connection.

16. As a result, the Working Party agreed that, given the close relation between the subjects treated in the Working Party and the ECMT Working Group on Combined Transport and furthermore given that the delegates for the sessions of the two groups are often the same, the possibility of organizing back-to-

back or joint sessions in one and the same location should be considered. In practical terms, this would mean that, as an example, in spring a session could be organized by UNECE in Geneva and in autumn a session would be organized by ECMT in Paris. For delegates this would mean that only two travels would be required, thereby making the participation more accessible. The budgetary impact for UNECE and ECMT remains to be evaluated in detail, but the UNECE has for the budget period 2004-2005 already incorporated a reduced number of meeting days. The UNECE secretariat is in the process of considering the possibilities of such a reorganization with the ECMT secretariat. In this context, one particular challenge might be the management of working languages since UNECE uses English, French and Russian, whereas ECMT uses English, French and German.

17. Some Governments expressed the view that, due to the division of labour in their respective ministries, such a reorganization would not necessarily facilitate their participation and that the issue needed to be considered in further detail.

18. The Committee is invited to provide guidance to the Working Party on the outlined reorganization of its work.
