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TRANSPORT OF PEOPLE WITH REDUCED MOBILITY

Note by the Secretariat

I. MANDATE

1. At its 69th session (6-8 February 2007), the Inland Transport Committee requested its Bureau to consider the possible continuation by the ITC of the work on transport of people with mobility handicaps carried out previously in the framework of ECMT and, following consultations with the appropriate subsidiary bodies, to prepare proposals to be presented at its next session. Subsequently, the ITC Bureau, at its sixth meeting in June 2007, discussed the possible continuation by the ITC of the work carried out by the ECMT and asked the secretariat to draft a note for consideration at its forthcoming session in November 2007 (TRANS/BUR.2007/5, item 5).

2. Following a short introduction, this note reviews briefly the work performed in the ECMT framework over the last two decades. The note then outlines the UNECE Transport Division activities related to accessibility and considers a few options for further work in this area.

II. INTRODUCTION

3. Transport of people with reduced mobility has become an important policy issue in Western Europe where, according to diverse sources, about one-quarter of the population has some kind of mobility impairment at any point in time. Approximately two-thirds of this group consist of the elderly persons aged 65 or more. Proportions may well be similar in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and South-Eastern Europe (SEE), although demographic trends differ considerably across countries. However, the issue has been comparatively less prominent at the policy level.

4. Given the prevailing pattern of population ageing in Western Europe and some EECCA countries (such as Belarus, Russian Federation and Ukraine), the issue of accessibility for people with mobility handicaps is bound to become increasingly important in the Pan-European region over time. Moreover, tragic wars and regional conflicts within some UNECE sub-regions in the 1990s caused a phenomenal increase in the number of people with mobility handicaps, resulting from an extensive use of land mines. Mobility restrictions have non-negligible economic repercussions, reducing labor market participation and increasing public expenditure on disability benefits. Lack of accessibility has also adverse effects on the quality of life of the elderly who no longer participate in the labor force.

III. THE WORK ON ACCESSIBILITY IN THE ECMT FRAMEWORK

5. The work on accessibility in the ECMT framework took place over the last two decades, including both research and policy-oriented activities. Since 1985 the ECMT Working Group on Access and Inclusion brought together governments and experts from ECMT states and associate member countries to exchange ideas on transport for people with reduced mobility and the ageing population. The Group produced a number of research reports and policy recommendations on achieving barrier-free travel. Political support for this work has been given through the adoption of several formal resolutions by the ECMT Council of Ministers.

6. Over time, the ECMT Working Group on Access and Inclusion analyzed key social, structural, operational and financial issues affecting the mobility of disabled and older people as well as individuals facing temporary mobility handicaps (use of public and special transport, private vehicle use, pedestrian activity), and identified best practices in these areas. The Group helped to mainstream accessibility issues into transport policy considerations, especially in high per-capita income countries of the UNECE region. Its last meeting took place in September 2006, following the ECMT decision to transform itself into an International Transport Forum (ITF). The need for international cooperation in this domain is demonstrated by the fact that the Group continues to exist as a network of experts. It is available to the ITF or to other international organizations, like UNECE, upon request.

7. The human resources cost associated with activities of the ECMT Working Group on Access and Inclusion included salaries of 1/3 professional staff and 1/3 support staff as well as 1-2 consultancies at any given time. Other relevant cost items would be associated with conference services, publication, travel, etc.

IV. ACCESSIBILITY-RELATED ACTIVITIES OF THE UNECE TRANSPORT DIVISION

8. The Division's contributions to date include technical norms as well as some resolutions. The World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations (WP.29) developed Regulation No. 107 Annexed to the 1958 Agreement on general construction of buses and coaches that introduced technical prescriptions to make buses and coaches accessible to people with reduced mobility <www.unece.org/trans/main/wp29/wp29regs101-120.html>. In addition, new prescriptions on accessibility entered into force on 10 November 2007 <www.unece.org/trans/main/wp29/wp29wgs/wp29gen/wp29ap_mar07.html>. At its one-hundred-and-forty-third session, WP.29 adopted a proposal for amendments to Regulation No. 107 that updates requirements for wheelchairs restraint systems <

TRANS-WP29-2007-84e.doc>. With respect to passenger vehicles, WP.29 has not harmonized the technical prescriptions existing in several countries for facilitating the access of passengers with reduced mobility. In this case national requirements, if any, apply to such vehicles.

9. The Working Party on Road Traffic Safety (WP.1) addressed accessibility in its Consolidated Resolution on Road Traffic (R.E.1). The revised Resolution (R.E.1) includes several provisions concerning persons with reduced mobility. R.E.1 also introduced in the past at the international level the symbol "handicapped persons" (in the annex 9 to the existing resolution R.E.1-TRANS/SC.1/294/Rev.5) in order to facilitate the movement of such persons.

10. The Working Party on Inland Water Transport (SC.3) noted at its 51st session in October 2007 that the accessibility issue was already covered in some of its instruments, such as the 1986 resolution No. 25, which contains Guidelines for Passenger Vessels also suited for carrying Disabled Persons and, more recently, resolution No. 61 with Recommendations on Harmonized Europe-Wide Technical Requirements for Inland Navigation Vessels. Acknowledging the importance of the issue, the Working Party agreed to include a specific reference to this issue in its programme of work and, in this context, to ask its Working Party on the Standardization of Technical and Safety Requirements in Inland Navigation (SC.3/WP.3) at its next session in March 2008 to consider whether Resolution No. 25 needed updating or could be completed with new elements.

11. Working Parties on Road Transport (SC.1) and Rail Transport (SC.2) have not addressed the issue of accessibility to date. Both Working Parties, responsible for the administration of agreements on transport infrastructure networks of international importance (AGR, AGC), could perhaps consider the issues linked to reduced mobility, such as adequate road wayside facilities, barrier-free design of bus terminals, rail stations, etc.

12. Given the UNECE Transport Division's activities pertaining to accessibility to date, it would seem worthwhile to keep developing further technical prescriptions pertaining to transport of persons with mobility handicaps in the WP.29 framework as well as updating pertinent resolutions of WP.1 and SC.3. An additional option could be to amend the 1968 Vienna Convention on Road Traffic Safety and the supplementary 1971 European Agreement with the provisions aiming to protect people with mobility handicaps, if Contracting Parties so desire.

V. FOLLOW-UP

13. In conclusion, the UNECE Transport Division has made so far relevant but relatively modest contributions to the improvement of accessibility. One option of continuing the policy-oriented ECMT work on transport of people with mobility handicaps within the Division would be to organize in 2008, in the framework of one of the WP meetings, a Workshop focused on selected aspects of accessibility (for instance, the economic analysis of social benefits and costs related to barrier-free transport), with a broad participation of government experts, academic researchers and representatives of major NGOs that deal with the matter at hand. The workshop could also address the question whether the "Consolidated resolution of ECMT No. 2001/3 on accessible transport" should form the basis for a multilateral agreement and if so, which new items should be included. Following the evaluation of the Workshop, the secretariat could prepare a report to the Bureau with a more detailed menu of feasible options for further work on disability by UNECE.

14. In view of the above the Bureau may wish to consider the appropriate framework for addressing transport of people with mobility handicaps by the ITC. Such a framework could provide for a meaningful cooperation with members of the former ECMT Working Group on Access and Inclusion and other stakeholders. It might be also interesting to explore whether some member states would be willing to provide voluntary contributions for an UNECE programme aiming to continue the ECMT work on transport of people with mobility handicaps.

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