The Trans-European Railway Project (TER) is one of the most rapidly developing European regional infrastructure projects, with a long history of promoting connectivity and rail transport infrastructure development on the TER Backbone Network to improve quality and efficiency of international rail and combined transport.

The TER Project facilitates the development of the modern railway system connecting the Baltic, Adriatic, Aegean, Black and Caspian Sea.

To the west, the TER Backbone Network is linked with the Trans-European rail network (TEN-T), while to the east and south-east the TER Backbone Network has direct links with the railway systems of Western Asia and Middle East.

The unified standards of the TER Backbone Network railway lines ensure high-quality rail services and safe, fast and comfortable rail transport, thus contributing to the economic and social development of the entire Europe.

Seventeen Central Eastern, South Eastern European and Caucasus countries (Armenia, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Georgia, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey) participate in the Project, with six more countries – Belarus, Latvia, Moldova, Montenegro, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Ukraine having the status of observers.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) is TER Project Executing Agency, responsible for technical and administrative backstopping of the Project and UNECE Sustainable Transport Division is providing substantive support and co-ordination of its activities.

The Project was initiated in 1990, and in 1992, the UNECE and the Governments of Hungary, Romania and Turkey signed the TER Co-operation Trust Fund Agreement. Since that time, 14 Governments joined the TER, and the number of participating Governments has increased to 17.
The main objectives set for the Project are:

- The general objectives of the TER Project is to develop a coherent and efficient rail and combined transport system, connecting Central and Eastern European countries with other European countries.

- **Infrastructure development** — implementation of the TER standards in infrastructure development, with the final target to upgrade existing infrastructure to the levels specified in the AGC and AGTC Agreements. Upgrade of the existing and development of the new combined transport installations, supplied with appropriate equipment.

- **Modernization of transport equipment** (rolling stock, motive power, signaling and telecommunications equipment, etc.), — specific objective is to promote progressive replacement of the obsolete equipment. The new one should be harmonized or at least be compatible with the equipment used in different TER countries.

- Adaptation of railway organizations to market oriented management — to assist all railway companies of the TER participating Governments in transition towards a modern, efficient market-oriented organization and management,

to be able to ensure a smooth transition to a new optimal and sustainable transport modal split. In particular, full attention should be paid to international combined transport. Advantages of the motorway transport should be combined with the environmental and safety advantages of rail transport in order to increase the efficiency of the combined transport services.
Since 1990 when the TER Project was initiated, an efficient co-operation has been established between the TER participating Governments, UNECE and TER Project management. At the same time, the Project institutional framework and organizational structure was established to support efficient Project implementation.

**TER Project structure is organized around:**

- Active participation and support of the TER participating Governments through the Project’s Steering Committee;
- The Project Central Office (PCO), which operates under the direction of the Steering Committee and under guidance from the UNECE;
- National Coordinators, nominated by participating Governments to liaise between national and TER Project activities.

The highest decision-making body of TER Project is the Steering Committee, composed of officially appointed members, representing the participating Governments. The UNECE as an Executing Agency is participating ex-officio. The Steering Committee meets twice a year, gives strategic guidance and determines the policy of the Project, adopts general activities to be carried out and makes decisions on the TER development.

**The main functions of the Steering Committee include:**

- approving the programmes of work;
- adopting operating budgets and financial reports on their execution;
- establishing any subsidiary bodies it deems necessary;
- adopting TER reports, studies and documents;
- issuing instructions to the Project Manager or any subsidiary bodies it might decide to establish;
- examining any other matters concerning the activities of the TER.
The Project was established in 1990 with the initial financial support provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Starting from 1992, the funding of all Project activities is provided exclusively by the participating Governments. It was carried out through the establishment of the TER Cooperation Trust Fund Agreement signed in Geneva on 17 December 1992. According to the Agreement, each participating country contributes US$ 10,000 annually to the Project. Under the terms of the Agreement, the UNECE is the Executing Agency. This way of organization allows the Project to be well-functional with all its on-going technical, managerial and economic activities successfully carried out and coordinated.

The annual TER programmes of work as well as the long term strategic objectives are set by the Steering Committee. The activities are undertaken by the Project Management, ad hoc expert groups and — when required — by external consultants in close co-operation with the participating Governments.

The Project Central Office (PCO) is run by the Project Management, consisting of Project Manager and Deputy Project Manager. Their main duties are: acting as Secretaries to the Steering Committee, maintaining liaison with National Coordinators regarding all matters concerning the implementation of the TER activities, preparing reports for the Steering Committee sessions and executing the Project budget in accordance with the Steering Committee decisions.

In the course of the Project’s life, The TER Project Managers have been provided by the Governments of Romania, Slovenia and Austria, respectively. Currently Project Manager and Deputy Project Manager are provided by the Governments of the Russian Federation and Austria, accordingly, and commenced their assignments in 2014.
At the governmental level, TER is the unique forum in the region addressing the key rail transport issues concerning a more rapid integration of the European rail transport infrastructure network, giving an excellent opportunity to representatives of the Transport Ministries and railway companies of the participating Governments to interact and cooperate.

In the framework of the Project, each participating Government takes responsibility for financing, planning, designing, constructing and maintaining the railway system on its own territory, for participating in TER activities under the aegis of the UNECE, as well as for developing solutions to specific problems identified within the TER project.

To achieve its objectives, the Project organized a number of capacity building and technical assistance activities, gathering decision-makers, TER National Coordinators, railway operators and experts with the aim of facilitating the exchange of experience and the best practices. Capacity building activities include seminars, workshops and round tables usually organized by one of the participating Governments conjointly with the TER Project Central Office and in collaboration with one or more non-TER institutions or consultants.

The most important activities of the TER Project at present include:

- Assistance in **financing of rail infrastructure**, based on the work being done by the UNECE Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics (WP.5) and focused especially on basic principles of funding capital investments in railways and on exchange and promotion of the best financing practices;

- Strengthening the connectivity of the **TER Backbone Network by extending it to non-TTER countries and close collaboration with the UNECE, the European Commission and the Organization for Co-operation of Railways (OSJD) in order to harmonize the layout and development of the TER Backbone Network with the Trans-European Transport Network and OSJD Corridors**.
• Improving and upgrading the TER Project’s database, as well as elaborating the High-Speed Master Plan in the TER region in cooperation with the UNECE Working Party on Rail Transport (SC.2);

• Building capacities for implementing the AGC and AGTC standards in the region and for improving the railway and combined transport services;

• TER Backbone Network data collection and processing activity, based on data provided annually by the participating Governments, which makes it possible to produce detailed TER Backbone Network maps of each country, as well as of the whole TER region, showing the present or expected future status of the TER Backbone Network;

• Monitoring the implementation of the TER Revised Master Plan (UNECE, Geneva 2011), in which the following countries were involved:
  - Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey and Ukraine.

• Extension of the Project’s activities to the countries of Central Asian region and its participation in the UNECE Euro-Asia Transport Linkages program;

The original TER Master Plan, published in 2006, reflected the priority rail transport needs of 21 European countries, identified the TER Backbone Network in these countries and presented the investment strategy to develop the Network. As many as 172 rail projects with the total cost of EUR 53 billion were evaluated and prioritized. The TER Revised Master Plan, launched in 2011, in which 25 countries took part, comprised 191 rail projects with the total cost of EUR 188 billion. This Revised Master Plan still provides a useful framework for intergovernmental co-operation towards the coordinated development of coherent rail infrastructure networks in Europe. This Plan promotes intermodal operations and complementarity of transport modes in order to provide high effectiveness of the rail transport infrastructure.
• Extension of the Project’s activities to the countries of Central Asian region and active participation in the **UNECE Euro-Asia Transport Linkages (EATL)** Project;

• Cooperating with the UNECE group of experts on:
  - Benchmarking Transport Infrastructure Construction Costs;
  - Unified Railway Law;
  - Euro-Asia Transport Linkages;
  - Safety at levels crossings;
  - Ports hinterland Connections;

From its outset in 1990 under very different political, economic, social and transport conditions, the TER Project has manifested that the principles and objectives that inspired participating Governments to found it are still valid and topical. With well-established and self-sustaining structure, the TER represents a firm, living and constantly developing feature of the new European transport environment, being tailor-made to face the present and future requirements of rail transport integration in the region - for the benefit of the TER participating Governments and entire Europe.

The TER Project co-operates closely with international organizations dealing with rail and combined transport issues, especially with the European Commission (DG MOVE), CEI (Central European Initiative), UIC (International Union of Railways), BSEC (Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation) and the UN/TEM (Trans-European North-South Motorway) Project. Recently, TER established closer relations with the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the members of which are the countries of Central and South Western Asia.
Terms and conditions of participation in the TER Project are set down by the TER Co-operation Trust Fund Agreement. In accordance with the provisions of this Agreement, any member State of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, as well as any State having consultative status with ECE and any regional economic integration organization constituted by sovereign States members of the UNECE can apply for membership.

Any Government or international organization which desires to participate in the Project, shall so notify the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. The latter shall transmit a copy of this notification to the participating Governments.

If no objection from the TER participating Governments is received by the Executive Secretary within 90 days of his communication to the TER Governments, the State or the organization concerned will become a Contracting Party to the Agreement, subject to the execution of its obligations stipulated above.

Taking part in the TER Project brings to every Government the following benefits:

• participation of their representatives in all the TER sessions, meetings, workshops and round tables;

• sharing the experience and knowledge regarding railway financing, construction, maintenance, operation and management accumulated in the Project by all its members;

• contributing to the future development of the TER by its own inputs and research results;

• receiving all the Project’s documents, annual reports and maps showing the present status of the TER Backbone Network in all TER countries, as well as the progress reports on implementation of the TER Master Plan investment programme;

• incorporation of all their major rail projects in the next version of the TER Master Plan;

• information on rail development in the TER region and in the neighboring countries which are members of the European Union, Commonwealth of Independent States and the Economic Cooperation Organization;

• every participating Government or organization has to provide an annual contribution of US$ 10,000 per annum to meet the costs of the Project.

Non-member States, other international organizations and/or private bodies may also contribute to the Project as observers and donors.
TER PCO contacts

Sustainable Transport Division, Palais des Nations,
8-14 avenue de la Paix, CH - 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland;
email: infotransport@unece.org