

Progress Report of Expert Group

Experts Group on Hinterland Connections of Seaports

Geneva, September 9th, 2008

Experts Group on Hinterland Connections of Seaports

- At its 20th session a year ago, the Working Party decided to support the creation of an ad hoc Group of Experts on Hinterland Connections of Seaports for a period of one year. The Inland Transport Committee approved at its 70th session in February 2008, the formation of the Group of Experts

Experts' Group Internal Procedures (1)

- The first session of the Group was held in Geneva on April 18th, 2008 and the session was attended by 29 persons.
- The full report of the session is available on the website of the UNECE Transport Division.
- The Group elected its chairman (Captain . Ioannis Protopapas, Greece) and vice-chairman (Mr. Emre Dincer, Turkey) and approved the work plan drafted by the secretariat.

Experts' Group Internal Procedures (2)

- The Group of Experts noted that the preliminary work should be completed by the end of January 2009.
- However, the time needed to properly examine conclusions of the conference in Piraeus is too short for the elaboration of concrete recommendations in the final report by that date and an extension is planned to be requested.

Work plan (1)

- Following a research on the availability of data on seaports and hinterland connections during its 1st session, it was decided that a small group which would identify relevant data gaps should be formed.
- The Group of Experts decided
 - to focus its inquiry on the infrastructure to connect seaports to the hinterland and
 - limit its inquiry to container (LO-LO mother ships and feeder services), barge, rail and road traffic as well as ferry transport (RO-RO, RO-PAX and RO-LA).

Work plan (2)

- The Group decided that the secretariat will distribute a draft questionnaire to members of the small group by the end of May 2008, finalize the draft following the responses and distribute the questionnaire to UNECE member States in early July 2008.

Data collection

- The questionnaire was distributed by the secretariat to approximately 70 port authorities in Europe and North America, a number of transport firms and organizations and delegates of the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics) in late July 2008. The questionnaire is available at the website (http://www.unece.org/trans/main/wp5/wp5_ge1_Questionnaire.html)
- To date, about half a dozen completed questionnaires have been received from port authorities and a shipping companies

Consultant

- The secretariat decided to engage a consultant who would be responsible for the evaluation of responses to the questionnaire and drafting of the Group's report.
- Following the completion of formalities, the consultant, Dr Allan Woodburn of the University of Westminster, will be offered the contract in the near future.

The UNECE Conference

- The UNECE conference “The Role of Seaports as a Link between Inland and Maritime Transport” will be hosted by the Greek Government.
- In addition to hosting the conference, the Government of Greece has approved a grant of 15,000 euros to cover travel and accommodation costs of selected speakers who could not participate otherwise.
- The Hellenic Chambers Transport Association provided a contribution of 6,000 euros to pay for travel and accommodation of a smaller group of speakers in need of financial assistance.

What remains to be done

- The next session of the Expert Group will take place in Geneva on October 28th, 2008 and the Group will consider the main conclusions of the Piraeus Conference as well as some recent regulatory and statistical initiatives pertaining to container traffic between seaports and their hinterlands.
- The consultant engaged by the UNECE will present the draft outline of the Final report in order to prepare a partial first draft of the Final report before the end of the year. This draft would be presented to the Bureau and ITC in February 2009.

Conclusion

- I would like to thank the Working Party for having initiated the formation of the Expert Group to address a very typical problem of the growing congestion on strategic transport links between major gateways for seaborne container traffic and their hinterland, a problem that defies easy answers or patent solutions.
- The Expert Group has produced some tangible results during the first five months of its existence and I am convinced that a year from now we should be able to provide you with a number of interesting conclusions and policy recommendations.