Sustainable transport development

The transport sector contributes to over 10% of global domestic product (GDP) and provides mobility, prosperity and jobs in UNECE member countries. The negative effects of transport include air pollution, congestion, climate change as well as traffic accidents and other harmful health effects, particularly in urban areas. Transport is also responsible for 23% of world CO2 emissions from fossil fuel combustion. A large part of this is caused by road traffic.

Also, the sector is 95% dependent on oil and accounts for 60% of all oil consumption. In addition, traffic safety in all modes of transport is a condition for sustainable development, and particularly, road traffic safety which is a development issue, impacting on all areas of life: social, economic and financial.

This calls for internationally harmonized regulatory, technical and behavioural measures and policies to ensure that our transport system continues to provide for personal mobility and serve people and their needs in the future generations. At the same time, transport needs to be a factor in the conservation of our economies and international trade which are the foundations of prosperity, without becoming a burden on human life and the environment.

The UNECE Transport Division works toward this goal by setting international standards and guidelines, hence the Consolidated Resolution on Road Signs and Signals in which all countries agree to have a consistent international road traffic signs system.

The 1958 Agreement also provides global technical harmonization for the transport of dangerous goods such as ordinary and special cargo, packaging and labels. The benefits of this system are tangible for the environment, vehicle and pedestrian safety, as well as for trade. Two main agreements govern this work: the 1958 and 1990 Agreements. The 1990 Agreement provides a global framework, grouping major players such as North America, Europe, Japan, South Korea, China, India, etc. The 1958 Agreement also provides global technical harmonization with the exception, for the time being, of North America, China and India. However, it is the indispensable administrative certification tool which allows complete global harmonization. Examples of such regulations include specifications for engine emissions, fuel quality and efficiency, brake systems, electronic stability control and child restraint systems. These are international agreements which the European Union has so far been through the World Forum which has been dealing with these issues.

ITS

Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) offer non-traditional solutions in an effective way. UNECE’s main focus on ITS regulations has so far been through the World Forum which has been dealing with vehicle to vehicle and vehicle to infrastructure communication. Technical specifications for autonomous emergency braking and lane departure warning systems are just two examples of products from the World Forum.

Dangerous goods and special cargo

UNEP provides the secretariat for the ECOSOC Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods (TDG) and on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS). It provides recommendations on classification, listing, use of packagings and tanks, testing, construction and approval, their marking and labelling, as well as consignment and operational guidelines for international transport. These recommendations are implemented not only at country level but also through international instruments by other international organizations such as the International Maritime Organization and the International Civil Aviation Organization. UNECE ensures that the Maritime Model Regulations for the carriage of dangerous goods on ships are consistent with the IHO recommendations on classification, listing, and packaging of substances and mixtures to the GHS. The transport of perishable foodstuffs also requires specific conditions in order to preserve public health, and UNECE provides for such conditions through an international instrument called the ACP.

Transport Infrastructure Development

UNEP provides an international forum for coordinating inland transport infrastructure planning in the pan-European region. This work is carried out on the basis of four major UNECE transport infrastructure agreements, establishing the E-networks for road, rail, inland waterways and combined transport lines. These infrastructure agreements provide UNECE Governments and members with a coherent framework to integrate and develop coherent international networks and national E-networks, to coordinate transport investments through various modes of inland transport. In addition, three regional projects support internationally harmonized freight and passenger transport infrastructures and investments, more connected with related facilitation measures. These are the Trans European Motorway (TEM), the Trans European Railway (TER), and the Euro-Asia Transport Links (EASL) project.

Transport economics

Working closely with member Governments and international partners, UNECE work on economic aspects of transport is complementary to its legal and regulatory work. Through studies, internationally agreed recommendations and guidelines, UNECE provides sound methodological tools and ready-made solutions for a wide range of applications. These cover not only direct transport-related economic aspects, such as cost-benefit analysis, financing of transport infrastructure projects, identification of bottlenecks and missing links and quality of transport services, but also deal with globalized-induced trends and competitiveness which create new challenges for global transport supply chains.

Statistics

In close cooperation with EUROSTAT and OECD/ITF, UNECE collects and disseminates on-line comprehensive annual transport statistics focusing on road, rail, inland waterways and intermodal transport based on internationally agreed definitions. Similarly, the UNECE on-line data base on road traffic accidents in Europe and North America provides extensive data on road traffic accidents and casualties by nature of the accident, user and age group and involvement of alcohol. Every five years, detailed traffic counts are undertaken on main international roads and railway lines (E-roads and E-rail traffic censuses), with the next round of censuses scheduled for 2020.

Border crossing facilitation

Countries that lack reliable and harmonized transport and border crossing regulations and procedures, often find themselves at an increasing disadvantage in the global economy. To contribute to the improvement of the situation, UNECE provides a framework for globally agreed recommendations on facilitation that can be accepted everywhere. The European Union has decided to replace some of its directives on type approval with those of the regulations developed by the World Forum. Similarly, Japan and South Africa actively promote the 1958 Agreement to the Asia Pacific region and the Southern African Developing Community, respectively.

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