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UNECE – UNESCAP

*UN Development Account Capacity Building Project
on Interregional Transport Linkages*

2nd Expert Group Meeting on Developing Euro-Asian Transport Linkages
(3 – 5 November 2004, Odessa, Ukraine)

Project overview and progress to date

I. Introduction

In 2000, UNECE and UNESCAP put forward their “Common ECE/ESCAP Strategic Vision for Euro-Asian Transport Links” at the Second International Euro-Asian Conference on Transport (September 2000), which was subsequently modified and adopted by the UNECE Inland Transport Committee in 2001.

In 2001, the General Assembly approved the project “Capacity-building in developing interregional land and land-cum-sea transport linkages” (2002-2006). This project includes a component which specifically focuses on transport linkages between Europe and Asia. With trade volumes between Europe and Asia increasing steadily, the timing of this project presents a valuable opportunity for countries to strengthen cooperative efforts through some of the actions outlined in the “Strategic Vision”. It also provides the opportunity to fulfill the vision of an “integrated and harmoniously functioning Euro-Asian transport system”, as endorsed by the Third International Euro-Asian Conference on Transport (September 2003), as well as to address some of the priority actions contained in the Almaty Programme of Action (International Ministerial Conference on Transit Transport Cooperation, August 2003).

The 1st Expert Group Meeting on Developing Euro-Asian Transport Linkages, held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in March 2004, agreed on a broad strategy for the implementation of the project. The main phases of the strategy are outlined in the box below. For Phase 1 of the project, “*Formulation of interregional transport linkages between Europe and Asia*”, participating countries were requested to nominate the relevant “Euro-Asian transport linkages” which passed through their territories. It was proposed that the basis for the selection of these linkages was that: 1) they should be generally be based on existing international transport networks, including, but not limited to, the E-road network and the Asian Highway network, the E-rail network and the Trans-Asian Railway network, the Pan-European Transport Corridors, TRACECA routes, ECO road and rail networks, and OSJD Euro-Asian routes; 2) they should encompass intermodal aspects, with linkages to inland waterways and major seaports, as well as major transshipment points such as inland container depots and border crossing facilities; and 3) the focus of the work should include container transport.

Based on the country reports received from the National Focal Points of the project, UNECE and UNESCAP (hereafter “the secretariat”) set to work to: 1) consolidate the nominated linkages and associated data into a GIS database; and 2) identify data gaps and “missing links” between the nominated linkages. This document describes the progress achieved up to the middle of October 2004.

Box 1.: Steps in the Development of Euro-Asian Transport Linkages (2004-2006)

1. *Formulation of interregional transport linkages between Europe and Asia (2004)*

- 1.1 Identification of routes
- 1.2 Route inventory
- 1.3 Consolidation and analysis of data
- 1.4 Presentation of results and prioritization of investment projects

2. *Facilitation of transport along the Euro-Asian transport linkages (2005)*

- 2.1 Analysis of transit times and costs along routes
- 2.2 Strengthening of implementation of the major international transport agreements and conventions by countries
- 2.3 Strengthening of national transport development bodies who are responsible for the formulation and implementation of national action plans on transport facilitation and development

3. *Information dissemination and institutional networking (2006)*

- 3.1 Establishment of a database with contact details of responsible experts and institutions involved in Euro-Asian transport development
- 3.2 Creation of a website for the project (see <http://www.unece.org/trans/main/eatl/>)
- 3.3 Organization of workshop for sharing lessons learned across the Regional Commissions.

II. Progress achieved under Phase I: Formulation of interregional transport linkages between Europe and Asia”

A. *Country reports*

According to the outline of the country report developed by the secretariat, countries were asked to nominate their Euro-Asian linkages and to provide selected information on those linkages, including:

- a) Road/rail/IWT linkages basic technical specifications; traffic volumes; missing links and bottlenecks;
- b) Ports/ICDs: capacity; cargo volumes; available equipment and services; traffic handled.
- c) Border crossings for road and rail: capacity (in terms of number of tracks); opening hours; services; traffic handled.
- d) Investment activities on nominated linkages: list of current/planned projects and newly proposed projects.

Country reports have been received from the following countries (14 out of 18 participating countries): Azerbaijan; Belarus; Bulgaria; China (roads and ports); Georgia; Kazakhstan; Islamic Republic of Iran (itineraries of routes and list of projects); Moldova (itineraries of routes); Romania; Russian Federation (itineraries of routes and details of projects); Tajikistan; Turkey; Ukraine; Uzbekistan.

Some preliminary observations are as follows:

- As agreed by the 1st Expert Group Meeting, the majority of linkages nominated by countries to date were based on the AGR/AH as well as on the AGC network and draft TAR network. A number of countries also indicated where the linkages were part of the Pan-European Transport Corridors (PETrC), OSJD's Euro-Asian Routes and the TRACECA programme. Some countries only nominated a few linkages, while other nominated all of the transport routes found in the international agreements.
- With regard to the data received, it was found that the level of detail varied significantly, and that not all countries had interpreted the tables in the same way. There was a need to follow-up with countries to clarify terms as well as solicit missing data. Further follow-up with countries is deemed necessary in the framework of the GIS application.
- As some countries had not yet sent their reports to the secretariat, it was a challenge to present a full picture of Euro-Asian linkages.

B. *Mapping of nominated linkages and consolidation of associated data into GIS database*

The secretariat therefore decided that the best way to proceed would be the following:

- Since the long term vision of the participating member states of both UNECE and UNESCAP is to develop an integrated intermodal transport network bridging Europe and Asia, the majority of nominated linkages should be retained and should form the basis of a long term development plan towards this end. The exceptions would be those linkages, which did not immediately appear to serve traffic between Europe and Asia (for example, those linkages which serve intra-European or intra-Asian traffic).
- The information received in the country reports could serve as a valuable resource, particularly if shared amongst the participating countries. It should therefore be consolidated in such a way as to be understood by all countries; have the potential to be updated over time; and be easily accessible.

To achieve this, the process for transforming country reports into a GIS database has started. This database would allow users: 1) to view the linkages against the background of national and international transport networks; 2) to view transport modes separately or together, which may help in identifying intermodal opportunities; 3) to view selected associated information pertaining to specific linkages (for example, capacity or conditions of the linkage) which could help in conducting a preliminary assessment of potential international routes; and 4) to locate existing investment activities and identify priority areas for future investment.

Given time and resource constraints, the GIS consultant was asked to: 1) put the AGR/AGC/Asian Highway and draft Trans-Asian Railway network maps into the database; 2) show the nominated linkages for all countries, as well as potential linkages for those countries which did not provide country reports (based on existing international agreements); 3) be able to demonstrate the full capacity of the database based on one sample country. An important part of this work is already completed.

III. Issues for consideration

Based on the demonstration of the database, the secretariat seeks the views of participating countries on the following:

- ***Should the database be further developed?*** If yes, then countries would be requested to provide as much of the missing information as possible, as well as additional information necessary for the GIS application.
- ***How should the database be maintained and shared?*** Depending on the licenses needed to use the GIS software, it may be possible to 1) give every participating country a copy for their own use (this may be a challenge to maintain, as well as costly in terms of licenses); and/or 2) put the database on a website (countries must agree on the level of access they wish to allow).
- ***How could the database be made most useful for countries?*** Countries may have ideas and suggestions on how to make this database most useful for themselves. This question is also linked to the next phase of the project, that is, the selection of routes for further analysis, cooperation and development.

