

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENT ON THE TRANS-ASIAN RAILWAY
NETWORK TO COME INTO FORCE IN JUNE 2009**

Approval by China triggers countdown

BANGKOK (UN/ESCAP Information Services) – The Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network will come into force on 11 June 2009 with China becoming the eighth country approving the Agreement.

The Trans-Asian railway network comprises nearly 114,000 km of rail routes linking 28 countries in the region. The aim of the network is to offer efficient rail transport services for the movement of goods and passengers within the region as well as between Asia and Europe. The network will also provide improved access for landlocked countries to major ports. It has been developed under the auspices of the regional arm of the United Nations – the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

Dr. Noeleen Heyzer, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP, hails the entry into force of the Agreement as “another landmark in the development of transport infrastructure for the region.”

“It is an expression by ESCAP member countries of their desire to work closely together, putting in place efficient transport infrastructure across the continent,” says Dr. Heyzer. “The Agreement provides an important framework for the coordinated development of major rail routes across Asia and will help attract related investments”

The Agreement was opened for signature November 2006 during the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Transport at Busan, Republic of Korea. It has now been signed by 22 countries.

The Agreement comes into force on the ninetieth day following the ratification of at least eight governments. On 13 March, China became the eighth country to have deposited its ratification of the Agreement with the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Other countries which have already done so include Cambodia, India, Mongolia, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Thailand.

Under the terms of the Agreement, a working group comprising all ESCAP member states will be established. It will meet every two years to discuss policies and issues relating to the development of the rail network. As secretariat of the agreement, ESCAP will organize the first meeting of the working group in December 2009.

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Headquartered in Bangkok, ESCAP is the largest of the UN's five Regional Commissions in terms of its membership, population served and area covered. The only intergovernmental forum covering the entire Asia-Pacific region, ESCAP works to promote sustainable and inclusive economic and social progress. More information is available at www.unescap.org.

This is the second treaty to have been developed under the auspices of ESCAP and deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The other treaty is the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network which entered into force July 2005. The two networks are major building blocks towards the realization of an intermodal transportation network promoting intra regional trade within Asia, according to Dr. Noeleen Heyzer. “The entry into force of the railway agreement will be cheered by ESCAP member countries as a good omen for the region amid the present economic downturn.”

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