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Policies and issues relating to the development of the Asian Highway

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Note by the secretariat

Summary

The present document outlines policies and issues relating to the development of the Asian Highway. The Working Group may wish to provide the secretariat with further guidance on the policies and approaches relating to: (a) developing and upgrading the Asian Highway; (b) updating the Asian Highway Database; (c) improving road safety; and (d) developing dry ports and intermodal transport corridors. The Working Group may also wish to provide updates on the progress and status of priority projects for developing and upgrading the Asian Highway.

I. Introduction

1. The Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network[1] entered into force on 4 July 2005, marking the beginning of a new era in the development of international highways in the ESCAP region. The Asian Highway network, together with the Trans-Asian Railway network, on which another intergovernmental agreement came into effect on 11 June 2009, have become important building blocks for the realization of the vision of an international integrated intermodal transport system in Asia, receiving priority attention in national programmes of member countries.

2. The present document outlines activities of the secretariat relating to the Asian Highway and road transport since the third meeting of the Working Group on the Asian Highway, held on 4 September 2009. It also provides a summary of discussions and recommendations made at recent legislative meetings.

[1] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 2323, No. I-41607.

II. Legislative meetings

3. Policies and issues related to the development of the Asian Highway and road transport continue to be subjects of great interest at various legislative and expert group meetings and workshops.

4. The legislative meetings held in 2009, 2010 and 2011 included: (a) the first session of the Forum of Asian Ministers of Transport (Bangkok, 14-16 December 2009); (b) the sixty-sixth session of the Commission (Incheon, Republic of Korea, 13-19 May 2010); (c) the second session of the Committee on Transport (Bangkok, 1-3 November 2010); and (d) the sixty-seventh session of the Commission (Bangkok, 19-25 May 2011). These meetings highlighted the important role of the Asian Highway in promoting regional cooperation, the progress made in its development and formalization, and the importance of road safety. The annex to the present document highlights some excerpts from reports of recent legislative meetings.

III. Activities of the secretariat

A. Developing and upgrading the Asian Highway

5. Following the mandates of the Commission and Committee sessions, including those noted in the annex to the present document, both the secretariat and member States have been implementing activities to promote the development of the Asian Highway.

6. A seminar on road maintenance in Asia was held in Bangkok on 3 September 2009. The main objective of the seminar was to enhance regional cooperation through the exchange of experiences and lessons learned on the maintenance and upgrading of highway infrastructure, with a particular focus on improving road safety.

7. The Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network has made it easier for member countries to secure grants and loans to upgrade the Asian Highway routes.[2] The secretariat continues to work with member countries, development banks (including the Asian Development Bank, the Islamic Development Bank and the World Bank), and other development partners to promote investment in the priority projects by facilitating discussion between member countries and potential donors.

8. In recognition of the importance of the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway, the Asian Development Bank, in partnership with ESCAP, is implementing a technical assistance project on promoting regional infrastructure development. Under the project, there are plans to undertake prefeasibility studies, focusing on sections of the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks, to prioritize investment and update project pipelines, develop a framework to facilitate linkages between trade and transport, and establish a regional project development facility.

9. The secretariat has started to implement a project on the promotion of investment in the Asian Highway network. Four member countries have been

[2] J. Reynders, "Evaluation of the Japan-ESCAP Cooperation Fund 1996-2006—Annex III: Evaluation of the Asian Highway Initiative (transport)" (Bangkok, ESCAP, 2007), p. 210.

requested to nominate a section of the Asian Highway network in their respective countries to be considered for conducting prefeasibility studies.

10. During the process of developing and upgrading Asian Highway routes, national highways and other roads, it may also be necessary to consider the following:

(a) Promoting investment in the identified priority projects;

(b) Exploring various sources and forms of funding, such as build-operate-transfer, public-private partnerships and other innovative financing mechanisms;

(c) Ensuring the sustainable maintenance of Asian Highway routes and other highways through: (i) regular and periodic maintenance planning; and (ii) the establishment of road funds/boards;

(d) Undertaking environmental and social impact assessments for road projects;

(e) Capacity-building through the sharing of experience, knowledge, technology and best practices.

11. Member States may wish to provide an update on their progress in developing the Asian Highway network and on the status (for example, feasibility study completed, funds secured, or under construction) of the priority projects identified earlier.

B. Asian Highway Database

12. The Asian Highway Database includes comprehensive and detailed data and information on the Asian Highway routes in member States. The secretariat updates the database regularly to monitor the improvement of the network in member States. It is currently being updated using 2010 data and information received from member States. As of 19 June 2011, updates have been received from 14 member countries. The information from the Asian Highway Database is available to member countries and developing partners through the ESCAP website (www.unescap.org/ttdw/common/ tis/ah/member%20countries.asp).

13. In this regard, member States may continue to provide the secretariat with updated data and information on changes in the status of Asian Highway routes.

C. Improving road safety on the Asian Highway

14. According to a 2009 World Health Organization report,[3] more than 1.2 million people die and as many as 50 million people are injured on the world's roads every year. Over 90 per cent of them are killed on the roads of low- and middle-income countries. According to the figures in the report, about 700,000 people were killed by road accidents in the ESCAP region in 2007, representing 57 per cent of road fatalities that year worldwide, even though the region accounts for only 43 per cent of the world's registered road vehicles.

[3] World Health Organization, *Global Status Report on Road Safety: Time for Action* (Geneva, World Health Organization, 2009).

15. According to the latest data available from the Asian Highway Database (2008),[4] primary class Asian Highway roads have the best safety record, while those below class III have the worst record. The upgrading of roads to access-controlled primary class has significant benefits in reducing fatality rates.[5] Substantial improvement in terms of safety can also be gained when roads below class III are upgraded to the minimum class III standards.[6] Road safety records for class I and II, however, show worse performance compared to class III, possibly due to other relevant factors, such as higher traffic flows, higher shares of motorized vehicles, and greater average travel speeds.

16. The upgrading of roads has also been linked to improved Asian Highway safety in many countries, particularly when the upgrades involved: (a) the construction of barriers to separate opposing directions of traffic and different types of vehicles; and/or (b) the improvement of road shoulders.

17. Road safety has received greater prominence and priority following a global ministerial-level conference on road safety held in Moscow in 2009. The General Assembly in its resolution 64/255 proclaimed the period 2011-2020 as the Decade of Action for Road Safety. The overall goal of the Decade is to stabilize and then reduce the forecast level of road traffic fatalities around the world by increasing road safety activities conducted at the national, regional and global levels.

18. At the regional level, the Ministerial Conference on Transport held in Busan, Republic of Korea, in November 2006 adopted the Ministerial Declaration on Improving Road Safety in Asia and the Pacific (E/ESCAP/63/13, chap. IV), which resolved to save 600,000 lives and prevent a commensurate number of serious injuries on the roads of Asia and the Pacific over the period 2007 to 2015.

19. Pursuant to global and regional mandates, the ESCAP secretariat has developed regional road safety goals, targets and indicators for the period 2011-2020.

20. The Decade of Action for Road Safety (2011-2020) was formally launched on 11 May 2011. A number of countries in the region organized national programmes on road safety to commemorate the day.

21. During the sixty-seventh session of the Commission (Bangkok, 19-25 May 2011), a large number of delegates also signed the special poster and sent postcards which had been prepared by the secretariat to mark the launch of the Decade.

22. The secretariat has been organizing national workshops and providing advisory services to assist member countries (with an emphasis on low- and middle-income countries) in developing road safety strategies, and setting or refining national road safety goals and targets for the Decade of Action for

[4] In the Asian Highway Database (2008), road safety data are available for only 33 per cent of the length of the Asian Highway, including 630 road sections (or 42.7 per cent of all sections), covering 47,939 km in 21 countries.

[5] The average fatality rate for primary class roads was 42 fatalities per billion vehicle km, the lowest rate among all types of roads.

[6] The average fatality rate for class III roads was about 79 fatalities per billion vehicle km compared to 709 fatalities for roads below class III.

Road Safety. National workshops on road safety were organized in collaboration with the relevant national ministries in Nepal (Kathmandu, 7-8 October 2009), Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek, 6 November 2009), Sri Lanka (Colombo, 3-4 December 2009), Cambodia (Phnom Penh, 7-8 December 2009), Mongolia (Ulaanbaatar, 20 August 2010), Uzbekistan (Tashkent, 25 November 2010), Tajikistan (Dushanbe, 29-30 November 2010), the Philippines (Tagaytay City, 31 March-1 April 2011) and Bangladesh (Dhaka, 11-12 May 2011).

23. A number of countries have prepared or are in the process of finalizing their draft national strategies and action plans on road safety.

24. Member States may wish to initiate policy measures and implement national road safety action plans and programmes in order to achieve the goals and targets and to monitor their achievements.

D. Developing dry ports

25. Using the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks as two major building blocks, the secretariat has been promoting the development of an international integrated intermodal transport and logistics system for the region. Another complementary and important element of such a system is the development and operation of a network of dry ports, which serve as intermodal interfaces and enable the efficient transfer of goods between different modes of transport.

26. In March 2011, the secretariat initiated a project on capacity-building for dry port planning using prefeasibility studies on selected dry ports in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) subregion. The project involved desk research, fact-finding missions, studies, and the preparation and publication of reports on prefeasibility studies, as well as national training workshops.

27. The secretariat is also implementing a project on the development of dry ports along the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks, encompassing the development of an intergovernmental agreement on dry ports. As part of the project, a series of subregional meetings are planned to develop an intergovernmental agreement on dry ports. The first subregional meeting, for South-East Asian countries, is scheduled to be held in Vientiane on 7 and 8 July 2011. Other subregional meetings are tentatively scheduled for September 2011 for South Asian countries and for October 2011 for Central and North-East Asian countries.

IV. Issues for consideration

28. The Working Group may wish to provide the secretariat with further guidance on its policies and approaches relating to: (a) developing and upgrading the Asian Highway; (b) updating the Asian Highway Database; (c) improving road safety; and (d) developing dry ports. The Working Group may also wish to provide updates on the progress and status of priority projects for developing and upgrading the Asian Highway.

Annex

Excerpts from the reports of legislative meetings related to the Asian Highway

Legislative meeting	*Decisions and recommendations*
Forum of Asian Ministers of Transport, first session, Bangkok, 14-16 December 2009	• The Forum noted with satisfaction the progress being made by a number of countries in becoming parties to the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network and the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network[a] • The Forum noted that countries were developing and upgrading various sections of the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks as integral components of their national programmes[b] • The Forum requested the secretariat to continue to assist and coordinate in the identification of priority investment needs and to promote financing for the development of road and railway infrastructure and rolling stock as well as supporting the installation of route signage along the Asian Highway network[c]
Committee on Transport, second session, Bangkok, 1-3 November 2010	• The Committee noted that the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks were now serving as the basis for the development of intra- and interregional transport linkages[d] • The Committee noted the progress being made to upgrade the Asian Highway in member countries[e] • The Committee requested the secretariat to continue promoting investment in the development and improvement of the priority sections of the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks, including undertaking prefeasibility studies[f]
Commission, sixty-sixth session, Incheon, Republic of Korea, 13-19 May 2010	• The Commission noted the progress made in developing the Asian Highway and the Trans-Asian Railway networks and improving interregional connectivity, including intermodal transport corridors between Asia and Europe, and requested that those efforts be continued[g] • The Commission noted with satisfaction the ratification of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network by Indonesia and its progress in becoming a party to the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network[h] • The Commission noted with satisfaction the secretariat's efforts to develop an international integrated intermodal transport and logistics system based on the Asian Highway network and the Trans-Asian Railway network, with the plan to develop an intergovernmental agreement on dry ports forming a third element[i]

Commission, sixty- seventh session, Bangkok, 19-25 May 2011	• The Commission commended the work of ESCAP in supporting the development of transport infrastructure in the Asia-Pacific region. It encouraged the secretariat to continue its work in fostering better transport connectivity among member countries to promote regional cooperation and integration[j] • The Commission also expressed its full commitment to the Decade of Action for Road Safety, 2011-2020, proclaimed by the General Assembly in its resolution 64/255 of 2 March 2010 on improving global road safety, which had been launched on 11 May 2011[k]

Notes:

[a] Report of the Forum of Asian Ministers of Transport on its first session (E/ESCAP/66/11), para. 14.

[b] Ibid., para. 15.

[c] Ibid., para. 16.

[d] Report of the Committee on Transport on its second session (E/ESCAP/67/7), para. 19.

[e] Ibid., para. 21.

[f] Ibid., para. 52.

[g] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2010, Supplement No. 19; Annual report* (E/2010/39-E/ESCAP/66/27), para. 80.

[h] Ibid., para. 83.

[i] Ibid., para. 257.

[j] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2011, Supplement No. 19; Annual report* (E/2011/39-E/ESCAP/67/23), para. 110.

[k] Ibid., para. 124.