Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Fourth Ministerial Conference on Transport
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Item 2 of the provisional agenda*
Assessment and evaluation of the implementation of the
Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Transport
Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific and the Regional
Action Programme for Sustainable Transport Connectivity
in Asia and the Pacific, phase I (2017–2021)

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Note by the secretariat

Summary

The Third Ministerial Conference on Transport, held in Moscow from 5 to
9 December 2016, adopted the Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Transport
Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific, including the Regional Action Programme for
The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific at its seventy-third
session adopted resolution 73/4, in which it endorsed the Ministerial Declaration,
including the Regional Action Programme, and requested the Executive Secretary
to carry out in 2021 an evaluation of the implementation of phase I of the Regional
Action Programme and submit a report with recommendations to the Fourth
Ministerial Conference on Transport.

The present document provides an overview of the activities implemented
under phase I of the Regional Action Programme and the conclusions and
recommendations of the independent evaluation of the implementation of phase I,
together with management responses. The present document may be read together
with information document ESCAP/MCT/2021/INF/1, which contains a summary
list of activities implemented, key outcomes and participating countries for the
above-mentioned period.

The present document concludes with issues for consideration by the Fourth
Ministerial Conference on Transport. The Ministerial Conference will be invited to
consider these documents and to provide its views on the key findings, conclusions
and recommendations of the evaluation of the implementation of the Regional
I. Introduction

1. The Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific, including the Regional Action Programme for Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific, phase I (2017–2021), was adopted at the Third Ministerial Conference on Transport, held in Moscow in December 2016. In the Declaration, the Ministers affirmed their commitment to the implementation of General Assembly resolution 70/1, in which the Assembly adopted the Sustainable Development Goals and targets to achieve sustainable development in its economic, social and environmental dimensions in a balanced and integrated manner, and expressed their conviction that sustainable transport connectivity was a major contributor to inclusive and sustainable development.

2. The Regional Action Programme for Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific, phase I guides the work of the secretariat in seven broad thematic areas, namely: (a) regional transport infrastructure connectivity; (b) regional transport operational connectivity; (c) Euro-Asian transport connectivity; (d) transport connectivity for least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States; (e) sustainable urban transport; (f) rural transport connectivity to wider networks; and (g) improving road safety. Since the adoption of the Regional Action Programme, the secretariat has worked on its implementation in close collaboration with members and associate members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), as well as development partners, to steer a path towards the realization of sustainable transport connectivity in the region and the achievement of the transport-related Sustainable Development Goals and targets.

3. Section II of the present document contains the objectives of each of the thematic areas specified in the Regional Action Programme and provides member States with updates on the progress made in implementing phase I. The conclusions and recommendations of the independent evaluation of the implementation of phase I are provided in section III.

4. The present document may be read in conjunction with information document ESCAP/MCT/2021/INF/1, which contains a summary list of activities implemented during phase I.

II. Overview of the implementation of the Regional Action Programme for Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific, phase I (2017–2021)

A. Regional transport infrastructure connectivity

Immediate objective. Regional connectivity is to be enhanced through the continued development, upgrading, planning and operationalization of the transport infrastructure networks, including through the introduction of new technologies and necessary regional standards.

5. The Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network, the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network and the Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports provide a set of institutional frameworks for enhancing transport connectivity in the Asia-Pacific region. The development of the two infrastructure networks and of the network of intermodal facilities contributed to enhanced regional connectivity and scaled up the logistics industry and domestic and international trade.
6. In accordance with the terms of those Intergovernmental Agreements, the secretariat convened the following biennial meetings of the Working Groups established pursuant to the Agreements: Working Group on the Asian Highway (7th meeting, Bangkok, December 2017; 8th meeting, Bangkok, September 2019; and 9th meeting, Bangkok and online, June 2021); Working Group on the Trans-Asian Railway Network (5th meeting, Busan, Republic of Korea, June 2017; 6th meeting, Bangkok, December 2019; and 7th meeting, Bangkok and online, May 2021); and Working Group on Dry Ports (2nd meeting, Bangkok, November 2017; 3rd meeting, Bangkok, November 2019; and 4th meeting, Bangkok and online, June 2021).

7. The Working Group on the Asian Highway adopted amendments to the routes of the network proposed by Mongolia and Sri Lanka (7th meeting) and China, Georgia, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation (8th meeting), resulting in the expansion of the Asian Highway routes to approximately 145,000 km. Further amendments proposed by Cambodia and Pakistan were adopted during the 9th meeting of the Working Group and have yet to enter into force. The Working Group also took stock of progress and advanced discussions on the issues related to the development and operationalization of the Asian Highway network, such as facilitation, decarbonization, road safety and improving social inclusiveness, including gender mainstreaming. To date, there are 30 parties to the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network.

8. Annex II bis to the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network, entitled “Asian Highway Design Standards for Road Safety”, was approved during the 7th meeting of the Working Group to provide guidance to member States on design standards for several road infrastructure safety facilities (for further details, see subsection II.G below).

9. The Working Group on the Trans-Asian Railway Network adopted amendments to the routes of the network proposed by Cambodia and Thailand (5th meeting), the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation (6th meeting) and Myanmar, Tajikistan and Turkey (7th meeting). Turkey and Myanmar acceded to the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network in 2019 and 2020, respectively, thus bringing the number of parties to the Agreement to 21. The Working Group also agreed to work on a new annex to the Agreement on the general mainstreaming of electronic information exchange/data interchange among railways and between railways and control agencies along the Trans-Asian Railway network. Furthermore, the secretariat continued to cooperate with other relevant partners to address issues of technical and institutional relevance through various events and platforms.

10. The Working Group on Dry Ports adopted amendments to the list of dry ports of international importance in the Russian Federation, Thailand and Turkmenistan (2nd meeting), India, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation (3rd meeting) and Myanmar and the Russian Federation (4th meeting). The Islamic Republic of Iran, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Azerbaijan and Myanmar became parties to the Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports in 2017, 2019, 2020 and 2021, respectively, thus bringing the number of parties to the Agreement to 16.

11. Recognizing the potential of the Regional Framework for the Planning, Design, Development and Operation of Dry Ports of International Importance in helping member States to achieve greater regional connectivity, the Commission at its seventy-fourth session adopted resolution 74/2 on the promotion of the Regional Framework. To promote the Framework and put it to effective use, the secretariat held a series of capacity-building seminars for
countries in the South-East Asia, North and Central Asia, and South and South-West Asia subregions. The secretariat also produced a study report entitled “Institutional determinants of dry port development and logistics performance in Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Thailand and Viet Nam” and held a series of regional and national workshops on strengthening the institutional framework for the development of dry ports in those countries. Those efforts resulted in the ratification of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports by the Government of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic.

12. To further assist member States, the secretariat held expert group meetings and published studies and technical material that fostered regional transport infrastructure connectivity during the reporting period. For example, the project on the comprehensive planning of Eurasian transport corridors to strengthen the intraregional and interregional transport connectivity served to identify three main Eurasian transport corridors, collect information on infrastructure and existing gaps, and analyse the operationalization of the corridors. Technical and policy recommendations to strengthen seamless connectivity along the corridors were made available.

13. Progress made in the thematic area of regional transport infrastructure connectivity directly contributed towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 9, in particular target 9.1 on developing quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure to support economic development and human well-being, and target 9.4 on upgrading infrastructure and retrofitting industries to make them sustainable.

B. Regional transport operational connectivity

Immediate objectives. (a) Regional transport operational connectivity is to be enhanced through strengthened transport facilitation measures, including harmonization of transport technical and operational standards, regulations and practices; understanding and use of new technologies; as well as implementation of transport facilitation tools and frameworks; (b) integrated intermodal transport systems are to be developed and operationalized by using existing capacities and infrastructure more effectively, enhanced network connectivity resulting from better interconnected and compatible transport networks throughout the region, transfer facilities, harmonization of technical standards and the definition of common legislative frameworks; (c) transport logistics services are to be increased in the region by building capacity and establishing logistics information systems to improve logistics efficiency and reduce costs.

14. Following the signing of the Intergovernmental Agreement on International Road Transport along the Asian Highway Network by the Governments of China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation during the Third Ministerial Conference on Transport in December 2016 and its entry into force on 21 September 2018, the secretariat continued to facilitate the implementation of the Agreement by holding a series of expert group meetings among parties to the Agreement in 2018 and 2019 to facilitate preparations for its implementation and to explore the possibility of extending the scope of the Agreement to cover passenger operations. The secretariat also provided technical advisory services to the 1st meeting of the Joint Committee to the Agreement, which was held in Manzhouli, China, in July 2019 to launch the implementation of the Agreement.
15. To improve operational connectivity in Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Thailand and Viet Nam, the secretariat also held a series of capacity-building workshops in 2018 and 2019 and conducted a study on the feasibility of a coastal shipping agreement between Cambodia, Thailand and Viet Nam.

16. During the reporting period, India and Pakistan became parties to the 1975 Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets. A number of multilateral agreements have been signed to facilitate cross-border movements of goods by road, such as the Afghanistan-Pakistan-Tajikistan Trilateral Transit Trade Agreement, and the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal Motor Vehicles Agreement. In that regard, the secretariat held a workshop in Bangkok in 2018 on road transport facilitation in southern Asia along the Asian Highway corridors.

17. To facilitate the development and operation of international railway transport, the secretariat developed the framework for enhancing the efficiency of railway border crossings along the Trans-Asian Railway network and beyond through a project on the harmonization of rules and regulations for the facilitation of international railway transport, funded by the Government of the Russian Federation. In addition, partnering with the Organization for Cooperation between Railways, the secretariat held a meeting in 2017 on the existing legal instruments in international railway transport. A regional policy dialogue was also held in 2018, and its participants recommended the establishment of an intergovernmental group of experts to ensure the coherence of corridor development initiatives among member States.

18. With regard to the use of new technologies, the secretariat produced a study on railway and customs electronic information systems and their linkages, and held an expert group meeting in Bangkok in 2019 on the use of new technologies for the facilitation of international railway transport. In addition, the Transport Division and the Trade, Investment and Innovation Division jointly organized a capacity-building workshop in Bangkok in 2018 on the facilitation of international railway transport to support intraregional and interregional trade. Participants at the workshop recommended the secretariat to initiate projects on electronic data exchange to facilitate railway transit in the region.

19. The secretariat continued to collaborate with national freight forwarders, multimodal transport operators and logistics service providers in Asia and the Pacific through the exchange of knowledge and good practices. As part of that effort, the secretariat held a series of capacity-building events in 2018 and 2019, including an ESCAP-Thai International Freight Forwarders Association training-of-trainers workshop and two annual regional conferences for logistics service providers.

20. In addition, the secretariat developed a database of bilateral and multilateral agreements on road and railway transport through a project funded by the Government of China on operationalizing sustainable transport connectivity along the China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
21. The secretariat also published the Review of Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific 2019: Addressing the Challenges for Freight Transport¹ to support policymakers in the region in accomplishing sustainable freight transport connectivity.

22. With regard to maritime connectivity, the Commission at its seventy-sixth session adopted its resolution 76/1 on strengthening cooperation to promote the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific, in which it requested continued regional dialogue on sustainable maritime connectivity. As a follow up, the secretariat implemented projects to support smart port development policies and facilitated sustainable and resilient port development for sustainable maritime connectivity in the region. The secretariat also organized special sessions on sustainable maritime connectivity as part of the commemoration of the Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean in 2019, 2020 and 2021.

23. An unprecedented scale of disruptions to operational connectivity of both passenger and freight transport was seen in 2020 owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The secretariat conducted a series of online meetings to review national experiences and policy responses and developed a framework to support the region’s socioeconomic response to the pandemic. The secretariat also promoted contactless, seamless and collaborative solutions in the policy responses to the pandemic through a United Nations Development Account rapid response project.

24. Progress made in the thematic area of regional transport operational connectivity directly contributed towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 9, in particular targets 9.1 and 9.4.

C. Euro-Asian transport connectivity

**Immediate objective.** To work towards the establishment of an interregional coordination committee on transport between Asia and Europe designed to foster seamless sustainable transport connectivity between Asia and Europe for people and goods.

25. In the Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific, the Ministers agreed to work towards the establishment of an interregional coordination committee on transport between Asia and Europe in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE).

26. In its resolution 73/4 on the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration, the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to seek cooperation from ECE and other international organizations and accelerate the ongoing work towards the establishment and full functioning of the interregional coordination committee. In response to the request, the secretariat shared a draft study report with the ECE secretariat to obtain its views on addressing the issues with regard to enhancing transport connectivity between Asia and Europe.

27. The secretariat conducted the study in late 2018 under a project on connecting transport infrastructure networks in Asia and Europe in support of interregional sustainable transport connectivity, funded by the Government of the Russian Federation, to support the establishment of the interregional coordination committee on transport between Asia and Europe in accordance

¹ United Nations publication, 2019.
with the Declaration. The study report proposed mechanisms for the implementation of the Euro-Asian transport connectivity agenda, including the establishment of the interregional coordination committee.

28. The Interregional Expert Group Meeting on Transport Connectivity between Asia and Europe, held in Bangkok in January 2019, showcased the strong interest among participating countries to further enhance Euro-Asian transport connectivity and the necessity of a continuing interregional dialogue on related matters between the States members of ECE and ESCAP.

29. However, the establishment of the interregional coordination committee was subject to the distinct mandates of the two regional commissions. While ESCAP was fully mandated to work towards the establishment of the coordination committee by the Ministerial Declaration and resolution 73/4, the mandate given to the ECE secretariat at the eighty-first session of the Inland Transport Committee, in February 2019, was limited to continuing to seek cooperation with the ESCAP secretariat to explore, together with the Committee bureau, possibilities to jointly organize consultations in Geneva between States members of ECE and ESCAP, presenting the results of those consultations, in cooperation with the bureau, to the Committee at its eighty-second session, and formulating proposals for future cooperation.

30. However, following a regional forum jointly organized by the ECE and ESCAP secretariats in Geneva on 30 October 2019, and upon reporting on the forum’s outcomes at the eighty-second session, the Inland Transport Committee did not take any decision on extending the mandate of the ECE secretariat.

31. In 2020, the ESCAP secretariat prepared an updated study report on progress in enhancing transport connectivity between Asia and Europe to reflect the latest trends in interregional transport connectivity, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the study report, the secretariat recommended that, given the rapidly evolving situation and the need to revise the approaches for ensuring sustainability and the resilience of transport systems, setting up a periodically held interregional forum on Euro-Asian transport connectivity would be an optimal modality for cooperation and coordination of efforts for relevant stakeholders in both regions.

32. The ESCAP secretariat brought the recommendation to the attention of the Committee on Transport at its sixth session, in November 2020. The Committee reaffirmed the importance of Euro-Asian transport connectivity and requested the secretariat to explore, in a cost-effective manner, the possibility of including additional stakeholders from government, the private sector and the scientific community from other regions.

33. In line with the recommendation of the Committee, the secretariat held an online regional meeting on sustainable transport connectivity between Asia and Europe in 2020 and a forum on sustainable transport connectivity between Asia and Europe in October 2021 to identify priorities and practical steps in enhancing interregional transport connectivity.

34. The secretariat, with financial support from the Government of China, conducted a study on the comprehensive planning of the Eurasian transport corridors to strengthen intraregional and interregional transport connectivity and held three expert group meetings in 2017. Participants at the meetings proposed mechanisms and measures to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and seamlessness of transport and logistics along three major Eurasian
transport corridors, namely the northern, central and southern corridors. Furthermore, the secretariat held an expert group meeting in Beijing in 2019 on strengthening transport connectivity between the Republic of Korea and Europe through the Eurasian transport corridors.

35. With regard to the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia, the ESCAP and ECE secretariats jointly organized the annual sessions of the thematic working group on sustainable transport, transit and connectivity. The thematic working group at its twenty-fourth session approved its new terms of reference, which then received final approval from the Governing Council of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia at its fourteenth session, in 2019. At that session, the Governing Council also approved the Ashgabat initiative on reducing barriers to transport and enhancing transport connectivity in the Special Programme subregion and beyond. The thematic working group, at its twenty-fifth session, in 2020, held a discussion on the socioeconomic response to COVID-19 and post-pandemic recovery in the Special Programme subregion. The secretariat also supported the annual sessions of the Governing Council and Economic Forum of the Special Programme.

36. Progress made in the thematic area of Euro-Asian transport connectivity directly contributed towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 9, in particular targets 9.1 and 9.4.

D. Transport connectivity for least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States

Immediate objective. States with special needs (least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States) are to be assisted in developing and implementing innovative policies and frameworks to improve and enhance sustainable transport connectivity with adequate inclusion of urban and rural transport and road safety.

37. Certain activities in other thematic areas also helped to foster transport connectivity for least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. They are described in subsections II.A and II.B of the present document.

38. In addition, the secretariat held a capacity-building training workshop in South-East Asia in 2017 on the use of the Traincost railway traffic costing model, developed by ESCAP, to help railway managers to assess the financial contribution of specific projects to corporate profitability. The study concerned the following: (a) northern transport corridors – China; Kazakhstan; Mongolia; and Russian Federation; (b) central transport corridors – Afghanistan; Azerbaijan; China; Georgia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Kazakhstan; Kyrgyzstan; Pakistan; Russian Federation; Tajikistan; Turkey; Turkmenistan; and Uzbekistan; and (c) southern transport corridors – Bangladesh; Cambodia; China; India; Lao People’s Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Myanmar; Singapore; Thailand; and Viet Nam.

39. The secretariat also held a capacity-building workshop in Uzbekistan in 2019 on the use of new technologies for landlocked developing countries in Central Asia, during which a draft study was presented on creating a digital freight platform for the completion of regulatory requirements in international transport corridors.
road transport. Online training sessions on dry port development were conducted in Mongolia and Uzbekistan in 2020.

40. The secretariat and the Economic Cooperation Organization jointly implemented a study project funded by the Islamic Development Bank on the commercialization of a railway corridor in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. It resulted in a memorandum of understanding aimed at setting up a permanent working group for the railway corridor.

41. The secretariat continued to support small island developing States, partnering with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to hold a regional workshop in Bangkok in 2019 on mainstreaming the maritime sector in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. The secretariat also implemented a project funded by IMO on enhancing the safety of domestic ferry services in support of safe maritime connectivity in Asia and the Pacific. In addition, an online expert group meeting on improving domestic ferry safety in support of safe maritime connectivity in Asia and the Pacific was held in 2020.

42. As part of the theme study for the seventy-sixth session of the Commission, Changing Sails: Accelerating Regional Actions for Sustainable Oceans in Asia and the Pacific, the secretariat, in cooperation with IMO and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, prepared a chapter on transforming maritime shipping, which provided an assessment of maritime connectivity in Asia and the Pacific, focusing on challenges faced by Pacific small island developing States.

43. The secretariat supported the organization of the Euro-Asian Regional Midterm Review of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024 in Asia and the Pacific in 2019 and contributed to regional inputs to the global report on the midterm review of the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action in the transport sector.

44. Progress made in the thematic area of transport connectivity for countries with special needs directly contributed towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 9, in particular target 9.a on facilitating sustainable and resilient infrastructure development in developing countries through enhanced financial, technological and technical support for least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States.

E. Sustainable urban transport

Immediate objective. The region’s countries and cities are to initiate and implement innovative policies and frameworks to assess, plan, develop, improve and maintain sustainable urban transport systems and services.

45. In achieving the objective set out under the thematic area of sustainable urban transport, the secretariat developed the sustainable urban transport index for cities in Asia, which was finalized at a regional meeting held in Jakarta in 2017 and endorsed by the Committee on Transport at its fifth session, in 2018, as a tool for the assessment and improvement of urban transport policies. The Committee recommended the continued development of the index and its further promotion throughout the region. In response to the Committee’s recommendation, the secretariat further refined the indicators, improved the quality of assessment and updated the data collection guidance. The secretariat also refined the index to include analysis of the gender dimension of urban
transport and renewable energy use and a component on the impact of COVID-19 on mobility.⁴

46. During the reporting period, the secretariat conducted urban mobility assessments using the sustainable urban transport index in 25 cities in 15 member States⁵ and promoted its concept through international, regional and subregional events. An increasing number of cities expressed interest in the assessment and technical assistance to refine their urban transport policies and plans and enable evidence-based decision-making to enhance the overall sustainability of urban transport systems and services. A series of capacity-building workshops and meetings were held to introduce the index, share the results and discuss evidence-based policy formulation.

47. Furthermore, under a project on Asia-Pacific sustainable urban transport systems to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, with support from the Government of the Russian Federation, the secretariat held an online regional meeting on the theme “City and transport: safety, efficiency and sustainability”, which culminated in the adoption of the 2021 Bangkok Declaration. The secretariat also published a study on the development of sustainable urban transport in the Asia-Pacific region, focusing on green, smart and safe transport. The regional meeting followed the high-level international conference held on the same theme in Khabarovsk, Russian Federation, in September 2017.

48. Also at its fifth session, the Committee expressed its support for the secretariat’s work in promoting intelligent transportation systems to improve urban transport. The secretariat implemented a project on innovative and integrated intelligent transportation systems for the development and operation of sustainable transport systems in urban areas, funded by the Government of the Republic of Korea. In that regard, a series of expert group meetings and regional meetings resulted in policy recommendations on the development of regional strategies and policy plans on intelligent transportation systems.

49. To strengthen technical capacity in target countries to utilize smart transport technologies for the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions, the secretariat prepared a study report on the topic and held a series of subregional capacity-building workshops in 2019 and 2020.

50. To further fulfil its sustainable urban transport objective, the secretariat published Nos. 87, 88 and 90 of the Transport and Communications Bulletin for Asia and the Pacific, entitled “Transport and Sustainable Development Goals”, “Intelligent transport systems” and “Resilience of transport systems and services”.

51. Progress made in the thematic area of sustainable urban transport directly contributed towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 7, in particular target 7.3 on doubling the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency by 2030, and Goal 11, in particular target 11.2, on providing, by 2030, access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport

⁵ Bangladesh (Dhaka and Khulna); Bhutan (Thimphu); Cambodia (Phnom Penh); Fiji (Suva); India (Bhopal, Jaipur and Surat); Indonesia (Greater Jakarta, Bandung, Palembang, Pekanbaru and Surabaya); Islamic Republic of Iran (Tehran and Mashhad); Mongolia (Ulaanbaatar); Myanmar (Yangon); Nepal (Kathmandu); Pakistan (Islamabad and Rawalpindi); Philippines (Manila); Sri Lanka (Colombo); Thailand (Bangkok); and Viet Nam (Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City).
systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.

F. Rural transport connectivity to wider networks

Immediate objective. Member countries are to be assisted in developing and achieving greater rural connectivity coverage and connections to the wider transport networks.

52. The secretariat, in collaboration with the United Nations Centre for Regional Development, held the Tenth Regional Environmentally Sustainable Transport Forum in Asia in 2017, which culminated in the adoption of the Vientiane declaration on sustainable rural transport towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In conjunction with the Forum, a regional seminar was jointly organized on sustainable and inclusive transport development to foster rural transport connectivity to help to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals focusing on rural access.

53. To stimulate a wider discussion on what governments can do to enhance rural transport connectivity to higher level networks, and in doing so, improve the effectiveness of their rural transport networks as conduits for socioeconomic development, the secretariat published Enhancing Rural Transport Connectivity to Regional and International Transport Networks in Asia and the Pacific in 2019, as part of the monograph series on sustainable and inclusive transport. It also prepared several other texts on rural transport connectivity, including background documents for the Tenth Regional Environmentally Sustainable Transport Forum in Asia; Nos. 86 and 87 of the Transport and Communications Bulletin for Asia and the Pacific; and a chapter in the Review of Developments in Transport in Asia and the Pacific 2017.

54. The secretariat also convened an expert group meeting in Bangkok in July 2019 on enhancing rural transport connectivity to regional and international transport networks. Representatives from Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Kazakhstan, Nepal, Thailand and Viet Nam and from international development organizations, as well as academic researchers, presented information on current rural transport policies and discussed common challenges faced by governments in delivering rural transport programmes.

55. Progress made in the thematic area of rural transport connectivity to wider networks directly contributed towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 2, in particular target 2.a, on increasing investment, including through enhanced international cooperation, in rural infrastructure in order to enhance agricultural productive capacity in developing countries, in particular least developed countries.

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7 ST/ESCAP/2886.
8 ST/ESCAP/SER.E/86; ST/ESCAP/SER.E/87.
G. Improving road safety

Immediate objective. Countries in the region are to be assisted in improving road safety situations and meeting their commitments under the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011–2020 and Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 11.

56. The Third Ministerial Conference on Transport adopted the Regional Road Safety Goals and Targets for Asia and the Pacific 2016–2020 with the overall objective of achieving a 50 per cent reduction in fatalities and serious injuries on the roads of the regions by 2020. Those objectives received further support in Commission resolution 74/3 on improving road safety in Asia and the Pacific for sustainable transport systems.

57. With a view to achieving the updated road safety goals and targets, the secretariat organized a capacity-building workshop for the South-East Asia subregion in Phnom Penh in 2017 and implemented a project with funding support from the Korea Expressway Corporation to harmonize road safety infrastructure facilities along the Asian Highway network. The implementation of that project was one factor that contributed to the adoption by the Working Group on the Asian Highway Network at its 7th meeting, of annex II bis to the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network, entitled “Asian Highway Design Standards for Road Safety”.

58. With financial support from the Government of the Russian Federation, a two-year project to tackle the main causes of road traffic crashes, fatalities and injuries in Asia-Pacific countries was launched in 2018. The project resulted in the identification of speeding and drink-driving as two of the main causes of road traffic crashes in the region and the publication of two study reports, which included recommendations for improvement in that regard: Strategies to Tackle the Issue of Impaired Driving for Road Safety in the Asia-Pacific Region: Implementation Framework;\textsuperscript{10} and Strategies to Tackle the Issue of Speed for Road Safety in the Asia-Pacific Region: Implementation Framework.\textsuperscript{11} A regional seminar and subregional capacity-building workshops were also held.

59. In order to create awareness and broaden and deepen understanding of road safety issues, the secretariat published No. 89 of the Transport and Communications Bulletin for Asia and the Pacific, entitled “Improving road safety”, which included various approaches to improving road safety in specific contexts.\textsuperscript{12} The secretariat also published a monograph, an analytical report and infographics with a view to improving the road safety situation in the region.

60. To accomplish synergies in assisting member States to achieve the goal of the Decade of Action for Road Safety and the road safety targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, the secretariat continued to collaborate with other development partners to improve road safety in the region, including at the national level. The secretariat developed road safety management systems for Viet Nam in collaboration with ECE and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; facilitated the preparation of a draft strategy and action plan on road safety in Nepal (2020–2030) in close partnership with the secretariat of the Special Envoy for Road Safety and ECE; strengthened

\textsuperscript{10} ST/ESCAP/2887.
\textsuperscript{11} ST/ESCAP/2888.
\textsuperscript{12} ST/ESCAP/SER.E/89.
speed management in the Philippines and improved the driver-licensing system in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic under the United Nations Road Safety Fund; and improved the road safety data management system in the Asia-Pacific region in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank, the International Automobile Federation and the International Transport Forum through the Asia-Pacific Road Safety Observatory initiative.

61. Progress made in the thematic area of improving road safety directly contributed towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 3, in particular target 3.6 on halving the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents by 2020, and Goal 11, in particular target 11.2 on providing, by 2030, access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all.

III. Independent evaluation of the implementation of the Regional Action Programme for Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific, phase I (2017–2021)

A. Background

62. The transport activities of ESCAP are guided by phase I of the Regional Action Programme, which supports the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the realization of the goals set out in the Busan Declaration on Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific. The Regional Action Programme sets out the specific activities to be implemented by the secretariat and member States. Each phase of the Regional Action Programme is developed as a five-year medium-term plan.

63. In its resolution 73/4, in which it endorsed the Ministerial Declaration, including phase I of the Regional Action Programme, the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to carry out in 2021 an evaluation of the implementation of phase I and submit a report with recommendations to the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Transport. The year 2021 marks the end of phase I, and the requested evaluation has been carried out.

B. Purpose and scope

64. The Commission commenced the evaluation with the goal of informing the Conference’s deliberations on the implementation of phase I, providing recommendations for improvement, and setting the vision for the regional action programme for sustainable transport development in Asia and the Pacific (2022–2026), taking into account the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in line with the 2030 Agenda.

65. Overall, the objectives of the evaluation were the following:

(a) To assess the implementation of phase I with regard to the achievement of the objectives of each of the seven thematic areas;

(b) To assess the performance of the activities and services provided by the secretariat to member States in support of the implementation of phase I using the standard evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and gender mainstreaming;
(c) To recommend areas for improvement in the regional action programme (2022–2026) and priority activities in light of the needs and requirements of member States in line with the 2030 Agenda and in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

66. The results of the evaluation will be used to formulate the scope and delivery modalities of the regional action programme (2022–2026). The evaluation gave ESCAP stakeholders, in particular its member States and development partners, an opportunity to share information and ideas on improving the relevance of the secretariat’s work under the framework of the Regional Action Programme. In addition, member States and development partners were invited to provide their feedback on the achievements of phase I and any associated challenges. Moreover, the evaluation gathered the feedback of the stakeholders on the future structure and key thematic areas of the regional action programme (2022–2026) linked to the 2030 Agenda.

C. Methodology

67. The evaluation used various data collection techniques, such as key informant semi-structured interviews, online questionnaires and structured documentary analyses. Quantitative and qualitative information was analysed with particular attention given to the cross-validation of data. The data gathered through in-depth interviews were validated through desk research and the review of relevant documents, study papers and reports produced under phase I.

68. In addition, the evaluation used a set of key questions outlined in its terms of reference to address the gender mainstreaming agenda. The methodology entails assessing the feedback of national and international stakeholders on whether gender mainstreaming was incorporated into phase I and what should be done to improve the consideration of gender-related topics in the regional action programme (2022–2026).

69. The evaluator interviewed more than 40 stakeholders and subject-matter experts, as well as the staff of ESCAP, and received completed surveys from 34 respondents (17 men and 17 women) representing 20 member States, international organizations and subject-matter experts.

D. Key findings and conclusions

70. The evaluation applied a participatory approach and resulted in the following key findings and conclusions.

71. **Key finding and conclusion 1.** Almost all representatives of member States confirmed that phase I was entirely relevant to their needs and priorities and was in line with multilateral and bilateral transport-related agreements.

72. **Key finding and conclusion 2.** The phase I framework demonstrated flexibility, a thematic diversity linked to the transport sector, and a customer-centric approach to cope with the emerging needs and requirements of the member States.

73. **Key finding and conclusion 3.** Not all of the thematic areas were top priorities of all the member States, owing to their geopolitical, social and economic diversity.
74. **Key finding and conclusion 4.** The tangible results (including the outcomes of the sessions of the thematic working groups and the expert group meetings, as well as the introduction of the sustainable urban transport index methodology) of phase I implementation highlight the most successful and scalable approaches.

75. **Key finding and conclusion 5.** The extent of the contribution of phase I towards the Sustainable Development Goals was gauged according to informants’ subjective perception and their knowledge of the Goals. The majority of the stakeholders were convinced that the activities of phase I greatly contributed towards the achievement of transport-related Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goals 3 and 11. However, some internal and external stakeholders diverged in their understanding of the links between phase I, the transport sector and the Sustainable Development Goals.

76. **Key finding and conclusion 6.** Many stakeholders supported the seven thematic areas of phase I and highlighted the importance of incorporating several cross-sectoral dimensions related to resilient, inclusive and environmentally friendly transport into the regional action programme (2022–2026) to maximize the economic, social and environmental impact of the transport sector. The framework of the thematic areas and changes thereto in the regional action programme (2022–2026) are driven by challenges and opportunities in operationalizing the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network, the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network and the Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports, as well as strong interest and support expressed by the member States to continue the implementation of the Regional Action Programme and to focus it more on the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement and the cross-sectoral social, economic and environmental agendas.

77. **Key finding and conclusion 7.** The output indicators and immediate objectives under each thematic area of phase I were fully achieved. However, the stakeholders held varying views on which interventions or activities had contributed the most to the achievement of the outputs and objectives. Some were convinced that all phase I activities were equally important, while others considered the most important activities to be those with which they were most familiar. Overall, phase I served as a platform for accumulating and sharing knowledge on issues related to the transport sector and building the capacity of member States.

78. **Key finding and conclusion 8.** The advisory services and capacity-building activities offered within the framework of phase I proved to be a successful model for replication in existing areas and, potentially, new areas (including transport resilience and recovery from the impacts of COVID-19).

79. **Key finding and conclusion 9.** The secretariat successfully engaged a variety of stakeholders and built activity-based cooperation and partnership with United Nations agencies, development partners and global, regional and subregional organizations within the framework of phase I. The secretariat pursued the engagement of national stakeholders and forged communication channels with them through formal communication protocols. However, some stakeholders reported a lack of information about ongoing results of phase I due to a high turnover rate of government transport officials and to existing formal communication and cooperation practices. Overall, political and intra-institutional (staffing) dynamics at national and interregional levels affected the continuity of knowledge transfer; the degree of national-level ownership of the potential outcome of interventions; political will; and country
capacity to initiate changes at the national level or at the regional and intergovernmental levels.

80. **Key finding and conclusion 10.** Overall, phase I was implemented in a timely manner. In addition, the secretariat demonstrated a customer-centric approach to maximize the service and range of activities to address the ad hoc needs of the member States.

81. **Key finding and conclusion 11.** The findings of the evaluation suggest that gender mainstreaming was only partially incorporated into the outputs of phase I. While the gender mainstreaming agenda remains ambiguous for stakeholders, the increasing interest in it provides an opportunity in the regional action programme (2022–2026) to reinforce the discussions on gender equality and social inclusiveness in the transport sector, which remains male dominated with regard to employment and stereotypes on gender equality in the sector.

E. **Recommendations and management responses**

82. On the basis of the findings and conclusions, the evaluation included a number of strategic recommendations for the member States and the secretariat on the design and implementation of the regional action programme (2022–2026).

1. **Recommendations addressed to member States on the thematic areas and framework of the regional action programme for sustainable transport development in Asia and the Pacific (2022–2026)**

83. **Recommendation 1.** It is recommended that the Regional Action Programme be continued, including along existing thematic areas from phase I, namely regional transport infrastructure connectivity, regional transport operational connectivity, sustainable urban transport and improving road safety, and it is further recommended that the link to sustainable transport be strengthened in the regional action programme (2022–2026), including by merging and clustering the thematic areas into higher-level and broader themes that correspond to the dimensions of sustainable development.

84. **Recommendation 2.** It is recommended that the regional action programme (2022–2026) include the thematic areas related to environmentally sustainable and inclusive transport and that it be better linked to the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement.

85. **Recommendation 3.** It is recommended that the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development be mainstreamed across transport areas in the regional action programme (2022–2026), focusing on the contribution to transport-related Sustainable Development Goals and taking into account new development trends and emerging issues (e.g. COVID-19 recovery).

86. **Recommendation 4.** It is recommended that the regional action programme (2022–2026) move towards a results-oriented approach by defining specific and measurable outcomes and outputs under each thematic area in accordance with results-based management principles. In this regard, member States may wish to consider applying specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound output and outcome indicators.
87. **Recommendation 5.** It is recommended that the regional action programme (2022–2026) incorporate gender-responsive activities (e.g. gender equality and social inclusiveness aspects of the transport sector) and appropriate output and outcome indicators in accordance with results-based management principles.

88. **Recommendation 6.** It is recommended that awareness-raising and capacity-building activities be continued across thematic areas of the regional action programme (2022–2026), in both physical and online modalities in an appropriate combination to secure a reasonable balance of cost efficiency and impact creation.

89. **Management response.** The secretariat prepared the draft regional action programme for sustainable transport development in Asia and the Pacific (2022–2026) in line with recommendations 1–6 and presented the draft at the regional preparatory meeting for the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Transport, held online on 29 and 30 July 2021. Participants at the meeting supported, in principle, the overall structure and objectives as presented in the draft and agreed to finalize it and the ministerial declaration on sustainable transport development in Asia and the Pacific before the Ministerial Conference, by holding multiple rounds of written comments and online meetings. They also agreed to adopt the ministerial declaration on sustainable transport development in Asia and the Pacific (2022–2026) using the silence procedure.

90. **Recommendation 7.** It is recommended that national focal points take on an enhanced role in implementing the regional action programme (2022–2026), coordinating among transport and non-transport sectors at the country level and communicating the achievements and results of the regional action programme (2022–2026).

91. **Recommendation 8.** It is recommended that the approaches that were successfully adopted under phase I be replicated in the regional action programme (2022–2026), and it is further recommended that mechanisms similar to the working groups or expert groups on thematic areas be created.

92. **Management response.** With regard to recommendations 7 and 8, the secretariat stands ready to facilitate discussion and consultation with and among member States on the decisions and arrangements for the nomination of national focal points for the implementation of the regional action programme (2022–2026) and the creation of mechanisms similar to the working groups or expert groups on thematic areas. These matters are included as issues for consideration in the present document.

2. **Recommendations addressed to the secretariat on strengthening partnerships, communication, outreach and visibility of the regional action programme (2022–2026) and on preparations for the next phase**

93. **Recommendation 9.** The secretariat is recommended to prepare the draft regional action programme for the next phase in line with recommendations 1–6 for consideration by member States and to facilitate future discussion and consultation with and among member States on the arrangements in response to recommendations 7 and 8.

94. **Management response.** With regard to recommendation 9, the secretariat prepared the draft regional action programme (2022–2026) in line with recommendations 1–6 for consideration by the member States and stands
ready to facilitate future discussion and consultation with and among member States on the arrangements in response to recommendations 7 and 8.

95. **Recommendation 10.** The secretariat is recommended to enhance the engagement of key stakeholders from non-transport sectors with a focus related to economic, social and environmental sustainability, thus contributing to the overall sustainability of the transport sector.

96. **Recommendation 11.** The secretariat is recommended to forge effective partnerships with the private sector, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and other relevant stakeholders in implementing the regional action programme (2022–2026).

97. **Management response.** With regard to recommendations 10 and 11, during the implementation of the regional action programme (2022–2026), the secretariat will identify key stakeholders from transport and non-transport sectors, government and non-government sectors, the private sector as well as academia in the implementation of each thematic area, and will enhance engagement and reinforce partnerships with the key stakeholders. The secretariat will also reach out to and work collaboratively with the United Nations country teams and United Nations resident coordinators in implementing national-level activities.

98. **Recommendation 12.** The secretariat is recommended to strengthen the communication and outreach to increase the awareness and visibility of the regional action programme (2022–2026) and its achievements and results, including by using existing online platforms.

99. **Management response.** With regard to recommendation 12, the secretariat will initiate the process to strengthen communication and outreach to increase the awareness and visibility of the regional action programme (2022–2026) and its implementation progress, including revamping the website of ESCAP subprogramme 3 to reflect the new thematic areas and provide periodic updates on the implementation progress through various online platforms.

**IV. Issues for consideration**

100. The secretariat has reviewed the report on the evaluation of phase I and has taken its recommendations into consideration in the process of finalizing the pre-session documents for the Ministerial Conference and the drafting of the regional action programme for sustainable transport development in Asia and the Pacific (2022–2026). The Ministerial Conference may wish to provide its views on the overview of the implementation of phase I and the key findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation.

101. In addition, the Ministerial Conference may wish to provide its views on the following outstanding issues, as contained in the recommendations of the evaluation:

   (a) The role of national focal points in the implementation of the regional action programme (2022–2026);

   (b) The creation of mechanisms similar to the working groups or expert groups on thematic areas.