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Working Group on the Asian Highway

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POLICIES AND ISSUES RELATING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ASIAN HIGHWAY

(Item 6 of the provisional agenda)

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.

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, has become an important building block 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 relevant to the Asian Highway and road transport since the second meeting of the Working Group on the Asian Highway, held on 15 November 2007. It also provides, for ready reference of the Working Group, a summary of discussions and recommendations made at recent legislative meetings.

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

I. LEGISLATIVE MEETINGS

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

4. The legislative meetings held in 2008 and 2009 included: (a) the sixty-fourth session of the Commission, Bangkok, 24-30 April 2008; (b) the first session of the Committee on Transport, Bangkok, 29-31 October 2008; and (c) the sixty-fifth session of the Commission, Bangkok, 23-29 April 2009. These meetings highlighted the important role of the Asian Highway in promoting regional cooperation, the progress 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.

II. 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, the secretariat, along with member States, has been implementing activities to promote the development of the Asian Highway.

6. In 2006, the secretariat completed a study on priority investment needs for the development of the Asian Highway network, which identified 121 priority projects that would require investment of about $18 billion (see ST/ESCAP/2424). As a follow-up to the study, the secretariat implemented a project entitled "Promotion and Development of the Asian Highway: Upgrading of Asian Highway Priority Routes", under which a prefeasibility study, covering route assessment, traffic forecast, cost-benefit evaluation and economic analysis, was undertaken for four selected Asian Highway routes, namely, AH82 in Armenia, AH1 in Bangladesh, AH32 in Mongolia and AH1 in Myanmar.

7. The Seminar on Road Maintenance in Asia is scheduled to be held in Bangkok on 3 September 2009. The main objective of the seminar is to enhance regional cooperation through the exchange of experiences and lessons on maintenance and upgrading of highway infrastructure, with a particular focus on improving road safety.

8. 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.

9. 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;

[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.

(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 and technology and best practices.

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

B. Asian Highway Database

11. 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. The Database is currently being updated using the 2008 data and information received from member States. As of 15 July 2009, updates have been received from 20 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).

12. 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

13. 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 these were killed on the roads of low- and middle-income countries. According to the figures in that report, more than a half million people were killed by road accidents in the ESCAP region in 2007—42 per cent of the world road fatalities for that year, even though the region accounts for only one third of the world's registered road vehicles. Road accidents inhibit the economic and social development in Asia and have a disproportionate impact on lower income groups, thus contributing to the persistence of poverty. It is crucial to ensure that the traffic on the regional roads in general, and on the Asian Highway network in particular, is as safe as realistically possible for both motorized and non-motorized road users.

14. According to the latest data available from the Asian Highway Database (2006),[4] Asian Highway roads of class I, II and III show the worst safety records, most likely due to higher traffic flow and increases in mixed traffic with high motorcycle shares. For example, the average fatality rate typically doubles when roads below class III are upgraded to the minimum class III standards.[5] However, 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

[3] World Health Organization, *Global Status Report on Road Safety: Time for Action* (Geneva, World Health Organization, 2009).
[4] In the Asian Highway Database (2006), road safety data are available only for 31 per cent of the length of the Asian Highway, including 521 road sections (or 39 per cent of all sections) covering 43,432 km in 20 countries.
[5] The average fatality rate for class III roads is 47.43 fatalities per billion vehicle km, compared to 23.39 fatalities for the roads below class III.

directions of traffic and different types of vehicles; and/or (b) the improvement of road shoulders. Upgrading Asian Highway sections to class I and particularly to access-controlled primary roads has significant benefits.

15. The Ministerial Conference on Transport held in Busan, Republic of Korea, adopted the Ministerial Declaration on Improving Road Safety in Asia and the Pacific (E/ESCAP/63/13, chap. IV) on 11 November 2006. It sets an overall goal to save 600,000 lives and to prevent a commensurate number of serious injuries on the roads of Asia and the Pacific over the period 2007 to 2015. In the Declaration, the Ministers of transport also request the development of a "set of goals, targets and indicators, to be achieved by 2015, in order to assess and evaluate road safety progress". As a follow-up to the Ministerial Declaration, in 2008 and 2009 the secretariat organized a series of expert group meetings on improving road safety under the United Nations Development Account project entitled "Improving global road safety: setting regional and national road traffic casualty reduction targets". The outcome of the project will be submitted as an input to the First Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety, to be held in Moscow in November 2009, which will call on the General Assembly to announce 2010-2020 as a Decade of Action for Road Safety.

16. 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. Asian Highway Truck Caravan

17. The year 2009 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Asian Highway initiative. In order to celebrate the anniversary and demonstrate the regional connectivity made possible by the Asian Highway network, plans for an Asian Highway Truck Caravan were to be implemented in collaboration with regional Governments, the International Road Transport Union and its national member associations along the route. However, as a result of the current economic downturn, the launch of the Truck Caravan has been postponed.

E. Developing dry ports and intermodal transport corridors

18. With the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks as two major building blocks, the secretariat has been working towards 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 allow efficient transfer of goods between different modes of transport. Locating dry ports in strategic inland locations will greatly enhance the efficiency of logistics and supply chains and contribute to the economic growth of inland areas, particularly landlocked developing countries, by: (a) generating local employment; (b) stimulating the emergence of local production and distribution centres; and (c) nurturing a cluster of economic activities and related services, similar to those that exist around seaports.

19. The secretariat recently completed a project entitled "Promoting the role of the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks: intermodal interfaces as focus for development", aimed at the development of an integrated intermodal transport system in Asia. Major findings of the project are consolidated in a study on a policy framework

for the development of intermodal interfaces as part of an integrated transport network in Asia. The draft text of the study can be downloaded from the ESCAP website.[6]

20. It is deemed that, given the extensive and complicated nature of the challenges to achieving an international integrated intermodal transport and logistics system, an effective approach is to develop and operationalize priority transport corridors and routes. In this connection, an expert group meeting was held in Tashkent on 4 and 5 March 2009 under the secretariat's project on the operationalization of international intermodal transport corridors in North-East and Central Asia. The meeting identified three priority corridors for further in-depth study on, among other things, good practices and specific measures, such as memorandums of understanding, that could lead to the effective development and operationalization of those corridors.

III. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

21. 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.

[6] See ESCAP, "Promoting the role of the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway Networks: intermodal interfaces as focus for development", draft study report (2007), available at www.unescap.org/ttdw/common/TIS/TAR/text/draft_study_report_3aug07.pdf.

Annex

EXCERPTS FROM THE REPORTS OF THE LEGISLATIVE MEETINGS RELATED TO THE ASIAN HIGHWAY

Legislative meeting	*Decisions and recommendations*
Sixty-fourth session of the Commission, Bangkok, 24-30 April 2008	The Commission: ▪ Expressed support for the work of the secretariat in the development of the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway;[a] ▪ Noted the importance of road and transport linkages for creating opportunities for economic activities such as trade, investment and tourism, which would benefit people along the routes;[b] ▪ Noted the importance of road safety and expressed its support for the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration on Improving Road Safety in Asia and the Pacific (E/ESCAP/63/13, chap. IV), which had been adopted at the Ministerial Conference on Transport in November 2006, and had been endorsed by the Commission in its resolution 63/9 on the implementation of the Busan Declaration on Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific and the Regional Action Programme for Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific, phase I (2007-2011).[c]
First session of the Committee on Transport, Bangkok, 29-31 October 2008	The Committee: ▪ Noted with appreciation the progress achieved in the development of the Asian Highway network and the resultant regional connectivity that brought peoples in the Asian and Pacific region closer (E/ESCAP/CTR/8, chap. II, para. 61); ▪ Expressed support for the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Asian Highway in 2009 and welcomed the efforts of the secretariat in planning and organizing various celebratory activities (E/ESCAP/CTR/8, chap. II, para 62); ▪ Agreed that the agenda for the first session of the Forum of Asian Ministers of Transport would include, among other things, transport infrastructure, such as the Asian Highway network (E/ESCAP/CTR/8, chap. II, para 65); ▪ Emphasized the urgency of implementing measures to improve road safety and expressed its general support for the conclusions and recommendations of the Expert Group Meeting on Improving Road Safety on the Asian Highway: Targets and Engineering, held in Bangkok from 27 to 29 October 2008 (E/ESCAP/CTR/8, chap. II, para. 52); ▪ Encouraged member States to continue their efforts and to sustain high-level commitment to improving road

Legislative meeting	*Decisions and recommendations*
	safety (E/ESCAP/CTR/8, chap. II, para. 53).
Sixty-fifth session of the Commission, Bangkok, 23-29 April 2009	The Commission: ▪ Noted that, with the entering into force of the Asian Highway network agreement, more and more parts of Asia were now connected, with development in landlocked and transit countries being promoted and the goals contained in the Almaty Programme of Action being achieved.[d] Some delegations: ▪ Highlighted the role of the Asian Highway network in the ongoing development of Euro-Asian transport linkages and in providing improved transit opportunities;[e] ▪ Stressed the importance of improving road safety in the region and informed the Commission of their national initiatives, policies and measures to reduce road accidents.[f]

[a] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2008, Supplement No. 19* (E/2008/39-E/ESCAP/64/39), chap. III, para. 101.
[b] Ibid, para. 105.
[c] Ibid, para. 109.
[d] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2009, Supplement No. 19* (E/2009/39-E/ESCAP/64/32), chap. III, para. 311.
[e] Ibid, para. 67.
[f] Ibid, para. 76.

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