UNITED NATIONS ESCAP
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Distr.: General
17 December 2019

Chinese, English and Russian only

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Working Group on the Trans-Asian Railway Network

6th meeting
Bangkok, 10 and 11 December 2019

Report of the Working Group on the Trans-Asian Railway Network on its 6th meeting

I. Deliberations

1. The secretariat introduced the documents under agenda items 2 (ESCAP/TARN/WG/2019/L.1), 3 (ESCAP/TARN/WG/2019/1), 4 (ESCAP/TARN/WG/2019/2), 5 (ESCAP/TARN/WG/2019/3), 6 (ESCAP/TARN/WG/2019/4) and 7 (ESCAP/TARN/WG/2019/5/Rev.1), which formed the basis for the deliberations of the Working Group on the Trans-Asian Railway Network.

2. The Working Group received updates from delegations on ongoing or planned initiatives and policies related to the development and operation of the Trans-Asian Railway network in their respective countries.

3. The Working Group noted that the statements made by the representatives who had taken part in the deliberations and provided copies of those statements to the secretariat would be made available on the web page of the Transport Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), at www.unescap.org/our-work/transport.

II. Conclusions and recommendations

4. The Working Group reaffirmed the crucial role of the Trans-Asian Railway network in realizing the vision of an integrated intermodal regional transport system for sustainable transport connectivity, with a view to achieving the objectives of the Regional Action Programme for Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific, phase I (2017–2021), and in supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Working Group also underlined its role in providing a regional platform to address persistent and emerging challenges, identifying opportunities for strengthening international railway transport in the region and beyond, and building synergies with the Asian Highway network and the network of dry ports of international importance.

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5. The Working Group considered the current status of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network. It noted that the number of parties to the Agreement had increased to 20, with the Government of Turkey depositing its instrument of ratification on 11 June 2019. The Working Group welcomed the information that the Government of Kazakhstan was taking steps to become a party to the Agreement. In that regard, the secretariat was requested to transmit, using diplomatic channels, to the competent authorities in Kazakhstan, information on all amendments that had taken effect since the entry into force of the Agreement, the latest consolidated text of the Agreement and a letter outlining the key benefits of being a party to the Agreement.

6. The Working Group encouraged other member States to speed up their internal processes to become parties to the Agreement, and noted that the secretariat stood ready to assist member States in completing the required model instruments of ratification, approval, acceptance or accession and forwarding them to the Office of Legal Affairs.

7. With regard to changes to the legal text, the Working Group noted that the amendments to annex I to the Agreement, as proposed by the Governments of Cambodia and Thailand and adopted at the previous meeting, had entered into force.

8. The Working Group considered various initiatives, policies and issues related to infrastructure development and operational connectivity along the Trans-Asian Railway network.

9. The representatives of Bangladesh, China, Georgia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey and Uzbekistan informed the Working Group about current and future projects being implemented or considered in their respective countries to further develop and upgrade the routes of the Trans-Asian Railway network and its linkages with the wider transport networks.

10. The Working Group expressed satisfaction that related projects were being designed and implemented and that those projects considered continuity with neighbouring countries and linkages to intermodal facilities and maritime ports, with the objective of achieving seamless regional connectivity. The Working Group also noted that the Agreement continued to be highly relevant in confirming national and regional priorities in railway development in Asia. It also noted the initiatives related to the development of the East Asia Railway Community by the Republic of Korea to stimulate economic exchanges in East Asia, centred around railway transport.

11. While expressing its satisfaction with progress in the construction of the missing links along the Trans-Asian Railway network, the Working Group expressed its continued concern with regard to the remaining missing links, particularly in South-East Asia. It urged the member States to give priority to the construction of those links in cooperation with development partners. The Working Group further sought the assistance of the secretariat in providing tools to help countries to prioritize projects on the construction of missing links along the network on the basis of commonly acceptable criteria. The Working Group underscored the role of data collection, transport modelling and applied research with regard to the network, and invited the secretariat to take appropriate action to develop a database and modelling tools that would serve as regional public goods to support railways in taking sound investment, policy and operational decisions and raising the attractiveness of the relevant projects to international investors.

12. Recognizing that commercial railway operations had become increasingly critical for meeting the investment needs of railways, the Working Group noted the joint implementation of the study project on the commercialization of the railway corridor between Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran by the secretariat and the Economic Cooperation Organization, with the financial support of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB). The Working Group welcomed the implementation of the collaborative study project and expressed the view that there were various ways to manage railway corridors, as each corridor needed to be studied extensively to ascertain challenges and suggest appropriate solutions. The Working Group recommended that the secretariat continue to provide a forum for the region-wide sharing of experience and exchange of information in support of evidence-based policies for the management of corridors.

13. Further to the initiatives related to the expansion of the railway networks, the Working Group noted various measures being taken by the member States to facilitate international transport along the Trans-Asian Railway network. Those measures included the electronic exchange of information among railways; interconnection between the electronic systems of railways with border agencies; the development of a unified digital space for digitizing transport corridors using blockchain and related technologies; reducing transit formalities; unlocking the capacity of the railway lines using better signalling and telecommunication systems; and the development of intermodal transport corridors and arrangements for the movement of intercountry freight wagons.

14. The Working Group emphasized the importance of those efforts, given the growing need to address operational issues to fully harness the network's potential. It noted the development of the draft framework for enhancing efficiency of railway border crossings along the Trans-Asian Railway network and beyond. It thanked the secretariat and the Organisation for Co-operation between Railways for their efforts in developing that instrument consequent to the recommendations of the Working Group at its 5th meeting, held in Busan, Republic of Korea, in June 2017.

15. The Working Group reaffirmed the importance of the four issues identified in the draft framework for enhancing efficiency of railway border crossings along the Trans-Asian Railway network and beyond, namely: (a) electronic information exchange between railways and among railways and control agencies; (b) harmonizing customs formalities for transit by rail through appropriate arrangements; (c) dealing efficiently with break-of-gauge; and (d) developing comprehensive indicators and methodology to measure the performance of railway border crossings.

16. The Working Group acknowledged the high potential of electronic information exchange among various stakeholders to significantly enhance the efficiency of international railway transport operations. Linkages between the electronic information systems of railways and control authorities could lead to the efficient sharing of information and could become a building block for the digitization of the transport corridors along the Trans-Asian Railway network as well as those linking it to other networks.

17. At the same time, the Working Group recognized that electronic information exchange among railways, driven by scattered initiatives, could potentially lead to the development of diverse ways of exchanging information electronically. Therefore, to support the harmonization of such initiatives in the region, the Working Group requested the secretariat to take further steps in facilitating expert discussions and consultations among interested member countries with the goal of identifying good practices, performance indicators and possible multilateral arrangements, including an annex or protocol to the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network, in that area.

18. The Working Group acknowledged that efficiently addressing break-of-gauge along the Trans-Asian Railway network was key to reducing delays at border crossings. Taking into account the recommendations made in the draft framework for enhancing efficiency of railway border crossings, the Working Group requested the secretariat to work together with the Organisation for Co-operation between Railways to develop a manual of good practices to address break-of-gauge.

19. The Working Group noted the proposal of the representative of Georgia on the possibility of hosting a meeting focused on taking further action on the issues identified in the framework for enhancing efficiency of railway border crossings, as related to efficient international railway transport along the railway corridors, and on sharing experiences regarding the new technologies in the railway sector.

20. The Working Group recognized that the use of new technologies was making rapid inroads in all aspects of railway operations. The use of new technologies, such as electronic tracking systems using electronic seals based on the Secure Cross Border Transport Model developed by the secretariat, would strengthen seaport-hinterland transport connectivity, thereby providing enormous benefits to the landlocked developing countries of the region. In that regard, the Working Group requested the secretariat to provide technical assistance to interested member countries by supporting the pilot application of new technologies in selected international railway corridors, to build the related capacities of the officials involved and to provide a platform for the sharing of experience and the dissemination of good practices in the region.

21. The Working Group welcomed the activities of the secretariat in collaboration with the Institute of Railway Technology of Monash University, Australia, on the use of aerial drones for the inspection and monitoring of railway infrastructure. The Working Group acknowledged that the use of aerial drones presented a cost-effective way to inspect and maintain national networks and also created significant safety and efficiency benefits as well as possibilities for rapid emergency responses. The Working Group was also of the view that the matter of using aerial drones was subject to national legislation and related regulations. Accordingly, there was a need to further consider the matter at the national level.

22. The Working Group invited the secretariat to further pursue activities in that area, focusing on the following issues: (a) quantifying the economic benefits and cost savings from deploying such methods; (b) the legal and regulatory aspects that would need to be addressed, including any possible regional approaches; and (c) operational aspects including through pilot projects and expert meetings, subject to availability of resources.

23. The Working Group acknowledged railway safety as an area of growing importance for the region. Given the expected increase in international railway traffic, differences in railway safety principles, approaches and cultures among countries could exacerbate challenges related to efficient international railway transport. Therefore, the Working Group was of the view that benefits could be derived from the harmonization of (a) safety rules and operational practices, including at level crossings, (b) the tasks and roles of railway safety authorities and (c) the investigation of accidents by, among others, establishing railway safety authorities to share experiences and exchange information. Against that background, the Working Group invited the secretariat to consider developing guidelines for enhancing railway safety in the region.

24. Given the close linkage between safe railway operations and carriage of dangerous goods by rail, the Working Group was reminded that the Regulations concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Rail

were published by the Intergovernmental Organization for International Carriage by Rail in Appendix C to the Convention concerning International Carriage by Rail and that the dangerous goods provisions for the Organisation for Co-operation between Railways were set out in annex II to the Agreement on International Railway Freight Communications. Both organizations were actively working together to harmonize those rules. For countries that were not members of those organizations, the Working Group recommended developing regulations aligned with existing international regulations.

25. The Working Group also considered the linkages between freight and passenger transport along the Trans-Asian Railway network to address some of its financial and facilitation needs. It welcomed the holding of the policy segment on supporting the efficient operation of international passenger trains along the network, which was held back to back with the Working Group meeting. The Working Group was further informed about a study report being developed on that issue to highlight, among others, the recent progress in the facilitation of international railway passenger transport, in particular the adoption of the new Convention on the Facilitation of Border Crossing Procedures for Passengers, Luggage and Load-luggage Carried in International Traffic by Rail, open for signature by interested member States. It encouraged the secretariat and the interested member countries to consider further actions to harness synergies between passenger and freight transport by rail and to consider initiating the necessary domestic procedures to become parties to the Convention.

26. The Working Group further observed that differences in technical and operational parameters had led to diversity in the rolling stock specifications available with railways, leading to increased maintenance costs, and invited the secretariat to set up an institutional mechanism to harmonize technical and operational parameters to reduce maintenance and operational costs for the railways of the region.

Amendments to annex I

27. The Working Group considered the amendments to annex I to the Agreement, proposed by the Governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation and contained in annex II to the present report, as well as that proposed by the Government of Viet Nam.

28. In accordance with article 8, paragraph 3, of the Agreement, referring to amendments that change a border station, the Working Group noted that the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran had consulted with and obtained the agreement of the Government of Afghanistan, that is, the neighbouring State which shared the border to which the subject of the amendment was connected. Following the confirmation of the representatives of both countries at the meeting, the Working Group adopted the amendments proposed by the Islamic Republic of Iran in accordance with article 8, paragraph 6, and requested the secretariat to communicate them to the Secretary-General for circulation to all parties.

29. The Working Group considered and adopted the amendments proposed under article 8, paragraph 4, by the Russian Federation in accordance with article 8, paragraph 6, and requested the secretariat to communicate them to the Secretary-General for circulation to all parties.

30. The Working Group considered the amendment proposed by Viet Nam and noted that the consent of the neighbouring State which shared the border to which the subject of the amendment was connected had not been obtained as required under article 8, paragraph 3. Therefore, in the absence of a representative of Viet Nam at the meeting, the Working Group decided to

revert the consideration and possible adoption of that proposal to its next meeting and requested the secretariat to follow up accordingly.

31. Finally, the Working Group noted that, in accordance with article 8, paragraphs 7 and 8, of the Agreement, the amendments adopted would be deemed accepted if, during a period of six months from the date of depositary notification, less than one third of the parties notified the Secretary-General of their objection to the amendments. If deemed accepted, the amendments would enter into force for all parties after a period of three months following the expiry of the above-mentioned period of six months.

III. Other matters

32. The Working Group noted the statements made by the Asian Institute of Transport Development, IDB and the Intergovernmental Organisation for International Carriage by Rail.

33. The Working Group noted with appreciation the valuable role of the Asian Institute of Transport Development in arranging training courses for railway personnel from South and South-East Asia on the development of the Trans-Asian Railway network.

34. The representative of IDB informed the Working Group that its first regional cooperation and integration policy and operational strategy had been approved. It set standards and provided strategic direction to foster regional cooperation among IDB members. He further informed the Working Group that in addition to normal lending instruments for its member countries, the Bank also provided a variety of technical assistance grants for selected projects, including for transport, under its different programmes. He invited common member countries together with ESCAP to consider submitting proposals on transport connectivity, in particular in Central Asia, for consideration for funding by the Bank.

35. The representative of the Intergovernmental Organisation for International Carriage by Rail informed the Working Group about the important role being played by his organization in fostering Euro-Asian transport connectivity. In that regard, he briefed the Working Group on the Uniform Rules concerning the Contract of International Carriage of Passengers by Rail contained in Appendix A to the Convention concerning International Carriage by Rail as well as on the cooperation with the Organisation for Co-operation between Railways to facilitate international railway transport between Europe and Asia.

36. The representative of the Organisation for Co-operation between Railways informed the Working Group about the work of his organization in the facilitation of border crossing procedures for international passenger traffic. He highlighted the role of the Agreement on International Passenger Traffic by Rail and the ongoing efforts of his organization aimed at facilitating border crossing by passenger trains and encouraging the use of digital technologies. He elaborated on the factors holding back the development of international passenger traffic and shared recommendations for improving the competitive position of railway transport services for passengers.

37. The secretariat provided information on the role of the Trans-Asian Railway network in achieving sustainable regional transport connectivity in Asia and the Pacific and on related ongoing and planned technical assistance projects of interest to the Working Group.

38. The Working Group noted the request of the representative of Kazakhstan to organize a one-day seminar on issues related to the development

of railway transport in conjunction with the thirtieth International Union of Railways Asia-Pacific Regional Assembly, to be held in Nur Sultan in October 2020.

39. The Working Group recognized that developing human resources was crucial for efficient international railway transport and noted the request made by a number of member countries for support for capacity-building on issues related to the facilitation of international railway transport and the use of new technologies.

40. The Working Group expressed its appreciation to the Government of the Russian Federation for its financial assistance to facilitate the meeting. It also expressed its gratitude to the secretariat for organizing and servicing the meeting.

IV. Adoption of the report

41. The Working Group adopted the present report on 11 December 2019.

V. Organization

A. Opening, duration and organization of the meeting

42. The 6th meeting of the Working Group on the Trans-Asian Railway Network was held in Bangkok on 10 and 11 December 2019. The Director of the Transport Division of ESCAP delivered an opening statement.

B. Attendance

43. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following member States: Afghanistan; Armenia; Bangladesh; Cambodia; China; Georgia; India; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Kazakhstan; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Mongolia; Myanmar; Nepal; Pakistan; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Tajikistan; Thailand; Turkey; Turkmenistan; and Uzbekistan.

44. The meeting was also attended by representatives of the following organizations: Asian Institute of Transport Development; Committee of the Organisation for Co-operation between Railways; Eurasian Economic Commission; European Union Agency for Railways; IDB; Infrastructure Economics Centre; Institute of Railway Technology, Monash University, Australia; Intergovernmental Organisation for International Carriage by Rail; Joint Stock Company Research and Design Institute for Information Technology, Signalling and Telecommunications in Railway Transportation, subsidiary of Russian Railways; Korea Rail Network Authority; Korea Railroad Research Institute; Presidential Committee on Northern Economic Cooperation, Republic of Korea; Russian Railways; and United Transport and Logistics Company – Eurasian Rail Alliance.

C. Election of officers

45. The meeting elected the following officers:

Chair:	Ms. Mozhgan Kordbacheh (Islamic Republic of Iran)
Vice-Chairs:	Mr. Ba Myint (Myanmar) Mr. Suhrob Sohibnazarov (Tajikistan)

D. Agenda

46. The meeting adopted the following agenda:

1. Election of officers.
2. Adoption of the agenda.
3. Status of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network.
4. Matters arising from the 5th meeting of the Working Group on the Trans-Asian Railway Network.
5. Policies and issues related to the development and operationalization of the Trans-Asian Railway network.
6. Inspection and monitoring of railway infrastructure using aerial drones.
7. Consideration of proposals for amending the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network.
8. Other matters.
9. Adoption of the report of the Working Group on its 6th meeting.

Annex I

List of documents

Symbol	*Title*	*Agenda item*
General series		
ESCAP/TARN/WG/2019/1	Status of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network	3
ESCAP/TARN/WG/2019/2	Update on the matters arising from the 5th meeting of the Working Group on the Trans-Asian Railway Network	4
ESCAP/TARN/WG/2019/3	Policies and issues related to the development and operationalization of the Trans-Asian Railway network	5
ESCAP/TARN/WG/2019/4	Inspection and monitoring of railway infrastructure using aerial drones	6
ESCAP/TARN/WG/2019/5/Rev.1	Proposals for amending the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network	7
ESCAP/TARN/WG/2019/6	Report of the Working Group on the Trans-Asian Railway Network on its 6th meeting	
Limited series		
ESCAP/TARN/WG/2019/L.1	Annotated provisional agenda	2
ESCAP/TARN /WG/2019/L.2	Draft report	9

Annex II

Amendments to annex I to the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network adopted by the Working Group

1. In annex I to the Agreement, under the entry for the Islamic Republic of Iran, *insert* the following amendments:

(a) Under the Razi – Sarakhs line, *modify* the square brackets to reflect the construction of missing links as follows:

* New brackets in **grey bold** font

Razi – Sarakhs

(Kapikoy, Turkey)
Razi *(border station)*

Sufian *(junction)* → Jolfa *(border station and break-of-gauge)* – (Djulfa, Azerbaijan)

Tabriz

Miyaneh *(junction)*

Qazvin *(junction)* → Rasht – **[**Bandar-e-Anzali *(ferry terminal)***]** – Astara *(border station and break-of-gauge)* – (Astara, Azerbaijan) (Ferry link to Caspian seaports in *Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation* and *Turkmenistan*)

Tehran *(junction)* → Qom *(junction)* – Badrud *(junction)* – Meybod – Bafq *(junction)* – Kerman – Bam – Fahraj – Zahedan *(break-of-gauge)* – Mirjaveh *(border station)* – (Koh-i-Taftan, Pakistan)

- ↳ Qom *(junction)* – Arak *(junction*) – Ahvaz *(junction)* – Khorramshahr *(maritime connection)*
- ↳ Arak *(junction*) – Kermanshah **[**– Khosravi *(border station)* – (Khaneghein, Iraq)**]**
- ↳ Ahvaz – Bandar-Emam *(maritime connection)*
- ↳ Badrud *(junction)* – Esfahan
- ↳ Bafq (connects with Sarakhs – Bandar Abbas line)

Garmsar *(junction)* → Sari *(junction)* – Gorgan – Incheboroun *(border station)*

- ↳ Sari *(junction)* – Bandar-e-Amirabad *(ferry terminal)* (ferry link to Caspian seaports in *Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation* and *Turkmenistan*)

Shahrood

Kashmar *(junction)* → (connects with Sarakhs – Bandar Abbas line)

Fariman *(junction)* → Mashhad

Sarakhs *(border station and break-of-gauge)*

(Sarakhs, Turkmenistan)

(b) Under the Sarakhs – Bandar Abbas line, *modify* the Torbat Heidarieh – Sangan branch as follows:

* New text marked in **grey bold** font

Sarakhs – Bandar Abbas

(Sarakhs, Turkmenistan)		
Sarakhs *(border station and break-of-gauge)*		
Fariman *(junction)*	→	Mashhad
Kashmar*(junction)*	→	(connects with Razi-Sarakhs line)
Torbat Heidarieh	→	**Khaf** – Sangan – **Shamtigh** *(border station)* [– Herat *(border station)* – (Afghanistan)]
Tabas		
Chadormalu *(junction)*	→	Ardakan
Bafq *(junction)*	→	(connects with Qom-Mirjaveh line)
Bandar Abbas *(maritime connection)*		

(c) *Add* a new North-South line from Sarakhs to Chabahar port as follows:

Sarakhs [– Chabahar]

(Sarakhs, Turkmenistan)		
Sarakhs *(border station and break-of-gauge)*		
Torbat Heidarieh		
Yonnesi station		
Birjand		
Zahedan	→	Mirjaveh (*border with Pakistan)*
Chabahar *(maritime connection)*		

2. In annex I to the Agreement, under the entry for the Russian Federation, *delete* the Tatarskaya-Lokot branch from the Krasnoe – Nakhodka line as follows:

[*] Deletion marked in ~~strikethrough~~ font

Krasnoe – Nakhodka

(Osinovka, Belarus)

Krasnoe *(border station)*

Smolensk

Moscow

Nizhniy Novgorod

Kotelnich *(junction)* → Saint Petersburg

Ekaterinburg *(junction)* → Kurgan – Utyak – Petukhovo *(border station)* – (Petropavlosk, Kazakhstan)

→ Chelyabinsk – Kartaly *(junction and border station)* – (Tobol, Kazakhstan)

↳ Kartaly *(junction and border station)* – Orsk *(junction and border station)* – (Nikeltau, Kazakhstan)

↳ Orsk *(junction and border station)* – Orenburg – (Iletsk, Russian Federation) – (Aktyubinsk, Kazakhstan)

~~Tatarskaya *(junction)*~~ → ~~Lokot *(junction and border station)* (Aul, Kazakhstan)~~

Novosibirsk *(junction)* → Lokot *(junction and border station)* – (Aul, Kazakhstan)

Krasnoyarsk

Irkutsk

Ulan Ude

Zaudinski *(junction)* → Naushki *(border station)* – (Sukhbaatar, Mongolia)

Karimskaya *(junction)* → Zabaykalsk *(border station and break-of-gauge)* – (Manzhouli, China)

Ussurijsk *(junction)* → Grodekovo *(border station and break-of-gauge)* – (Suifenhe, China)

Baranovski *(junction)* → Makhalino *(junction)* – Khasan *(border station and break-of-gauge)* – (Tumangang, Democratic People's Republic of Korea)

↳ Makhalino *(junction)* – Kamyshovaya (*border station and break-of-gauge)* – (China)

Uglovaya *(junction)* → Vladivostok *(maritime connection)*

Nakhodka *(junction, maritime connection)* → Nakhodka Vostochnaya *(maritime connection)*