

Workshop on
Road Transport Facilitation in Southern Asia Along the Asian Highway Corridors

6 February 2018

United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok

Concept Note

High cost of doing trade in South Asia has a detrimental effect on growth of the subregion's trade. At 112 percent, the ad-valorem cost of intra-regional trade in South Asia is well more than double that of East Asia. Transport facilitation along cross-border land transport corridors, particularly international road transport corridors which account for more than 70 percent of intra-regional cargo flows, is therefore critical for realizing South Asia's intra-regional trade potential estimated at more than 3 times the actual figure of US\$ 26 billion in 2016.

The greater Southern Asian subregion (comprising of countries in South and South-West Asia and Myanmar) has achieved notable improvements in domestic road transport infrastructure. In terms of road density (road length in kilometres per 1,000 square-kilometres of surface area), South and South-West Asia is the leader among Asia-Pacific subregions by far, with some 840 km of roads per 1,000 sq.km against 400 in East and North-East Asia. Though the national road networks in the contiguous countries of South and South-West Asia are linked, fully functional international road transport links are still few and far between. Cross-border transport operational and infrastructure connectivity remains suboptimal, severely constraining trade, owing to both procedural and cross-border transport infrastructural issues.

Existing international carriageways and land transport infrastructure are getting crowded with the increase in trade, putting upward pressure on the marginal cost of transportation. By contrast, missing links, heterogeneous transport regulations and the requirement of transshipment at borders have limited the development of land transport corridors as viable alternatives or additional carriageways. As a result, Southern Asia is experiencing challenges in expanding trade within the subregion.

In recent years, a number of policy initiatives have been spearheaded by Southern Asian countries to facilitate seamless cross-border road transport. For instance, on the infrastructural side, India and neighbouring countries are investing in upgrading their land customs stations (LCSs) to integrated check posts (ICPs). Equipped with cargo complexes, parking spaces, immigration services and other facilities, the ICPs offer simplified procedures and single-window facility covering customs, warehousing and transshipment under a single roof.

On the procedural side, Southern Asian countries are acceding to international road transport conventions (such as the TIR Convention) and similar policy tools. Some of the allied developments are the Pakistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan Trilateral Transit Trade Agreement, the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal Motor Vehicle Agreement (BBIN MVA) and the ongoing negotiations for an MVA facilitating cargo movement along the India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) Trilateral Highway. The MVAs are of particular importance as they are expected to remove restrictive requirements of transshipment of cargo at borders and thereby

generate significant cost and time advantages for traders. However, none of these initiatives have realized their expected positive effects, as none of them is implemented yet.

Additional facilitation measures are required to boost and support the implementation of these initiatives. For instance, current architecture of the ICPs is highly influenced by safety and security concerns. But new developments such as the Secure Cross Border Transport Model and tools developed by UNESCAP, regional Electronic Cargo Tracking Systems (eCTS) which make use of advanced ICT, radio frequency identification (RFID), geographical information systems (GIS) technologies are transforming the way international cargo movement is monitored. Similarly, implementation of policy tools including protocols and conventions, framework MVAs etc. needs formulation, negotiation and finalization of the necessary legal instruments and specific operating procedures.

Countries of Southern Asia have an opportunity to optimize their road transport facilitation measures through subregional cooperation and coordination. The Turkey–Islamic Republic of Iran–Pakistan–India–Bangladesh–Myanmar (TIPI–BM) Road Corridor proposed by UNESCAP, which combines various segments of the Asian Highway (AH) network to form a trunk international transport corridor in Southern Asia, provides connectivity to sea and land ports, and to important rail gateways. It thus offers multimodal transport options. Recognizing the need for long-term commitment and continuity in addressing critical issues in the transport sector, UNESCAP member States have adopted a ‘Regional Strategic Framework for the Facilitation of International Road Transport’. The Subregional Workshop will explore ways and means of operationalizing the TIPI-BM corridor, in light of the above Framework, taking into account the unmet procedural and infrastructural requirements, and available policy tools.

Objectives of the Workshop

- To take stock of important initiatives in the Southern Asian subregion regarding cross-border road transport facilitation measures and identify gaps in implementation of infrastructure and policy reforms;
- To present and discuss modalities for harmonization of transport documentation, allied procedural reforms based on modern policy tools and global best practices, covering various aspects of transport operations;
- To present and discuss possible application of new developments and technological advancements for the implementation of the Regional Strategic Framework in the subregion;
- To frame a forward-looking policy agenda for regional cooperation to facilitate cross-border road transport in Southern Asia along the AH corridors.

Participation

Senior officials from ministries/departments in charge of international road transport from Southern Asian countries, and representatives from international, regional, subregional organizations engaged in international road transport facilitation in the subregion.

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Meeting Room H

Programme

0830-0900	Registration
0900-0930	<p><i>Opening: Introduction to the Workshop</i></p> <p>Hongjoo Hahm, Deputy Executive Secretary, ESCAP Michael Williamson, Head, South and South-West Asia Office, ESCAP</p>
0930-1030	<p><i>Session 1: Challenge to Operationalizing Road Transport Corridors along the Asian Highways in Southern Asia: Challenges and Prospects</i></p> <p>Moderator: Anil Kumar Gupta, former Chairman and Managing Director, Container Corporation of India and ESCAP Consultant</p> <p>Fedor Kormilitsyn, Transport Division, ESCAP Sandeep Raj Jain, Transport Division, ESCAP</p>
1030-1045	Coffee Break
1045-1215	<p><i>Session 2: Policy tools for enhancing cross-border road transport connectivity</i></p> <p>Moderator: Sandeep Raj Jain, Transport Division, ESCAP</p> <p>Aivaras Pigaga, Lead Expert for ACTS IT System Implementation, ARISE Plus – ASEAN Regional Integration Support from the EU, Jakarta Goran Andreev, Consultant, ESCAP Gopal Valecha, Assistant Vice President – Business Development (IT), Delhi Integrated Multi-Modal Transit System Ltd., New Delhi Rajan Sharma, Former President, Nepal Freight Forwarders Association, Kathmandu Surendar Singh, Fellow, CUTS Centre for International Trade, Economics and Environment, Jaipur</p>
1215-1330	Lunch

1330-1500	<p><i>Session 3: Status of Road Transport and Transit Facilitation in Southern Asia: Country Presentations</i></p> <p>Moderator: Syed Nuruzzaman, Consultant, ESCAP</p> <p>Bangladesh Bhutan India Iran (Islamic Republic of) Myanmar Nepal Pakistan Turkey</p>
1500-1515	Coffee Break
1515-1630	<i>Session 3: Status of Road Transport and Transit Facilitation in Southern Asia: Country Presentations (Contd.)</i>
1630-1700	<p><i>Closing Session</i></p> <p>Transport Division, ESCAP Sustainable Transport Division, ECE</p>