

Editorial statement

The *Transport and Communications Bulletin for Asia and the Pacific* is a peer-reviewed journal published once a year by the Transport and Tourism Division (TTD) of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). The main objectives of the *Bulletin* are to provide a medium for the sharing of knowledge, experience, ideas, policy options and information on the development of transport infrastructure and services in the Asian and Pacific region; to stimulate policy-oriented research; and to increase awareness of transport policy issues and responses. It is hoped that the *Bulletin* will help to widen and deepen debate on issues of interest and concern in the transport sector.

Traditionally, most Asian countries have relied on maritime transport for their export and import trade. However, the continuing evolution of containerization along with the successful implementation of various land transport infrastructure development projects at the subregional and regional levels, including the ESCAP initiated Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks, have created new opportunities for extending the opportunities of globalization to inland locations in both landlocked and transit countries.

With these developments, railway container traffic has shown the ability to meet shippers' requirements for efficient international services. For example, between 2001 and 2005, the numbers of twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) carried along the Trans-Siberian Railway increased by over 200 per cent. Other notable achievements include 250 per cent growth in the number of TEUs on the Malaysia-Thailand landbridge since its first year of service in 1999 and 83 per cent growth in international TEUs on Indian Railways in fiscal year 2004/2005 over 2000/2001. New international container block-train services have also been launched. In March 2002, the railways of Belarus, Mongolia and the Russian Federation launched an international container block-train service between Brest and Ulaanbaatar, followed two months later by a similar initiative by the railways of China and Mongolia with the launch of a regular service between Tianjin and Ulaanbaatar. These services proved popular with shippers and became the precursor of the extended service launched in March 2005 between Hohhot in China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and Duisburg in Germany. In 2005, cross-border rail traffic between India and Pakistan (Munabao-Khokropar) was also reopened.

Similar interesting developments in container transportation by railway have taken place between the west and the east coasts of the United States of America. The present arrangement allows containers from Asia unloaded from

vessels on the west coast to be delivered on the east coast in 72 hours, which is reportedly four to six days faster and less costly than the all-water route.

The above-mentioned examples show there is growing acceptance that railways have an important role to play in the national and international movement of goods. There are a number of factors that speak in favour of greater utilization of rail transport in Asia, and between Asia and Europe, including: (a) the long land transport distances within and across Asia and between Asia and Europe; (b) the sustainability of the rail mode in terms of its reduced impact on the environment and its greater energy efficiency; and (c) the ability of rail to clear landside port areas quickly to avoid congestion.

In recognition of these advantages of rail transport and growing demand for freight movement, many Governments have taken initiatives to promote container transportation by railway. These include planning and implementation of new intermodal facilities, inter-country cooperation and private sector participation. Interventions by the public and private sectors have resulted in positive results both at the national and regional levels and ushered a new era of regional cooperation in trade and transport development in the region. Experiences, ideas, and information about these developments need to be shared for their wider consideration for possible replication and implementation by decision makers and policy planners. Against this background, ***Container transportation by railways*** was chosen as the theme for the current issue of the Bulletin. Six articles are included in the volume.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific launched the Asian Land Transport Infrastructure Development (ALTID) project in 1992. The long-term objective of the project was to assist member countries in planning and developing transport infrastructure able to serve the unprecedented surge in international trade between Asian countries and their main trading partners outside the region. The ALTID project was articulated around three components, namely: the Trans-Asian Railway (TAR), the Asian Highway (AH) and facilitation of land transport. The first article reviews the progress made in developing the TAR since the inception of the ALTID project and assesses the challenges and opportunities for a greater utilization of railways across the Asian region. The article also reviews international cooperation in promoting transport development in the region.

The rapid economic growth of the Indian economy in recent years has created huge demand for transportation services. Indian Railways (IR) has registered significant growth in freight and passenger transportation. To meet the growing demand for such services, IR has launched many important initiatives to increase its capacity and improve the quality of service. Notable

among these initiatives include development of dedicated freight corridors, running of double and triple stack container trains, introduction of modern rolling stock, technological upgrading, and involvement of the private sector. The second article reviews these recent developments in India. It also presents an interesting case study on a public-private partnership project to develop a 270-km new railway line to connect a port with the main railway network of IR.

The third article also relates to Indian Railways. While the second article discusses the whole range of initiatives in the railway sector, the focus of the third article is on the development of container freight operations by a government-owned company. Indian Railways started container transportation in the mid-1960s with the use of a special type of small containers for the carriage of domestic freight. The Container Corporation of India Ltd. (CONCOR), a wholly-owned government company took over IR's infrastructure of inland container depots (ICDs) and started providing services to shippers at dry ports for warehousing, customs clearance, consolidation, disaggregation and other terminal facilities as well as feeder road services. CONCOR soon diversified into handling and carriage of intra-country freight in ISO containers. The third article describes the success of CONCOR in intermodal transport development in India as well as its success as a "blue chip" company.

The focus of the fourth article is on recent development in container transportation by rail in the Russian Federation. Structural reforms have been undertaken by the Russian Railways (RZD) to create a competitive business environment in container transportation that can capitalize on the natural advantages of railways. RZD established in 2006 a subsidiary for this purpose called TransContainer as a joint-stock company. The article provides an account of development in container transportation by TransContainer and the progress that has been made so far.

The Ministry of Transport in Thailand will take the lead role in implementing the strategic agenda of the Government in Transport and Logistics Network Optimization. The target of this agenda is to establish an integrated transport network and logistics management system which will cover the activities of collection and distribution of goods and transshipment, both at national and regional levels. Within the strategic agenda, there is a clear policy statement specifying that the Government will be responsible for rail infrastructure investment while the role of the State Railway of Thailand (SRT), a public enterprise under the Ministry of Transport, will be restricted to network management and administration and carriage of passengers. In the future, SRT would compete with private sector operators who will be allowed to invest in their own locomotives and rolling stock for providing carriage of goods services.

The fifth article discusses the on-going and planned future developments of the railway sector in Thailand.

The landbridge is an interesting concept in intermodal transport development that was first conceived in the early 1960s to promote a more efficient means of shipping between East Asia and Europe. The landbridge service involves a combination of land and sea transport as an alternative to transportation service entirely by sea. Many landbridge services are now operated in the world. One of these services in Asia and the Pacific is the landbridge container train operation between Malaysia and Thailand jointly operated by the railways of the two countries. The sixth and last article describes different aspects of this landbridge service.

The *Bulletin* welcomes analytical articles on topics that are currently at the forefront of transport infrastructure development and services in the region and on policy analysis and best practices. Articles should be based on original research and should have analytical depth. Empirically-based articles should emphasize policy implications emerging from the analysis. Book reviews are also welcome. See the inside back cover for guidelines on contributing articles.

Manuscripts should be addressed to:

The Editor

Transport and Communications Bulletin for Asia and the Pacific

Transport and Tourism Division, ESCAP

United Nations Building

Rajadamnern Nok Avenue

Bangkok 10200, Thailand

Fax: (662) 288 1000, (662) 280 6042, (662) 288 3050

E-mail: escap-ttd@un.org; quium.unescap@un.org