

1. INTRODUCTION

While trade with the rest of the world retained its importance, a salient feature of the ESCAP region's trade growth in recent years had been the steadily growing significance of intraregional trade, indicating a need to improve and expand transport and communications links within the region as well as with other regions. Travels in the region (for both tourism and business purposes) followed similar trend. The development and strengthening of intraregional and interregional transport and communications linkages constitute therefore a major objective of Phase II (1992-1996) of the Transport and Communications Decade for Asia and the Pacific.

To achieve this objective in the field of land transport in Asia, the Commission at its 48th session in 1992 endorsed an integrated project "Asian Land Transport Infrastructure Development" (ALTID) comprising the Asian Highway, the Trans-Asian Railway projects and facilitation of land transport. This project was accorded priority for Phase II of the Decade.

It became evident however, that because of the scope of ALTID project, the varied status of land transport network development in the countries and subregions concerned, and the limited availability of resources, the implementation of the project would require a special approach and strategy.

The implementation strategy for ALTID project was therefore adopted by the Commission at its 50th session (1994) focusing on maximizing the utilization of existing land transport infrastructure, establishing efficient cooperative arrangements at the subregional level, and optimizing the utilization of the limited resources available. The strategy comprises the following elements:

- (a) Facilitation of land transport at border-crossing through the promotion of the relevant international conventions and agreements in Asia, as an important basis for the development of international trade and tourism;
- (b) A step-by-step approach, through studies of corridors and other aspects of land transport development, to assist in the formulation the rail and road network and to establish minimum route (road and rail) standards and requirements as reflected in the approved ALTID Action Plan for 1994-1995;
- (c) Cooperation with other international organizations, to avoid the duplication of work and to ensure the eventual compatibility of road and rail route standards and requirements; and
- (d) Major emphasis put on the implementation at the subregional level.

Since Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) represents a major regional grouping and includes Central Asian Republics (CAR) which are also members (as of 1992) of ESCAP and keeping in view that the land-locked CAR with their major land transport routes developed mainly to the North have an increasing need to gain access to the sea ports in the South (Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan) and the East (China) to develop closer relations with all the neighbouring and other countries and to also rapidly develop international trade and tourism, ESCAP has carried out in 1994 this study on land transport linkages of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan with sea ports of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan in the South and those of China in the East.

The major objective of the study, funded generously by the Government of Netherlands, was to assist CAR in identifying main present and future land transport routes from Central Asia to sea ports of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan as well as of China. The identification of problems in land transport facilitation as well as of the measures to improve it constitutes another important part of the study. The study has been carried out in close cooperation with ECO secretariat and with the active participation of the countries concerned. However, due to limited funds available, only three CAR, namely Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were covered by the study. Nevertheless, the results of the study, are expected to be useful to Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, whose national land transport systems are directly linked with the international corridors identified in the study. Missions were also undertaken to China, Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan.

In spite of excellent cooperation rendered by all the participating countries it was not possible to obtain all the required data and information, particularly those relating to traffic forecast, cost of transport etc. mostly due to a fact that international trade between Asian Republics and other countries is at its initial development stage. Under the circumstances, the project team's own estimates and judgement were in some cases the only possible way to proceed with the study.

The study report consists of five chapters, namely: Introduction; Central Asian Republics and their new transport demands; Land transport routes from Central Asia to sea ports of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, and those in China in the East; Comparison of the land transport routes to the sea ports in the South and the East; Land transport border-crossing facilitation; Major conclusions and recommendations.

Annexes attached to the report include: list of countries and organizations visited; railway and road technical standards and data; land transport overview by countries; container terminals in Central Asia; road and rail border-crossings between CAR and Afghanistan, Islamic Republic of Iran and China; list of transit and transport agreements; list of references.

It is hoped that results of the study would provide useful guidelines for all the countries' authorities concerned in the development of efficient and reliable land transport routes from land-locked Central Asian Republics to the sea ports in the South and the East.