

**Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**
Committee on Transport**Third session**

Bangkok, 10-12 October 2012

Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

Preparations for the second session of the Forum of Asian Ministers of Transport, 2013**Preparations for the second session of the Forum of Asian Ministers of Transport, 2013******Note by the secretariat***Summary*

Mindful of the growth of output, trade and investment in the region and the need for the transport sector to respond rapidly and effectively to these new demands, the Commission, in its resolution 64/5 of 30 April 2008 on the establishment of the Forum of Asian Ministers of Transport, requested the Executive Secretary to convene the first session of the Forum of Asian Ministers of Transport in 2009 and subsequently on a regular basis, with the first session deciding its frequency. The first session of the Forum, which was convened in Bangkok in 2009, was attended by more than 150 representatives of 27 members and associate members of ESCAP and partner organizations. At the session, the Forum adopted the Bangkok Declaration on Transport Development in Asia, which has provided important policy direction on priority areas for the realization of an international integrated intermodal transport and logistics system in the region, such as the development of an intergovernmental agreement on dry ports.

The second session of the Forum is scheduled to be held in November or December 2013. The present document describes proposals from the secretariat on the agenda for the Forum. In its resolution 64/5, the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to ensure that a regional policy-oriented agenda was placed before the forum, addressing transport infrastructure, transit policy, facilitation, logistics, interregional and international transport linkages, financing and safety issues, as well as their economic, environmental and social sustainability. The Committee may wish to provide the secretariat with guidance on the proposed agenda, taking into account the implications of the global financial and economic crisis, as well as the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), which was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012.

* E/ESCAP/CTR(3)/L.1.

** The late submission to conference services is due to the need of the secretariat to consult with member States about the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, which was held in June 2012.

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 64/5 of 30 April 2008 on the establishment of the Forum of Asian Ministers of Transport, the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to convene the first session of the Forum in 2009, and to ensure that a regional policy-oriented agenda was placed before the Forum, addressing transport infrastructure, transit policy, facilitation, logistics, interregional and international transport linkages, financing and safety issues, as well as their economic, environmental and social sustainability. Accordingly, the first session of the Forum of Asian Ministers of Transport was held in Bangkok from 14 to 18 December 2009.

2. The Forum reviewed progress towards 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),¹ and considered a broad range of issues under five themes: transport infrastructure; transport and development; transport and poverty; transport and environment; and transport and society. It also adopted the Bangkok Declaration on Transport Development in Asia,² which has provided policy direction at the ministerial level on priority areas for the realization of an international integrated intermodal transport and logistics system in the region, such as the development of an intergovernmental agreement on dry ports. The Bangkok Declaration has also guided the Regional Action Programme for Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific, phase II (2012-2016),³ which was adopted by the Ministerial Conference on Transport at its second session, in March 2012.

3. For the second session of the Forum, which is scheduled to be held in November or December 2013, ministers and other high-level representatives may wish to provide guidance to the secretariat on priority actions needed to accelerate progress towards an international integrated intermodal transport network and to address the various transport challenges facing the region. The present document contains the proposed agenda for the Forum, taking into account the implications of the global economic and financial crisis and the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), which was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012.⁴

II. Proposed agenda for the second session of the Forum

4. The global economic climate has changed drastically since the convening of the first session of the Forum. The global economic and financial crisis has had serious repercussions in Asia and the Pacific, although the severity of these repercussions has varied from country to country. For example, export-dependent countries have felt the impact of the crisis more directly due to a slowdown in demand for imports in Europe, Japan and North America.⁵ The slowdown in trade coupled with the volatility of global financial markets has led to a contraction of both public and private resources for infrastructure investment. In addition, official development

¹ E/ESCAP/63/13, chap. V.

² Commission resolution 66/4 of 19 May 2010.

³ Commission resolution 68/4 of 23 May 2012, annex, appendix I.

⁴ See General Assembly resolution 66/288 of 27 July 2012 on “the future we want”.

⁵ *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2012: Pursuing Shared Prosperity in an Era of Turbulence and High Commodity Prices* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.12.II.F.9).

assistance from developed countries to developing countries has been trending downward since 2010.⁶

5. In the light of these circumstances, Governments of the region need to reassess their medium to long-term transport development strategies. Although, intraregional trade offers the potential to offset the slowdown in trade between Asia and the Pacific and other regions, the rate and direction it takes depends on the quality of the physical infrastructure connecting countries in the region and the removal of barriers at borders. Furthermore, Governments will have to look to alternative sources of financing for this infrastructure as well as strengthen planning and oversight mechanisms to ensure that investment funds are used in an optimal way. Notably, there is growing consensus among Governments of the need for more sustainable transport, as reflected in “The future we want”, the outcome document of Rio+20.

6. As part of the Secretary-General’s Five-Year Action Agenda, which was presented to the General Assembly on 25 January 2012, the Secretary-General made a commitment to mobilize the United Nations system to support global, regional and national strategies to address the building blocks of sustainable development. In the area of transport, he called on the United Nations system to “convene aviation, marine, ferry, rail, road and urban public transport providers, along with Governments and investors, to develop and take action on recommendations for more sustainable transport systems that can address rising congestion and pollution worldwide, particularly in urban areas.”⁷ The second session of the Forum of Asian Ministers of Transport will provide member States with the opportunity to consider ways to enhance the economic, social and environmental sustainability of transport and, at the same time, exchange views on how to overcome the challenges arising from the global economic and financial crisis. In this regard, the secretariat proposes the following themes for the agenda of the second session of the Forum.

7. *Strengthening the connectivity of regional transport networks for sustainable transport development:* In line with the increasing demand for intraregional trade, physical and operational connectivity of regional transport networks is becoming vitally important for sustainable trade and economic development of the region. The Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks are firmly in place, and significant progress has been made towards the development of an intergovernmental agreement on dry ports (see E/ESCAP/CTR(3)/2). This agenda item will therefore entail a discussion of policies for further integrating and improving these regional networks and on how to facilitate the operation of the networks for international transport in a sustainable manner. Issues to be discussed under this agenda item could include: (a) increasing the modal share of railways and waterways for long-distance freight transport; (b) improving intermodal connectivity through the development of inland container depots and dry ports; (c) promoting efficient movement of goods, people and vehicles along the Asian Highway through the implementation of the Regional Strategic Framework for the Facilitation

⁶ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, “Development: Aid to developing countries falls because of global recession”, 4 April 2012, Table 1. Available from www.oecd.org/dac/developmentaidtodevelopingcountriesfallsbecauseofglobalrecession.htm.

⁷ The Secretary-General’s Five-Year Action Agenda, 25 January 2012, available from www.un.org/sg/priorities/sg_agenda_2012.pdf.

of International Road Transport;⁸ (d) enhancing the use of the Trans-Asian Railway network by facilitating international railway transport and promoting closer cooperation among railway authorities; (e) simplifying and harmonizing border-crossing documentation and procedures; and (f) setting policies aimed at fostering the development of professional logistics services.

8. *Financing sustainable transport development:* As a result of the global financial and economic crisis, many Governments in the region have had to seek alternative financing and delivery options for infrastructure development, maintenance and operations. Issues to be discussed under this agenda item could include alternative sources of financing for sustainable transport infrastructure development and operations, in particular for filling investment gaps in the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks, such as public-private partnerships, South-South cooperation and climate funds.

9. *Sustainable transport for inclusive development:* Sustainable transport systems are those which contribute to the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the communities they serve. Transport planners have traditionally focused on developing the road sector without paying sufficient attention to the negative effects of motorization. Meanwhile in rural areas, many communities are still living without access to roads or affordable transport services. Issues that could be discussed under this agenda item could include: (a) effective policies and best practices with regard to achieving inclusive and sustainable transport development, including ways to enhance the contribution of the Asian Highway, Trans-Asian Railway and dry ports in reaching this goal; (b) road safety; and (c) meeting the mobility needs of poor and vulnerable groups.

III. Issues for consideration

10. The Committee may wish to provide guidance on the organization of the second session of the Forum, particularly the proposed agenda for the meeting.

11. The Committee may also wish to encourage members and associate members to consider hosting the second session of the Forum.

⁸ Commission resolution 68/4 of 23 May 2012, annex, appendix II.