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SOUTH AMERICAN TRANSPORT STATISTICS SYSTEM (SETAS) New regional transport data base

A meeting of experts was held in Santiago, Chile on 27 and 28 October 1999 to mark the start of the project for the development of the South American Transport Statistics System (SETAS). The main objective of the meeting was to analyse different elements for the development of a SETAS pilot project.

The meeting was attended by representatives of Bolivia, Brazil and Chile, the countries chosen to participate in this early stage of the project's development. Officials from the Latin American Integration Association (LAIA), and from the Statistics and Economic Projections Division and the Transport Unit, Natural Resources and Infrastructure Division of ECLAC also participated.

This edition of the FAL Bulletin focuses on this regional effort, listing the specifications and components of the SETAS pilot plan and the results expected from its implementation. For further information on this project, contact José María Rubiato: e-mail: jrubiato@eclac.cl or Myriam Echeverría: e-mail: mecheverria@eclac.cl

MEETING OF EXPERTS AT ECLAC

The participants agreed that a regional statistical data bank on transport should be established and that, in this regard, the SETAS initiative would be an appropriate approach. The SETAS project is seen as a potential instrument for the exchange of information, development of methodology, adoption of definitions and establishment of standards.



The country representatives agreed as far as possible to provide the assistance required by ECLAC staff responsible for developing the pilot plan of the SETAS data system. This cooperation would take the form of statistical inputs and advice in response to any questions that might arise within the framework of the visits scheduled for each participating institution in Bolivia, Brazil and Chile.

The LAIA representative expressed full support for the development of the SETAS project on behalf of the secretariat of that organization and offered to collaborate in

every area in which the experience of LAIA information services might contribute to a better performance of the project. *Empresa Brasileira de Planejamento de Transportes*, the representative of the Executive Group for the Integration of Transportation Policies (GEIPOT), Brazil, placed at the disposal of the SETAS project, the methodology, documentation and data of its Information System, SITRA, Systems of Technical Information on Transport.

The participants agreed to set up a group for collaboration on the SETAS pilot plan. The persons in charge of the plan would keep other members of the group informed on the status of the projected work schedule by sending the relevant documentation at each phase.

BACKGROUND

It may be useful to recall some of the landmarks and dates in the development of the SETAS proposal.

In November 1997, LAIA and ECLAC presented to the Conference of Ministers of Transport, Communications and Public Works of South America a proposal for the development of the Transport Statistics System for South America – SETAS. The proposal was based on a questionnaire sent to public- and private-sector organizations of producers and potential users of transport statistics and on information collected during visits to competent agencies in Brazil, Colombia, Chile and Uruguay and from the statistical divisions of LAIA and ECLAC. The Conference, in resolution 38 (IV), took note of the LAIA/ECLAC report and requested the two organizations to complete the analysis and pursue their research by consulting competent agencies in the remaining member countries not included in the first study, namely, Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela.

In the course of the year 1998, consultations with each of the countries mentioned were made by telephone, mail and in some cases visits to the agencies. In December 1998, the SETAS project was presented to the third meeting of transport ministers on the Western Hemisphere Transport Initiative (WHTI). This led to a proposal for the development of a western hemisphere transport data system based on SETAS and the transport statistics system of the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA). In April 1999, the Conference of Ministers of Transport, Communications and Public Works of South America mandated LAIA and ECLAC to start to implement the SETAS project. In May, the project was presented in Washington to the meeting of the working group on the western hemisphere transport data system.

MANDATE

The regulatory framework for the SETAS project was established in ministerial Resolution 45 (V) on transport statistics, which reads as follows:

The Conference of Ministers of Transport, Communications and Public Works of South America,

CONSIDERING:

That in Resolution 38 (IV), the Conference took note of the report of the Latin American Integration Association (LAIA) entitled: "Proposal for the development of a Statistical System for Transport for South America – SETAS, and requested that the two organizations proceed with their research;

That, in compliance with that same resolution, a further study was conducted on the status of transport statistics in all member countries of the Conference;

That the results of these two studies and the recommendations they contain suggest a gradual, long-term process and the need to initiate a cooperation project for the short term in order to satisfy the complex management requirements and provide the human and financial resources demanded by the SETAS project.

RESOLVES:

1. To thank LAIA and ECLAC for the work accomplished, take note of the report of activities delivered during the current meeting and reiterate its interest in the full development of the SETAS project.
2. To request LAIA and ECLAC to undertake the following actions and inform the President and Secretariat of the Conference, once they have been completed:
 - To prepare a draft document setting forth the objectives, expected outcome, budget, work schedule and participation plan of the national statistics and transport agencies;
 - To initiate and develop activities under the SETAS project as soon as the necessary prerequisites have been met;
 - To examine the procedures and possible options for funding of the SETAS project.
3. To urge the member countries of the Conference to collaborate fully with LAIA and ECLAC in carrying out these activities.

CONTEXT

A number of other initiatives, organizational models and methodologies have served as references and sources of external support for the SETAS project and will form the basis for a future inter-regional network of transport statistics information services.

Some of the most noteworthy initiatives taking place at regional levels are the following:

EUROPE and NAFTA:

Contacts made with agencies in charge of similar initiatives in Europe and under the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA), with a view to the development of regional transport statistics systems have afforded valuable experience for the SETAS project, both in terms of methods of data harmonization

and systematic organization of information and as regards inter-agency cooperation.

AMERICAS:

In a presentation made at the third Hemispheric Meeting of Ministers of Transport in New Orleans, the Director of Transport Statistics Canada announced the development of a regional transport statistics system for NAFTA countries; the Director of the Bureau of Transport Statistics, in the United States Department of Transport proposed the establishment of a system for the entire hemisphere. The proposal was well received by the plenary meeting and incorporated into the Ministerial Declaration as one of the priority activities to be carried out by the hemispheric meeting of ministers.

The Meeting of Directors of Statistics of the Americas which held its most recent meeting at ECLAC headquarters in Santiago in March 1999, considered the need to form a working group on statistics on trade in services including statistics on transport and distribution.

MERCOSUR:

At a meeting held in Buenos Aires, in September 1999, the European Union and the Mercosur countries agreed to carry out a project for harmonization of statistical methodologies within Mercosur and between that group of countries and the European Union. The supervisory authorities are the European Commission, on the one hand, and the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INDEC) of Argentina, on behalf of Mercosur, on the other .

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SETAS PROJECT

The SETAS project is the first effort to establish a statistical transport system in the region using existing data, the rationale being that it is necessary to have a system capable of interpreting and assimilating different types of data provided by existing national statistical systems.

This approach poses a challenge that other plurinational systems in Europe and, more recently, in NAFTA have sought to address through harmonization of data prior to collection and consolidation. The main difference between this methodology and the approach contemplated for SETAS is that SETAS will attempt to achieve the maximum benefit from already existing national systems through use of the most advanced data-processing tools available.

The SETAS approach minimizes the cost of adapting national systems and progressively developing regional standardization without interfering in the functioning of each country. It aims to centralize complex system operations and distribute functions but this will demand highly advanced technical mechanisms for standardization and validation of data as well as a rigorously efficient organizational structure.

Data harmonization and standardization will be tackled after the resources for data conversion have been exhausted. Technical assistance and methodological development will be required in order to implement the best alternative for collecting standardized data, for example, by applying advanced technical methods.

SETAS will set up a transport information network through a client/server model, using the Internet as the platform for the communications network between national suppliers, a regional producing centre and users throughout the world.

The participation of ten countries in a single project poses particular difficulties for coordination and

management which can only be faced within the framework of a project with specially assigned staff and its own budget, with a view to establishing a regional body for the production and dissemination of transport statistics.

THE SETAS PROJECT: COMPONENTS

Areas of intervention

The development of the project, which is expected to last 3 to 4 years, encompasses the following main areas of activity:

- Methodological development and creation of a network for data collection
- Development of information systems
- Regional institutional development
- Phases of development

The work plan prepared by ECLAC envisages two phases of development:

- An initial phase undertaken to create a pilot plan which would operate with data from three countries in the region; and
- A second phase geared to the implementation of a project of wide scope with the participation of the 10 member countries of the Conference.

National inputs

The role of the participating agencies in the development of the pilot plan will be different from that required in the development phase of the large-scale project.

For the pilot plan, it is expected that the national counterparts will collaborate solely as providers of data with minimum costs and effort and without interference in the normal course of their activities. The data used in the pilot plan system will be mainly historic data; however, it will be necessary to carry out transmission tests of data in real time at some stage of the development. The most precise definition of this and other details, with respect to the contribution of the countries participating in the development of the pilot plan was considered at the coordination meeting in Santiago in October 1999.

The development of the large-scale project will require a greater commitment on the part of national counterparts, both for data transmission and the gradual harmonization of the definition and content of

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