

UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

**REPORT OF THE SUBREGIONAL EXPERT GROUP MEETING
ON
IDENTIFYING INVESTMENT AND PRIORITIES FOR THE
DEVELOPMENT OF THE ASIAN HIGHWAY NETWORK
AND
RELATED INTERMODAL CONNECTIONS
21-23 September 2004, Islamabad**



UNITED NATIONS

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This document has been issued without formal editing.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background

1. The Asian Highway has made considerable progress, with the recent signing of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network by 26 member States. The entry into force of the Agreement will signify a new phase for the initiative.
2. Currently 17 per cent of the 140,000 kilometres of the Asian Highway network is below the agreed minimum standards. In addition, infrastructure rehabilitation is needed on a number of routes. Upgrading and improving the network to the requirements of international transport are important considerations underlying the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network. While some States are capable of mobilizing the resources to fulfill the obligations of the Agreement, other States will need development assistance from multilateral and bilateral donors as well as multilateral lending institutions to meet those obligations.
3. In the context of such funding constraints, UNESCAP has launched a project, financed by the Government of Japan, to prepare subregional overviews of investment needs and priorities for the development of the Asian Highway network as requested in the Commission Resolution 60/4 Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network to promote the development of the Asian Highway, particularly taking into account the special needs of landlocked developing countries. The project also aims to facilitate dialogue among members and donors on these priorities, leading to investment projects that optimally use available funds.
4. The main activities of the project include: (i) the preparation of sub-regional overviews of investment needs and development priorities for the Asian Highway network and intermodal connections; and (ii) the organization of three subregional Meetings with the participation of member countries, multilateral and bilateral donors, subregional and other international organizations to identify the priority investment projects of common national and subregional importance for possible funding.
5. Three subregional Expert Group Meetings of member countries, multilateral and bilateral donors, subregional and other international organizations are planned for: (i) South Asia (SAARC) subregion; (ii) North, Central and South West Asia; and (ii) South-East Asia (ASEAN) subregion.
6. This Meeting was for the SAARC subregion the first in the series of planned Meetings that have the objectives to: (i) review the status of the Asian Highway network in member countries; (ii) identify investment requirements for the development of the Asian Highway Network; (iii) identify priority projects of subregional importance for the development of Asian Highway network and related intermodal connections; and (iv) showcase and promote the identified priority projects for investment.
7. In addition to the SAARC member countries, Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran were invited to discuss and consider investment requirements for international connection to the SAARC subregion. A meeting for the ECO subregion is planned in which specific investment in Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran will be taken up.

B. Organization of the Meeting

8. The Subregional Expert Group Meeting on Identifying Investment and Priorities for the Development of the Asian Highway Network and related Intermodal Connections was held in Islamabad, from 21 to 23 September 2004. The Meeting was organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and hosted by the Ministry of Communications and National Highway Authority, Government of Pakistan. The programme of the Meeting is attached as annex I to this report.

C. Attendance

9. The Meeting was attended by participants from eight member countries namely: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Representatives of the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, the Islamic Development Bank, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), and Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) also attended the Meeting. The list of participants is attached as annex II to this report.

D. Opening of the Meeting

1. Opening message from Mr. Kim Hak-Su, Under Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Executive Secretary of UNESCAP, delivered by Mr. Barry Cable, Director, Transport and Tourism Division

10. Mr. Kim Hak-Su, Executive Secretary of UNESCAP welcomed the participants and thanked H. E. Mr. Mohammad Shahid Jamail Qureshi, Minister of State for Communications, Government of Pakistan for his presence. He mentioned that in an era of globalization, there was a need to put in place the basic arrangements for transport infrastructure linkages in anticipation of increased intra- and interregional trade. He affirmed that the development of international transport networks was an important part of the work of UNESCAP and it was anticipated that transport linkages will play a greater role in socio-economic development, combating poverty and making globalization work for all.

11. The Executive Secretary, in his message, underscored the success of signing of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network in Shanghai by 26 member States and outlined progress towards the entering into force of the Agreement.

12. Highlighting the importance of investment for the Asian Highway he hoped that the Meeting would encourage discussion among the member countries, donors and interested organizations, and would identify priority investment projects of common national and subregional importance. In this respect he sought the support of member Governments, bilateral and multilateral donors.

13. In closing, the Executive Secretary expressed his sincere appreciation to the Ministry of Communications and National Highway Authority, Government of Pakistan, for hosting the Meeting and the excellent arrangements made for the participants. He also recognized the continued support from the Government of the Japan for the development of the Asian Highway network and for financing the subregional Meeting.

2. Welcome address by Major General Farrukh Javed, Chairman, National Highway Authority (NHA)

14. The Chairman welcomed the participants to Islamabad and NHA Head Office. He mentioned that roads promote interregional harmony and integration and praised UNESCAP's efforts for turning the Asian Highway into reality. Pakistan, as an active member of the Asian Highway was striving hard to upgrade its highways to international standards. He then gave brief outline of international links to Afghanistan, China, India and the Islamic Republic of Iran while explaining some of projects intended to improve connectivity with these countries and further to Central Asia.

15. He explained NHA's plan for construction of Motorways and links to the Gwadar Port. He also noted that Pakistan placed a high value on the cooperation and contribution of the international organizations for the development of road infrastructure and hoped that the cooperation would continue for the development of the Asian Highway Network.

16. At the end, the Chairman wished that the outcome of the Meeting would enhance meaningful cooperation among the countries.

3. Opening statement from H. E. Mr. Mohammad Shahid Jamail Qureshi, Minister of State for Communications, Government of Pakistan

17. In his opening address H.E. Mr. Mohammad Shahid Jamail Qureshi, Minister of State for Communications, Government of Pakistan, expressed his pleasure in welcoming all participants to the Expert Group Meeting.

18. He mentioned that road infrastructure had enduring effects on economic development and that Pakistan had about 258,000 km of road network which included 8,885 km of well maintained national highways. Located at the crossroads Pakistan could provide effective transit routes towards the East, West and North.

19. The Minister of State informed the Meeting of the bilateral transport agreements with China and the Islamic Republic of Iran and resumption of Lahore-New Delhi bus service with India. Pakistan was a signatory to the Asian Highway Agreement and Traffic in Transit Agreement with China, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Some of the initiatives being supported and implemented included development of the New Silk Route, the ECO Decade Programme of Actions on Transport and Communications, and the ECO Transit Transport Framework Agreement.

20. At the end, the Minister of State thanked UNESCAP for organizing the Meeting, which he hoped, would be useful for experience sharing.

II. PROCEEDINGS

A. UNESCAP transport sector activities and the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network

21. The Director of the Transport and Tourism Division briefly described the UNESCAP transport sector activities. He outlined the initiative of UNESCAP on integration of different modes of transport, and transport facilitation, and mentioned some of ongoing activities in the highway sector.

22. The Director explained the processes of development of the Asian Highway network and signing of the Intergovernmental Agreement. He briefly mentioned the obligations of States under the Agreement. He also outlined the present status of the Asian Highway network.

23. The Director concluded by outlining the objectives and programme of the Meeting.

B. Updates from States on ratification/signing of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network

24. The member States provided the following updates on the ratification/signing of the Agreement:

(a) Afghanistan

25. Afghanistan had signed the Agreement in Shanghai and would inform on ratification in the due course.

(b) Bangladesh

26. The delegation from Bangladesh appraised the Meeting of their governments' willingness to sign the Agreement. However, they also conveyed the earlier request of their government to redesignate Dhaka-Chittagong-Cox's Bazar-Teknaf (upto Myanmar border) route as AH1 since the route was substantially crossing more than one subregion.

27. However, the Meeting was informed that the numbering system could not be negotiated until the Agreement entered into force.

(c) Bhutan

28. The delegation from Bhutan informed the Meeting that ratification of the Agreement is likely to be tabled for consideration in the forthcoming National Assembly session.

(d) India

29. The delegation from India mentioned that Government of India had approved the signing of the Agreement and would inform about the ratification in due course. The delegation of India also did not favour any change in the route alignment of AH1 as already decided after due deliberations.

(e) Islamic Republic of Iran

30. The Islamic Republic of Iran had signed the Agreement in Shanghai and would inform on ratification in the due course.

(f) Nepal

31. The delegation from Nepal informed the Meeting that the ratification of the Agreement would be considered by the Parliament after its election.

(g) Pakistan

32. The delegation from Pakistan informed that the process of ratification had been started and would be submitted for cabinet approval in due course.

(h) Sri Lanka

33. The delegation from Sri Lanka informed that the Cabinet approval had already been obtained and Sri Lanka was ready to ratify the Agreement.

C. Development of the Asian Highway network and intermodal connections

(a) Subregional overview of the Asian Highway network

34. The secretariat provided an overview of the development of the Asian Highway and intermodal connections in the region and subregion. It was highlighted that 17 per cent (about 24,000 km) of Asian Highway network needed upgrading to the Class III standards in the region. In the SAARC subregion 12 per cent of AH network currently did not meet minimum design standards. Sections of the Asian Highway network requiring improvement and upgrading were highlighted with the help of maps. An outline of important international AH corridors in SAARC were provided.

(b) Country statements on development and financing of road and intermodal projects related to the Asian Highway

(i) Afghanistan

35. The delegation from Afghanistan mentioned that 95 per cent of passenger and freight traffic was carried by road transport in landlocked Afghanistan. He hoped that the implementation of the Asian Highway Agreement, already signed by Afghanistan, would bring benefits to all member countries and Afghanistan through its connectivity with Pakistan, Islamic Republic of Iran and Central Asian countries to both Europe and Asia. The road network in Afghanistan had been damaged during the wars. However, with cooperation of member countries and international organizations renovation of Salang-Tonal had almost been completed, rehabilitation of Torkham-Jalalabad-Kabul was ongoing and of Mazer-e-Sharif-Herat was under study. He hoped that the cooperation for rehabilitation would continue.

(ii) Bangladesh

36. The delegation from Bangladesh appraised that road transport carried about 70 per cent of passenger and 72 per cent of freight traffic. Outlining the Asian Highways in Bangladesh the progress in development of Dhaka-Chittagong-Cox's Bazar-Teknaf (Myanmar border) through the signing of a MOU with Myanmar was provided. Two sections of the Asian Highway were proposed for investment: (i) four laning of Daudkhundi-Chittagong (246 km); and (ii) improvement of Chittagong-Cox's Bazar-Ramu-Gundum (Myanmar border) (186 km).

(iii) Bhutan

37. The delegation from Bhutan provided an overview of the transport sector in Bhutan. Bhutan had 4,122 kms of road network of which 1,577 kms were National Highways. There were plans to construct and upgrade major highways in Bhutan. The Phuentsholing-Thimpu Highway (179 km) was proposed for double laning and there was a plan to construct a dry port at Phuentsholing which was the nodal point of Asian Highway in Bhutan. Jaigaon in

India had been identified as a nodal point in India for providing connectivity to the nearest Asian Highway at Siliguri.

(iv) India

38. The delegation from India gave a comprehensive outline of highway development in India. The current road network in India was more than 3.3 million kms of which 65,569 kms were national highway. Road transport carried about 85 per cent of passenger traffic and about 65 per cent of freight traffic. The National Highway Development Project (NHDP) was being implemented and included four laning of about 14,279 km of National highways at a cost of US \$ 14 billion connecting four metropolitan cities, north-south and east-west as well as major ports. The major part of Asian Highway was being developed as a part of National Highway Programme. About 26 km of Asian Highway in India formed part of the State Road network. The entire Asian Highway in India was paved and most of it already qualified to be class III standard and above. It was mentioned that for the AH connection to Bhutan, Siliguri-Jaigaon was recommended as an appropriate link.

(v) Islamic Republic of Iran

39. The delegation from the Islamic Republic of Iran provided an outline of national transport policies which included among others construction of highways in the North-South and East-West Corridors, and the Asian Highway network and enhancing the safety and facilities for freight transportation. It was highlighted that about US \$ 2.2 billion was currently being invested in various Asian Highway projects. Some initiatives to improve international road transport included construction of Milak Bridge on the border with Afghanistan, reconstruction of border terminals at Dogharoum (Afghanistan), Bajgiran (Turkmenistan) and Nurdouz (Armenia) and Doughram-Herat road. The strategy for development of intermodal transport was outlined.

(vi) Nepal

40. The delegation from Nepal provided an update on the status of the Asian Highway network in Nepal. About 93 per cent of the Asian Highway was in good and fair condition. The construction of the new Koshi Bridge at Chatara, widening of bridges in Dhalkebar-Pathalaya section of AH2, Kathmandu-Birgunj ICD link, widening of Thankot-Kathmandu, Kathmandu-Bhaktapur, surface improvement and slope stabilization on Barabise-Kodari section of AH42, Container Freight Station at Kathmandu and ICD at Kodari were proposed for investment. Details on the projects of subregional importance were provided. The

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