#### I. Introduction to the Asian Highway



In centuries past, great explorers embarked by land and sea in search of new worlds and riches. Like today, the purpose of travel was to explore new horizons, learn from different cultures, trade, or simply to secure food, shelter and means of subsistence for families and communities. They returned with tales of exotic lands, strange animals and fascinating customs of peoples living in these lands. Today's modern explorers do not need to sit riveted to their chairs listening to the tales and marvelling at the richness of the cultures. The Asian Highway allows them to experience at first hand the accounts that were relayed by great explorers.

In 1959, the Asian Highway project was conceived partially to resurrect those dreams, of trade and travel and to bring the world closer together. In doing so the Asian Highway promotes social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom as laid down in the preamble to the Charter of the United Nations.

In the 1960s and 1970s, considerable progress was achieved in identifying a regional road network with active cooperation of member countries. In the late 1980s, the Asia-Pacific region as a whole emerged as a dynamic arena of economic growth. Demand increased for reliable and efficient road transport, which proved to be a versatile and cost-effective mode for moving large numbers of people and goods across borders.

In 1992, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) endorsed the Asian Land Transport Infrastructure Development (ALTID) project comprising of the Asian Highway and the Trans-Asian Railway network as well as facilitation of land transport. The Asian Highway project is one of the cornerstones of ALTID. The formalization of the Asian Highway, through the Intergovernmental Agreement on Asian Highway Network adopted in November 2003, has brought the project to a new turning point in its history.

#### 1. Concept of the Asian Highway Network

Developing an international highway network is a hugely expensive and timeconsuming exercise. It involves building roads of common standards through vastly different kinds of terrain, ranging from mountains to deserts, crossing rivers and traversing forests. Because many ESCAP member countries cannot afford the high costs of building such a comprehensive network, it was agreed that the basic thrust of the Asian Highway project would be *to coordinate the development and upgrading of existing regional highways among member countries.* 

In this regard, participating countries agreed that the basic underlying principles for the Asian Highway network would be to include only major national roads in the network and to make the maximum use of existing roads, avoiding the construction of new highways except in

cases where deemed necessary to complete "missing links". Furthermore, the criteria used to select the road, rail and road-cum-rail routes should provide for:



# 2. Identifying the Network

The process of identifying the roads to be included in the Asian Highway network began in the late 1950s, but it was mainly after 1992, when the ALTID project was endorsed by ESCAP, that the network formulation process was taken up in earnest. The ESCAP secretariat was tasked with the complex task of coordinating the development of the Asian Highway network by facilitating discussion among member countries. With the financial assistance from the Government of Japan, it conducted a series of studies, the first of which was published in 1995. This study identified 29 Asian Highway routes, totaling 69,000 kilometres.

In 1996, a second study was completed on the Asian Highway network in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, leading to the inclusion of a further 13 routes totalling 21,000 kilometers. In 1999, the Asian Highway routes in Turkey were agreed upon, adding a further 3,200 kilometres to the network.

The ALTID implementation strategy stressed the importance of the formulation of the Asian Highway network to cover all of Asia. Building on this momentum, a third study was completed in 2001 and identified the Asian Highway routes in China, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, the Russian Federation and the Korean peninsula. These routes formed the Northern Corridor of the Asian Highway, effectively linking North-East Asia with Central Asia, the Caucasus and Europe. About 40,000 kilometers of road network were included in the network.

In 2001 and 2002, Asian Highway routes were identified in Georgia and Bhutan respectively. An Expert Group Meeting held in May 2002 amongst 30 member countries reviewed the entire network and extended it to towns and cities in 31 countries, covering a total of 140,000 kilometres. In November 2003, Japan joined the Asian Highway project by including the Tokyo-Fukuoka section in the network. Brunei Darussalam has also expressed a keen interest to join the network.

# 3. Current status of the Asian Highway

The Asian Highway Map (figure 1) shows the current network across all 32 member countries, as well as linkages to the European Road Network (E-road).

Further information on the current status of the Asian Highway network, by country and by route number, is summarized in tables 1 and 2.

# Figure 1: The Asian Highway Network



	Length	Paved						~
Country		2 Lanes or more	1 Lane	Unpaved	Ferry	Missing link	Unknown	Section
Afghanistan	4,247	2,330	10	1,906	1	0	0	472
Armenia	958	958	0	0	0	0	0	10
Azerbaijan	1,442	1,442	0	0	0	0	0	184
Bangladesh	1,804	1,188	584	2	9	21	0	487
Bhutan	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cambodia	1,339	1,337	0	0	2	0	0	0
China	25,579	25,047	0	532	0	0	0	1,692
DPRK	1,320	0	0	0	0	0	1,320	0
Georgia	1,154	1,154	0	0	0	0	0	206
India	11,432	11,389	43	0	0	0	0	1,174
Indonesia	3,989	3,955	0	0	34	0	0	0
Islamic Republic of Iran	11,152	11,152	0	0	0	0	0	566
Japan	1,200	1,200	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kazakhstan	13,189	12,080	214	895	0	0	0	2,075
Kyrgyzstan	1,695	1,317	0	378	0	0	0	34
Lao PDR	2,297	1,873	0	249	3	45	127	106
Malaysia	1,595	1,595	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mongolia	4,286	800	0	3,486	0	0	0	37
Myanmar	3,003	1,472	1,013	518	0	0	0	771
Nepal	1,321	1,304	0	17	0	0	0	107
Pakistan	5,377	5,377	0	0	0	0	0	1,275
Philippines	3,517	2,979	0	388	150	0	0	0
Republic of Korea	907	907	0	0	0	0	0	68
Russian Federation	16,869	14,945	0	1,924	0	0	0	422
Singapore	19	19	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sri Lanka	650	537	113	0	0	0	0	0
Tajikistan	1,925	1,671	0	220	1	33	0	0
Thailand	5,112	4,553	0	0	2	0	557	363
Turkey	5,254	5,254	0	0	0	0	0	538
Turkmenistan	2,204	2,180	0	24	0	0	0	358
Uzbekistan	2,966	2,722	0	244	0	0	0	379
Viet Nam	2,678	2,343	335	0	0	0	0	0
Total	140,479	125,081	2,312	10,783	200	99	2,004	11,324

Table 1: Status of Asian Highway by country (as of 2002)

Note: The length of route in Japan is estimated by ESCAP.

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Route No.	Length	Paved		Unnaved	Ferry	Missing		Common
		2 Lanes or more	1 Lane	Ulipaveu	гену	link	Unknown	1 Section
AH1	20.557	19.138	768	216	9	21	405	0
AH2	13 177	9 623	767	216	8	0	0	2 563
AH3	7.331	4.655	5	978	1	0	0	1.692
AH4	6.024	4.097	0	714	0	0	0	1.213
AH5	10.380	9.842	0	0	0	0	0	538
AH6	10.475	9.285	0	267	0	0	855	68
AH7	5,868	5,160	0	145	1	0	0	562
AH8	4,718	4,244	0	126	0	0	0	348
AH11	1,588	1,541	0	46	1	0	0	0
AH12	1,195	1,170	0	25	0	0	0	0
AH13	730	0	0	0	1	45	684	0
AH14	2,077	1,891	186	0	0	0	0	0
AH15	566	394	65	0	1	0	0	106
AH16	1,032	947	84	0	1	0	0	0
AH18	1,042	1,042	0	0	0	0	0	0
AH19	459	459	0	0	0	0	0	0
AH25	2,549	2,523	0	0	26	0	0	0
AH26	3,517	2,979	0	388	150	0	0	0
AH30	2,739	1,231	0	1,508	0	0	0	0
AH31	1,595	1,595	0	0	0	0	0	0
AH32	3,748	1,534	0	2,117	0	0	60	37
AH33	575	575	0	0	0	0	0	0
AH34	1,033	1,033	0	0	0	0	0	0
AH41	948	675	110	0	2	0	0	161
AH42	3,754	3,155	0	492	0	0	0	107
AH43	3,024	2,911	113	0	0	0	0	0
AH44	107	107	0	0	0	0	0	0
AH45	2,030	1,937	0	0	0	0	0	93
AH46	1,513	1,513	0	0	0	0	0	0
AH47	2,057	2,057	0	0	0	0	0	0
AH48	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
AH51	862	837	0	0	0	0	0	25
AH60	2,151	2,136	0	0	0	0	0	15
AH61	4,158	3,744	189	191	0	0	0	34
AH62	2,722	1,489	0	375	0	0	0	858
AH63	2,434	1,996	0	438	0	0	0	0
AH64	1,666	1,311	0	23	0	0	0	332

 Table 2: Status of Asian Highway by route number (as of 2002)

AH65	1,250	1,023	0	227	0	0	0	0
AH66	995	854	0	108	0	33	0	0
AH67	2,288	1,534	0	0	0	0	0	754
AH68	278	278	0	0	0	0	0	0
AH70	4,832	3,042	25	277	0	0	0	1,488
AH71	426	162	0	264	0	0	0	0
AH72	1,147	1,147	0	0	0	0	0	0
AH75	1,871	1,871	0	0	0	0	0	0
AH76	986	327	0	659	0	0	0	0
AH77	1,298	315	0	983	0	0	0	0
AH78	1,076	1,076	0	0	0	0	0	0
AH81	1,143	1,003	0	0	0	0	0	140
AH82	1,261	1,071	0	0	0	0	0	190
AH83	172	172	0	0	0	0	0	0
AH84	1,188	1,188	0	0	0	0	0	0
AH85	338	338	0	0	0	0	0	0
AH86	247	247	0	0	0	0	0	0
AH87	606	606	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	151,803	125,081	2,312	10,783	200	99	2,004	11,324

# 4. Formalization of the Asian Highway Network

As the final step in the formalization of the Asian Highway Network, an Intergovernmental Agreement was adopted in November 2003. The main obligations of the Contracting Parties within the Agreement are to adopt the Asian Highway network as a coordinated plan for the development of highway routes of international importance; bring the network in conformity with the Asian Highway classification and design standards; and facilitate navigation along the routes through the placement of adequate signage along the Asian Highway routes.

The Agreement was prepared by a Working Group on Asian Highway set up by the fifty-eighth session of ESCAP on the recommendation of the Ministerial Conference on Infrastructure held in Seoul in 2001. It is based on the European Agreement of Main International Traffic Arteries.

A formal signing ceremony of the Agreement is scheduled to be held during the sixtieth session of the Commission in Shanghai, China, in April 2004.

# (i) The Asian Highway routes

The formal definition of the Asian Highway routes is included as an annex to the Intergovernmental Agreement. These routes are reproduced in table 3. Provisions exist within the Agreement to convene a Working Group, one of the functions of which is to periodically review the routes.

#### (ii) Asian Highway Classification and Design Standards

Asian Highway routes are required to conform to minimum standards of classification and design in terms of construction, improvement and maintenance. This is intended to uphold quality standards and enhance recognition among users. Member countries have agreed to make every possible effort to conform to these provisions both in the construction of new routes and in modernizing existing ones. The provisions of these classification and design standards are summarized in table 4.

#### *(iii) Numbering and signage*

Like airline flights, Asian Highway routes have been assigned numbers to help make them easy to identify on maps as well as via signage along the routes themselves. The principles for assigning route numbers is as follows:

- 1. Route numbers begin with "AH", which stands for "Asian Highway", followed by one, two or three digits.
- 2. Single-digit route numbers from 1 to 9 are assigned to Asian Highway routes which substantially cross more than one subregion.
- 3. Sets of two- and three-digit route numbers are assigned to indicate the routes within subregions, including those connecting to a neighbouring subregion, and highway routes within member States as indicated below:

- Route numbers 10-29 and 100-299 are allocated to South-East Asia which includes Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam;
- (b) Route numbers 30-39 and 300-399 are allocated to East and North-East Asia which includes China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation (Far East);<sup>1</sup>
- (c) Route numbers 40-59 and 400-599 are allocated to South Asia which includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka;
- (d) Route numbers 60-89 and 600-899 are allocated to North, Central and South-West Asia which includes Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation,<sup>1</sup> Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

This numbering system is illustrated in figure 2.

The Asian Highway signage is rectangular in shape and consists of the letters AH followed by the route number in Arabic numerals with a white or black inscription affixed to or combined with other signs which can be easily identified and understood by drivers.



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