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Inland Transport Committee

Working Party on Rail Transport

Seventy-third session

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Item 19 of the provisional agenda

Activities of Inland Transport Committee and its subsidiary bodies of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Implementation of the Inland Transport Committee Strategy

Note by the secretariat

I. Mandate

1. The Inland Transport Committee, at its eighty-first session in February 2019 adopted its new strategy to 2030. Following this adoption, the ITC mandated its subsidiary bodies to review their work in order to align their activities to the new strategy. This document sets out the current activities of the Working Party on Rail Transport (SC.2) and how they will be modified over the coming years to reflect the requirements of the new strategy. This document should be read in conjunction with the draft programme of work for the Working Party, document ECE/TRANS/SC.2/2019/1.

II. Current activities of SC.2

2. The Working Party on Rail Transport has an annual meeting and ad-hoc workshops on specific railway themes. Each year, a workshop is held at the start of the meeting as a policy makers' session to discuss and deal with key policy aspects of rail transport driving decision making in the sector. Recent examples include a workshop on rail reform (2017) and a workshop on innovation in the railways (2018) both of which were followed by a publication which have been downloaded numerous times from the UNECE website.¹

3. First and foremost, the Working Party is also the forum where the Administrative Committee of the European Agreement on Main International Railway Lines (AGC) meet to discuss and agree amendments to the AGC which currently has thirty-two contracting parties.

4. In addition, the working party currently addresses the following topics in its deliberations and discussions on railway matters:

- Security
- Financing

¹ INSERT links to publications.

- New legal instruments including Unified Railway Law and the Convention on the facilitation of crossing of frontiers for passengers and baggage carried by rail.
- Euro-Asian connectivity
- Progress on the Trans-European Railway Project
- The Development of a Masterplan on High-Speed Railways
- Climate change
- Facilitation of international rail travel
- Rail Review
- Productivity
- Safety
- Railway Reform
- Statistics.

5. This is supplemented by regular updates from international institutions and organizations on their activities of relevance to the sector.

III. Current activities of subsidiary bodies of SC.2

6. Currently there is only one subsidiary body to SC.2 — the Group of Experts towards Unified Railway Law (GEURL). Work on the development of Unified Railway law started at UNECE with an informal group of experts in 2010 and proceeded to a Joint Declaration towards Unified Railway Law, signed by 37 member States, supporting the finalisation of the work. Since then intensive work has been carried out in relation to the development of the provisions. At its seventy-third session, SC.2 will propose to ITC a way forward for the activities of the Group of Experts.

IV. Key elements of the ITC Strategy

7. The 2017 Ministerial Resolution of the ITC contains the policy directions for the future work of the ITC, as articulated in Decision 1, in principle “enabling the Committee to efficiently address the needs of global inland transport, with special attention to global regulatory governance through the UN transport Conventions and other means, (...) while leaving the organizational structure of the ECE secretariat, as well as the programme-budgeting function and oversight unchanged”. Based on this, the ECE reform review and United Nations General Assembly Resolutions, the vision for ITC is that it is “...the UN platform for inland transport to help efficiently address global and regional needs in inland transport.”

8. To achieve this, it should perform the following key functions:

- Leading change in inland transport
- Developing and administering transport legal instruments
- Increasing accessions and equitable participation, including by non-ECE Member States.

9. The mission for ITC is that it contributes to sustainable inland transport and mobility for achieving the sustainable development goals in the ECE and UN member States through policy dialogue, harmonizing regulatory frameworks, as appropriate, promoting new technologies, assisting in enhancing connectivity and supporting the implementation of legal instruments.

10. The objectives of the ITC are:

(a) Strategic: Increased governance – ITC is truly the UN platform with equal participation of all contracting parties to UN legal instruments under its purview to lead the future development of inland transport; - UN transport conventions under its purview are universally accepted and implemented, open for accession/ratification by all UN Member States if feasible, and inclusive of regional good practices; - ITC keeps pace with technological developments in a timely manner; - ITC's work enhances regional and inter-regional connectivity;

(b) Horizontal: Increased support to the implementation of all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular through: (a) improved traffic safety and urban mobility (SDGs 3 and 11); (b) reduced pollutant and GHG emissions (SDGs 3 and 13); (c) improved industry innovation and infrastructure efficiency and connectivity (SDG 9); (d) Affordable and clean energy (SDG 7); (e) decent work and economic growth (SDG 8); (f) gender equality (SDG 5) and (g) contributions to global monitoring of progress towards sustainable transport as much as feasible (all relevant SDGs).

11. To achieve these objectives, the following actions need to be taken:

(a) Enhance the role of ITC as the United Nations Platform for inland transport conventions;

(b) Enhance the role of ITC as the United Nations Platform for supporting new technologies and innovations in inland transport;

(c) Enhance the role of ITC as the United Nations Platform for regional, interregional and global inland transport policy dialogue;

(d) Enhance the role of ITC as the United Nations Platform for promoting sustainable regional and interregional inland transport connectivity and mobility.

V. Evolving the activities of SC.2 to meet these requirements

12. Firstly, it is important to note that the activities of SC.2 are already in line with the ITC strategy as can be seen in its annual agenda which cover all four of the actions set out at the end of the previous section. Nevertheless, the work can evolve further to meet the updated requirements of Strategy to meet the needs of member States as well as the requirements relating to achieving the SDGs.

Enhancing the role of ITC as the UN platform for inland transport conventions.

13. It is proposed that this is done for railways by:

- Continuing the modernization of the AGC and related tools to increase its attractiveness and encourage further accession.
- Completion of current efforts to introduce new legal instruments (URL).
- Assessment of potential new legal instruments to further facilitate the growth and use of the railways and increase the sustainability of transport.

Enhancing the role of ITC as the UN platform for supporting new technologies and innovations in inland transport.

14. It is proposed that this is done for railways by:

- Continuing the work on innovation that that is currently being undertaken in the framework of the working party.
- The development of new tools to assess the environmental impact and efficiency of the railways.
- Assessing cybersecurity implications for the railways in line with the work that is currently being carried out by World Forum for Harmonization of vehicle regulations.

- The creation of a rail innovation observatory looking at technological developments in the railways.

Enhancing the role of ITC as the UN platform for regional, interregional and global inland transport policy dialogue.

15. It is proposed that this is done for railways by:

- Continued focus on current railway related issues within the scope of the annual workshop.
- Renewed focus on other policy areas related to railways such as railway reform, productivity, climate change, etc.
- (Co-)Organization of additional workshops, separated from the main SC.2 session on key issues of interest to member States.

Enhancing the role of ITC as the UN platform for promoting sustainable regional and interregional inland transport connectivity and mobility.

16. It is proposed that this is done for railways by:

- Continued work on reviewing east-west rail transport for passengers and freight with a focus on the growth of traffic along the Silk Road.
- Undertaking more targeted activities aimed at ensuring improved passenger accessibility to international railway hubs and connections to other modes of transport.
- Further promoting the railways as an optimal mobility solution.
- Developing tools aimed at promoting railway connectivity through the assessment of the reliability of rail.

In addition to this this, other activities as per the current terms of reference and agenda should continue as important to the achieving the goals of increasing the importance of the railways.

VI. Next steps for the Working Party

17. The Working Party may wish to consider the actions set out in this document to better align the work of SC.2 to the ITC strategy. Based on the decisions taken at the seventy-third session of the Working Party, the Secretariat will prepare an updated term of reference for the working party to be presented to member States at the seventy-fourth session of SC.2.
