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International Passenger Railway Hubs

Progress on the Work of the Group of Experts on International Passenger Railway Hubs

Note by the secretariat

I. Background

1. The Group of Experts on International Passenger Railway Hubs was established by the Working Party on Rail Transport at its seventy-fourth session following the conclusion of the international workshop on “The development of international passenger rail transport in the context of ITC resolution No. 264” which identified railway passenger stations as lacking harmonization and common facilities leading to them potentially being a barrier to the development of international passenger rail journeys.
2. The Group of Experts started its activities in 2021 with two meetings in that year, followed by two meetings in 2022. This document sets out a summary of the work done to date by the Group.

II. Main Areas of Work

3. The Group of Experts on International Passenger Railway Hubs has the following main tasks in its terms of reference:
 - Identify which stations on the European Agreement on Main International Railway Lines (AGC) network should be defined as an “International railway passenger hub” and its type as appropriate;
 - Identify the technical and service parameters necessary for the definition of an “International railway passenger hub or hubs”;
 - Identify what legal instrument or tool should be used to define and implement these “International railway passenger hubs” and draft the necessary legal provisions;
 - Analyse the legal framework governing international passenger transportation in order to identify restrictions hindering the development of international passenger transport by rail in East – West traffic and prepare recommendations for its improvement;

- Prepare a document (recommendations, joint action plan, ECE ITC resolution) on measures to support international rail carriers in the context of the crisis caused by the pandemic of the new coronavirus infection COVID-19; and
- Propose a way forward in the form of a report to the Working Party on Rail Transport for consideration.

4. One of the main tasks for the sessions to date has been on the identification of what an international railway passenger hub (henceforth Hub) should be and in particular the identification of which stations on the European Agreement on Main International Railway Lines (AGC) network should be defined in this way. As an important step, the Group has discussed a common definition of what such a Hub should be and has come up with the following definition:

“An International Railway Passenger Hub is a rail station that provides passengers connections to multiple international and national rail services, to other Hubs and to the services delivered by other modes. International railway passenger hubs can be “primary” or “secondary” as defined by member States and depending on the level of service offered.

The technical and service parameters that member States are to work towards providing in “primary” and “secondary” international railway passenger hubs are identified in annex X of...”

5. While the Group has now agreed this definition, it may be the case that as work continues in this area the definition may need to be further refined. For example, the definition refers to primary and secondary hubs. For the moment, experts have stated that this differentiation is not necessary, but this may change as the work progresses.

6. The Group has also started identifying a list of stations that should be defined as Hubs. The current list of stations is set out in document ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2022/8 and the Group will continue work on this going forward to produce a definitive list. The Group will also add to this list those intra and intermodal connections that exist at these Hubs to further facilitate the designation process.

7. In parallel to the definition of the stations the Group has also started identifying the technical and service parameters that are needed inside these Hubs. The current list of parameters is included in document ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2022/9 and it is envisaged that this list will be finalized at the next meeting of the group.

8. The Group has also discussed at length the possible options for a potential legal instrument tied to Hubs. After reviewing the advantages and disadvantages of the various options (as set out in document ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2022/10), experts agreed that the desired approach was the updating and amending of the European Agreement on Main International Railway Lines (AGC) to include the relevant Hubs and their characteristics. The Group has already initiated discussions on possible amendment proposals and the next meeting of the experts will seek to finalise these proposals.

9. A key task of the Group was to review the legislation on international passenger transportation. This work was carried out within the framework of the activities of Organisation for Co-operation between Railways (OSJD) and presented to the Group at its second session. Experts agreed that the document that had been prepared by OSJD, available now in three languages in document ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2021/7, met the requirements of this part of the terms of reference of the Group and as such no further work was needed on this.

10. As part of the work on the identification of measures to support international rail carriers in pandemics, the Group has exchanged a number of good practices relating to the response to COVID-19 in the rail sector. From this information exchange and building on the dedicated workshop held during the seventy-fifth session of the Working Party on Rail Transport a study has been prepared summarising the various measures. This study will be published shortly.

III. Next Steps

11. The Group of Experts will meet twice in 2023 to finalise the activities mentioned above and will then prepare a report of the outcomes to the seventy-seventh session of the Working Party on Rail Transport in November 2023. In its report to the Working Party, the Group may wish to highlight potential amendments to AGC to reflect discussions during the sessions. If so, a contracting party to AGC will then need to propose these amendments as only contracting parties can propose amendments to AGC.
