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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Inland Transport Committee

#### Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics

##### Thirty-sixth session

Geneva, 4–6 September 2023

Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda

##### Development of transport networks and/ or links:

##### Euro-Asian Transport Links

### **Progress report on operationalization efforts taking place in the framework of the Economic Commission for Europe/ Economic Cooperation Organization Coordination Committee for the Trans-Caspian and Almaty-Tehran-Istanbul Corridors**

#### Note by the Chair

## I. Background

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) secretariat jointly with the secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) organized, in conjunction with the thirty-fifth annual session of the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics (WP.5), in September 2022, in Geneva, a roundtable discussion to take stock of the operational rail capacity of the Trans-Caspian and Almaty- Tehran-Istanbul corridors. This work was undertaken further to decisions of the ECE Inland Transport Committee at its annual sessions in 2020,<sup>1</sup> 2021<sup>2</sup> and 2022<sup>3</sup> and by WP.5<sup>4</sup> at its annual session in 2021. On this occasion, participating railway companies and customs administrations from Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Türkiye, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan requested the establishment of a coordination committee that would gather periodically in the format of an informal Group of Friends of the WP.5 Chair co-facilitated by the ECE and ECO secretariats.

2. The requested governments specified that they required this Coordination Committee (CC) to provide an inter-governmental platform for the exchange of views and information on inter alia the following: (a) remaining technical interoperability issues; (b) unified time schedules and tariffs for both corridors; (c) marketing plans for the corridors to show-case their potential as economically viable inland transport routes thereby attracting higher interest levels from private sector operators and freight forwarders; and (d) digitalization efforts of

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<sup>1</sup> ECE/TRANS/294, para. 52

<sup>2</sup> ECE/TRANS/304, para. 59

<sup>3</sup> ECE/TRANS/316, para. 62

<sup>4</sup> ECE/TRANS/WP.5/72 (paras. 12–19); ECE/TRANS/WP.5/70 (paras. 11, 12 and 14); ECE/TRANS/WP.5/68 (paras. 19 and 20)



transport and customs documents. WP.5 requested the countries concerned and the secretariat to prepare an update report ahead of its annual session in September 2023. ITC at its annual session in February 2023 reiterated this request. The present document prepared by the WP.5 Chair with the support of the ECE secretariat serves this purpose.

## **II. Progress up-date report 2022–2023**

### **A. Deliberations at the first session of the Coordination Committee**

3. Following the request by the governments and under auspices of the Chair of WP.5, the ECE and ECO secretariats organized on 16 December 2022, in Geneva, in hybrid format, the first session of the Coordination Committee. It provided a stock-taking opportunity for private sector, freight forwarders and logistics companies operating on the Trans-Caspian and Almaty-Tehran-Istanbul corridors to share their views and perspectives on the way ahead in fully operationalizing both routes. The session was attended by representatives from ministries in charge of transport and railway undertakings as well as customs representatives from Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Türkiye, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Upon invitation by the WP.5 Chair, representatives of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Geneva-based Greater Caspian Region (GCR) Association, the International Federation of Freight Forwarders (FIATA) as well as multiple FIATA national associations and private sector operators HUPAC Intermodal and APM Terminals also attended.

4. The representatives of WTO informed the Coordination Committee that world merchandise trade volumes were expected to grow 2.7 per cent in 2022 before slowing to 1.7 per cent in 2023. They explained that trade volumes were being weighed down by several shocks, including the war in Ukraine, high energy prices, inflation, and monetary tightening. Based on estimates provided by Astana Times (September 2022) it was mentioned that the volume of shipments on the Trans-Caspian corridors had almost tripled in the first seven months of 2022 and was expected to reach 1.5 million tons by the end of 2022 which would mean a significant increase compared to 311,000 tons in 2021. It was noted that exports and imports were still affected by high trade costs and non-tariff measures including: quotas; import licensing systems; sanitary regulations; and other types of prohibitions. It was stressed that urgent investments were needed to improve the current transit potential of the corridors, inter alia through introducing harmonized import/export documentation; enhanced digitalization of border processes; improved customs interconnectivity and interoperability as well as more transparent information on transit requirements and the development of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) standards that would be applicable to goods in transit only when they present a risk. In conclusion, it was stressed that the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) which entered into force on 22 February 2017 and has been ratified by 156 WTO Members provides for such measures to be introduced.

5. The representative of GCR noted that while the primary cargo flow is westbound (Central Asia – Europe/Africa/Americas), the primary container flow is eastbound, resulting in a container imbalance. The representative stressed that because of this situation carriers are hesitant to ship their own containers to the region due to a lack of backhaul containerized cargo, resulting in:

- Containers accumulating idle or abandoned in the region;
- Lack of cost-efficient logistics options for non-bulk exporters selling Full Container Loads (FCL) and Less than Container Loads (LCL);
- Cost increases for shippers / consignors and consignees;
- Lack of outbound business for carriers.

6. The representative indicated that solutions were available but that collective efforts were required to leverage existing regional trading volumes inter alia through increased containerization, i.e. by converting bulk exports into secure containers (FCL/LCL); by securing backhaul cargo for carrier-owned containers; and by offering own containers for regional exporters.

7. The representative of the FIATA national association in Iran (Islamic Republic of) emphasized the need for improvement of port infrastructure on the Caspian Sea, the deployment of additional ferry services, the easing of customs formalities through the reduction of documents and the limitation of congestion and long waiting times at ports and land border crossings.

8. The representative of the FIATA national association from Kazakhstan summarized remaining bottlenecks on the Trans-Caspian and Almaty-Tehran-Istanbul as follows:

- Heavy reliance on multimodal transport which is more complex and involves higher risks due to the need to change transport modes, the use of various unimodal documents, the conclusion of different contracts of carriage etc.
- Complex and sometimes unpredictable pricing and delivery times, including the cost of ground delivery, transshipments, roll-on/roll-off ferry services, administrative compliance etc. The overall cost of transportation remains 2-3 times higher than on the Northern corridors.

9. The representative also noted that due to the increased interest in transport across the Caspian Sea and given the complexities involved, the need for freight forwarding services has increased as well.

10. In terms of next steps, the FIATA Kazakhstan representative suggested that in the framework of the Coordination Committee the following activities could be conducted:

- A series of studies to identify bottlenecks and develop specific recommendations covering legislation, infrastructure, rolling stock, procedures and documentation requirements.
- Work on broader accession to and implementation of the Convention on International Multimodal Transport (Geneva, 1980) including the improvement of national legislation.
- Facilitate the use of the FIATA Multimodal Bill of Lading and CIM/SMGS.
- Implementation of transport and border crossing documents` digitalization projects, both at national as well as at corridor-wide levels.

11. The representative of HUPAC Intermodal emphasized the importance for both corridors to develop a common strategic vision and to start putting corridor priorities before national priorities keeping in mind the interests of industry and operators. The representative also stressed the need to strengthen the reliability and capacity of the rail freight sector including through the development of a common network putting rail passenger and freight transportation on an equal footing.

12. The representative of the Port of Baku informed about an ongoing round of modernizations/ up-grades to the port infrastructure which in a first phase had already increased the total handling capacity of the port to 15 million tons of gross cargo and 100,000 TEU containers. The construction of a grain terminal with an annual capacity of 1 million tons was still underway as well as the construction of additional container handling facilities, the development of a truck park and extra intermodal and multimodal terminals. Upon completion of the project, the port`s total handling capacity will increase to up to 25 million tons, including 500,000 TEU containers.

13. The representative of APM Terminals Poti briefed participants on latest developments surrounding the Poti Sea Port. It was noted that the port currently handles containers, liquids, dry bulk cargo and passenger ferries and in doing so offers a multi-purpose facility with fifteen berths, a total quay length of 2,900 meters, more than twenty quay cranes and a 17 km rail track. Cargo volumes mostly originating from Central Asia predominantly consist of commodities handled in bulk, including fertilisers, sulphur, ammonium nitrate, metals, grains as well as containerisable goods which are primarily transported by rail or road in conventional wagons. The representative informed that since 2019 new container ship lines had been established with Chernomorsk (Ukraine) and Constanta (Romania) and that ferry traffic towards Varna (Bulgaria) had increased. As result, the total cargo transportation

volume transiting the territory of Georgia had increased to 44,3 million tons as per 2021 (an increase of 3,2 per cent compared to 2020).

14. The representative of Iranian Railways (RAI) informed about ongoing efforts to decrease rail freight transit time on the Almaty-Tehran-Istanbul corridor (through prioritization of transit trains as per an established timetable; reducing delays caused by loading or unloading of wagons and transshipment operations; providing modern equipment and infrastructure; as well as offering substantial discounts to customers with the aim to build a competitive advantage. The representative expressed support for the setting up of a common tariff for the whole corridor with the involvement of all en-route countries; the establishment of an electronic data exchange platform on the corridor and the use of a single consignment note on the corridor, i.e. the CIM/SMGS consignment note.

15. The representative of Türkiye, on behalf of TCDD Tasimacilik A.S, provided an overview of national rail freight transport operations, particularly on the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway line which forms an important link on the Trans-Caspian corridor. It was noted that the implementation of a simplified procedure for border crossings (involving full electronic integration with customs) and the usage of the CIM/SMGS consignment note make cross-border transactions more time and cost efficient.

16. The representative also noted other ongoing developments including: the commissioning of the Kars logistics centre at the border between Türkiye and Georgia; the deployment of two rail ferries servicing the Lake Van crossing in Türkiye; a seventeen percent increase in 2022 in rail freight volumes between Türkiye and Iran (Islamic Republic of) with the aim of reaching 1 million tons annually; as well as the resumption (in 2021) of the Istanbul-Tehran-Islamabad (ITI) cargo train under auspices of ECO.

17. The representative highlighted that although setting a single tariff for the entire middle corridor route is important, it may not be possible at this stage (at least not on an equal fee per kilometre basis) given the differences among countries involved, in terms of economic conjuncture, transfer and handling procedures, customs fees, additional charges and transport costs of individual railway undertakings. Rather than trying to follow a fixed timetable, emphasis should be put on reducing the overall transit time of the trains, thereby avoiding that costs would incur because of a failure to stick to a set timetable.

18. The ECE secretariat provided an overview of some of its transport facilitation legal instruments such as TIR/e-TIR, CMR/e-CMR as well as its infrastructure agreement AGTC of relevance in the context of operationalization of the corridors. ECE referred to the work on Unified Railway Law (URL) and the development of the Agreement on the Contract for International Carriage of Good by Rail between Europe and Asia as a first URL Convention, which, if adopted, would not only provide for a single consignment note for the whole carriage but more importantly would offer a single legal regime under which carriage can be made.

19. Considering the inputs offered by private sector stakeholders at this ad hoc first meeting of the Committee, participants requested the WP.5 Chair with the support of the ECE/ ECO secretariats to prepare a draft Terms of Reference and a 2023–2025 draft programme of work for both corridors for consideration and endorsement at the second session of the Coordination Committee.

## **B. Deliberations at the second session of the Coordination Committee**

20. Upon initiative of the WP.5 Chair, the second session of the Coordination Committee was held in Istanbul, Türkiye, on 6 and 7 June 2023, co-hosted by the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure of Türkiye and Turkish Railways Joint Stock Company (TCDD Tasimacilik A.S./ JSC). The session was chaired by the WP.5 Chair in conjunction with the WP.5 Vice Chair and gathered the Committee's officially appointed members, representatives of Ministries of transport and infrastructure and railway undertakings from Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan, Türkiye and Uzbekistan. Upon invitation of the WP.5 Chair, Mr. A. Assavbayev, Secretary General of Intergovernmental

Commission (IGC) TRACECA, participated in the session with a view to identify opportunities for cooperation and synergies in programmes of work.

21. The second session was instrumental in detailing the Committee's mandate and scope of action and served a two-fold purpose: (a) To prepare and endorse Terms of Reference of the Corridor Coordination Committee (see Annex I) and (b) To prepare and endorse a 2023–2025 programme of work for both corridors (see Annex II).

22. Following the endorsement of the Terms of Reference (ToR) and to gather government inputs for the 2023–2025 programme of work for both corridors, a tour-de-table was held involving all Committee Members focusing on latest developments and operationalization initiatives.

23. The committee members from Azerbaijan informed about a multi-agency Coordination Council that had been established under the auspices of the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport of Azerbaijan which aims at optimization of tariffs, simplification and improvement of transit procedures as well as enhancing cooperation and exchange of data among the authorities of countries of origin and destination.

24. The member also spoke about ongoing efforts to establish a single transit document on the Trans-Caspian corridor allowing for: (a) the electronic exchange of customs and other data between transit countries covering maritime, rail and road transport operations between the parties; and (b) the acceptance of pre-submitted transit declarations as a transit document for all en route countries. Through the establishment of an electronic queue system, freight vehicles entering and leaving the country can better predict and manage their waiting time at border crossings.

25. The representatives of Azerbaijan also presented recent digitalization efforts at the Port of Baku, including the creation of an electronic portal between the Azerbaijan Customs Committee and Azerbaijan Railways (ADY) as well as the automation of the weighing of trucks and wagons as part of the dry cargo handling process. It was also noted that a port management information system has been created which in a later stage will be integrated with similar type systems in other Caspian Sea ports such as the Aktau and Kuryk ports (in Kazakhstan) and the Turkmenbashi port (in Turkmenistan). It was stressed that these efforts have since the first quarter of 2022 created a sixty per cent reduction of non-operational time at the Port of Baku, a fifty per cent reduction in the average bridge and processing time of ferries and a fifty per cent reduction of round-trip time of rail freight transport movements between the ports of Baku and Poti/Batumi.

26. The committee members from Georgia informed about a “Road map for the simultaneous elimination of bottlenecks and the development of the Middle Corridor for 2022–2027” which was signed in Aktau, Kazakhstan in November 2022, by the Governments of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Türkiye. The road map consists of seven pillars of work on which the Governments agreed to focus:

- Development of commonly prioritized transport and logistics infrastructure.
- Operational optimization through the attraction of additional cargo flows.
- Implementation of a unified tariff policy.
- Development of a commonly agreed network of logistics centres.
- Sustainable development of multimodal transportation.
- Implementation of a unified digital transport corridor.
- Improvement of the transport regulatory and legal framework.

27. The representatives also introduced an ongoing rail infrastructure modernization project being implemented by Georgian Railways (GR) whereby the core railway network in the country will become entirely double-tracked. Overall travel time will be reduced by 40–50 minutes and rail traffic is expected to become much safer. The annual freight processing capacity of the line will rise from 27 to 48 million tonnes. It was also noted that GR is aiming to speed up the Trans-Caspian Corridor digitalization process, and that it has already started testing electronic data sharing with other railway undertakings on the corridor. At this stage,

information from the GR Freight Transportation system is fully synchronized with Georgian customs, and the cargo status is automatically updated. It is possible to submit to the customs authorities a digital SMGS document signed with an electronic signature. The GR Freight Transportation system is pre-filled with information from neighbouring railway undertakings to shorten the process of document processing at border crossings.

28. The representatives from Iran (Islamic Republic of) provided a comprehensive overview of the country's national railway infrastructure and rolling stock and presented a summary of its main railway border crossing points including those with Turkmenistan (Sarakhs and Inche-Borun terminals); Türkiye (Razi terminal); the Amirabad Port terminal (at the Caspian Sea) and the Rajaei Port terminal (at the Persian Gulf). The representatives then provided an overview of several agreements and protocols that have been concluded with neighbouring countries, between Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Türkiye regarding transport tariffs, and with China, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan regarding the further operationalization of the Almaty-Tehran-Istanbul corridor.

29. The representatives of Türkiye on behalf of TCDD Tasimacilik A.S., provided a comprehensive overview of the national railway infrastructure and rolling stock as well as main railway border crossing points. Reference was made to the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway line which provides uninterrupted rail transport between countries in Central Asia, China and Europe via the Marmaray subsea tunnel. It was noted that over time multiple container block trains from China to Europe have been conducted using this link. As of 2016, the consignment notes are transferred electronically to the customs administration. The CIM and CIM/SMGS consignment notes also serve as a "Transit Accompanying Document" regarding customs procedures in Türkiye. Since September 2021, it has been used for rail freight transport operations via the BTK Middle Corridor railway line. During the period 2018–2023 an interconnection has been established between Iranian Railways (RAI) and TCDD for the purpose of electronic rail freight data transfers between both administrations. Work is underway to improve the system and overcome remaining deficiencies.

30. The Committee members from Kazakhstan provided an update on ongoing and planned railway infrastructure construction projects. Reference was made to the construction of a new container terminal at the port of Aktau which will provide opportunities for reloading of cargo from a traditional rail freight wagon or truck into containerized transport units. The terminal will also offer container storage capacity and possibilities for weighing (Verified Gross Mass), repair and certification of containers. Reference was also made to the construction of a bypass railway line in Almaty which reduces the pressure on the existing Almaty junction by a 40 per cent and speeds up delivery time by up to 24 hours. The representatives also spoke on the need to provide a fair and fixed tariff policy on the corridors and referred to the regular conduct of a rail freight shuttle service on the territory of Kazakhstan following a fixed time schedule and tariff on the rail section Altynkol-Aktau port, departing from Altynkol station three times a week with an overall transport time of not more than 90 hours for a total distance of around 3,700 km. The construction of a third railway crossing on the border between Kazakhstan and China on the Bakthy-Ayagoz railway line was also announced.

31. The Committee Members from Uzbekistan informed that attracting higher levels of rail freight transit volumes is a key priority for the country. Reference was made to several recent large-scale infrastructure projects. In August 2016 for instance, a new electrified Angren-Pap railway line was constructed, with a length of 123 km. This new line runs through a mountain range with a difficult terrain at an altitude of 2,200 m above sea level and includes a 19 km long tunnel. Reference was also made to various digitalization initiatives in public service provision, electronic customs services as well as a newly established cargo owner service portal and an information system for automated recognition of registration numbers and weights of goods in wagons and containers.

32. On the second day of the Coordination Committee session a visit to the Marmaray subsea railway tunnel was conducted which enables uninterrupted rail (passenger and freight) transport between Asia and Europe and currently processes around 845 freight trains per year.

## C. Conclusions and next steps

33. Committee members endorsed the Terms of Reference of the Coordination Committee (see Annex I) and a comprehensive 2023–2025 programme of work (see Annex II) for the two corridors consisting of five thematic clusters:

(a) Evaluation of transport infrastructure and renewal requirements as well as identification of missing links;

(b) Digitalization, harmonization, and standardization of transport documents in use on the corridors;

(c) Evaluation of availability of reliable corridor-wide agreed timetables and tariffs and other issues hampering regular rail freight services on both corridors;

(d) Evaluation of the en-route border crossing efficiency on both corridors and identify, prioritize and implement border crossing facilitation initiatives; and

(e) Strengthening the economic viability and resilience of the corridors as well as their environmental performance.

34. As per its newly adopted Terms of Reference, the Coordination Committee appointed for a period of one year (from June 2023–June 2024) two Corridor Coordinators, Georgia for the Trans-Caspian route and Uzbekistan for the Almaty-Tehran-Istanbul route.

35. As an immediate first step, the two appointed Corridor Coordinators, agreed to prepare an analysis of the currently available routes/lines on the two corridors and identify segments of the railway lines or road in need of modernization (i.e., renewal, upgrade, or partial reconstruction). It was agreed that the following parameters should be included as minimum for railway lines: Number of tracks; Vehicle loading gauge (type of UIC leading gauge, e.g. UIC B or UIC C); Minimum distance between track centres (in m); Nominal minimum speed (in km/h); Authorized mass per axle (in t); Maximum gradient (in mm/m); Minimum useful siding length (in m). Such a study is to be discussed at the fourth session of the Coordination Committee scheduled for autumn/ winter 2023.

36. Committee members were introduced to the URL and were invited to participate in the Special Session of the Working Party on Rail Transport on Unified Railway Law in July to join discussions regarding the finalization of the Convention on the Contract for International Carriage of Goods by Rail as a first Convention of the System of Unified Railway Law.

37. Committee members were introduced to ITIO-GIS.org and received a username and password to explore its functionalities. All members committed to identify the Geographic Information System (GIS) focal point within their respective agency/ administration and share any available relevant data on their national networks of international significance.

38. Azerbaijan offered to host the third session of the Corridor Coordination Committee in Baku at the end of July 2023 with a focus on en route border crossing efficiency on both corridors. Committee members requested the WP.5 Chair and ECE/ ECO secretariats to work with the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport of Azerbaijan in preparing this third session.

39. Committee members agreed to create and maintain a joint table of activities which for coordination purposes they would update ahead of each Coordination Committee session regarding the work being undertaken in support of the corridors (reflected in document ECE/TRANS/WP.5/2023/2).

40. The Coordination Committee members thanked the WP.5 Chair and Vice-Chair, the ECE and ECO secretariats, as well as the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure of Türkiye and TCDD Tasimacilik A.S./JSC for the organization of the second session of the Coordination Committee.

## **Annex I**

### **Terms of reference of the Coordination Committee on the Trans-Caspian and Almaty-Tehran-Istanbul Corridors**

**Endorsed by the Committee Members from Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan on 5 June 2023 in Istanbul, Türkiye.**

#### **I. Name of the coordination committee**

1. Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)/ Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Coordination Committee on the Trans-Caspian and Almaty-Tehran-Istanbul Corridors, hereinafter referred to as “Coordination Committee or CC” gathering in the framework of an informal Group of Friends of the Chair of the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics (WP.5).

#### **II. Mandate**

2. The Coordination Committee strives to untap the full potential of the Trans-Caspian and Almaty-Tehran-Istanbul corridors enabling economically viable, environmentally sound, interoperable, and resilient multimodal inland transport corridors between Europe and Asia.

3. Main emphasis of the Coordination Committee will be on intercontinental rail freight and intermodal operations given their potential for long-distance. Road transport will be dealt with in the context of last mile connectivity from/ to major rail freight hubs and to connect countries directly on the Trans-Caspian and Almaty-Tehran-Istanbul rail freight corridors with adjacent countries that are not located along major routes by means of rail or road transport.

#### **III. Geographical scope**

4. The Coordination Committee will gather countries located on the Trans-Caspian corridor, including from East to West: Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Türkiye countries located on the Almaty-Tehran-Istanbul corridor: including from East to West, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Türkiye.

5. Other countries, in particular Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), heavily relying on access to the Trans-Caspian and Almaty-Tehran-Istanbul Corridors for their import, export, and access to international markets such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as well as countries located on the very start or end point of the respective corridors such as China in the East or Ukraine in the West as well as EU Black Sea littoral States (Bulgaria and Romania) are invited to join the efforts of the Coordination Committee at any time during the fulfilment of its mandate and biennial work plan.

6. In cases where a government meeting the criteria spelled out above, wishes to join the Coordination Committee a letter by the relevant authority to the WP.5 Chair suffices.

#### **IV. Membership**

7. Every government either listed under section III above or those meeting the criteria for membership, are invited to appoint, in writing, three representatives, as follows:

- One (1) senior level representative from the ministry in charge of transport and/ or infrastructure.



- One (1) senior level representative from the national railway undertaking in charge of rail freight / corridor management.<sup>1</sup>
  - One (1) senior level representative from the customs/ revenue administration in charge of cross-border transport and transit policies.
8. Transport authorities and rail undertakings make up the core membership of the Committee and will be invited to each of the sessions. These nominated representatives commit themselves to participate in and contribute to all meetings of the Coordination Committee.
9. The representative of the customs/ revenue administration will be invited on a case-by-case basis, depending on the agenda and thematic scope of each session.

## V. Dimensions of work and thematic scope

10. The Coordination Committee will undertake the following activities, further elaborated in the 2023-2025 programme of work:
- Evaluation and prioritization of transport infrastructure and renewal requirements as well as their investment needs, including for rolling stock and pool containers, as well as missing infrastructure links.
  - Digitalization, harmonization, and standardization of transport documents in use on the corridors.
  - Evaluation of the availability of reliable corridor-wide agreed timetables and tariffs and other issues hampering regular rail freight services on both corridors.
  - Evaluation of en-route border crossing efficiency on both corridors and identify, prioritize, and implement border crossing facilitation initiatives.
  - Strengthening the economic viability and resilience of the corridors as well as their environmental performance.

## VI. Methods of work

11. All meetings will be chaired by the WP.5 Chair who, in accordance with the WP.5 rules of procedure, is appointed by the Working Party for a period of two years. In case of unavailability of the WP.5 Chair a session can exceptionally be chaired by the WP.5 Vice Chair with the prior approval of the Coordination Committee. ECE and ECO secretariats provide secretariat services.
12. Two corridor coordinators (one for each corridor) are appointed from among the main members of the CC on a one-year rotational basis.
13. Frequency and sequence of sessions:
- Up to three, two-day sessions of the Coordination Committee will be held per calendar year/ as deemed appropriate by the members. For reasons of quality of interaction, sessions will preferably be held in-person and will either be hosted by CC member countries or back-to-back with existing inter-governmental meetings in Geneva/ Switzerland as deemed relevant by the CC and permitting budget.
  - Exceptionally, for reasons of urgency, intermediate/ ad hoc sessions could also be held in hybrid format with remote participation, upon proposal of the WP.5 Chair.
14. Decision-making: ECE guidance for teams of specialist (ECE/EX/2/Rev.1) applies, as appropriate for this informal group.

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<sup>1</sup> In countries where operations are separate from development also a senior level representative from the infrastructure manager could be appointed.

## VII. Committee member tasks

15. In accordance with the dimensions of work and thematic scope of the Committee, tasks of the Corridor Coordinators involve:

- Support the WP.5 Chair and the ECE and ECO secretariats in organizing the sessions, setting the agenda, developing supporting documentation, running the meetings, drafting the report, and conducting relevant follow-up activities.
- Support the identification of appropriate, corridor specific interoperability priorities and operational targets and assessing expected impacts of actions to be taken.
- Support identification and endeavour to address the capacity needs of the specific corridors (financial, human resources, infrastructure related etc.).
- Report annually to the WP.5 in cooperation with the WP.5 Chair/ Vice-Chair and the ECE and ECO secretariats.

16. In accordance with the dimensions of work and thematic scope of the Committee as outlined under provision 5, tasks of the Committee members involve, under the guidance of the Corridor Coordinators and the WP.5 Chair:

- Setting up of appropriate, corridor specific interoperability priorities and operational targets.
- Mapping the interests of different stakeholders on a corridor (shippers, transporters, customs authorities, road authorities, security services, health authorities etc.) to ensure seamless transport from origin to destination and make suggestions to the Committee.
- Development of a comprehensive corridor work plan for the implementation of priorities and targets (including Key Performance Indicators, envisaged cargo volumes, pooling possibilities of rolling stock, containers etc.).
- Monitoring implementation of the work plan; as and when necessary, highlighting difficulties and looking for appropriate remedies.
- Formulating recommendations in areas such as transport development along corridors or access to financing / funding sources including from multilateral development banks.
- Advocating for regulatory and legislative reforms and piloting reforms in border crossing facilitation and logistics.
- Marketing of the corridor, advocating for and promoting corridor use in line with the operational targets.

17. Respecting that the core members of the Coordination Committee are government stakeholders from countries on both corridors, additional stakeholders, including relevant international organizations and private sector operators are welcome to participate/ contribute only to specific agenda items upon prior invitation by the WP.5 Chair and the respective corridor coordinators.

## VIII. Resources

18. In its inception phase, the setting up, operation and servicing of the Coordination Committee, as well as travel costs for participants (DSA and flight tickets) enabling their participation in the Committee sessions, and interpretation services (English and Russian), are covered until the end of 2025 through ECE XB resources provided by the Netherlands.

19. Starting from 2026 and given the desire of the involved countries to continue collaboration, the CC activities should be covered through funding provided by the interested governments following the good practice of TEM/TER projects.

## Annex II

# Coordination Committee programme of work for 2023–2025

**Endorsed by the Committee Members from Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan on 6 June 2023 in Istanbul, Turkiye**

## I. Introduction

1. The present document defines the 2023-2025 programme of work for the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)/ Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Coordination Committee on the Trans-Caspian and Almaty-Tehran-Istanbul Corridors established in the framework of an informal Group of Friends of the Chair of the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics (WP.5) at its thirty-fifth annual session in September 2022, hereinafter referred to as Coordination Committee (or CC).

2. It defines five clusters of work and lists specific activities and expected accomplishments within the proposed clusters to constitute the 2023–2025 programme of work and evaluation framework. Wherever possible and of use, the clusters of work are linked to international legal instruments under the purview of ITC. This is done when the specific activities support the implementation of the provisions of the legal instruments.

## II. 2023–2025 clusters of work and expected accomplishments

3. The 2023-2025 Corridor Committee programme of work sets forth activities for implementation. The activities are listed together with expected accomplishments which are defined to help the Coordination Committee evaluate its achievements over time. Wherever appropriate and deemed useful, links are established between specific planned activities and the implementation of relevant legal instruments under ITC purview.

### A. Evaluation of transport infrastructure and renewal requirements as well as identification of missing links

<i>Activities:</i>	<i>Expected accomplishments</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building on the available AGTC, AGC and AGR infrastructure agreements, CC undertakes a comprehensive, corridor wide mapping exercise of missing infrastructure links and all the existing technical parameters for seamless transport on the Trans-Caspian and Almaty-Tehran-Istanbul routes, covering rail, road, and inter-modal transport assets. In particular:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CC analyses the currently available networks and identifies segments of the railway lines or road in need of modernization (i.e., renewal, upgrade, or partial reconstruction)</li> <li>• CC prioritizes a list of infrastructure construction, or upgrade projects and</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A technical study specifying all the technical parameters on the corridors is prepared</li> <li>• A detailed mapping exercises identifying missing links or segments of the network in need of modernization, renewal or upgrading is conducted</li> <li>• A list of priority transport infrastructure projects for new construction, renewal or upgrading is compiled and commonly endorsed</li> <li>• The matching of projects with national funding programmes is performed</li> <li>• 1-2 funding proposals are developed in detail to apply for additional funding with MDBs.</li> </ul>

<i>Activities:</i>	<i>Expected accomplishments</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CC matches the projects with the national funding programmes for the development of infrastructure</li> <li>• CC develops funding proposals to receiving additional financing for the projects and includes them in the International Transport Infrastructure Observatory (ITIO)</li> <li>• CC reaches out to Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs), Regional Cooperation Organizations (RCOs) and other relevant stakeholders to assist in funding assurance</li> </ul>	

## **B. Digitalization, harmonization, and standardization of transport documents in use on the corridors**

<i>Activities:</i>	<i>Expected accomplishments</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CC reviews the use of different types of multi- or uni- modal transport documents and digital platforms on the Trans-Caspian and Almaty-Tehran-Istanbul Corridors and matches them against the requirements by enforcement bodies in all countries along the corridors, in particular customs or other inspection authorities.</li> <li>• CC produces recommendations on digitalization solutions and use of technical standards and norms on the corridors taking into consideration among others the work undertaken by UIC in this field where appropriate</li> <li>• CC explores the use of eTIR as an inter-modal customs transit document on the corridors.</li> <li>• CC explores the use of eCMR</li> <li>• CC implements Unified Railway Law (subject to adoption of URL and its entry into force)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A review is completed, and document are matched against individual country requirements.</li> <li>• Recommendations on digitalization solutions/ electronic standards and norms are formulated and submitted for consideration of national authorities</li> <li>• Pilots are started to test and confirm opportunities for broader deployment of eTIR/ eCMR/ and other digital transport efforts on specific segments of the corridors.</li> </ul>

## **C. Evaluate the availability of reliable corridor-wide agreed timetables and tariffs and other issues hampering regular rail freight services on both corridors**

<i>Activities:</i>	<i>Expected accomplishments</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CC prepares an analysis on existing timetables and tariffs and makes recommendations for tariff and timetable harmonization</li> <li>• CC explores the possibilities to establish a unified/ consolidated customer service centre,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis on existing timetables and tariffs is prepared and a proposal for a more unified/ better coordinated time schedule and tariffication system on both corridors is formulated</li> </ul>

<i>Activities:</i>	<i>Expected accomplishments</i>
offering a “Single Window” customer access for private sector operators interested in the available service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proposal (including a cost plan) is prepared for the establishment of a neutral corridor wide customer service centre</li> </ul>

#### **D. Evaluate the en-route border crossing efficiency on both corridors and identify, prioritize and implement border crossing facilitation initiatives**

<i>Activities:</i>	<i>Expected accomplishments</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on the provisions of the Harmonization Convention and its Annexes and Appendixes, CC assesses the main border crossing points performance in terms of staff resources/ infrastructure/ processing capacity and coordination among control agencies nationally as well as bilaterally taking into account studies and recommendations provided by other organizations (e.g. TRACECA). Identify those border crossing points that have room for improvement and based on available ECE legal instruments and other relevant tools and standards identify solutions. In particular: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CC Verifies the extent to which provisions of Annex 9 of the Harmonization Convention on Facilitation of border crossing procedures for international rail freight are observed at rail</li> <li>Based on Appendixes 1 and 2 to Annex 8 of the Harmonization Convention, CC evaluates the use of the proposed Technical Inspection Certificate and the International Vehicle Weight Certificate (IVWC) for road vehicles travelling on the corridors</li> <li>In accordance with the “Convention of Customs Treatment of Pools Containers Used in International Transport”, CC verifies the extent the extent to which a Container Pool agreement is in place on the corridors and if so whether there is scope to align it with the former</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluation report is prepared on the current status and degree of compliance of main border crossing points on the corridors with the provisions of the Harmonization Convention, TIR Convention and other relevant ECE border crossing facilitation instruments.</li> <li>Proposals are formulated to align the practices at these border crossings with internationally recommended standards and provisions in these instruments.</li> </ul>

## **E. Strengthening the economic viability and resilience of the corridors as well as their environmental performance**

<i>Activities:</i>	<i>Expected accomplishments</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on relevant international contingency management (ICM) guidance materials prepared in the framework of WP.5 for road, rail and inland waterways transport, CC develops an ICM concept pilots for one or both corridors. In particular:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) CC assesses in the ICM external contingencies or emergencies likely to occur (accidents, natural disasters, pandemics etc.)</li> <li>(b) CC proposes response plans and emergency protocols to be activated during contingency situations likely to occur; and submits them for approval to relevant national authorities in charge of management of emergency situations.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• CC members inform each other on aspects related to environmental performance of corridors as appropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An ICM is developed for one or both of the corridors or segments thereof, and submitted for approval by relevant national authorities</li> <li>• Information on environmental performance of the corridors is exchanged among CC members</li> </ul>