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Inland Transport Committee

Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics

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Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda
Development of transport networks and links:
Euro-Asian transport links

Establishment within the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics of a coordination committee on Euro-Asian Transport Links Route No. 1*

Transmitted by the Government of the Russian Federation

I. Background

1. At the session of the Working Party on Transport Trends and Transport Economics of the Inland Transport Committee of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) (4–6 September 2023), the Russian Federation made a proposal to establish a coordination committee for the Euro-Asian Transport Links (EATL) railway route No.1, similar to the already functioning committees for the Trans-Caspian and Almaty-Tehran-Istanbul corridors (report of the session, paragraph 33). The proposal was supported by the Working Party and recorded in the report, with information on progress to be presented at the thirty-seventh session of the Working Party in September 2024. As indicated in paragraph 48 of the list of decisions of the eighty-sixth session of the Inland Transport Committee (20–23 February 2024), the proposal of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus on the establishment of the EATL Route No. 1 coordination committee was approved.

2. Significant experience has been accumulated to date in the functioning of Eurasian transport linkages providing interregional transport links. Other international transport corridors have been set up and are functioning; they include the Pan-European and the Euro-Asian transport corridors, the railway corridors of the Organization for Cooperation between Railways (OSJD) and the networks of European and Asian highways established by the regional commissions of the United Nations.

3. The crisis that was initially caused by the pandemic and has extended into the post-pandemic period has become a huge challenge for certain modes of transport and opened a wide window of opportunity for others, especially rail transport, which is environmentally and epidemiologically sustainable.

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4. With fundamental structural shifts in the world economy that have caused a sharp reversal of freight flows to the east and the south, the maintenance of existing logistics links and the creation of new ones are key to interregional connectivity and the competitiveness of countries' economies.

5. In the current situation, a high level of sustainability must be ensured in the Eurasian transportation system, as well as reliable alternative routes.

6. The main way of ensuring the sustainability of transcontinental transportation is through the development of international transport corridors (ITCs).

7. This document presents the most important ITC for the Eurasia region: EATL Route No. 1 (Trans-Siberian Railway and its branch lines), which forms a link to the markets of the Asia-Pacific countries, primarily China, and other key ITCs in the Eurasian area.

8. In view of this, issues related to the development of EATL Route No. 1 (Railway Transport Corridor No. 1 in the OSJD system) with regard to the Trans-Siberian Railway and its branch lines, the volumes of goods transported to the east through the seaports of the Far East, and railway crossings at the borders with Mongolia and China are of special significance.

9. The mandate of the future EATL Route No. 1 coordination committee should be based on the existing tools of specialized international organizations such as the ECE Inland Transport Committee, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and OSJD:

- The European Agreement on Main International Railway Lines (AGC) is the legal and technical basis for the development of a harmonized and efficient international railway network in the ECE region. AGC defines railway lines of international importance (E-railway network) and their technical characteristics for the further development of railway infrastructure. It also defines infrastructure parameters for two categories of lines: those that already exist and those that will be built. The latter are divided into lines for passenger and goods traffic and lines for passenger traffic only.

10. Railway sections of ITCs in the territories of the countries belonging to EATL Route No. 1 must comply with the AGC standards and specifications.

- The second, and equally important, agreement in terms of the implementation of ITCs is the European Agreement on Important International Combined Transport Lines and Related Installations (AGTC). AGTC is a plan for the development of a coherent and efficient international network of combined transport and related installations and their technical and operational characteristics. Under the Agreement, a network is formed of international combined transport lines, including railway lines (almost identical to those of AGC), terminal and logistics centres, border crossing points, stations for the exchange of wagon groups, and rail-ferry links/ports.

11. In the ECE route system, EATL Route No. 1 received the official support of the Ministers of Transport at the Second International Euro-Asian Transport Conference on 12 and 13 September 2000 in St. Petersburg and was recorded in the final document – the Declaration.

- The ESCAP countries' regional transport connectivity network is formalized in three intergovernmental agreements: on the Asian Highway Network, on the Trans-Asian Railway Network and on Dry Ports.

12. The Trans-Asian Railway Network links up over 112,000 km of railways in 21 countries (including the Trans-Siberian Railway – the northern leg of the network – and the North-South ITC). The Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports includes a list of logistics centres operating in 17 countries along the Asian Highway Network and the Trans-Asian Railway Network (including the Russian Federation, China, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Turkey and Kazakhstan), the range of services they provide, their throughput capacity, etc.

13. The Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports aims to develop dry ports of international importance as one of the means of creating an international integrated intermodal transport and logistics system in Asia and between Asia and neighbouring regions.

14. The implementation and skilful use of the above Agreements will make it possible to carry out unimpeded transcontinental transportation across the entire Eurasian area.

- The OSJD agreements, treaties and memorandums are the most important tools for the organization and implementation of the unimpeded transportation of goods and passengers throughout the Eurasian area. The definition of ITCs in the OSJD framework is recognized by all international organizations (in the OSJD framework, an international transport corridor consists of all the mainline transport linkages with, as a rule, the corresponding arrangement of different modes of transport providing transportation of passengers and goods on the routes connecting different countries and consequently of international importance. A railway corridor refers directly to railway lines with high levels of technical equipment designed to allow significant goods and passenger traffic to transit in the directions of highest demand).

15. All the OSJD instruments should be used to coordinate the actions of EATL Route No. 1 stakeholders: the Agreement on International Railway Freight Communications (SMGS) (the normative legal base regulating the transportation of goods and passengers) and its six annexes, the Agreement on International Passenger Traffic by Rail (SMPS), economic agreements, road maps to facilitate border crossing, standard transportation documents in digital format, the mechanism for mutual settlements between railway companies, the mechanism for the coordination of volumes at border crossing points, memorandums laying out the technical requirements for infrastructure and rolling stock, the memorandums, comprehensive plans and technical and operational certificates for each corridor).

16. The call by the Ministry of Transport of the Russian Federation and the Russian Railways Company[1] to the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics is directly related to the ECE Corridor Coordination Management Mechanism. The ECE secretariat is currently piloting implementation of the Mechanism on EATL Route No. 3.

17. The Corridor Coordination Management Mechanism is used to help identify specific problems within the corridor, develop plans to address them and priorities for corridor-wide coordination and interoperability, and to effectively and systematically monitor the implementation of agreed plans.

18. The interoperability priorities for EATL Route No. 1 and its branch lines will be decided on with the support of the coordinator chosen by the ECE secretariat and the representatives of Governments, including some at the level of ministries of transport/economy/customs, of railway companies and of port administrations of each of the countries along the corridor.

19. In addition to using the existing OSJD and ESCAP instruments, the EATL Route No. 1 coordination committee should apply the Corridor Performance Review Mechanism, which consists in a systematic study and objective analysis of the performance of the States concerned in bringing the corridors into operation (vertical actions) and the degree of implementation of horizontal (intercountry) priorities for corridor interoperability (assessment of transport infrastructure requirements, reconstruction and modernization needs and the identification of missing links; assessment of the existence of reliable train schedules and agreed tariffs within the corridor, analysis of other issues impeding the provision of regular rail freight transport, identification of priorities and implementation of border crossing facilitation initiatives).

II. EATL Route No. 1: characteristics

20. In the OSJD system of railway corridors, EATL Route No. 1 partially coincides with OSJD corridor No. 1 and corresponds with the ESCAP East-West corridor, as well as the Trans-Siberian Euro-Asian corridor (in accordance with the resolution adopted by the Second

[1] Russian Railways Open Joint Stock Company.

Euro-Asian Conference on Transport), the main arteries of which are the Trans-Siberian and Baikal-Amur railways.

21. The Trans-Siberian Railway saw the first container services for freight transport between the countries of the Asia-Pacific Region, the Russian Federation and Europe, which were piloted there and are being actively developed, using all the various instruments for the simplification of international transportation and harmonization of border crossing procedures.

22. EATL Route No. 1 is the main railway route within the framework of trade and economic relations between East Asia and Europe. The East-West ITC includes four subsidiary routes (branch lines): the Eastern (via Zabaikalsk and Grodekovo stations), Central (involving Mongolia, Naushki station) and Western (involving Kazakhstan, Lokot station) routes, and a route through the ports of the Russian Far East (Vostochny, Vladivostok).

23. Main lines:

1. Berlin/Sassnitz/Dresden – Warsaw – Brest – Minsk – Moscow – Nizhny Novgorod – Kotelnich – Perm – Yekaterinburg – Omsk – Novosibirsk – Krasnoyarsk – Irkutsk – Ulan-Ude – Karymskaya – Khabarovsk – Vladivostok/Vostochny.

2. Berlin/Sassnitz/Dresden – Warsaw – Brest – Minsk – Moscow – Nizhny Novgorod – Kotelnich – Perm – Yekaterinburg – Omsk – Novosibirsk – Barnaul – Lokot – border with Kazakhstan.

3. Berlin/Sassnitz/Dresden – Warsaw – Brest – Minsk – Moscow – Nizhny Novgorod – Kotelnich – Perm – Yekaterinburg – Omsk – Novosibirsk – Krasnoyarsk – Irkutsk – Ulan-Ude – Naushki – border with Mongolia.

4. Berlin/Sassnitz/Dresden – Warsaw – Brest – Minsk – Moscow – Nizhny Novgorod – Kotelnich – Perm – Yekaterinburg – Omsk – Novosibirsk – Krasnoyarsk – Irkutsk – Ulan-Ude – Karymskaya – Zabaikalsk – border with China.

5. Kaliningrad – Kaunas – Vilnius – Minsk and onwards on the Trans-Siberian Railway.

6. Klaipeda – Kaunas – Vilnius – Minsk and onwards on the Trans-Siberian Railway.

7. Finland – Buslovskaya – St. Petersburg – Moscow and onwards on the Trans-Siberian Railway.

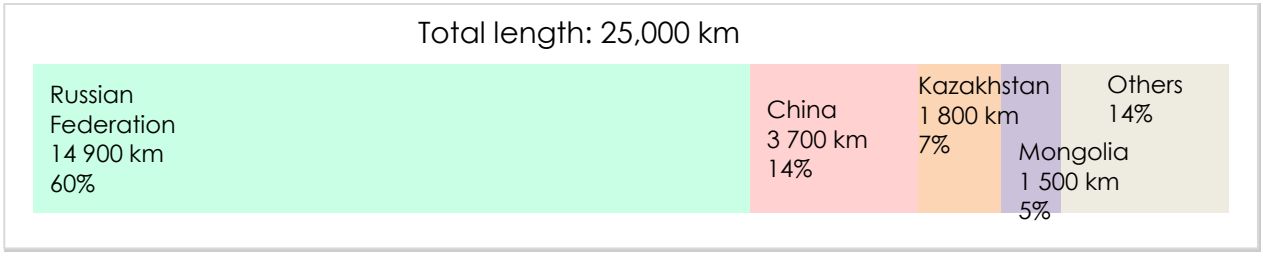
8. Ust-Luga – St. Petersburg – Moscow and onwards on the Trans-Siberian Railway.

24. EATL Route No. 1 passes through the territories of Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Belarus, Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, China and Mongolia. At over 25,000 km, it is the longest corridor, one of the key Euro-Asian land transport corridors and is recognized by all international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, notably OSJD and ESCAP.

25. The main line of EATL Route No.1 is 11,500 km long: Berlin/Sassnitz/Dresden – Warsaw – Brest – Minsk – Moscow – Nizhny Novgorod – Kotelnich – Perm – Yekaterinburg – Omsk – Novosibirsk – Krasnoyarsk – Irkutsk – Ulan-Ude – Karymskaya – Khabarovsk – Vladivostok/Vostochny.

26. The main part of the corridor passes through the territory of the Russian Federation – the Trans-Siberian Railway – (60%) and China (14%). 63% of the segments on the corridor are electrified and 66% have two or more tracks.

Figure I
Structure of EATL Route No.1, by participating country

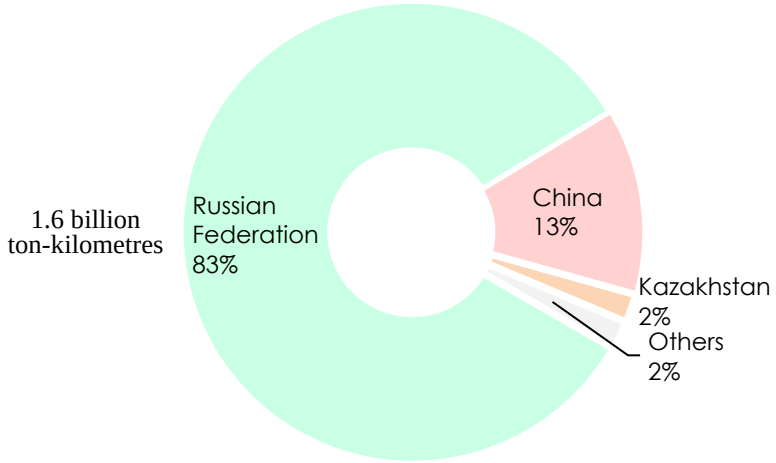


27. Branches off the main line of EATL Route No. 1 provide access to the seaports of Latvia, the Russian ports in Kaliningrad Oblast, the Russian seaports of Bolshoi St. Petersburg and Ust-Luga and the seaports of Estonia; and they connect the main line of the corridor with the railway networks of: Kazakhstan, through Lokot station; China, through Zabaikalsk station; and Mongolia, through Naushki station.

III. Analysis of foreign trade transported on EATL Route No. 1

28. In 2022, a total of 1.6 billion ton-kilometres was transported along EATL Route No. 1, in the following proportions, by member country: 1.6 billion ton-kilometres, of which 83.1% in the Russian Federation; 12.1% in China; 2% in Kazakhstan; 1.3% in Mongolia; and 1.5% in others.

Figure II
Freight transport along EATL Route No.1 by participating country



29. The carrying capacity of the Baikal-Amur and Trans-Siberian railways stood at a record 158 million tons at the end of 2022 and will increase to 180 million tons by the end of 2024. The national Comprehensive Plan for the Modernization and Expansion of Mainline Infrastructure for the period up to 2024 provides for a four-fold increase in transit container traffic and a reduction in the transportation time from the Far East to the western border of the Russian Federation to no more than 7 days.

Analysis of foreign trade transported on EATL Route No. 1 in 2018–2023

30. In 2022, more international freight was transported on Russian railways to the East than to the West.

31. One in every three tons of freight transported on the Russian railway network is international traffic.

32. The volume of freight transported through international railway crossing points and ports of the Russian Federation along the corridor has increased over the past five years to 172.6 million tons (estimated, total exports, imports and transit), which is an increase of 22% over the figure for 2018, and an increase of 4.1% on average per year over the period 2018–2023.

33. The analysis of the volume of freight transported on EATL Route No. 1 is based on: volume of freight transported internationally (export, import, transit) on Russian railways through Russian ports in the Far East (Nakhodka, Vostochny and Vladivostok, including all freight terminals), and through railway crossing points on the Far East, Transbaikal and East Siberian railways on the border with China and Mongolia.

Table 1
Trends in foreign freight trade transported on EATL Route No. 1 during the period 2018-2023, in million tons

Crossing point	*2018*	*2019*	*2020*	*2021*	*2022*	*2023*
Far East ports – for reference	104.9	111.5	121.1	125.1	127.7	128.0
Nakhodka and Vostochny	60.5	63.3	68.5	68.5	66.8	69.5
Vladivostok	10.6	11.5	11.9	13.1	14.3	13.6
Zabaikalsk	17.0	17.9	17.9	17.2	16.7	22.1
Naushki (general) – for reference	6.0	6.6	7.1	6.8	5.8	8.2
Naushki (Chinese Railways)	3.4	3.9	4.4	4.1	3.2	5.2
Naushki (Ulan Bator Railways)	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.6	3.0

34. The following border crossing points accounted for the largest increase in 2023 compared to 2022: Zabaikalsk: +32% (5.1 million tons); and Naushki: +41% (2.2 million tons).

35. The cumulative volume of container freight traffic in 2023 totalled 3.7 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEU), representing an increase of 12% over the 2022 figure and a five-year average annual growth rate of +25%.

36. Containerization rate of 23%: in exports: 12%; in imports: 80%; in transit: 99%.

Table 2
Structure of traffic on EATL Route No. 1 (Russian network) by type, %

Type	*2018*	*2019*	*2020*	*2021*	*2022*	*2023*
Export	92.2%	91.2%	89.8%	86.9%	84.5%	84.6%
Import	4.7%	5.4%	5.6%	7.0%	10.4%	11.4%
transit (east)	1.5 %	1.6%	2.0%	2.5%	2.6%	2.2%
transit (west)	1.6%	1.8%	2.6%	3.6%	2.5%	1.8%

IV. Bottlenecks

Problems arising at international rail border crossing points and along the entire length of EATL Route No. 1

37. Problems in international rail transport can be divided into physical and non-physical. International experience shows that obstacles occur in the operation of transport corridors both at border crossings and along the route. There are technical, technological, administrative, economic, financial and legal factors that directly affect the control of freight transportation on ITCs.

38. As indicated above, EATL Route No. 1 is more than 25,000 km in length and passes through the territories of Germany, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Belarus, the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, China and Mongolia. The difficulties and problems that arise in the transportation of goods by rail from China to Europe (physical and non-physical barriers) along the Route can be categorized as follows:

(a) Technical:

- Infrastructure constraints at border stations
- Throughput and carriage capacity of the railways
- Insufficient terminal and logistics centres – "dry ports" – along railway routes
- Speed
- Different wagon load capacities and axle loads, lack of fully functioning heavy wagons for carriage of international freight traffic

(b) Technological:

- Different track gauges and, as a consequence, the need to trans-ship freight and/or change wagon bogies
- Freezing of goods and, as a consequence, difficulties in unloading at the receiving end
- Requirements for container transportation: uncoupling of container trains en route, different composition of container trains, formation of container trains from wagons to the same destination station
- Imperfect border control technologies and procedures
- Lack of proper interaction and coordination among corridor member countries
- Differences and limitations in the operation of border stations
- Lack of technology for the transfer of tanks onto bogies of a different gauge
- Different lengths of receiving and dispatching tracks and, as a consequence, the transfer of incomplete trains, their assembly up to the set length (including issues related to the lack of synchronization in the technological process of transferring container trains)
- Difficulties in transmitting complete information to the customs authorities for the preliminary notice of goods arriving on the territory of the Russian Federation

(c) Inadequate level of digitalization:

- Incomplete electronic consignment notes: – failure to use electronic digital signatures
- Incomplete implementation of paperless technology for freight and empty car transportation

(d) Legal issues:

- Lack of a unified legal system in contrast to competing modes of transport (road, sea): the existence of two legal systems (SMGS and the International Convention concerning the Carriage of Goods by Rail (CIM)) for the transportation of goods in the Eurasian area
- Absence of necessary conditions for multimodal transportation (no multimodal bill of lading, incl. electronic, valid for all participants in the process)
- Impossibility of applying the provisions of the OSJD Agreement on International Transportation of Containers by Container Trains along the whole route of the East-West ITC

(e) Economic issues:

- High cost of transportation compared to the maritime route due to limited competition (compared to high levels of competition among shipping companies), emerging difficulties in negotiating through tariff rates, insufficient level of development of transport and logistics services provided, poor development of intermodal transportation, mandatory transit escort and security en route for a number of goods
- Insufficient level of stakeholder awareness of transport and logistics solutions in freight transit on China-Europe-China routes
- Various problems in the area of freight security and safety

39. Based on its experience of existing corridor management coordination mechanisms (in particular, the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route), the Russian Federation has drawn up proposals for the goals, objectives, terms of reference and composition of the EATL Route No. 1 coordination committee.

V. Proposals for the goals, objectives, terms of reference and composition of the EATL Route No.1 coordination committee

A. Basis for the establishment of the coordination committee

- Successful experience with the coordination committee for the management of Euro-Asian railway route No. 3
- Report of the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics on its thirty-sixth session, paragraph 33
- List of decisions of the Inland Transport Committee at its eighty-sixth session, paragraph 48

B. Goal of the coordination committee

- Development and improvement of international transportation between Europe and Asia along EATL Route No. 1, including combined transportation

C. Main objective

- To coordinate the activities of all participants along EATL Route No. 1

D. Terms of reference of the coordination committee

- Monitor the performance of the corridor and its branch lines
- Identify existing and assess potential bottlenecks
- Draft proposals for the development of the corridor and improvement of its performance
- Monitor tariff conditions for transportation along the corridor
- Draft proposals for the digitalization of procedures and the introduction of electronic data exchange
- Draft proposals to improve the environmental friendliness of the transportation corridor

E. Composition of the coordination committee

- ITC secretariat

- Chair of the Working Party on Rail Transport (SC.2)
- Chair of the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics (WP.5)
- Chair of the Working Party on Intermodal Transport and Logistics (WP.24)
- ECE member States (ministers responsible for rail transport, railway companies of the countries participating in the route)
- Railway companies of the countries through whose territory EATL Route No. 1 passes
- Representatives of transport and logistics companies of the countries through whose territory EATL Route No. 1 passes
- Joint meetings may be held between the EATL Route No. 1 coordination committee and the Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport (WP.30)

F. Secretariat of the coordination committee

40. The ECE Sustainable Transport Division serves as the secretariat.