Regional Conference on Transport Research and Education

Bangkok, 22-23 September 2021

SUMMARY OF CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

1. The Regional Conference on Transport Research and Education was organized by the Transport Division of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) in cooperation with the Russian University on Transport (RUT) and held virtually on 22-23 September 2021.

2. The Conference was attended by the representatives of the following ESCAP member States: Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Japan, Kazakhstan, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Russian Federation, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, Uzbekistan and Vietnam. The Meeting was also attended by representatives of international organizations, research institutes, academia, as well as by invited resource persons. The list of participants will be circulated to all registered participants in Annex. The programme of the Meeting and all related materials and presentations are available on the meeting website: https://www.unescap.org/events/2021/regional-conference-transport-research-and-education.

3. The Conference was opened with a keynote speech by the first vice-Rector of the Russian University of Transport, who underscored that the Conference was timely and topical against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and called for strengthening cooperation among transport research, education and training institutes and government agencies for sustainable transport development in line with the 2030 agenda.
4. The participants welcomed the presentations made and exchanged information and experiences on the research gaps for education and training on sustainable transport in the region. Specifically, the Conference discussed the need to effectively connect the evidence base with transport policy and, in that connection, noted good practice examples such as that of the Transport Evidence Base Strategy of New Zealand, as well as other initiatives for effectively training a qualified human resource base for the transport industry in the region. The conference also noted initiatives to incentivize entry of young professionals in the transport field.

5. The participants also discussed the topic of the environmental performance of transport and climate change. In this context, the Conference noted that transport is a contributor to climate change and as a sector it can greatly contribute to climate action if the right focus is given to the emission reduction potential of the sector through energy efficiency, diversification of fuel consumption and prospects for modal shift. Experts also shared challenges and experiences regarding assessing climate risks and vulnerabilities for transport networks, especially the case of railway transport.

6. Technology and innovation as a driver for sustainable transport was extensively covered by experts and participants. In particular, participants noted the benefits of optimizing communication networks for multimodal transport, the transition to intelligent and paperless documents’ flow for border crossing facilitation in transport, and the overall digital transformation of the sector. In this connection, big data analytics, machine learning, cloud computing and blockchain technologies, among others, were flagged as important educational and training directions for the sector.

7. Touching on the important topic of road traffic safety, participants noted that robust data on road crash fatalities and serious injuries are missing in many countries in Asia and the Pacific. Compounding the problem, individual data sources from health agencies, police and insurance companies often provide an incomplete view of the actual road safety situation due to differences in definitions, reporting, and coding practices. In addition, not all countries have vital registration systems which provide records of officially registered deaths. The recently established Asia-Pacific Road Safety Observatory was established in 2019 to address this, among other critical road safety issues. The Conference, thus, commented on this
initiative as an important technology platform for understanding and promoting effective policy action on road safety, based on up-to-date and accurate data.

8. The Conference also discussed the topic of resilience and sustainability against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, information was provided on the diverse impact of COVID-19 on cross border movements of cargo and passengers and the lessons learned with regard to health and safety of transport workers while preserving connectivity in the times of crisis and building back better through digitalization and decarbonization measures. In this connection, the Conference was also apprised of the COVID-19 Recovery guidelines for resilient and sustainable international road freight transport connectivity in the countries of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) developed jointly by the International Transport Forum and the ESCAP secretariat.

9. On the topic of inclusive transport, particular attention was given to the issues of gender equality and the mobility of persons with disabilities. With reference to gender equality, the Conference noted that only 17% of the transport workforce is female on average in 46 countries and that significant barriers exist also for women as users of transport. During discussions, the particular vulnerability of women’s’ mobility due to climate change impacts was also highlighted. The Conference also noted that technology and access to better data systems can be especially helpful in advancing transport systems and policies that better cater to the needs of persons with disabilities that can often become marginalized due to reduced accessibility to transport services.

10. In the light of these discussions, the Conference welcomed the presentation of the special report of the project “Sustainable Transport Research and Training in Asia and the Pacific”, which reviewed existing training practices for transport professionals, assessed research, training and education gaps and needs for Asia-Pacific region and developed recommendations on formulating a comprehensive sustainable transport development training programme incorporating the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environment). Against this background, the Conference considered the proposed training recommendations and noted that some modules would be piloted as part of the project activities, particularly the recommendations to design training with direct links to the Sustainable Development Goals.
11. In the context of these substantive discussions throughout the Conference, the participants recognized that the region has a lot of good research and knowledge on sustainable transport that should be better shared and disseminated, particularly among decision makers and noted the initiative to establish a cooperation mechanism among research institutions and government agencies, to facilitate networking and collaboration on transport sector development, public policies and good and innovative practices in the region, as well as to increase the amount and quality of transport research in the region by harnessing the research capacity already available. The Conference also welcomed the high interest of several institutions to join the network as outlined in the relevant document (see https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/22-23Sep_Annex_ProposedNetworkMechanism.pdf).

12. The Conference also noted that the network would be formally launched and become operational at a special side event to be organized in the margins of the forthcoming fourth Ministerial Conference on Transport, scheduled to be held virtually from 14 to 17 December 2021.

13. The ESCAP secretariat expressed gratitude to the implementing partner (Russian University of Transport), as well as all country representatives and experts participating in the Conference, for their engagement and cooperation and informed all participants that the summary of the proceedings would be circulated to all participants after the Conference.

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