

## Joint ESCAP-OSJD Statement

### **Strengthening international railway transport for a more sustainable transport connectivity in the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic**

Measures implemented by the countries to contain the COVID 19 pandemic have led to drastic reduction in the freight transport demand and supply, changing the dynamics of international freight transport.

Amidst all the disruptions, international freight trains have been playing a critical role in transporting medical supplies, equipment and other goods, helping to maintain the truncated supply chains and demonstrating the reliability of the railway transport in the face of the pandemic.

For many countries in Eurasian area and particularly for the landlocked developing countries, railways are the backbone of their economy, transporting major part of their domestic and international freight supporting inter- and intra-regional trade and showing a potential for further growth.

The traditional benefits of railway transport, namely, lower per unit cost, higher energy efficiency, better environmental performance, coupled with the advantages of the use of relatively less manpower over long distance with fewer quarantine checks and human interactions, demonstrate that international railway transport could serve as an efficient instrument to minimize economic and social disruptions caused by the pandemic.

The railways, therefore, need to respond appropriately. While it is crucial for railways to reduce the disruptions to transport connectivity caused by the containment measures they must also seize this opportunity to further enhance the comparative advantage of railway transport and accelerate shift towards a more sustainable transport connectivity for building back better in realization of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development in line with the [ESCAP Framework on Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19](#).

In this context, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and Organization for Cooperation Between Railways (OSJD) jointly call on the Railways in their respective member countries to:

- Further reduce-border crossing delays by (a) encouraging electronic information exchange among railways as well as between railways and control agencies, including the use of electronic

documents and new technologies for efficient completion of border crossing formalities; and (b) harmonizing operational requirements and regulatory formalities for international railway transport with international standards and/or good practices.

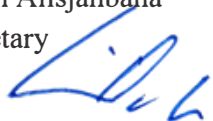
- Expand the use of smart railway solutions in areas such as (a) maintaining and operating railway infrastructure; (b) addressing break of gauge; and (c) improving energy efficiency, to boost the sustainability and resilience of railways.
- Take further institutional measures to effectively deal with the challenges to international railway transport posed by COVID-19 pandemic and similar future disruptions by setting up crisis management unit(s) at the railways headquarters with such functions as (a) sharing information on changes in regulatory and operational requirements; (b) coordinating responses to the gradual opening up keeping in view the evolving situation of the pandemic in each country; and (c) protecting the health of railway personnel.

ESCAP and OSJD stand together helping their member countries to further strengthen the efficiency of international freight trains through their well-established platforms and other institutional measures.

- The Trans-Asian Railway Network, formalized through intergovernmental agreement and set up under ESCAP auspices, plays a central role in strengthening international railway transport in the region and beyond. Using this comprehensive platform, ESCAP will support its member countries in assessing the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the freight operations to identify good practices, innovative solutions, and recommend actions to further reinforce regional cooperation among the railways in times of the similar other disruptions
- The OSJD foundational treaties and related instruments have established a firm legal framework governing international railway freight transport and have proven to be essential and reliable in the current crisis, provide continuity and interoperability of freight traffic for the most part of the Eurasian area. The OSJD Committee will continue to cooperate closely with various countries, railways, and international organizations to further improve such documents and keep them up to date to meet new challenges so as to provide useful cooperation platforms for countries and businesses.

Collective actions to make international railway transport stronger will boost sustainability of international freight train operations, help to “build back better” and shift to a new and more sustainable “normal” in the post-COVID-19 world to support countries in realization of Sustainable Development Goals.

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