25th Meeting of COMCEC Transport and Communications Working Group

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ESCAP at a Glance

One of the five regional commissions of the United Nations

53
MEMBER STATES

9
ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

40%
WORLD LAND AREA

60%
WORLD POPULATION

What role does ESCAP play?

- **Serves as a common voice on development, specifically achieving the Sustainable Development Goals**
- **Provides a platform of exchanges for countries in the region to develop common solutions to development challenges**
- **Undertakes research/work on 3 main pillars: “economic, social and environment” to support policymakers and stakeholders**
- **Assists countries, to build their development capacity**

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Transport Division: 3 major pillars of work

Platform for intergovernmental cooperation and policy dialogue

Committee on Transport

Ministerial Conference

Working Groups on Asian Highways, Trans-Asian Railways and Dry Ports

Comprehensive capacity building program

Operational connectivity

Transport Facilitation Models

Private Public Dialogue

Analytical work and data collection

Specialized monographs, bulletins and periodic assessments of transport development in the region

Major thematic topics

- Regional land transport connectivity and logistics
- Maritime and interregional transport connectivity
- Digitalization of transport
- Low carbon mobility and logistics
- Urban transport
- Road safety
- Inclusive transport and mobility

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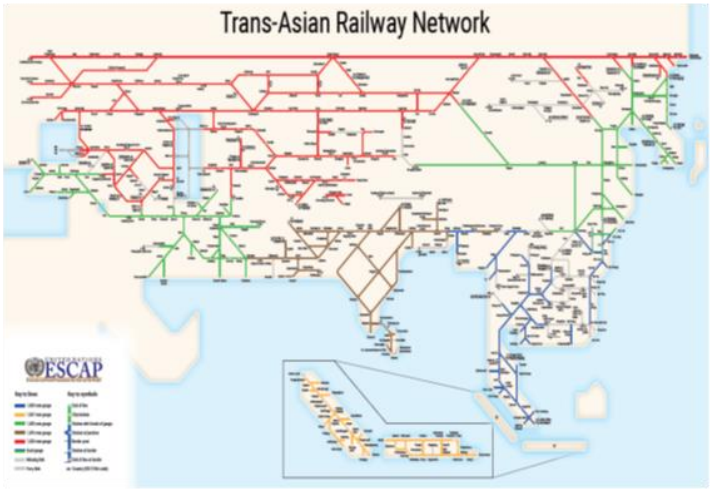
Intergovernmental Infrastructure Agreements

Asian Highway Network

- Intergovernmental Agreement on Asian Highway network
- 30 Parties
- 145, 000 kms in 32 countries
- Working Group on the Asian Highway

Trans-Asian Railway Network



- Intergovernmental Agreement on Trans-Asian Railway network
- 21 Parties
- 118, 000 kms in 28 countries
- Working Group on the Trans-Asian Railway Network

Dry Ports

- Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports
- 17 Parties
- 247 dry ports in 27 countries
- Working Party on Dry Ports

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Rural transport

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- Rural connectivity is a lifeline for roughly 50% of the population of the Asia-Pacific region.
- Majority of people suffering from extreme poverty in South and Southeast Asia predominantly lived in rural communities.
- Limited transport connectivity has impeded access to education, employment, healthcare, and other essential services
- Weak transport infrastructure also hindered the timely delivery of goods to rural communities, high logistics cost.

➢ ***Digital and transport connectivity for socioeconomic resilience of rural communities during the post-COVID-19 period in the Asia-Pacific countries***

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Objective:

To strengthen the capacity of government officials in target Asia-Pacific countries in special situations to develop innovative strategies for improving rural digital and **transport connectivity** for socio-economic resilience.

To achieve this objective, the project aims to:

- ✓ undertake national analytical studies
- ✓ propose actionable strategies

Target countries:

- Bangladesh
- Lao PDR
- Samoa

Joint implementation:

- Transport Division
- Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division

Rural Connectivity Challenges

- **Poor Accessibility:** Many villages lack year-round, reliable, affordable transport.
- **Low quality roads:** Narrow, unpaved, not all weathered, and poorly maintained with big funding gaps.
- **Climate Risks:** Floods, cyclones, and disasters frequently disrupt mobility.
- **Overloading:** Oversized vehicles damage roads, raising safety risks.
- **Fragmented network:** Weak integration across road, water, rail, and digital.
- **Limited Services:** Restricted access to markets, healthcare, and education.

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With torrential rains swelling the riverbank, the people of Lalomauga have only one way to move between both sides of their village, a narrow footbridge that has become a vital lifeline during extreme weather. A call has been made for better and resilient infrastructure.

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Bangladesh

Challenges

- Poor Road Infrastructure: Over 40% of rural roads are unpaved or seasonally inaccessible.
- Limited Multimodal Connectivity: Rural areas lack seamless links between roads, waterways, and rail, creating bottlenecks.
- Weak Institutional & Digital Capacity: Limited coordination and insufficient ICT use hinder planning, monitoring, and logistics efficiency.

Way forward

- Upgrade Climate-Resilient Roads: Prioritize all-weather roads, flood-resilient bridges, and dedicated maintenance funds.
- Strengthen Multimodal Connectivity: Develop integrated transport hubs and expand rural feeder links for year-round access.
- Enhance Digital & Institutional Capacity: Deploy real-time monitoring systems and coordinate transport planning across agencies.

Before and After: *a segment of rural road at Yousufpur UPC Road, Comilla District, Chattogram*

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Lao PDR

Challenges

- Poor Road Quality: Over 76% of rural roads are unpaved, becoming impassable during the rainy season.
- Geographical & Climatic Barriers: Mountains, floods, and storms increase costs and frequently damage infrastructure.
- Funding & Institutional Constraints: Heavy reliance on external funding and weak local capacity slow project implementation.

Way forward

- Infrastructure Development: Expanded roads, expressways, and dry ports, including the Lao-China Railway and Vientiane–Vang Vieng Expressway.
- Policy & Planning: Integrated rural access and economic corridors through national development and logistics plans.
- Development Partner Support: Partnered with ADB and World Bank to improve roads, climate resilience, and local capacity.

Samoa

Challenges

- Limited Inter-Island Aviation: Passenger flights between Upolu and Savaii are halted, restricting rural mobility.
- Unsafe Maritime Infrastructure: Wharf terminals, boats.
- High Dependence on Public Transport: Around 60% of households lack private vehicles, making residents reliant on buses and taxis.

Way forward

- Transport Infrastructure Upgrades: Improve roads, bridges, fords, ferry terminals, and airports for safe, all-weather access.
- Policy, Planning & Institutional Strengthening: Implement the Transport and Infrastructure Sector Plan with climate resilience, gender equality, and community participation.
- Public Transport Improvements: Regulate buses and taxis, formalize routes and timetables, and enhance service quality and affordability.

Actional strategies: Transport Policy

Policy Development:	Develop and implement a comprehensive Rural Transport Policy and Master Plan covering all transport modes and settlements.
Vehicle Registration and Licensing:	Establish a separate registration system for motorized and non-motorized vehicles using rural networks. Introduce a specialized driving license system for rural road users.
Digital Road Maintenance:	Digitize the Rural Road Maintenance System using web-based software to prioritize maintenance scientifically. Update Rural Road Maintenance Budget Guidelines for the next 3–5 years.
Engineering and Design:	Conduct a study to standardize the engineering design of Non-Motorized Vehicles (NMVs).
Integration and Climate Resilience:	Ensure integration among transport modes and ICT while addressing climate change and resilience in transport policies.
Development Control:	Implement mechanisms to discourage unplanned settlements and markets along rural transport corridors.
Financing and Budgeting:	Take steps to reduce the financing gap for rural road maintenance.
Road Construction:	Avoid new earthen road alignments, except for completing critical missing links.

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Actionable strategies: Improving infrastructure

Upgrading Key Roads:	Upgrade upazila roads to at least two lanes with all-weather capability and include bus bays at bus stops for better connectivity between production and consumption centers. Convert core village roads to at least one standard lane to support rural passenger and goods mobility.
Connecting Remote Areas:	Ensure reliable transport connectivity for missing remote villages through all-weather roads or rural water transport, ensuring access within 2 km for villagers.
Road Maintenance:	Prioritize routine and periodic maintenance of rural roads, particularly those damaged by frequent floods, with increased budgetary allocations.
Intermodal Connectivity:	Improve 3R (Rail, Road, and Riverine) intermodal infrastructure to enhance hinterland connectivity across the country.
Affordable and Efficient Transport:	Provide rural people with affordable and efficient transport choices across different modes.
Stakeholder Engagement:	Ensure stakeholder consultation during the development and maintenance phases of transport infrastructure projects.
Socio-Economic Impact:	Focus road connectivity investments on poverty reduction, human development, and promoting micro and small-scale enterprises in rural areas.
Addressing Institutional Constraints:	Tackle institutional challenges that hinder the effective implementation of transport projects.

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Actionable strategies: Rural road safety

Safety During Construction and Operations:	Prioritize road safety measures during construction and operation phases due to the increasing traffic on rural roads.
Road Safety Campaigns and Training:	Conduct campaigns and training for vulnerable road users, including drivers, to address road safety as a public, social, and economic challenge.
Accident Data and Emergency Response:	Develop and maintain a national road accident database for rural transport. Establish a digital emergency response system for accident management.
Implementation of Road Safety Manual:	Enhance the application of LGED's "Rural Road Safety Manual" (introduced in 2022).
Speed Limit Enforcement:	Enforce speed limits in rural communities and school zones to protect drivers, pedestrians, cyclists, and animals.
Safety Audits and Accident Analysis:	Conduct regular safety audits and analyze accidents to identify road safety problems and implement measures to reduce fatalities and injuries.

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Actionable strategies: Digital and transport connectivity

Enhancing Internet Accessibility:	Develop strategies to improve internet services at the village level.
ICT Centers for Rural Communities:	Establish and operationalize ICT centers in Union Parishad Offices, rural markets, and schools to benefit rural communities.
Digital Mapping and Information Sharing:	Upload digital maps of rural road networks on LGED websites to provide road users with access and transport mode information. Make available the rural road network inventory and its connectivity with rural water transport online.
Transport Information Accessibility:	Share information about the transport network and services available for destinations in rural areas.
Road Safety Education:	Upload road safety engineering and education videos for road users to promote safety awareness. Ensure information dissemination on transport matters by Union Parishads to reach rural populations.

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New study project on "Accelerating collective action in the third decade of the Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries (2024-2034) through strengthening operational connectivity along the Asian Highway Network and its connections"

- *Enhance transport connectivity, improve operational efficiency, and advance environmentally sustainable solutions through a regional framework for sustainable transport corridors, bringing mutual socioeconomic benefits to landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and transiting countries*
- *Your support and participation will be most welcomed*

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