Towards a Strategic Common Vision for the Development of Future Multi-modal Transport in the Arab Region

Expected Accomplishments

1. By 2020, transport policies in the Arab region are informed by state-of-the-art, evidence-based research on current flows, future scenarios and expected bottlenecks with regard to multi-modal transportation.

2. By 2020, Arab countries and interested financial institutions have access to an Appraisal Tool for assessments of investment in regional transport infrastructure.

3. By 2021, Arab countries adopt a comprehensive and coherent Future Vision for developing transport infrastructure at the regional and national levels.

4. By 2022, Arab countries and international financial institutions have access to three technical and business case studies for addressing key bottlenecks in regional transport.

Background

The Arab region faces important challenges regarding cross-border movement of labour, capital and goods.

A main factor contributing to these challenges is the lack of integrated transport systems and infrastructure. Without such infrastructure, the region will continue to struggle in achieving regional value chains and connecting to the rest of the world, which in turn will hinder the region’s active participation, as a block, in the contemporary global system of production and distribution and thereby in the achievement of greater prosperity and sustainable growth.

ESCWA’s experience in promoting regional transportation initiatives has led to the identification of key gaps.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia has been supporting the development of the Integrated Transport System in the Arab Mashreq (ITSAM) since 2009 and the Integrated Transport System in the Arab States (ITSAS) since 2014. These initiatives have resulted in regional agreements on international roads and railways and include a plan of action for the development of road and rail networks. In 2013, ESCWA carried out an assessment of the implementation of the plan of action and found the following gaps:

1. While the level of implementation of the road agreements, based on reports prepared by member States was estimated at around 100%, actual implementation does not exceed 60%;

2. While the agreements represent considerable progress in terms of clearly mapping international road and railway networks in the region and the missing links for their integration, they remain weak in terms of commitments to address those missing links, as they do not provide clear instruments for financing the construction of missing infrastructure and are conditioned by the special circumstances of various countries, and;

3. The agreements do not contain provisions with regard to the quality of service of the various segments of the networks, which means that segments are not necessarily compatible across borders.
Project Implementation

1. The project will be implemented by a dedicated team at ESCWA, in partnership with regional and international specialized organizations. ESCWA will build bilateral MoUs with expert partners who would be called upon to technically implement specific parts of the project to ensure innovation.

2. The five phases of the project are designed to be consecutive and build on the achievements of the previous phase. This modular approach allows for more effective monitoring of progress and for possible modifications to project design to reflect the key findings of each phase.

3. An external evaluation of the project will be conducted at the end of the project to provide partners and donor(s) with an independent assessment on whether the project achieved its targeted goals and to identify possible needs for follow-up activities.

4. The estimated budget for this three-year project is $3.5 Million.

Project Activities:

Phase 1: Baseline Studies and GIS Mapping of Transport Networks

Baseline studies will outline a systems approach to transport in the Arab region, considering the full role of transport systems in supporting multidimensional sustainable development: economic, environmental, social and political. The purpose of the studies is to promote a better understanding of the dynamic links and causal relationships between transport systems and their multidimensional changing environment.

Outputs will include:

- A megatrends study exploring the drivers of change in global transport and the potential impact of identified trends on the transport situation in the Arab region; and
- An ITSAS-GIS map serving as an operational tool to monitor the implementation of existing agreements and establishing a full picture of the actual performance of airports, ports, border crossings and logistics zones in the region.

Phase 2: Comprehensive Regional Transport Planning Study

A comprehensive regional transport planning study will assess the performance of existing transport networks and facilities, forecast their future performance in terms of level of service and potential constraints and bottlenecks, and identify infrastructure projects and policy reforms required to meet future transport needs.

This planning study will provide a basis for launching multi-stakeholder consultations on a common Future Vision for transport infrastructure in the Arab region.

Phase 3: Development of an appraisal tool for Undertaking Assessments of Investments in Transport Infrastructure and Transport Policy Reforms

ESCWA will develop an Appraisal Tool for undertaking comprehensive assessments of the expected developmental impact and return on investment of future regional transport infrastructure and policy reforms. This tool will draw upon innovative methods used in the assessment of the effects and impact of investment in transport and will assist in the formulation and implementation of the Future Vision.

Phase 4: Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue and Intergovernmental Negotiations on a common future vision for Transport Infrastructure in the Arab Region

This phase will conduct extensive consultations with key stakeholders from governments, the private sector, civil society and international financial institutions on the formulation of a comprehensive and integrated common Future Vision for regional transport in the Arab region. This vision will be based on the baseline studies and will seek to identify:

- Complementarities or contradictions between national planning instruments;
- Level of compliance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- Requirements to meet future demand on transport and logistics infrastructure; and
- Elements of greater regional integration that would be most conducive to shared growth and prosperity.

Phase 5: Follow-up Phase: Elaboration of Innovative Development Tools for Infrastructure Projects

This phase will identify three pilot projects that would help realize the Future Vision and apply the Appraisal Tool to develop proposals that could be presented to prospective funders, including through Public Private Partnerships. It will be further developed once the Appraisal Tool and Future Vision have been developed and agreed upon.

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