

**32nd Meeting of the**

**ECO Regional Planning Council (RPC)**

**Working Paper on Transport and Communications**

Prepared by the ECO Secretariat

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### Executive Summary

Draft Working Paper of the upcoming 32ndst Regional Planning Council scheduled for
16-19 January 2022, Tehran, in Virtual mode, informs about progress attained during the reported year of 2021 in activity areas under the Directorate for Transport & Communications (TC). The structure of the present document outlines six TC-activity priority areas as mandated by the ECO. The performance in these activity areas in the reported year has been reflected along the priorities set by ECO’s guide-lining documents. Thus, Sections (I-VII) primarily focus on the targets set by ECO Vision 2025. On implementation, the recommendations embedded in the Work Program 2021, which was adopted by the 31st Regional Planning Council meeting (January 2021, Tehran) were taken as key implementation tasks. In the planning for subsequent year of 2022, the TC’s proposed activities have been shown in each section. ECO Calendar of Events (TC) for year 2022 and the list of project proposals on planned activities for 2022 may be seen at Annexes.

# Current Status: TC Area Activities/Achievements/Proposals

 During the reported year of 2021, performance of the ECO region in transport and communications have been in line with the Organization’s overall trend and guided lined embedded in ECO visions and 31st RPC i.e. conducting the projects on connectivity, organizing coordination meetings and developing the sufficient capacity and resistance against COVID-19 spillover effects on transport and communications. The TC has taken tangible steps to conduct targeted steps to materialize some of the plans and projects in road and rail and maritime sectors as well as organizing some of the coordination meetings in ICT, Maritime, Road and rail sectors and also has mobilizes for smooth passage in the ECO Member States of transport vehicles carrying food, medicines and essential stuffs in order to help people to be able to cope with the COVID-19 outbreak. Along the similar lines, the TC Directorate has continued to encourage the Member States on implementing the “ECO Practical Guidelines on Cross Border Facilitation Measures under conditions of COVID-19”.

 **On** **railways**: At the back of the sustained trend in “cargo mobilization”, the joint ECO-ESCAP-IsDB Project on the Commercialization of the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran (KTI) railway has been completed and after several round of negotiations the MoU on establishment of Corridor Management Mechanism has also been signed on the sidelines of the 15th Summit in Ashgabat on 26 Nov 2021. Turkmenistan has proposed to organize the 1st Permanent Working Group meeting on KTI Corridor.

 Another achievement has been the resumption of the movement of the Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) train in December 2021 through which cargo form Pakistan is to be carried to Turkey and other destinations.

 The Qazvin- Rasht-Astara (Iran)- Astara (Azerbaijan) railway after its meaningful progress in 2019 is now witnessing the start of construction of railway tracks along the final third segment Rasht-Astara. During the previous years of 2017 -2019: the 1.3km rail-based stretch in Iran has been completed in 2017, the 8.3km rail-based bridge was completed in March 2018 and the 164km Qazvin-Rasht railway segment was completed in March 2019. The project works on this railway route is the embodiment of a good example of swift project implementation in the region. A railway linking Rasht to Anzali Port of Iran will pave the way for linking the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea and operationalizing the North –South Corridor through multimodal transportation.

 Yet, the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran (KTAI) railway still seeks financing for feasibility study in the Kyrgyz segment. The pre-feasibility and feasibility studies in other en-route countries’ segments were duly completed. The 2nd Ministerial Meeting of KTAI Corridor was delayed due political developments in Afghanistan in 2021.

 **On road cooperation**, besides the completion of Study Project (2020) on ITI and KTAI, the ITI Road Corridor was activated by dispatch of two loaded trucks from Pakistan to Turkey under cover of TIR System in October 2021 as per the Action Plan of the 5th HLWG on ITI Road Corridor. Also the 6th Meeting of HLWG on ITI Road Corridor was organized and reviewed the ECO\IRU Joint Report on the recent test run (on 8 Oct 2021) and decided on certain measures to facilitate the corridor and regularize the operations.

 **On maritime cooperation**, to implement recommendations 9 and 10 of the Turkmenbashi Declaration (3 May 2018) on “linking of the existing regional sea ports in the ECO region with ECO’s landlocked and transit countries’ dry ports”, the TC after extensive follow up and consultations prepared the project proposal on “*Establishment of of Common Gateways for ECO Economies (the ECO Gate)”* and has ensured financial contribution of the Islamic Development Bank to the project. The 6th Meeting of HRMO was also held on 27 April 2021 and decided on a number of areas of cooperation.

**On civil aviation**, a few proposals from Member States on offering training courses have been received and circulated as per recommendations of the first meeting of the ECO Working Group of Civil Aviation held on 23 November 2020 in virtual mode.

 **On GIS**, progress on the joint ECO-UNECE-IsDB project on Geographic Information System (GIS) has realized in the completion of the first component of the project, which was designed for “Benchmarking of Transport Construction Costs in ECO Member States”. The final report has been uploaded on the UNECE website. The Focal Points/National Consultants that have been, at times, nominated by their respective Member States have fully contributed to the completion of the first component of the project. Further steps will be taken as the project moves on. The ECO maps and ECO Railways and Roads Networks Development Plans are also submitted to UNECE and the project team to be included in the GIS platform. It is expected to start the 2nd phase of the project in 2022.

**On ICT**, The Secretariat organized the First Expert Group Meeting on ICT on 28 September through which some measures and further steps adopted including within the scope of the “*2025 ECO Regional Strategy for Information Society Development*” and its Action Plan for enhancing the cooperation among the Member States were agreed upon.

**On the ECO Events Calendar** although the pandemic of COVID-19 and the resulting lockdown have limited our movement, placed restrictions on international flights and group gatherings, in such a scenario videoconferences/virtual meetings have come up as a useful communication mode that allows people to stay connected with their colleagues, peers, clients and partners. Worthy to mention that the 2nd KTAI Ministerial Meeting, the 10th TTCC Meeting were postponed due to political developments in Afghanistan and the 11th Transport Ministerial Meeting was postponed due to lack of quorum. Therefore, considering the unavoidability and importance of the meetings, the ECO Secretariat has successfully conducted the following events virtually with the consent of the Member States:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Several Virtual Meetings on the Study Project on Commercialization of KTI Railway Corridor, With the participation of the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, UNESCAP, IsDB and ECO Secretariat.  | 19 May 2020- 07 November 2021 |
|  | 12 and 13 Virtual follow up session on ITI Road and rail Corridor  | April – November 2021 |
|  | Two eCMR Workshop | 6 April and 3 Nov 2021 |
|  | eTIR Workshop | 14 April |
|  | 6th Maritime Meeting (6th HRMO) | 27 April 2021 |
|  | Consultations with IDB on future cooperation | 7 April 2021 |
|  | GIS Observatory Meeting  | 11 May 2021 |
|  | Webinar on Joint MDBs Report and IsDB Webinar on "MDBs as Key Partners in Promoting Regional Cooperation and Integration" | 24 June 2021 |
|  | 7th Customs Committee of TTCC | 17 August 2021 |
|  | Follow up Meeting with IDB on ECO gate project | 25 Aug 2021 |
|  | IsDB Webinar on Infrastructure Financing | 22 August 2021 |
|  | 1st Expert Group Meeting on ICT Cooperation | 28 September |
|  | Activation of ITI Road Corridor (Istanbul) | 08 October 2021 |
|  | 6th HLWG on ITI Corridor  | 14 Dec 2021 |
|  | Participation at 4th Transport Ministerial Meeting of ESCAP  | 16 Dec 2021 |
|  | Consultations with IRU and UNECE on mutual cooperation | Various dates |
|  | 14th Follow up session on coordination ITI Train  | 15 Dec 2021 |
|  | ITI Train cargo dispatch from Pakistan | 21st Dec 2021  |
|  | Participation on various meetings and conferences of UNECE, UNESCAP and UNOHRLLS | 2021 |

##

## LEGAL FRAMEWORK: TTFA

## Priority Area No.1:

## Implementation of Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA)

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

**ECO Vision** envisages that “administrative procedures and controls in inter-regional transport will be streamlined and simplified within the framework of the TTFA.” (ECO Vision 2025, Expected Outcome (v), p.4).

1. The “full implementation of the Transit Transport Framework Agreement in ECO” has been identified as the prerequisite for attaining the goals of the ECO Vision (ECO Vision 2025: Section II: Policy Environment, p.3).
2. According to the Turkemnbashi Declaration of May 3, 2018, the Member States should strive “to speed up the implementation process of the Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) in the ECO rail and road networks, to facilitate cross-border transit transport and in line with international frameworks on transport, remove non-physical barriers entailing from excessive administrative formalities and hurdles arising in transit transportation in the region” (paragraph-1, Turkmenbashi Declaration, 3 May 2018).
3. **The Midterm Review of ECO Vision (Nov. 2021)** envisaged fund-raising “Forum” should be organized, by ECO-TDB in collaboration of ECO Secretariat, as early as feasible and possible, to mobilize funds through national and international financial institutions/banks, particularly for rehabilitation of existing railways and road links as well as construction of new railways. In the same spirit, the ECO-TDB may be mandated to facilitate transfer of resources/payments related to regional connectivity and ECO transit transport infrastructures.
4. **The Midterm Review of ECO Vision(Nov. 2021)** envisaged assisting the Member States to join relevant international instruments for transit facilitation, including Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road (ADR) and Agreement on the International Carriage of Perishable Foodstuffs and on the Special Equipment to be used for such Carriage (ATP).

### TTFA Background:

1. The ECO Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) is the legal backbone of the “Programme of Action for ECO Decade of Transport and Communications”, which was endorsed by ECO Summit (13-14 March 1997, Ashgabat). As the basic document on transport within the region, the TTFA was signed in May 1998 and entered into force in May 2006. Eight Member States are parties to the TTFA. Turkmenistan has signed the agreement and the Republic of Uzbekistan is yet to join.
2. Ever since, the Transit Transport Co-ordination Council (TTCC) assumed the mandate to ensure the implementation of the TTFA. To date, the TTCC has held nine main meetings coupled with meetings of its four technical committees and auxiliary bodies.

### Recent decisions on TTFA:

1. The 9th Meeting of TTCC was the last meeting of the committee before the Coronavirus hit in 2020 and was held on 15 February 2018 in Islamabad. It was preceded by the 9th Meeting of Road Committee and the 6th Meeting of Customs Transit Committee within TTFA’s framework. The Member States, notably, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Turkey participated in the event. The IRU representative was present.

1. The aforementioned meeting considered/approved reports of technical committees of TTCC: (i) Report of the 9th Meeting of Road Committee, (ii) Report of the 6th Meeting of Customs Transit Committee, (iii) Report of 13th Meeting of Heads of ECO Railway Authorities/7th Meeting of the Railway Committee of TTCC, (iv) Report of the Meeting of the ECO Heads of Railways en-route Railway connecting Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran (KTI), (v) Reports of the 3rd and 4th Meeting of High Level Working Group on Qazvin-Rasht-Astara (Iran)- Astara (Azerbaijan) Railway Project, (vi) Report of the 9th High Level Working Group Meeting of ECO Container Train on Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) route.
2. On the status of ratification of TTFA by Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan’s accession to TTFA, the TTCC requested both the countries to honor their commitments. During 2019, sequential high-level negotiations were held to encourage Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan to follow up procedural matters.

### Progress and recent developments on the TTFA implementation since 31st RPC

1. The 7th Meeting of the Customs Committee of TTCC was held virtually on 17 August 2021 through which a few initiatives were approved by the Meeting and chaired by Rep of Azerbaijan.
2. The 10th Meeting of Road Committee of TTCC (10 August 2021) was postponed due to request of member States

1. The 10th meeting of TTCC was postponed due to political developments in Afghanistan.
2. The Islamic Republic of Iran has recently acceded the ATP Agreement (Agreement on the International Carriage of Perishable Foodstuffs and on the Special Equipment to be used for such Carriage) that will further facilitate the transit transport in the region.

### TTFA expected outcomes for 2022 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:

1. On accession to TTFA, Turkmenistan may be requested to deposit its “Instruments of Ratification of TTFA” at ECO Secretariat and The Republic of Uzbekistan to consider acceding the TTFA as soon as possible and periodically informs Member States about its efforts towards accession to TTFA.
2. Due to the uncertain circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic the 10th TTCC Meeting/10th Meeting of Road Committee of TTCC/ may be held virtually in 2022 by the interested Member States or the Secretariat .
3. Member States may consider adhering to major international transport facilitationin2022, such as the e-TIR and e-CMR, Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road (ADR) and Agreement on the International Carriage of Perishable Foodstuffs and on the Special Equipment to be used for such Carriage (ATP).

inline with the arrangements to be reached by ECO Secretariat in coordination with relevant international bodies including IRU and IsDB and UNECE.

1. On the ECO Railway and Road Maps Member States may consider providing their updated information to the Secretariat in 2022. The new Maps may be published in 2022 So far all member States except Republic of Turkey and Turkmenistan have provided their update on the rail and road maps.

###

### Conclusions on the implementation of the TTFA

1. The TTFA Parties commit themselves to fully implement the TTFA’s provisions, particularly, on road transit, which, in practice, most commonly face instances of incompliance with TTFA’s provisions, especially on visa and cross border facilitation. In regard of procedural matters of TTFA, Turkmenistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan are requested to consider finalizing the procedural matters.

## RAILWAY TRANSPORT

## Priority Area No. 1:

## Project: “Railway between Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran (KTI Railway)”

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. ECO Vision’s target pertaining to the aforementioned project is“to maximize transport connectivity” (Section B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective (I)).
2. Policy approach is “to cooperate on transit related policy issues through increasing the efficiency” (Vision 2025, Section: Policy Environment, paragrpah-2).
3. ECO Vision’s expected outcome in this area is “to develop and support transport-related facilitative harmonized regulatory framework” (ECO Vision 2025, Section III: Expected Outcomes: Outcome (iii).
4. **The Midterm Review of ECO Vision (Nov. 2021)** envisaged fund-raising “Forum” should be organized, by ECO-TDB in collaboration of ECO Secretariat, as early as feasible and possible, to mobilize funds through national and international financial institutions/banks, particularly for rehabilitation of existing railways and road links as well as construction of new railways. In the same spirit, the ECO-TDB may be mandated to facilitate transfer of resources/payments related to regional connectivity and ECO transit transport infrastructures.

### Project background:

1. The project’s first milestone was realized through the official launch of the test container train on 3 December 2014.
2. The project’s goal is to connect the Republic of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran to the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and develop “a replicable model of the common corridor management mechanism in order to bring in greater efficiency in the ECO railway network”.
3. The project’s economic impact will be 10 million tons freight throughput per annum via the KTI railway.

###  Latest decisions on the KTI Railway project:

1. The meeting of Heads of Railways of en-route countries on the commercialization of the KTI railway decided that this project will develop and install the regional Corridor Management Mechanism (CMM) via the Corridor Management Entity-CME (paragraph-15, sub-paras (i-ii), Report of Meeting of HRA, 6 February 2017, Tehran).
2. The Turkmenbashi Declaration required the “early operationalization and commercialization of those rail routes already in place” (paragraph-3, Turkmenbashi Declaration, 3 May 2018). As with that reference, the KTI railway route exists since 2014.
3. The 30st Meeting of the Regional Planning Council requested the Secretariat to release the 1st draft analytical report on the Study project on the commercialization of the KTI along with various options of the establishment of Common Management Mechanism (CMM) by February 2020. The Council further requested the Secretariat to coordinate with the en-route countries for organizing the validation meeting in March 2020.
4. The Council recommended that, upon validation of results of the Study project on the commercialization of the KTI railway in March 2020, and the subsequent test run of the corridor based on its common corridor management mechanism (CMM), the KTI project’s example be showcased for replicating it in other ECO's corridors as well.
5. The 14th meeting of the Heads of ECO Railway Authorities (Dushanbe, June 2019) noted the outcomes of Inception meeting of the Project (Tehran, April 2019) and requested to: (i) provide the required data/information for questionnaires, (ii) assist in organizing a test run along KTI, and (iii) facilitate inter-agency exchange of correspondences on Corridor Management Mechanism (CMM).

###  Progress since the 31st RPC and recent developments

1. Following the 30st RPC Meeting (para 11, Work Program, Section B: Transport and Communications) the consultancy team, selected and recruited by ESCAP, has been able to conduct two studies based on the data/information provided by the national consultants, data/information collected in the course of the field missions of the consultancy team to the Incheh Borun, Ak-Yayla, Etrek and Bereket stations along KTI and other reliable sources. The portion related to “physical and non-physical barriers” allowed to examine and assess a wide range issues, i.e. the status of rail infrastructure and rolling stock along the KTI corridor, existing railway stations, their capacitates, railway interoperability, physical linkages to other extended corridors etc. Another portion related to “freight flows” allowed to assess current volumes and types of commodities/freight flows moving via KTI corridor, tariff schemes, trading status between KTI and neighboring countries, trade forecast etc.
2. Besides, an initial proposal for a structure of a mechanism (Corridor Management Mechanism) to take up coordinated activities between three railways and other possible stakeholders to commercialize KTI railway corridor has been designed and shared with the en-route countries. The 1st draft MoU has been also prepared by ESCAP to formalize intentions to setup CMM.

1. Despite difficulties being faced due to COVID-19, the series of virtual meetings have been organized by ECO and ESCAP with the railways of each en-route country in 2020 and 2021 where the countries discussed and approved the reports/studies on the physical and physical barriers and freight flows along KTI railway corridor including initial proposal for the structure of the Corridor Management Mechanism (CMM) and 1st draft MoU.

1. Based on the outcome of the deliberations of the virtual meetings and in order to reach a solution acceptable for all three countries, ESCAP, an implementing agency, revisited the initial three-layer structure for CMM and a dedicated institutional mechanism, i.e. a permanent working group on KTI railway corridor (PWG-KTI) was proposed to set up through an MOU. The MoU states the common willingness of the three countries to enhance competitiveness of the corridor and attracting freight to the corridor and encouraging closer coordination among all parties. ECO, ESCAP and OSJD will play a consultative role to provide guidance to tackle administrative, legal, technical and other issues.
2. A Trilateral Review Meeting was also held virtually on October 28, 2020, with the participation of the representatives of the en-route countries and UNESCAP, the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) and OSJD. The Meeting was held to have the views of the en-route countries on the revised text of MoU and discuss a more simplified structure of the corridor management mechanism (CMM) based on the deliberations and comments, provided during the course of virtual meeting (s) with each en-route country*.*
3. During the Trilateral Review Meeting (28 October 2020), the en-route countries agreed that the future phases of the Study Project should be resulted in transforming the present KTI railway corridor into an economic corridor with its all necessary prerequisites, including, inter alia, developing economic hubs/zones at the areas adjacent to the border crossings points of KTI route, keeping in mind the Khorgos, the special trade zone/dry port on the Kazakhstan-China border, as one of the best practices in the region.
4. After extensive follow up sessions, the “Memorandum of Understanding Between Railway Administrations (railways) of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran on the Implementation of KTI railway Freight Corridor” during the signing ceremony on 26 November, 2021 in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan was finalized on 8 November 2021 and singed on the sidelines of the 15th ECO Summit on 26 November 2021 in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan (during the Business Forum).

### Expected outcomes for 2022 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:

1. A permanent working group on KTI railway corridor (PWG-KTI) will be set up as per the MOU allowing the countries to work together in a coordinated and sustained way for commercialization of KTI corridor. PWG-KTI may convene its meetings annually for setting priorities for the Corridor and finalize annual action plan delineating activities to be undertaken.
2. PWG-KTI may invite representatives from other organizations as deem necessary to realize the goals of the Corridor. PWG-KTI could set up one or more specialized advisory groups as required to implement the annual action plan for the Corridor.
3. The ECO Secretariat has drafted a small sized study project on **“**Development of economic corridor along ECO KTI Railway Corridor” and The ToR for this project proposal is prepared and posted on ECO website for procurement of consultant to conduct the project. However so far, no proposals have been received to conduct the Study.
4. The Council may request the Secretariat to approach the relevant financial institutions for partnership in the project.

### Conclusions on the activity area

1. The en-route countries agreed that the future phases of the Study Project should be resulted in transforming the present KTI railway corridor into an economic corridor.
2. The ToR for this project proposal is prepared and posted on ECO website for procurement of consultant to conduct the project.

## Priority Area No. 2:

## Project: “ECO Container Train on Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) route”

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. TheECO Vision’s target, as specified for railway transport, is “to maximize transport connectivity” (Section B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective (I)). Policy-wise, the objective is to “facilitate regular and commercially justified operations on ECO route and modernize border crossing points”.
2. Policy approach is “providing efficient and effective transit access” (ECO Vision 2025: Section II. Policy Environment, Paragraph 3, sentence-5).
3. ECO Vision’s expected outcome for the existing railway route is “to improve regional transport transit infrastructure” (Vision 2025, Section III: Expected Outcomes: Outcome (i)),

### Project background:

1. The project on the ITI Container Train along Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul railway route was initiated by the 7th Meeting of Ministers of Transport in Antalya on 17-18 April 2008. The overall length of this railway route is 6,543km (1,990km in Pakistan, 2,603km Iran and 1,950km Turkey). The feasibility study was completed as per project schedule. The first milestone was realized on 14 August 2009 through the test run of the ECO container train. The regular runs of container trains started on 2 October 2010 given the 30 percent reduced tariffs rates for the route. The total number of 14 commercial trains; 8 from Turkey and 6 from Pakistan; have been dispatched since the start of the project.
2. The project’sgoal is to provide railway connectivity for Pakistan and Iran to reach European railway junctures via Turkey. In this regard, paragraph-4 of the Turkmenbashi Declaration (3 May 2018) urged: “to speed up the process of rehabilitation of the existing rail segments of the main ECO rail corridors and routes crossing through the Member States’ territories”.
3. The project’sdeliverables during the reported period 2019 include: (i) successful completion by Turkey of Marmaray Project thus enabling rail-based passage for transit container trains to European destinations from Istanbul station; (ii) in Van-Tatvan segment: the completion of construction of the two fast high-capacity ferries for transportation on Van Lake); (iii) launch of passenger trains on Tabriz-Van segment.
4. The project’s economic impact was originally designed to be 10 million tons of freight cargo per annum.

### Latest decisions on the ITI project

1. All necessary preparations for dispatching the ITI Container Train have been fulfilled: (i) unified tariffs and additional charges agreed, (ii) time tables shared, (iii) infra-related issues considered in-depth, (iv) National Focal Points on each side assigned and mandated full authority for the operation of the ITI Container Train, and (v) the inquiries on commercial freight fully responded. The tarrif rates revisted again and new tariffs agreed by the En-route Member States in May 2021.
2. As proposed by Turkey in 31st RPC, the name of the train was changed to ITI Cargo Train.
3. To that effect, the 31st meeting of the Regional Planning Council recommended that the dispatch of the ITI Container Train be realized as soon as possible, to honor the decision of the 11th High Level Working Group Meeting on ITI (27 October 2020, virtual), after publicizing the dispatching of the train in mass media and also among business communities of the en-route countries.
4. The 31st Council also requested the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to secure provision of necessary wagons to be reached at Zahedan on time.

1. Due to COVID-19 outbreak and internationally imposed travel bans, the dispatch of the container train was deferred till further notice.
2. The 31st RPC has called for operationalization of the ITI Rail Corridor asap.
3. The Islamic Republic of Iran has offered to host the 12th HLWG on ITI Train.

### Recent developments and progress since the 31st RPC:

1. The 11th High Level Working Group Meeting on the ITI Container Train was held via virtual means on October 27, 2020. The Meeting discussed the infrastructure and capacities of en-route Member States.
2. The Meeting was informed that negotiations for the construction of the Zahedan-Mirjaveh standard railway track are underway with Iranian private companies. The Meeting further took note the Secretariat’s efforts in implementing a new small sized project on needs-based financial and technical assessment for installing the transshipment facilities, instruments and tools in Taftan railway station. The ToR for this project proposal is prepared and posted on ECO website for procurement of consultant to conduct the project.
3. The Meeting requested the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Republic Pakistan to approach the ECO Trade and Development Bank for the partial financing for the construction of the Zahedan-Mirjaveh standard railway track within Iran and the development of facilities, instruments and tools for the Taftan Railway Station for the transshipment of cargo.
4. On the regular timetable for the resumption of the Train’s operations, the meeting decided that ITI train would commence regular operations in January 2021. The previously agreed tarrfis were revised in 2021 and agreed upon by the railways..
5. The 31st RPC requested the ITI en-route countries to consider inviting other interested ECO Member States to join the ITI Road and Railway corridor.
6. In consultation with the en-route countries and the authorized Forwarders, it is decided that the ITI Train would resume its operation o 21st December 2021.

### Expected outcomes for 2022 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:

1. The Council may request the en-route countries to notify the particulars of their focal points, (one on operational and one on freight) to the Secretariat at the earliest possible, for necessary coordination, aimed at early resumption of ITI Train. The focal points are nominated. However there is a need to expand the FPs and update the existing ones.
2. The council may request the Member States to nominate at least three competent freight forwarders to operate the corridor.
3. The council may recommend the en-route Ms to consider multimodal transportation on the corridor.
4. The Council may request for the operalization of the container train by the agreed timetable and may request the en-route countries for publicizing the regular operation of the Train among the business communities.
5. The Council may request the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to secure provision of necessary wagons, cargo and container to be reached at Zahedan on time.
6. The 12th HLWGM on ITI agreed to be hosted by the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Council may request the Secretariat to finalize the exact date and other details in consultation with the host authorities.
7. The Council may request the Islamic Republic of Iran to convey, periodically, the progress report on the construction of the Zahedan - Mirjaveh standard railway track, to ECO Secretariat.
8. The Council may request the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to convey, periodically, the progress report on the rehabilitation of Quetta-Taftan railway track, to ECO Secretariat. The Council may also request Pakistan to include the Taftan – Quetta railway rehabilitation in the C-PEC priority plans for development.
9. The Council may request the MS to volunteer to conduct the small sized study project on “Needs-based financial and technical assessment for installing the transshipment facilities, instruments and tools in Taftan railway station”, and in this regard the Council may call the Secretariat for recruitment of a specialist for implementation of the said Study Project in the first half of 2022.

### Area conclusions:

1. During 2020, despite the Coronavirus pandemic, the ITI Container Train has geared towards “early operationalization” as recommended by the Turkmenbashi Declaration. Date of dispatch of the container train was determined by 11th HLWGM to be in January 2021. Specific issues of Infrastructure and logistics had previously been fully discussed throughout the last HLWGMs. As per consultations with the relevant stakeholders, the lack of rolling stock (wagons) and containers as well as gauge difference and infrastructure deficiencies in Pakistan are among the main obstacles for operationalizing the ECO-ITI Railway Corridor.
2. The Council may recommend utilizing multimodal transport on ITI Rail Corridor by the time of rehabilitation of the Taftan- Quetta segment.

## Priority Area No. 3

## “ECO Container Train on Istanbul-Almaty and Bandar Abbas-Almaty routes”

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. Thetarget set byECO Vision for railway transport is “to maximize connectivity by making major ECO transport corridors commercially viable and operational” (Section B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective-I).
2. Policy approach is “achieving of the maximum possible connectivity and its consequent impact on social and economic development” (ECO Vision 2025: Section II. Policy Environment, Paragraph-1).
3. The expected outcome is: “existing ECO Corridors will be operationalized and commercialized to enable increased intra and inter-regional trade” (Vision 2025, Section III: Expected Outcomes: Outcome (ii)).

### Project background:

1. The project titled “ECO Container Train on Istanbul-Almaty and Almaty-Bandar Abbas routes” was initiated in March 2001. The route’s overall length is 5,626km (Turkey 1,950km, Iran 2,016km, Turkmenistan 449km, Uzbekistan 732km and Kazakhstan 956km). The project’s first milestone was realized via formal launch of the container train on 20 January 2002. The “Feasibility Study on the ECO Container Train Operationalization” was completed in 2010. It was then approved in 2014. Since 2002, regular run of container trains accounted to 2,800 in number. In 2017, project stakeholders asked to conduct an additional study on the commercialization of this route in addition to one already completed in 2010 and approved in 2014.
2. The project’sinitialgoal designed at its onset was to enable rail-based multimodal connectivity till sea outlets in Turkey and Iran for the en-route landlocked (LLCs) countries, including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.
3. The Study on the commercialization of the ECO of ECO Container Trains on Istanbul-Almaty and Bandar Abbas-Almaty routes was completed in March 2018. The aforementioned documents were ensured for the planned discussions at 2nd HLWGM on Istanbul-Almaty and Bandar Abbas-Almaty routes in line with ECO Calendar of Events-2018, 2019 and 2020.

### Latest decisions on the project:

1. The 9th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport adopted recommendation-3 in the Turkmenbashi Declaration ̶ to make efforts to “early operationalize” ECO’s existing road and rail routes” (1-3 May 2018, Turkmenbashi). In that regard, the Istanbul-Almaty and Bandar Abbas-Almaty railway route is one of ECO’s existing five railway routes.
2. The 31st RPC while acknowledging the challenges faced by the Islamic Republic of Iran in dispatching Wagons to/from Kazakhstan, requested the en-route countries to organize bilateral negotiations to solve this problem in coordination with the Secretariat.
3. The 14th Meeting of Heads of Railway Authorities/8th Railway Committee Meeting of TTCC (20-21 June 2019, Dushanbe) acknowledged the regular number of 10 container trains in 2018 on the route compared to just 4 in 2017 and indicated the endorsement of the revised tariffs along the route (paragraph-35) while, at the same time, requested en-route countries to host the 2nd HLWGM (paragraph-37).

### Recent developments and progress since the 31st RPC:

1. The Covid-19 Pandemic has prevented the hosting the 2nd HLWGM on Istanbul-Almaty and Bandar Abbas-Almaty routes.
2. To date, the railway route is currently operational and transportation of cargo/freight in segments in en-route countries of the Istanbul-Almaty & Bandar Abbas-Almaty railway route is ongoing.
3. The Council considered the project titled: “ECO Container Train operationalization on Istanbul-Almaty and Bandar Abbas-Almaty” as completed. The Council may note that the railway route “Istanbul-Almaty and Bandar Abbas-Almaty” remains as one of ECO’s main railway routes in line as stipulated in the ECO Railway Network Development Plan

### Expected outcomes for 2022 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:

1. The Council may request the Secretariat to follow up the new project proposal to with joint ECO-UNECE-IsDB project on: “Quantifying the benefits of application of Unified Railway Law in the Route”( proposed by UNECE).
2. The Council may request the Secretariat to organize the 2nd HLGW Meeting virtually in 2022, in coordination with the en-route countries, to discuss the suggestions of the en-route countries and new project proposals for further improvement of the Routs.

### Area conclusions:

1. The “Istanbul-Almaty and Bandar Abbas-Almaty” railway route is one of the five main ECO railway routes as mapped in ECO’s Railway Network Development Plan. As such, it needs further improvement through a range of projects at choice of en-route countries. In this regard, the suggestions of the Member States would be welcomed to contribute to the draft agenda of the 2nd HLGWM.
2. The 2nd HLWGM in 2022 may consider ways to improve the route through a prospective project proposal.

## Priority Area No. 4:

## “Railway Project for the connection of China to Europe through Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Iran (KTAI)”

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. ECO Vision’s target is “to maximize accessibility” (Section B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective (I)).
2. Policy approach is to “achieve maximum possible connectivity” (ECO Vision 2025: Section II. Policy Environment: paragraph-1, sentence 3).
3. ECO Vision’s expected outcome is “to bridge gaps and interconnect Member Countries with neighboring regions” (Vision 2025, Section III: Expected Outcomes: Outcome (i).

1. **The Midterm Review of ECO Vision (Nov. 2021)**envisaged fund-raising “Forum” should be organized, by ECO-TDB in collaboration of ECO Secretariat, as early as feasible and possible, to mobilize funds through national and international financial institutions/banks, particularly for rehabilitation of existing railways and road links as well as construction of new railways. In the same spirit, the ECO-TDB may be mandated to facilitate transfer of resources/payments related to regional connectivity and ECO transit transport infrastructures.

### Project background

1. The 18th RPC Meeting (March 2008, Islamabad) welcomed the proposal of Afghanistan to initiate the project. The subsequent 1st ECO Senior Official Meeting (July 2009, Kabul) considered the details of the project proposal. Thus, the overall length of Kashgar-Herat-Sangan route was estimated at 2,346km, of which 215km in China, 194km in Kyrgyzstan, 496km in Tajikistan, 1,365km in Afghanistan, and 76km in Iran. The 1st Meeting of Ministers of Transport/Communications/Railways of enroute countries of KTAI (28-29 October 2010, Dushanbe) discussed and adopted the decisions on financing the project.
2. The railway route – KTAI – remains as one of the five key railway routes of ECO as reflected in the ECO Railway Network Development Plan. It seeks to provide rail-based connectivity from China to Europe through ECO’s countries of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Iran.
3. Since 2019 the project has undergone the following developments (i) construction of Khaf-Shamtiq segment completed by Iran; (ii) 3rd segment-Khaf-Herat railway-stretching from Shamtiq to Geno (Rozanak inAfghanistan)constructed; (iii) Afghanistan’s segment of KTAI has been estimated at over 1,000km; (iv) pre-feasibility studies completed in 2014; (v) feasibility studies on Kunduz-Sheberghan (1st segment) completed in 2016; (vi) feasibility study on Sheberghan-Herat (560km) completed as per para-16 of Work Program (TC) 2019; (vii) Khaf-Herat (4th segment, 87km) divided into two phases; (viii) in regard of the 1st phase of the 4th segment (43km) funded by Afghanistan government, procurement/construction started in the first half of 2019; (ix) in regard of the 2nd phase of the 4th segment (44km) funded by Italian government, procurement and construction started during the current year. A Kazakhs company is recruited to construct the remaing segment. However, due to recent political developments in Afghanistan, ther is no clear picture of the existing infrastructure and the the policies for continuation of the Project.
4. Tajikistan’s segment of KTAI is 496km. In 2016, construction of Vahdat-Yovon segment (40.7km) was completed. Vahdat-Yovlon has 3 tunnels, 8 large and medium-length bridges and 2 new railway stations, Boston and Bahor. In July 2009, during the meeting in Afghanistan of Ministers of Transport of ECO Member States, it was agreed that Tajikistan’s railway segment is: “Kashgar-Irkeshtam-Sarytash-Karamyk-Vahdat-Korgan Tobe (Hatlon)-Kalhazabad (J.Balkh)-Nizhniy Panj-Sherkhon-Bandar-Kunduz-Holm-Mazar-e-Sharif-Shebergan-Maimana-Bokhyz-Herat-Choysorh-Khaf-Sangan”. That is currently in its development stage of feasibility studies in relevant segments of en-route countries. Parallel in time, experts of en-route countries meet to review progress. Thus, on 8-10 December 2014 they met in Dushanbe and on 14-15 October 2015 in Bishkek. Of the overall 496km in the framework of this project, Tajikistan has already constructed 131km of the Vahdat-J. Balkhi line and, in the nearest future, Tajikistan plans to construct the 51km long J.Balhi- Nizhniy Panj railway line.
5. The segment of the Kyrgyz Republic is the sole segment that has no feasibility study fulfilled yet. The project is a priority for the Kyrgyz Republic as the KTAI will reduce transit time from East Asia to countries of the Middle East and South Europe and will thus stimulate utilization and conservation of affluent natural resources along the railway corridor. In 2015, in Bishkek, during the expert meeting on KTAI, the “Protocol” was signed on the allocation of financial assistance for Kyrgyz Republic, to fulfill its feasibility study. The Kyrgyz Republic has, vide Note Verbale No. 208/1 dated 7 April 2019 stated its confirmation, in response to Afghanistan’s request posted at the 29th RPC, to proceed with project works under the ECO framework and asserted its intention to participate in the Ministerial Meeting on the KTAI.

1. The project’s economic impact was designed to be 10 million tons of freight (rail/road) per annum, upon completion of construction. The project is expected to enable transit of goods from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan to the Persian Gulf. Currently, the project generates employment opportunities for local workforce in areas of rail road construction in relevant segments in enroute countries.
2. In regard of the KTAI Ministerial Meeting, the 14th Meeting of Heads of ECO Railway Authorities/8th Railway Committee Meeting of TTCC agreed that such meeting should be at high ministerial level (paragraph-45, Report).

### Latest decisions on the project:

1. The 31 Council appreciated the efforts and contributions of the Islamic Republic of Iran for completion of the construction of the Khaf (Iran) – Shamtiq – Rozanak (Afghanistan) railway segment of KTAI Railway in December 2020, requested en-route Member States to complete construction of the remaining missing portions within their territories. The en- route Member States confirmed theircommitment to construct the KTAI railway align with the 1435mm standard gauge size, based on the Protocol agreed and signed among the en-route KTAI Member States, in 2015 in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic.
2. The 31st meeting of the Regional Planning Council encouraged the en-route countries of the KTAI railway to exert all effort to complete the “missing links” in their relevant segments.
3. The Council requested the Kyrgyz Republic to update the ECO Secretariat about any development on construction of KTAI railway route in their territory. The Council also highlighted the importance of involvement of China in KTAI railway project.
4. The Council also requested the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to inform the Secretariat about the exact date and hospitality details of the Ministerial Meeting on the KTAI railway project.
5. The Council also requested the ECO Secretariat to contact relevant authorities of the Government of Peoples Republic of China for their participation in this important meeting.

### Recent developments and progress since the 31st RPC:

1. The I.R of Iran and Kyrgyz Republic provided the updated information regarding missing links, in response to secretariat's note verbal no. 27 dt 3/2/2021. The remaining en-route member states were again requested to provide the progress report on the construction of the railway missing links via note verbal no. 608 dt8/6/2021.issue.

1. The 2nd Ministerial, planned for 1st September 2021, was postponed due to political developments in Afghanistan. The follow up of the project is dependent on clarification of political situation in Afghanistan.
2. The project for the construction of the Khaf-Herat section of the KTAI railway in Iran and Afghanistan has been estimated nearly 206km long. It has been divided into four operational sections with two in Iran and the other two in Afghanistan. Currently, the construction of the standard railway consisting of the two sections in Iran, from Khaf to Shamtigh (total 81 km) has been completed.
3. In Afghanistan, the construction of the standard railway from Shamtigh to Rozanak (total 62km) has been completed by the Islamic Republic of Iran. The construction of the standard railway from Rozanak to Herat (total 63km) is being handled by the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.
4. The 140km section of the KTAI railway corridor, from Khaf (Iran) to Rozanak (Afghanistan) inaugurated on 10 December 2020 with the presence of high ranking dignitaries of the KTAI en-route countries.
5. The Fund Raising event was followed up with the I. R of Afghanistan vide note verbal no. 98 dt 3/2/2021. The issue has been referred to be followed up under the ECO Advocacy Programme for Afghanistan in the JPC and EAPA Section.

The follow up of the Fund Raising Conference is dependent on clarification of political situation in Afghanistan.

### Expected outcomes for 2022 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:

1. The Council may encourage the en-route countries of the KTAI railway to complete the “missing links” in their relevant segments, in line with recommendation-5 of the Turkmenbashi Declaration (3 May 2018).
2. The Council may request the KTAI enroute countries to host the 2nd Ministerial Meeting via virtual means in 2022. A High Level Expert Group meeting may also be convened- prior to the Ministerial Meeting to finalize the necessary documents.
3. The Council may request the en-route countries to consider re-structuring the project design into separate but easily workable segments, and provide the Secretariat with their suggestions in this regard.
4. The Council may request ECO TDB, IsDB, ADB and AIIB to consider financing the feasibility study and construction of the missing links of the KTAI Corridor.

### Area conclusions:

1. The Ministerial Meeting of en-route KTAI Railway corridor would consolidate proposals for en-route countries to see where each of them stands in completing “missing links” in their relevant segments of KTAI. Participation of potential financiers and other partners is to be encouraged. In addition, there arises a possibility of linking the KTAI railway route to adjacent railway links and lines, one option being the link to Uzbekistan’s dry port terminal at Termez. The project proposal on this option was discussed and approved by the 14th Meeting of Heads of ECO Railway Authorities/8th Railway Committee Meeting of TTCC (20-21 June 2019, Dushanbe). Alternatively, the Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Turkmenistan railway and “Lapis Lazuli transit transport corridor” may each be looked at closely for their integration into the KTAI railway mainstream. Turkey may also join to the Corridor and a new branch such as Herat-Tehran-Istanbul may also be considered. In this regard, the aforementioned railway links were originally designed as branch links of KTAI as envisaged in the “ECO Railway Network Development Plan” laid down in the ECO feasibility study (2016).
2. The Council may recommend the Member States and Secretariat for involvement and development of the KTAI Corridor within the framework of BRI mega project.

## Priority Area No. 5:

## “Railway Project on Qazvin-Rasht-Astara (Iran)-Astara (Azerbaijan) route”

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. ECO Vision’s targetis “to maximize connectivity and accessibility” (Section B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective No. I).
2. Policy approach is “to achieve maximum possible connectivity and its impact on social and economic development” (ECO Vision 2025: Section II. Policy Environment, para-1, sentence 3).
3. The ECO Vision’s expected outcome is “to bridge the gaps and interconnect Member Countries and the region with neighboring regions to reach international markets” (Vision 2025, Section III: Expected Outcomes: Outcome (i).
4. **The Midterm Review of ECO Vision (Nov. 2021)** envisaged fund-raising “Forum” should be organized, by ECO-TDB in collaboration of ECO Secretariat, as early as feasible and possible, to mobilize funds through national and international financial institutions/banks, particularly for rehabilitation of existing railways and road links as well as construction of new railways. In the same spirit, the ECO-TDB may be mandated to facilitate transfer of resources/payments related to regional connectivity and ECO transit transport infrastructures.

### Project background:

1. The project works present an important link withinthe International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC), which connects the ECO region to Europe destinations and Russia and the latter to the Persian Gulf through the Qazvin-Rasht-Astara railway. The throughput capacity via this railway was initially designed at 5 million tons per annum to further expand to annual 10 million tons within the project’s subsequent five year period.
2. The project’sgoal is to provide railway connectivity between countries of Scandinavia to countries of the Persian Gulf.
3. As per the project’s expected output, it is to connect the ECO countries particularly with Russia, Caucasus, countries of Northern Europevia a direct railway link with countries of the Persian Gulf. Thus, construction of the Qazvin-Rasht-Astara railway to inter-connect en-route countries along the INSTC is for the project to enable multimodal rail-based transit to the Persian Gulf.
4. The feasibility for construction of missing link between Rash- Asta (Iran) is conducted by Iran. However the construction is yet to be implemented.
5. The Turkmenbashi Declaration (3 May 2018) recommended Member States “to complete, at earliest, the missing links along the existing ECO rail and road routes” (recommendation-3). In that reference, Rasht-Astara railway is one of the existing ones.

### Latest decisions on the project:

1. The 31st meeting of the Regional Planning Council requested the Republic of Azerbaijan to inform the Secretariat about the date/venue of the 6th HLWG Meeting on Qazvin-Rasht-Astara (Iran)-Astara (Azerbaijan) to be held, preferably, in the second half of 2020.

### Recent developments and progress since the 31st RPC:

1. The 5th HLWG Meeting of the railway corridor was held on 17 December 2019 in Tehran. The Meeting acknowledged the following: (i) the 164 km Qazvin-Rasht segment of the project was completed and officially inaugurated on 6 March 2019; (ii) loading/unloading service provision for freight wagons (including containers) in Astara (Iran) terminal is intensively ongoing in the direction from/to Iran towards Baltic and CIS countries as well as to the Persian Gulf and vice-versa; (iii) construction of four different terminals in Astara (Iran) station namely grain terminal, oil terminal, general cargo terminal and container terminal are being implemented under the project, to increase the freight inflow; (iv) that the only remaining segment along the project is now the 162 km of Rasht-Astara, for which, the engineering studies have already been completed, which is a great progress for implementing the project; substructure of 9 km of the beginning of the route from Rasht side has been constructed in double track, upon which one line will go to Anzali and the other line will extend to Astara; land acquisition along the Rasht-Astara segment has already been started.
2. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the 6th HLWG Meeting on Qazvin-Rasht-Astara (Iran)-Astara (Azerbaijan) could not be held in the second half of 2020.
3. The 6th HLWG Meeting on Qazvin-Rasht-Astara (Iran)-Astara (Azerbaijan) has been postponed on the request of Republic of Azerbaijan. The concerned authorities of the Republic of Azerbaijan will communicate dates and other details of the meeting. The matter has been followed up.

### Expected outcomes for 2022 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:

1. The Council may request the Secretariat to start negotiations with ECO international partners, including inter alia, UNESCAP, and IsDB for conducting a study project for commercialization of the Route.

1. The Council may request that the 6th HLWG Meeting on Qazvin-Rasht-Astara (Iran)-Astara (Azerbaijan) convened in 2022 via virtual means.
2. The Council may request the ECO-TDB to consider financing the missing link of the afore-mentioned corridor (Rash - Astara).

### Area conclusions:

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1. The project is currently ongoing. The 6th HLWGM on Qazvin-Rasht-Astara is expected to oversee progress updates on commencement of concluding phase of the project while concentrating on financial aspects enabling start of construction works on the project’s last segment

##  ROAD TRANSPORT

## Priority Area No.1

## Development of ECO Road Corridors on Kyrgyz Republic-Tajikistan- Afghanistan- Iran (KTAI) and Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) routes

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. ECO Vision’s target is “to maximize connectivity and mobility by making major ECO road corridors operational” (Section 3B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective (I)).
2. Policy approach is to “provide for efficient and effective access to transit”, “facilitate regular and commercially justified operation of ECO corridors” (ECO Vision 2025: Section II. Policy Environment: paragraph-3).
3. ECO Vision’s expected outcome for the existing road corridors is “to improve regional transit transport infrastructure to bridge gaps”, “to encourage the Member State in their acceding to relevant regional and international legal instruments for the ease of transit transport”, “to streamline and simplify administrative procedures and controls in inter-regional transport within the framework of TTFA”, “to support more efficient customs functions and modernized customs facilities in Member Countries” and “simplify visa and consular procedures for transit and regionally and globally accepted insurance system to be activated in line with TTFA” (ECO Vision 2025, Section III: Expected Outcomes: Outcomes (i), (iv), (v), (vi), (vii)).
4. **The Midterm Review of ECO Vision (Nov. 2021)** envisages digitalization of procedures, including through capacity development programmes and application of eTIR and eCMR; etc.
5. **The Midterm Review of ECO Vision (Nov 2021)** envisaged fund-raising “Forum” should be organized, by ECO-TDB in collaboration of ECO Secretariat, as early as feasible and possible, to mobilize funds through national and international financial institutions/banks, particularly for rehabilitation of existing railways and road links as well as construction of new railways. In the same spirit, the ECO-TDB may be mandated to facilitate transfer of resources/payments related to regional connectivity and ECO transit transport infrastructures.

### Background information:

1. The 8th Ministerial Meeting on Transport and Communications (Ashgabat, June 2011) decided to establish two road transport corridors, one between Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI), and the other between Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Iran and (KTAI). Based on the decisions of the 1st HLWGM on ITI and 2nd HLWGM on KTAI to undertake a field study, appropriate measures have been taken in this regard. IRU, a partner organization of ECO, confirmed technical and financial support for the field study where its co-sponsorship share amounting to US$30,000 was subsequently transferred to ECO’s account in two portions (2017 and 2018). An international consultant was recruited to carry out the study. Nominations of national consultants were received to provide project inputs.
2. The Secretariat has updated the Study project’s findings of which final reports have been approved at the 4th HLWG Meeting on KTAI and 5th HLWG Meeting on ITI road corridors on 25-26 November 2019 in Tehran along with the Annexes containing Action Plan, Visa Pilot Scheme, and a set of recommendations.

### Latest decisions on the KTAI and ITI Road Corridors

1. The 31st meeting of the Regional Planning Council requested the en-route countries for immediate implementation of the Action Plan approved by the 4th and 5th HLWGMs on KTAI and ITI road corridors and noted that the Action Plan will “serve as a framework for systematic monitoring”.

The **Council** appreciated the en-route KTAI Member States, the ECO Secretariat and IRU for the successful test run of the loaded truck under TIR, conducted in July-August 2020 and requested en-route Member States to implement the recommendations of the report of the KTAI Test Run.

1. The Council recommended that, in the post project phase, digital TIR-IT tools be introduced in Afghanistan, Tajikistan while the Turkey-Iran e-TIR pilot project be expanded to all TIR customs and transport operators whilst Pakistan would join in.
2. The Council instructed ECO Secretariat to follow up with the UNECE and IsDB for organizing the regional workshops on e-TIR and e-CMR, proposed to be held in Tajikistan, for all ECO countries and the national workshop on CMR for Afghanistan, to be held in 2020.
3. The Council appreciated the Republic of Turkey's offer for holding the training programs on e-TIR based on the requests from the interested Member States. The Council requested the ECO Secretariat for necessary coordination in this regard.
4. The **Council** appreciated the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for completing the necessary procedures for accession to CMR in October 2020 and requested the Country to periodically provide the Secretariat with progress reports on the construction of the missing links, particularly road segments of Herat–Andkhoy and the Armalik–Laman segment of the Route.
5. The **Council** requested the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Tajikistan to provide the Secretariat with the proposed dates and other particulars of the 6th HLWGM on ITI road corridor and 5th HLWGM on KTAI road corridor to be held virtually in 2021.
6. The 31st RPC **requested** TTCC Road Committee to consider the proposal of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for the inclusion of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Turkey in the KTAI Road Corridor, and to report to the next RPC meeting.
7. The Council requested the ECO Secretariat to coordinate with the Member States for involvement of the ECO Chamber of Commerce in the future TIR operations of the loaded trucks along the KTAI road corridor.

### Recent developments and progress since the 31st RPC:

1. As per paragraph- 34 of the Work Program (TC) urging the en-route countries for immediate implementation of the Action Plan approved by the 4th and 5th HLWGMs on KTAI and ITI road corridors, in particular, to facilitate visa for drivers performing carriage of goods along both Corridors, the meeting on Visa Pilot Scheme for ITI and KTAI Road Corridors was organized on 9 February 2020 at the ECO Secretariat, Tehran. So far Iran and Pakistan have acceded to the Visa Scheme and exchanged list of professional transit drivers.
2. As per paragraph-340 of the Work Program instructing ECO Secretariat to organize, in close coordination with en-route countries and IRU, the test run of loaded trucks under TIR carnets on both, the ITI and the KTAI road corridors, a test run of loaded trucks carrying goods under TIR Carnets along KTAI road corridor was organized and commenced from the Iranian border crossing of Dogharoon on 26 July 2020. The caravan included seven trucks carrying cargo worth more than 85 thousand USD. During an official ceremony the trucks started their journey from Dogharoon with two heading for the city of Osh in the Kyrgyz Republic and five to the capital city of Dushanbe in the Republic of Tajikistan. The five trucks reached their final destination of Dushanbe on Friday, August 11 2020 while the two trucks reached Osh on Friday, August 14 2020. The Secretariat has circulated the report of the Test Run among en-route States (Note Verbal TC/KTI-Test Run Report/2020/466).
3. The ECO-ITI Road corridor was successfully activated under TIR system on 08 October 2021 on the route between Pakistan (Karachi) Iran (Mirjaveh – Bazargan BCP) and Turkey (Gurbolag - Istanbul) with two Pakistani trucks fully loaded on return trip as well.
4. The Report of the ITI Acticvation was jointly prepared by ECO Secretariat and circulated to the en-route countries.
5. With successful activation of the Corridor, the trucks of the en-route Member States may start transit operations on the corridor.
6. The eCMR and eTIR workshops were organized successfully on April 6, 2021 and April 14 and November 03, 2021. In cooperation with UNECE and IRU.

### Expected outcomes for 2022 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:

1. The Council may request the en-route countries for immediate implementation of the Action Plan approved by the 4th and 5th HLWGMs on KTAI and ITI road corridors. The Action Plan will serve as a framework for systematic monitoring.
2. The council may request ECO Secretariat to further cooperate with IRU, IDB and UNECE for promoting digitalization of transit transport in the region particularly through implementing e-TIR and eCMR and in this regard the Council may request ITI and KTAI en-route Member States to consider implementing the e-TIR and eCMR projects to further facilitate transport and transit in the corridor.
3. The council may further request ECO Secretariat to coordinate with IRU and IDB and UNECE for organizing virtually the regional workshops and the necessary studies for implementation of e-TIR and e-CMR in the region in 2022.
4. The Council may request ITI and KTAI en-route Member States to implement the recommendations of the reports of the KTAI Test Run.
5. The Council may request the KTAI and ITI en-route countries to keep the Secretariat abreast of the progress and developments on the construction\development\rehabilitation of the missing links in their territories to be circulated among the Member States.
6. The Council may request the ECO Secretariat to organize the 6th HLWGM on ITI road corridor and 5th HLWGM on KTAI road corridor via virtual means in 2022, due to the Covid-19 Pandemic.
7. Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, the special meeting of en-route Member States to discuss the establishment of a regional MVTPL insurance (White Card) scheme for the ITI road corridor may be held via virtual means. The Event may be chaired on voluntary basis by one the interested Member States.
8. The Member States may also consider establishment of joint stock\venture company to operate in the corridor.
9. The Council may recommend Pakistan to encourage more forwarders to join to TIR System to facilitate transit on ITI Corridor.
10. The Council may recommend the Secretariat to work with IRU to conduct a study project on extending the ITI Corridor to China.

### Area conclusions:

1. As the shortest possible route between Iran and Kyrgyzstan, the launch of the KTAI corridor would tap into the growing markets of the ECO Region. The success of the Test Run, will further push ECO-proven good practices of TIR operation toward sustainable levels both in ITI and KTAI road corridors.

The Activation of the ITI Corridor has been a historic milestone in the ECO region and was hailed by the 15th ECO Summit 0n 28 November 2021 in Ashgabat by the Presidents. These strategic corridors have the capacity to connect to China and absorb a considerable portion of transit trade to and from China.

1. The launch of the KTAI and ITI road corridors for TIR transport opens the region to trade and development, and enables freight forwarders and transport operators to benefit from significant cost and time savings when transporting goods.
2. Promotion and implementation of digital means is instrumental in minimizing the risk of Corona and maximizing transit facilitation. To this end the Secretariat will continue to cooperate with interested organizations to promote digitalization of transport in the region.

## Priority area No. 2

## Facilitation of border crossing procedures

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. ECO Vision’s target: “to maximize mobility by making major ECO transport corridors commercially viable and operational” (Section 3B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective (I)).
2. ECO Vision’s expected outcome of a “more efficient customs functions and modernized customs facilities in the member states will be supported” (Section III: Expected Outcomes: (vi)).
3. **The Midterm Review of ECO Vision (Nov. 2021)** envisages digitalization of procedures, including through capacity development programmes and application of eTIR and eCMR; etc.

### Background Information:

1. Article 28 (TTFA) stipulates that: “the Contracting parties shall establish a Customs Transit system for cargoes and means of transport in accordance with the relevant international Customs Conventions to facilitate movement of goods in their territories. The Contracting parties shall apply the provisions of TIR Convention amongst themselves.”
2. With technical assistance of ECO and IRU TIR System is reactivated in Afghanistan and operationalized in Pakistan in line with Action Plans designed by ECO’s relevant HLWGs in this for further facilitation of transit, the eTIR shall also be implemented and activated in those Member States.
3. In 2016, data/information gathered by ECO consultancy team, was reflected in the report titled “Feasibility study on the implementation of customs-transit related provisions of the TTFA”. The study resulted in the “5-year Action Plan for modernization of customs crossing borders of ECO Member States”.

1. The aforementioned Plan of Action (PoA) recommended the following implementation steps: i) modernization of the existing border crossing points’ services; ii) improvement of customs-related infrastructure; iii) strengthening of institutional and legal capacities. To implement PoA, the Member States were asked for regular updates on their measures/actions taken at cross borders. Feedback from Azerbaijan and Turkey were received.
2. The 6th Meeting of Customs Transit Committee of TTCC (Islamabad, 15 February 2018) was provided with more updates on the implementation of the 5-year Action Plan for the modernization of customs crossing borders of ECO Member States. The follow-up Notes of the Secretariat were forwarded to Member States, for feedback on implementation of the Plan of Action. Thus, the Secretariat received feedback vide Note No.662 dated 18.08. 2019 of the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Tehran commenting on the study report of the international consultant. In particular, it suggested the up-gradation or possibility of constructing a new border crossing point at juncture of Azerbaijan with ECO’ transport corridors. It also provided the information about the completion of installation of appropriate infrastructure at state border between Azerbaijan and Iran in the framework of construction works of the railway bridge over the Astara River. It also informed about the launch of the Astara (Azerbaijan)-Astara (Iran) railway line.
3. The 7th Meeting of the Customs Committee of TTCC (virtual on 17 August, 2021) discussed the measures to facilitate border crossing procedures particularly through establishment of green lanes for TIR Transit and fo perishable cargos. The Meeting also requested the Secretariat and IRU to expedite implementation of the decisions of the 10th Ministerial Meeting (15 Dec 2020) on establishment of the “Consultative Group of ECO TIR Issuing and Guaranteeing Associations” with the purpose of providing non-binding assistance and establish constructive dialogue with relevant bodies of ECO, notably the ECO “Transit Transport Coordination Council” on matters related to Customs, international trade and international transport, from the perspective of the private sector, represented by TIR Associations.
4. The 7th Meeting also called on all ECO Member States to work closely with IRU to further expand TIR digitalization projects and TIR green lanes at their borders.

### Latest Decisions:

1. The 31st **Council** requested Member States to implement the provisions of the ECO Guidelines on Cross Border Facilitation Measures under conditions of COVID-19 in a bid to secure the unhindered passage of goods and essential services throughout the region.
2. The 31st meeting of the Regional Planning Council requested the Member States to keep the Secretariat informed of progress in their customs improvements at their relevant border crossing points (BCPs) as per the provisions of the Action Plan.
3. The Council requested the Member States that are interested in the modernization of their Border Crossing Points, to convey to the Secretariat the shortlist of at least two BCPs requiring the modernization. For attracting investments of interested private companies, those BCPs should be of regional significance and avail of adequate potential for the transit of volumes of goods.
4. The Council suggested that Member States put forward their proposals for hosting the workshops and training courses in 2022 on Customs Transit and field visits of their BCPs, in line with recommendation (8) of the Turkmenbashi Declaration (3 May 2018).
5. The 31st **Council** requested the Member States to consider establishing ‘TIR-EPD Green lanes’ in their border crossing points along the main ECO transport routes to facilitate the movement of general cargo particularly food stuff, medicines and essential humanitarian and rescue products. The Council mandated the Secretariat to initiate a Small Sized Project on “Establishing TIR Green Lanes for main ECO Crossing Points” and recruit a specialist for implementation of the Project in the first half of 2021.
6. The Council appreciated the offer of the Republic of Turkey for organizing e-TIR training courses for the interested ECO Member States and requested the Country to provide the Secretariat with additional details of the Proposal. Recent developments and progress since the 31st RPC:
7. From the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Secretariat has circulated a number of documents among Member States to ensure the unhindered passage of goods and essential services. The report regarding the impacts of Covid-19 on Supply Chains and facilitating Passage of Medicine and Food Stuff in the ECO Region, the ECO Guidelines (Notes Verbales TC/2020/228 and TC/2020/535).
8. The 7th Meeting of the Customs Committee of TTCC (virtual on 17 August, 2021) discussed the measures to facilitate border crossing procedures particularly through establishment of green lanes for TIR Transit and for perishable cargos. The Meeting also requested the Secretariat and IRU to expedite implementation of the decisions of the 10th Ministerial Meeting (15 Dec 2020) on establishment of the “Consultative Group of ECO TIR Issuing and Guaranteeing Associations” with the purpose of providing non-binding assistance and establish constructive dialogue with relevant bodies of ECO, notably the ECO “Transit Transport Coordination Council” on matters related to Customs, international trade and international transport, from the perspective of the private sector, represented by TIR Associations.
9. The 7th Meeting also called on all ECO Member States to work closely with IRU to further expand TIR digitalization projects and TIR green lanes at their borders.
10. Given the current situation, ‘TIR-EPD green lanes’ along main transport routes are for concerted cooperation among world nations to ensure that all freight, including goods that are currently most needed by people be delivered to destinations with no further delay.

### Expected outcomes for 2022 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:

1. The Council may request the Member States to implement the provisions of the ECO Guidelines on Cross Border Facilitation Measures under conditions of COVID-19, to secure the unhindered passage of goods and essential services throughout the region.
2. The Council may reiterate on the importance of the modernization of border crossing points in the region and may once more request the Member States that are interested in the modernization of their Border Crossing Points, to convey to the Secretariat the short list of at least two BCPs requiring the modernization. For attracting investments of interested private companies, those BCPs should be of regional significance and possessing certain potential for the transit of volumes of goods.
3. The Council may request the Member States to establish ‘TIR-EPD green lanes’ in their border crossing points along the main ECO transport routes. The Member States may keep the Secretariat informed of progress in this regard as well as any progress in their customs improvements at their relevant border cross points (BCPs).
4. The Council may request the Secretariat to assist in operationalization of the “Consultative Group of ECO TIR Issuing and Guaranteeing Associations” and facilitate its participation in the meetings of relevant Committees of TTCC.
5. The Council may request the Secretariat to approach IRU and IsDB or any other relevant international organization for their assistance in digitalizing the transit including through implementing eTIR and eCMR.
6. The Council may request the MS to accede to eTIR and eCMR protocols to speed up digitalization of transit in the region.
7. The Council may also request the Secretariat to institutionalize cooperation with the International Road Union to further speed up and enhance transit and transport facilitation in the ECO Region.
8. The Council may request the interested Member States to inform the Secretariat about rehabilitation needs of Zero Areas between the border crossing points of any two neighboring Member States, to consider the implementation of a rehabilitation project by ECO Secretariat.

### Area conclusions:

1. The Covid-19 Pandemic has exacerbated the need for digitalization of transit transport and facilitation of BCP procedures in the ECO Region. Although the cooperation with international organizations has resulted in transit facilitation so far, the urgency of the situation requires for institutionalized cooperation with the relevant international specialized bodies particularly IRU
2. The Guidelines, prepared according to the TTFA, United Nations and International Road Transport Union (IRU) standards, seeks to keep ECO regional border crossings open for freight supply chains of medicine and foods supplies.
3. Up-gradation of BCPs and establishment of Green Lanes and digitalization of transit transport shall become a priority in the region to facilitate trade and mitigate the risks of pandemic.

## Priority area No. 3

## Project: Joint IDB/UNECE Project on Transport Geographical Information Systems (GIS)

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. ECO Vision’s target is “to maximize mobility by making major ECO transport corridors operational” (Section B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective (I)).
2. ECO Vision’s expected outcome: “regional transit transport infrastructure will be improved to bridge gaps and interconnect the Member States and the region with neighboring regions to reach international markets” (ECO Vision 2025: Section III: Expected Outcomes: Outcomes (i)).

### Background information:

1. The IsDB representative presented the concept project proposal to launch the Joint IDB/UNECE Project on Enhancing Regional Transport Infrastructure Connectivity and Establishment of a Transport Geographical Information System (GIS) Database for the ECO Member States to the 13th Meeting of ECO Heads of Railway Authorities (Baku, April 2017).
2. The meeting requested inclusion of ECO transport maps in the GIS initiative. The meeting requested member countries through ECO Secretariat to nominate national consultants/focal points for contribution to GIS initiative. The member states were also urged to provide necessary information/data and to actively participate in the meeting to be organized by IDB/UNECE under this initiative.
3. The project entails from the IsDB 10-Year Strategic Framework and documents of ECO and UNECE focusing on regional connectivity as one of strategic objectives of both. The design and development of transport infrastructure networks is the key goal of the project. The design of regional land and land-cum-sea transport network incorporating rail, road, maritime and inland water routes will be fulfilled under project. Major seaports, ferry links, intermodal terminals, dry ports and border-crossing points along selected routes will be key points of network. This will help partner institutions to develop priority sub-regional programs for coordinated actions among multiple partners to bridge the missing links and enhance capacity and efficiency of regional transport networks.
4. The project’s goal is to create a comprehensive mapping data base of the ECO region’s transport, to improve existing networks through the following activities: i) establishment of regional GIS database; ii) preparation of the list of priority investment projects; iii) preparing regional study on “Benchmarking transport construction and maintenance costs”; iv) preparing regional study on the “Establishment of multi-donor RCI financing facilities”.
5. The project has been structured in two phases: phase-1 contains components 1 and 2; it will collect data for existing transport networks and identify potential projects for investment. Phase-2 (Transport GIS application) will facilitate analyses, dissemination and visualization of data/information on transport infrastructure, including international transport operations and trade flows in Member States. This task will be fulfilled by customizing GIS software and establishing GIS database of transport infrastructure networks and infrastructure projects in addition to database on cargoes/trade flows.
6. The 9th Meeting of Ministers of Transport of ECO Member States (1-3 May 2018, Turkmenbashi) welcomed the aforementioned initiative on GIS “as a platform for monitoring quality of transport infrastructure and regional connectivity among the ECO Member Countries”.
7. The 14th Meeting of Heads of Railway Authorities of ECO Member States (20-21 June 2019, Dushanbe) re-iterated a request for inclusion of ECO transport maps in the GIS initiative.
8. The same Meeting suggested that project works be continued as initially agreed upon by project parties and instructed that maps, soft and hard formats, be released by the Secretariat while Member States would provide the required information, including on transit railway lines, investment projects, new/planned lines, HSR, BCPs, interchange stations for GIS at UNECE and IsDB, to transform such data into GIS-adjusted maps. For the latter action, the Meeting requested IsDB and UNECE to simplify questionnaires for the ease of processing (paragraphs 51-54, Report of 14th Meeting of Heads of Railway Authorities of ECO Member States, 20-21 June 2019, Dushanbe).

### Latest decisions:

1. The 31st **Council** appreciated the efforts of the Member States for completion of the 1st phase of the joint ECO/UNECE/IsDB project titled “Benchmarking Study for Transport Infrastructure Construction Costs” in the ECO Member States using GIS and requested the Secretariat to finalize the negotiations with UNECE and IsDB for the commencement of the 2nd phase of the project on the “Creation of a comprehensive GIS database and related maps, including the maps of ECO Region, for displaying regional and sub-regional transport networks and geo-mapping of infrastructure projects along these networks”.

### Recent developments and progress since the 31st RPC:

1. The two training workshops for the Focal Points/National Consultants in frame of the GIS project were conducted in 2021 virtually and participants were familiarized with the results of the project.
2. In the course of implementation of the project the following deliverables were produced:
* International consultant recruited by UNECE.
* National Focal Points-National Consultants appointed by ECO Member States.
* National Focal Points developed actual GIS indicators.
* Two workshops have been held on the GIS initiative with participation of involved ECO Member States in previous years
* Questionnaires of the ECO Member States on their transport infrastructure costs collected and reviewed by all of project parties during January-May 2020
* Final report on the completion of the 1st phase of the joint ECO/UNECE/IsDB project on GIS titled “Benchmarking of transport infrastructure construction costs” in ECO Member States using GIS system has been prepared and finalized on 07.11.2020.

### Expected outcomes for 2022 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:

1. The Council may request the ECO Secretariat to finalize the negotiations with UNECE and IDB for the commencement of the 2nd phase of the project which is the “Creation of a comprehensive GIS database and related maps , including the maps of ECO Region, for displaying regional and sub-regional transport networks and geo-mapping of infrastructure projects along these networks”.
2. The Council may request the UNECE and the project team to update the GIS maps with ECO’s recent maps and development plans. Area Conclusions:
3. The Secretariat has requested the project teams in UNECE, IsDB for the updated project framework to be able to follow the step-by-step implementation of project activities on the Secretariat’s side. It is agreed that the Secretariat and Member States will be provided with opportunity to update their information on the GIS System.
4. The Council may request to recruit a technical staff on temporary basis for cooperation with the project team and the member states to follow up the GIS project and assist in devising and implementing the 2nd phase of the project on temporary basis.

## Priority Area No.4:

## ECO Visa Scheme for Drivers

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. ECO Vision’s target is “to maximize mobility by making major ECO road corridors operational” (Section B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective (I)). To cooperate on fundamental transit policy related issues aimed at simplifying procedures for movement of people and goods across the region (Section B: Transport and Connectivity: Section II: Policy Environment, second paragraph, p.3).
2. ECO Vision’s expected outcome: “Simplified visa and consular procedures for transit related activities” (Section III: Expected Outcomes: Outcomes (vii)). “Administrative procedures and controls in inter-regional transport will be streamlines and simplified within the framework of TTFA” (Section B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective (v)).

### Background information:

1. According to Article 12 (TTFA), the TTFA Contracting Parties had committed to grant multiple entry and transit visa valid for one year with the right to stay on the territory of each Contracting Party for 15 days in transit per each trip and for up to 5 more days in places of loading and discharge to drivers and persons engaged in international transit traffic.
2. The 19th RPC Meeting recommended organizing meetings of consular officials of Embassies of Member States. So far, five meetings have taken place. The 1st Senior Consular Officials meeting (4October 2016, Secretariat) was attended by senior consular officials from eight Member States. The Meeting approved the text of the “ECO Visa Exemption Sticker Scheme”. In the same year, the revised “ECO Visa Exemption Sticker Scheme” was sent to Member States for their inputs, by 31 December, 2016.
3. Further, the 28th RPC was informed about the need for an agreed mechanism among the TTFA Contracting Parties. The 28th Council acknowledged feedback received from the concerned authorities of the Member States, notably, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Kazakhstan.
4. The 29th RPC (para 41) reiterated recommendations of 28th RPC asking the MSs that did not provide comments on the “ECO visa sticker scheme” to do so.
5. The 9th Meeting of Ministers of Transport of ECO Member States (1-3 May 2018, Turkmenbashi) requested those Member States that did not provide their respective comments/views on the revised “ECO Visa Exemption Sticker Scheme” to do so to enable the implementation of “ECO Visa Exemption Sticker Scheme”.
6. As no development has happened since 2016, the Secretariat in partnership with the International Road Union (IRU) simplified the initial scheme and renamed it as the “Visa Pilot Scheme for Drivers” to be implemented initially only to professional drivers along the KTAI/ITI Road Corridors.
7. The Scheme was presented to the meetings of the High Level Working Groups on ITI and KTAI road corridors on November 25-26, 2019 in Tehran and positively responded by participants from transport and customs administrations.

### Latest decisions:

1. The 31st Regional Planning Council requested the Member States to send their views on the “ECO Visa Pilot Scheme” to the ECO Secretariat, latest by end of February 2020.
2. The Council recommended the “ECO Visa Pilot Scheme” for practicing in en-route KTAI and ITI countries during 2020 along with their existing visa procedures. If successful, the scheme will be extended to other ECO Member States as well. Further, the Council called for an immediate meeting of consular sections of the embassies of the ITI and KTAI en-route countries in Tehran to elaborate on this issue, in detail.

### Recent developments and progress since the 31st RPC:

1. The meeting of the representatives of the Member States in Tehran (consular units of the Embassies) and Consular Department of MFA of the Islamic Republic of Iran of KTAI and ITI en-route countries was convened on February 9, 2020 at the ECO Secretariat in Tehran. The Meeting decided that the ITI & KTAI en-route Member States will submit their confirmations/comments, proposals and suggestions on the new ECO Visa Pilot Scheme to the ECO Secretariat within two months’ time, latest by mid of April 2020 and the same will be disseminated among the en-route Member States by the ECO Secretariat for implementation. The minutes of the meeting along with the request to submit their comments have been circulated among en-route Member States (Notes Verbales TC/2020/99, TC/KTAI-ITI/2020/245 and TC/ITI-KTAI/2020/294).
2. The Islamic Republic of Iran and Islamic republic of Pakistan have officially accepted the terms of the Scheme on a reciprocal basis and has dispatched the names of the approved drivers. The acceptance and the drivers list have been circulated among Member States.
3. The Republic of Turkey has in principle agreed to the terms of the Scheme. The acceptance letter has been circulated among Member States (Note Verbale TC/ITI-KTAI/2020/476).
4. The Kyrgyz Republic has provided a self-explanatory Note Verbale conveying a proposal on the Scheme for the consideration of Member States. The Note requests the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to consider reducing the Transport Visa fee and increasing the validity to one year. It also requests the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan and Iran to consider issuing Multiple Visa entries for assigned drivers. The Note has been circulated among Member States (Note Verbale TC/ITI-KTAI/2020/501)

### Expected outcomes for 2022 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:

1. The Council may request the Member States, to expedite providing their confirmations/comments (except for the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Turkey) on the Visa Pilot Scheme to the ECO Secretariat, at the earliest possible, latest by end of March 2022.
2. The Council may recommend the “Visa Pilot Scheme” for practicing in en-route KTAI and ITI countries during 2022 along with their existing visa procedures. If successful, the scheme will be extended to other ECO interested Member States as well.
3. The Council may request the interested Member States rather than KTAI and ITI en-route countries to express their interest to join the Scheme.

### Area conclusions:

1. Simplification of visa issuance for drivers and related personnel is one of major impediments in smooth transit road traffic among ECO Member States. It requires decisive action and adequate decision making by involved Member States.

## Priority Area No.5:

## ECO Logistics Provider Associations Federation (ECOLPAF)

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. ECO Vision’s target: “to maximize mobility by making major ECO transport corridors commercially viable and operational” (Section 3B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective (I)).
2. ECO Vision’s expected outcome**: “**Administrative procedures and controls in inter-regional transport will be streamlined and simplified within the framework of TTFA” (ECO Vision 2025: Section III: Expected Outcomes: Outcomes (v).

### Background information:

1. The 1st preparatory Meeting of ECO Logistics Provider Associations Federation-ECOLPAF (February 2008, Tehran) discussed nature, composition, status, institutional aspects and steps forward to establishing a federation to: (i) act as umbrella organization for national associations of international freight forwarder associations and logistic service providers in ECO members countries; (ii) facilitate transport, trade & logistic development, and (iii) safeguard/promote/advance professional and branch interests of its members at international level. Further, the Secretariat proposed the draft Statute of ECOLPAF, which was unanimously adopted at the 3rd Meeting of ECOLPAF (November 2011, Tehran).
2. The 28th RPC requested the Secretariat for more regular contacts with the liaison mechanism in Turkey. The 28th RPC Meeting was informed about regular contacts of the Secretariat with the liaison officer at UTIKAD, an agency specified for registration of ECO Member States for ECOLPAF. Further, the complete package of requisite documents was submitted by Pakistan International Freight Forwarding Association (PIFFA).
3. The 9th Meeting of Ministers of Transport of ECO Member States (1-3 May 2018, Turkmenbashi) requested the Member States, interested in joining ECOLPAF, to apply for registration in ECOLPAF without further delay to pave way to consideration of ECOLPAF agenda at the first General Assembly Meeting that was agreed to be hosted by Pakistan.
4. The 29th RPC Meeting requested relevant associations of Member States (other than Pakistan), interested in registration for ECOLPAF, to submit the requisite documents for registration for ECOLPAF to the Secretariat at the earliest possible and requested ECO Secretariat to follow up the issue, vigorously.
5. Till now the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Republic of Turkey have submitted their registration documents, while Islamic Republic of Iran is in its final process for finalizing the requested documents. The Republic of Azerbaijan has formally expressed its disinterest.

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### Latest decisions:

1. The 31st meeting of the Regional Planning Council re-iterated its request to Member States interested in joining the ECOLPAF to expedite conveying requisite registration documents directly to the offices of the Turkish Freight Forwarders and Logistics Service Providers Association (UTIKAD) and a copy to ECO Secretariat. The Council requested the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Republic of Tajikistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan to share their updated documents.
2. The Council re-iterated its recommendation reflected in the 29th RPC Work Program that the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, upon completion of registration procedures by UTIKAD, would host the first General Assembly meeting of ECOLPAF, in Karachi.

### Recent developments and progress since the 31st RPC:

1. Member States, except for Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Republic of Turkey, have not submitted simplified document set for registration in ECOLPAF. The registration procedures may be simplified to enable swift registration and move on.

### Expected outcomes for 2022 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:

1. The Council may request the Republic of Turkey, as the agreed headquarters of the ECO Logistics Provider Associations Federation (Third ECOLPAF Preparatory Meeting, 2011), to provide an update on the current status of the ECOLPAF.
2. The Council may request Member States except for Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Republic of Turkey, to expedite submitting simplified document set for registration in ECOLPAF.

# MARITIME COOPERATION

## Priority Area No. 1

## “Establishment of a common gateway among ECO countries – ECO Gate”

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. **ECO Vision’s strategic objective** is “to maximize transport connectivity, mobility and access” (ECO Vision: Section I. Strategic Objectives).
2. Policy approach is “addressing unique challenges faced by the seven landlocked Member Countries of ECO” (ECO Vision: Policy Environment: paragraph-3, sentence3).
3. **ECO Vision’s expected outcome** is “regional transit transport infrastructure will be improved to interconnect the Member Countries within the region and neighbouring regions to reach international markets” (ECO Vision 2025: Section III. Expected outcomes: Outcome (i)).
4. **The Midterm Vision Review (Nov 2021**) envisaged fund-raising “Forum” should be organized, by ECO-TDB in collaboration of ECO Secretariat, as early as feasible and possible, to mobilize funds through national and international financial institutions/banks, particularly for rehabilitation of existing railways and road links as well as construction of new railways. In the same spirit, the ECO-TDB may be mandated to facilitate transfer of resources/payments related to regional connectivity and ECO transit transport infrastructures.

### Background information

1. Till present, six meetings of Heads of Reference Marine Organizations were held. In May 2018, the 9th Meeting of Ministers of Transport of ECO Member States exchanged views on the development of maritime cooperation and considered new initiatives, in that regard. The Member States highlighted the importance of the vast area of cooperation on maritime in its facilitating trade/transport across the region. A specific focus was on “complementary networking” between ECO’s coastal countries’ seaports with the aim to help landlocked countries of ECO in their accessing open sea outlets. The unbeatable role of Free Economic Zones (FEZ), Free Trade Economic Zones (FTEZ) and Special Industrial Economic Zones at ports and terminals as well as similar facilities that could be beneficial to LLCs in transit of their goods and passengers was pointed out.
2. The 9th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport (1-3 May 2018, Turkmenbashi) adopted its concluding document, Turkmenbashi Declaration, in which recommendations 9 and 10 have strongly emphasized “the importance of linking the existing regional sea ports in the ECO Region with ECO landlocked and transit countries’ dry ports, to improve port facilities and services for massive transit of goods, modernize existing terminals in the ECO region. In that context, Ministers mandated the Transit Transport Coordinating Council (TTCC) “to explore ways and means for this purpose within ECO Frameworks”.
3. Following recommendations 9 and 10 of the Turkmenbashi Declaration, the Secretariat prepared the project proposal, of which its components’ contents stemmed from the decisions adopted by preceding 1 - 4 Meetings of Heads of Reference Maritime Organizations of ECO Member States while the strategizing of the project’s goals was fulfilled in direct accordance with recommendations 9 and 10 of the aforementioned Turkmenbashi Declaration.
4. The 5th Meeting of Heads of Reference Maritime Organizations of ECO Member States (MHRMO) included the participation of heads of large transport logistics companies of ECO’s landlocked countries (6 March 2019, ECO Secretariat). With the objective to implement recommendations 9-10 of the Turkmenbashi Declaration, the Meeting considered the aforementioned project proposal and the latter was endorsed and the project document was then circulated to Member States vide the Secretariat’s Note No. 332 dated 24.04.2019.

1. Further, the Secretariat arranged follow-up discussions in June 2019 at Secretariat on the implementation aspects/budget of the project proposal whence it was decided to supplement the proposal in view of the need for improvement of access of member countries to “free trade and economic areas/spaces” via “ECO gateways”. The project concept has been reviewed, in detail, against practicality of implementation was re-circulated to the Member States vide Note Verbale No 839 dated 6 October 2019.
2. As per ECO procedure, the above project proposal has been considered at the level of Council of Ministers (COM) thereby brining it the information of the 24th COM (8-9 November 2019, Ankara) under the title: “Establishment of a common gateway among ECO countries – ECO Gate”.

### Latest decisions:

1. The 31st Meeting of the Regional Planning Council requested the Secretariat to coordinate the exact dates and hospitality details of the subsequent 6th Meeting of Heads of Reference Maritime Organization of ECO Member States in Turkmenistan.
2. The Council acknowledged that the 24th ECO Council of Ministers Meeting (8-9 November 2019, Antalya) was informed about the project proposal titled “Establishment of a common gateway among ECO countries – ECO Gate” and, in that regard, the Council instructed the Secretariat to fulfill the study by Expert Consultant and ensure the timely implementation of the aforementioned within 6 months from the CPR’s approval.

### Progress and recent developments since the 31st RPC:

1. The 6th Meeting of Heads of Reference Maritime Organization of ECO Member States was held virtually hosted by Turkmenistan On 27 April 2021.
2. The Secretariat has secured the IsDB co-financing of the project (ECO Gate) and provide 50% of the project budget of “ECO Gate”.

### Secretariat’s suggestions and required actions:

1. The Council may request the CPR to allocate 65000 US$ (50 % of total budget) to the implementation of project and hiring a consultant/specialist for preparation of a bankable project proposal document to design ECO Gateways and their application to the existing main ports in the ECO region as well as to explore the possible ways and means to link the existing regional sea ports in the ECO region with the landlocked and transit countries’ dry ports, based on the “ECO Gate” concept proposal.
2. The Council may request the ECO Secretariat to approach ECO TDB, IsDB and IMO, for financial and technical support to implement the ECO Gate Project.
3. As per the Midterm Vision Review (Nov 2021) the ECO-TDB may be mandated to facilitate transfer of resources/payments related to regional connectivity and ECO transit transport infrastructures.
4. The Council may request Member States to intensify their cooperation in the framework of the aforementioned project on maritime cooperation.
5. The Council may appreciate Turkmenistan for hosting the the 6th Meeting of Heads of Reference Maritime Organizations of ECO Member States via virtual means in April 27, 2021and may request the MS to volunteer for hosting the 7th HRMO in their countries.
6. The Council may request the Secretariat to establish ECO Consultative Maritime Officials Network using social media\digital platforms to facilitate coordination on maritime issues in the ECO region and may request the Member States to provide the names of their respective representatives/focal points for establishing the proposed network to the Secretariat.
7. The Council may welcome the proposal of establishment a committee for enhanced cooperation on promotion of Ro-Ro services in the Caspian Sea by the pre- coastal states. The Member States may be requested to participate in this arrangement.
8. Taking into account the importance of digitalization of transport industry, the Council may supported digitalization of maritime transport and may request the ECO Secretariat to conduct a feasibility study in this connection through hiring international consultant.
9. Further the Council may request the MS to arrange field visits to their sea\dry ports for onsite exploration of facilities and opportunities by the officials and interested private sector investors.

### Area conclusions:

1. The 5th Meeting of Heads of Reference Maritime Organizations of ECO Member States reiterated its request of the Member States to provide their sea\dry port facilities and logistics services including: Infrastructure: land, equipment, office space, storage facilities, container depots, communication facilities, training, advisory services; Fiscal/customs measures, reduction in duties, minimization of custom inspections, and simplification of custom formalities for goods in transit; Fees and tariffs, incentives, administrative facilities/permits; Special services/facilities to LLCs in FEZ at ports or nearest locations to ports; Investment opportunities for the LLCs at ports of transit countries.

# CIVIL AVIATION

##  Priority Area No.1

## “Encouragement and promotion of combined and multimodal transport”

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. The **TTFA objective** is “encouragement and promotion of combined and multimodal transport” (TTFA: Article 7: para-1)
2. Policy **approach** is “to ensure regional development, prosperity and well-being” (ECO Vision 2025: Policy Environment: para-1, sentence1).
3. **ECO Vision’s expected outcome** is “transport-related facilitative harmonized regulatory frameworks will be developed” (ECO Vision 2025: Section 3. Expected outcomes: Outcome (iii).
4. **The Midterm Vision Review (Nov 2021)** envisaged fund-raising “Forum” should be organized, by ECO-TDB in collaboration of ECO Secretariat, as early as feasible and possible, to mobilize funds through national and international financial institutions/banks, particularly for rehabilitation of existing railways and road links as well as construction of new railways. In the same spirit, the ECO-TDB may be mandated to facilitate transfer of resources/payments related to regional connectivity and ECO transit transport infrastructures.

### Background information

1. Civil Aviation has been discussed during the 9th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport (1-3 May 2018, Turkmenbashi) where it was decided that potential benefits from civil aviation for people in areas with complex access to transport be unlocked. In statement reflected in the report of the 9th ECO Ministerial Meeting, the then Minister of Transport, Maritime Affairs and Communications of the Republic of Turkey, among other important transport issues, “called for expanding cooperation on civil aviation and marine shipments” (paragraph-9, Report). On the dynamics in the area of civil aviation, Minister of Transport of Republic of Tajikistan informed about the construction of 6 new passenger terminals at Dushanbe International Airport in the framework of investment projects (paragraph-9). Minister of Industry and Investments of Republic of Kazakhstan informed about reconstruction of 15 airports during 2008-2018 (paragraph-13).
2. On the sidelines of the 14th Meeting of Heads of Railway Authorities of ECO Member States (20-21 June 2019, Dushanbe), the discussion among UNESCAP, UIC and ECO was held on 21 June 2019 in Dushanbe. It was reported that UNESCAP has already embarked on the project to explore utilization of drones for railway, as planned. UIC presented its projects related to study of drones in their use for railway transport.
3. The 9th ECO Ministerial on Transport adopted the decision to establishing ECO Working Group on Civil Aviation to discuss the relevant issues.

### Latest decisions:

1. The 31st Meeting of the Regional Planning Council requested the Member States to provide to the Secretariat their detailed proposals on cooperation in Civil Aviation, provided during the 1st meeting of the ECO Working Group on Civil Aviation (WGCA) held on 23 November 2020 virtually.
2. The **Council** requested Member States to provide the Secretariat with their proposals and needs with regards to capacity building programs on civil aviation to be organized in 2021.
3. The **Council** requested the Member States to consider hosting the 2nd meeting of the ECO Working Group on Civil Aviation (WGCA) as well as High Level Meeting of Private airlines of ECO Region in 2021 virtually.
4. The **Council** welcomed the offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran for preparation of the draft Action Plan for ECO Civil Aviation Cooperation and requested the Country to provide the Secretariat with the Draft Action Plan for circulation among the Member States.

### Progress and recent developments since the 31st RPC

1. The Member States were requested to provide their proposals on cooperation in civil aviation vide note verbal no. 117 dated 4/2/2021. In response Kyrgyz Republic, Islamic Republic of Pakistan and Uzbekistan provided the proposals and training programs for the interested Member States. The said proposals and training programs were circulated among the Member States for their considerations vide Secretariat's note verbal no. 382 dated 8/4/2021 and 577 dated 3/6/2021 respectively.
2. The meeting had further decided that the Member States will encourage their Public and Private Civil Airlines to consider establishing direct flights among tourist destinations within the region with a priority to charter flights and will send their proposals regarding the way and means to establish air connections among touristic destinations of the ECO region through diplomatic channels to the Secretariat.
3. The interested Member States were also requested vide ECO Secretariat's Note Verbal No. 118 dated February 4, 2021 to provide the Secretariat with their proposals, requirements and needs with regards to capacity building programs/training workshops on civil aviation in 2022.
4. The interested Member States were requested to consider hosting of the 2nd HLWG meeting on civil aviation vide note no. 116 dated 4/2/2021 and subsequent follow up note verbales.
5. During the 31st RPC meeting, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan agreed to host the 1st High Level Meeting of Private Airlines of ECO Region. The matter is followed up vide not verbal no. 119 dt 4/2/2021 and no. 582 dt 6/6/2021. The required response from the concerned authorities of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan is still awaited.

### Secretariat’s suggestions for 2022 and required actions

1. The Council may request Member States to provide their detailed proposals on cooperation in Civil Aviation to the Secretariat.
2. The Council may request Member States to provide the Secretariat with their proposals and requirements with regards to capacity building programms on civil aviation in 2022.
3. The Council may request the ECO Secretariat to do necessary coordination for holding the 2nd meeting of the ECO Working Group on Civil Aviation (WGCA) in 2022.
4. The Council may request the ECO Secretariat to do necessary coordination for holding a High Level Meeting of private airlines of the ECO Region in 2022.
5. The Council may request ECO Secretariat to implement a study project on **“T**he ways and means to establish direct flights among tourist destinations within the ECO region with a priority to charter flights” and in this regard the Council may call the Secretariat for recruitment of a specialist for implementation of the said Study Project in the first half of 2022. The council may also request interested MSs to provide the Secretariat with an informative and justification report for initiating an ECO Air hub in the eastern region of ECO especially in Central Asia.

### Area Conclusions on the area

1. The meeting of the ECO Working Group on Civil Aviation (WGCA) on November 23, 2020 with the participation of all Member States indicates a will for more cooperation on Civil Aviation within the region. Although the Covid-19 pandemic has severely affected the civil aviation of ECO Countries, it is imperative that Member States receive assistance for the post COVID-19 pandemic aviation recovery. The ECO WGCA can help Member States in this regard.

# COMMUNICATIONS

## Priority Area No. 1:

## “Development of Information Society in the region” (Strategic Objective I, ECO Vision 2025)

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. **ECO Vision’s target** is “to achieve goals of information society in ECO region” (ECO Vision 2025: Section I: Strategic Objectives, Objective I.)
2. **Policy approach** is in line with the “Regional ICT Strategy for Information Society Development and ECO Regional Strategy for Broad-band Development will be developed” (ECO Vision 2025: Policy Environment: para-4).
3. **ECO Vision’s expected outcome** is “access and increased use of ICT” “digital divide will be bridged” “increased **availability** of digital local content will be encouraged” ICT infrastructure will b improved” “ institutional ICT framework and skills development will be improved” (ECO Vision 2025: Section 3. Expected outcomes: Outcomes (viii- xii).
4. **The Midterm Vision Review (Nov 2021)** envisaged fund-raising “Forum” should be organized, by ECO-TDB in collaboration of ECO Secretariat, as early as feasible and possible, to mobilize funds through national and international financial institutions/banks, particularly for rehabilitation of existing railways and road links as well as construction of new railways. In the same spirit, the ECO-TDB may be mandated to facilitate transfer of resources/payments related to regional connectivity and ECO transit transport infrastructures.

### Background

1. To define the needs for the development of infrastructure connectivity and services in the ECO Member States, the 1st Meeting of ECO Ministers of ICT (November 2012, Tehran) decided that a feasibility study will be conducted to identify the aforementioned needs. The Secretariat was asked to approach CPR for allocating US$ 30,000 from the ECO Feasibility Study Fund to prepare such study.
2. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) was also approached for the support to ECO in implementing the aforementioned step and sharing institutional expertise. Thus, ITU and ECO successfully implemented two phases of the regional study.
3. The first phase resulted in designing of the Feasibility Study to identify ICT needs of ECO Member States. The design was prepared by the lead expert, recruited by ITU, in collaboration with the Focal Points from concerned authorities of Member States. The key findings of the Study have been presented to the wrap-up meeting on ICT (May 2016, Tehran). That meeting developed recommendations on: the development of the ECO regional Strategy for Information Society, broad band development to increase public access to fast internet through establishing key priorities, targets and projects. It also recommended implementing the Strategy and establishing an efficient institutional set of regulations for the development of the effective legal and regulatory framework.
4. The second phase resulted in the preparation of the regional Study on “Information Society Services in the ECO Region: current status and ways forward” to assess the level of the adoption of ICT in such areas as Health, Education and Agriculture.
5. The 2nd Ministerial Meeting on ICT considered ways and means of enhancement of regional cooperation in the ICT area; preparation of the “2025 ECO Regional Strategy for Information Society Development”; “Action Plan” as ECO’s roadmap on ICT and called for the establishment of an appropriate mechanism, a Working Group, to enable Member States to regularly meet and adopt decisions on the issues in the framework of the proposed Regional Strategy and Action Plan.

### Latest decisions on Communications

1. The 31st Meeting of the Regional Planning Council instructed the Secretariat to organize the 1st meeting of the Working Group on ICT in 2021 as per the mandate extended by the 2nd ECO Ministerial Meeting on ICT.
2. The **Council** requested the Member States to exchange information and the best practices on digital governance transformation. The Council further requested the Member States to provide the Secretariat with their updated information and progresses in the area of different modes of Transport and communication to be uploaded on the website of the ECO Secretariat.

### Progress and recent developments since the 31th RPC

1. The Secretariat has organized the First Working Group meeting on ICT under the Chairmanship of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan virtually on September 28, 2021. The meeting discussed the progress on the ECO Plan of Action on the implementation of the "2025 ECO Regional Strategy for Information Society Development" and the implications of the pandemic on the realization of the Action plan and to provide real time alteration in the Plan of Action. After much deliberation the meeting decided that the ECO Member States may nominate their legal\technical experts to discuss the ways and means for the establishment of a regional regulatory framework and mandated the ECO Secretariat to organize the next meeting of the ICT Working Group for discussion and formulation of the framework. The Meeting also requested the ECO Secretariat to get assistance from the ITU and IsDB for establishment of the regulatory mechanism among the member States.

### Secretariat’s suggestions for 2022 and required actions

1. The meeting discussed the main challenges in implementation of the Strategy in the ECO region, and decided to establish a network of focal points for cooperation on the Strategy and requested the Member States (Except the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Republic of Turkey) to provide the Secretariat with the contact details of their focal persons for necessary coordination for implementation of the "2025 ECO Regional Strategy for Information Society Development and the Plan of Action.
2. The Council may request Member States, (except for the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Islamic Republic of Pakistan and Republic of Turkey), to expedite providing the contact details their focal points for further coordination on the implementation of the "2025 ECO Regional Strategy for Information Society Development and the Plan of Action.
3. The Council appreciated the Islamic Republic of Iran's offer for hosting the 2nd Meeting of ECO-ICT Working Group on establishment of a regulatory framework for ECO region in 2022 and the Council may request the Secretariat to finalize the exact dates and other details in consultation with the host authorities.
4. The Council welcomed the proposal of the Republic of Turkey to host the 3rd Meeting of ECO- ICT Working Group to discuss cooperation on cyber security in ECO region in 2022 and the Council may request the Secretariat to finalize the exact dates and other details in consultation with the host authorities.
5. The Council may recommend organizing the 3rd Ministerial meeting on ICT preceded by the High Level Experts Group meeting to finalize the necessary documents for the Ministerial meeting. The Council may request the interested Member States to voluntary Chair the 3rd Ministerial Meeting on ICT.
6. The Council may request ECO Secretariat to enhance and continue the cooperation with ITU to seek institutional guidance and any new possible project to be implemented in 2022.
7. The Council may request ECO Secretariat to implement, in consultation with ITU, a study project on **“T**he ways and means to establish and develop ECO regional fiber optic network” and in this regard the Council may call the Secretariat for recruitment of a specialist for implementation of the said Study Project in the first half of 2022.

### Area Conclusions

1. The Secretariat, in coordination with Member States, is to establish an appropriate mechanism (a Working Group) to enable regular interaction to find practical solutions in handling the issues related to the implementation of the Regional Strategy and Action Plan on ICT. Cooperation with ITU may be continued to provide institutional guidance and share expertise with Member States.

# COOPERATION WITH REGIONAL/INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS (Progress since 31st RPC)

1. ECO cooperates with the United Nations through UNECE, UNESCAP, UNCTAD and other international organizations/institutions, including the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), Regional Program of ADB for Central Asia (CAREC), International Union of Railways (UIC), Intergovernmental Organization of Railways (OSJD), Inter-Governmental Organization for International Carriage by Rail (OTIF), International Road Transport Union (IRU), International Telecommunications Union (ITU), International Maritime Organization (IMO) and others in the field of transport and communications where a good level of partnerships has been attained enabling to implement the projects of regional importance being pursued by ECO.
2. IsDB is a long-term important partner of ECO in materializing connectivity projects. ECO/IDB Joint Project on implementation of TTFA, IDB’s support through the Technical Cooperation Agreement (TCA) for a corridor developing study for KTI are the true witness of mutually beneficial cooperation at inter-institutional level. IDB has also contributed to the GIS project and the joint project of promoting eTIR and eCMR in ECO Region. The Bank has also agreed recently to contribute US $ 65000 to the ECO Gate project. The Secretariat and IDB are in continuous consultations on financing different projects of regional importance.
3. IRU‘s technical assistance to ECO member countries, notably, for the countries en-route ITI Road Corridor has enabled the launch of actual TIR operations with loaded trucks along ITI. Such assistance may help proceed to implement e-TIR. Due to necessity for increased cooperation, it is highly recommended to further deepen the mutual ties and institutionalize the relations with IRU.
4. ECO’s cooperation with UNESCAP on utilizing its multi-faceted institutional expertise has been felt in implementing the project on the commercialization of the railway between Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran (KTI). In addition to preparing the study, ECO also proposed other arrays for joint cooperation such as track systems, electronic seals, automated double coupling and drones.
5. UNECE’s Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport (WP.30) presents an appropriate platform to showcase ECO’s activities addressing customs provisions of TTFA. Since “road safety” issue is on ECO’s agenda since long, UNECE may guide ECO how to benefit from UNECE’s expertise in this area.
6. Along the similar lines, ECO and UNECE are cooperating on GIS for transport through the project of which phase-1 is nearing its finalization and move onwards.
7. In the same respect, ECO and UNECE are cooperating on e-CMR. Currently, some of the ten ECO Member States three are contracting parties to e-CMR whilst all ten to CMR Convention. The goal of the capacity building workshops, as proposed by UNECE to ECO to jointly organize these trainings under the IsDB financing, is the promotion of accession to e-CMR Protocol.
8. UIC and ECO have jointly developed Action Plan of cooperation on projects of common interest in the area of operational railways. Extensive expertise collected by UIC within its membership of 182 countries and territories on operational railways and technical standards/norms is highly valued by ECO.

1. OTIF has been instrumental in providing legal advisory on matters relating to transport.
2. It is in ECO’s plans to elevate the scope of cooperation with OSJD and other specialized organizations in transport to project-oriented collaborative level thereby strengthening the impact through tangible project deliverables.

1. On the ICT Regional Strategy Development, ECO will continue collaborating with International Telecommunication Union (ITU) during the implementation phases of “2025 ECO Regional Strategy for information Society Development” and Action Plan designed for the implementation of key objectives set by the Strategy.

# Secretariat’s suggestions and required actions

1. The Council may appreciate the Secretariat’s efforts in strengthening cooperation with Regional/International Organizations, including IsDB, UNECE, UNESCAP, IRU, UIC, OSJD, ITU, AIIF, OTIF, CAREC/ADB and others, to seek expertise and financial/technical assistance for advancing ECO’s mandated projects and, in that regard, the Council may further encourage the Secretariat to keep such efforts further up.
2. In view of ongoing cooperation and the prospective cooperation, the Council may request the Secretariat to institutionalize cooperation with the interested international organizations\agencies\unions in order to enhance transit transport and communication cooperation in the region.

# CONCLUSION

1. **On TTFA,** the practical outcomes of 2nd phase of the “ECO/IsDB Joint Project for Preparation of a Regional Program for Implementation of the TTFA” will be realized. On accession procedures, this agenda will be followed by TTCC throughout 2022 onwards.

1. **On** **railways**, in implementing the “early operationalization” of the KTI and of Istanbul-Almaty & Almaty-Bandar Abbas routes, those will be followed up during 2022. The ITI Container Train has been set forth for operation. Projects on Qazvin-Rasht-Astara and KTAI railway routes will proceed with construction works, as planned, on completing “missing links” to link these routes to major international transport corridors. In addition to the above, the joint trainings on new technological solutions and digitalization of railways may be organized for ECO countries jointly with ESCAP and UIC and OTIF.
2. **On roads**, the road project: ECO Road Corridors on Kyrgyz Republic-Tajikistan- Afghanistan- Iran (KTAI) and Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) routes resulted in test runs of loaded trucks along the KTAI and ITI road corridors, following the example of “ECO Truck Caravan-2010” and recommendations of the study. As with the 10th TTCC Meeting, this activity area will put more emphasis on practical outcomes of 2nd phase of the “ECO/IDB Joint Project for Preparation of a Regional Program for Implementation of the TTFA”.

1. **On maritime cooperation**, in implementing recommendations 8-9 of the Turkmenbashi Declaration (9th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport) envisaging the “linking ECO’s seaports’ logistics with dry ports in landlocked countries” (LLC). The project titled “Establishment of a common gateway among ECO countries-ECO Gate” will be implemented.
2. **On civil** aviation, in line with paragraphs 105-108 of the Report of 9th Ministerial Meeting on Transport (1-3 May 2018, Turkmenbashi), and also, Article-7 of the TTFA, the details of cooperation in this area will be discussed at the subsequent Meeting of Civil Aviation Authorities of ECO Member States after the Working Group will have consulted and developed the work plan for 2022.
3. **On GIS**: phase-1 of the joint ECO-UNECE-IsDB Joint Project on GIS has been finalized in year 2020 and ECO will negotiate with UNECE for the commencement of the 2nd phase in 2022.
4. **On e-CMR and e-TIR**: further trainings and projects will be organized during 2022 for ECO Member States in cooperation with IRU, UNECE and IsDB.
5. **On ICT**, the “Feasibility Study on ICT to identify the needs for the development of infrastructure connectivity and services in the ECO Member States” will have to implement the recommendations of the study in practice. For that, the next steps will be considered by the 3rd Ministerial Meeting on ICT. The feasibility study will be aligned with “2025 ECO Regional Strategy for Information Society Development” and Plan of Action, which is ECO’s roadmap on ICT.

1. **On ECO Calendar 202**2, the event-based activities will be implemented as scheduled in Annex-II.

# ANNEXES

# Annex-I: New draft Project proposals

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **“Development of economic corridor along ECO KTI Railway Corridor”** | **1. Project Title:****“Assessment of developing economic corridors along ECO`s main transit transport routes”** |
| **To prepare assessment report based on the business case of the Khorgos-Eastern Gate special economic zone to transform KTI Railway Corridor into a competitive economic corridor**  | **2. Project Objectives** |
| **Max US$10,000/-** | **3. Project Budget (US$)** |
| **GRF** | **4.Project Funding Source** |
| **ECO Secretariat** | **5. Project Coordinator** |
| **UNESCAP** | **6. Partner** |
| **Six months** | **7. Duration of Project**  |
| **2022** | **8. Project Starting Time** |
| **Quarterly** | **9. Project Progress**  |
| **Three months**  | **10. Project Completion Time** |
| **11. Background:**The construction project of railway line between Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran was duly completed in December 2014. The route however has yet to unravel its full capacitated operation. Therefore, with the aim to operationalize the route, from its present “random operation” status up to “regular run” of the KTI[[1]](#footnote-1), the IsDB was requested for funding. Thus, a “practical well-designed plan of commercialization” of the KTI railway was to be developed under the KTI railway project. In this regard, the Technical Cooperation Agreement concerning the Study for the “Commercialization of the Regional Railway Corridor between IsDB-ECO Common Member Countries” was signed in August 2017 where IsDB committed to allocate US$187,000 as its share in preparing the Study. UNESCAP was requested to prepare the Study under the Memorandum of Agreement signed in July 2018 to develop the framework of collaboration under the Study. In particular, ESCAP committed to: (i) analyze physical/non-physical impediments along KTI as well as assessment on trade flows. The project team from en-route countries, IDB and UNESCAP gathered at its Inception Meeting organized on 11-12 April 2019 at ECO Secretariat where international consultants, recruited to analyze “physical and non-physical” and “trade flows’ of KTI corridor, were tasked to fulfil the Study. In particular, the meeting specified: “to incorporate preliminary analysis on the possibility of developing KTI railway corridor to an economic corridor among the countries.” For the next phase of the project the meeting suggested “to develop the strategy/required actions for transforming/upgrading the KTI railway corridor into the economic transport corridor” (paragraph 27, Report of Inception Meeting). Thus, the extension of 1st phase of the KTI railway project to subsequently 2nd phase entailing an upgrade of the project from its current *niche* in the railway sub-sector to one in the transport sector will effectively widen the benefits of the railway corridor onto a much larger scale of benefits, to result from the economic transport corridor[[2]](#footnote-2).14th Meeting of Heads of ECO Railway Authorities (Dushanbe, 20-21 June 2019) was updated by the Secretariat about the current need to transform ECO’s existing railway routes, particularly KTI, from a transit corridor into an economic corridor (i) to generate its inherent all-purpose network sourcing from production inlets, (ii) supply chains feeding container trains with production output and (iii) delivering all-type rail-based freight and cargo to final seaport outlets. Such measure may eventually lead to the establishment of self-sufficient route in close vicinity to the economic and free trade structuring zones along ECO’s main transport corridors and international seaports in the ECO region. It was further noted that, for this particular target, an international consultant may be hired to strategize on the abovementioned transformation of railways into the integrated economic and free trade space to ensure its full alignment with transport policies of ECO Member States.  |
| **12. Necessary Actions and Assistance Needed in 2022:**1. Recruitment of a specialist under ToR prepared and published by the Secretariat.
2. Designing, planning, developing project milestones to be submitted to sectoral meetings for multiple level endorsement/ oversight/ adjustments/ approval.
 |
| Expected Outcomes of the ProjectBusiness study.  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **“Needs-based financial and technical assessment for installing the transshipment facilities, instruments and tools in Taftan railway station”** | **1. Project Title** |
| **In line with the Turkmenbashi Declaration on transport, the proposed project will assess existing capacities at Taftan railway station for a possibility of installing effective transhipment facilities** | **2. Project Objectives** |
| **ECO/US$10,000/**  | **3. Project Budget (US$)** |
| **ECO-GRF**  | **4.Project Funding Source** |
| **ECO Secretariat** | **5. Project Coordinator** |
|  | **6. Partner** |
| **Three months** | **7. Duration of Project**  |
| **March 2022** | **8. Project Starting Time** |
| **Quarterly** | **9. Project Progress**  |
| **July 2022** | **10. Project Completion Time** |
| **11. Background:**The 9th Meeting of Ministers of ECO Member States on transport held on 1-3 May 2018 in Turkmenbashi (Turkmenistan) in its Declaration (paras 9-11) pointed out a need to fulfill economic and technical assessments of potential projects on ECO’s transit transport routes. To that effect, the need to make an economic and technical assessment of the Taftan-Zahedan segment of the Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) railway route is acute. A particular point in focus is the Taftan railway station at which all transshipment of container trains carrying goods along the ITI railway route are made. Negotiation between Iranian Railway Authorities and one Iranian Private Company is underway for construction of the 95 Km new railway track of standard 1435mm gauge, from Zahidan to Mirjaveh Border Crossing Point (Mill 72) and most probably further to Taftan. The construction work is expected to be commenced soon. When completed, then the transshipment of cargo is inevitable in Taftan Railway Station. Therefore, the transshipment instruments and tools (Lifts, Derricks, Cranes, etc) are necessary to be installed in Taftan railway station. Transshipment is crucial as it enables shift of containerized volumes of goods from Pakistan’s broad track (1676 mm) to Iran’s standard rail track (1435mm). Structurally, an act of installing transshipment facilities is part of the overall process of rehabilitation of railway system. The matters directly relating to the process of rehabilitation of the ITI railway system have been discussed in greater detail during a number of Meetings of Heads of Railway Administrations (HRA), including the 14th HRA Meeting in 2019 in Dushanbe (Tajikistan) coupled with the 8th Railway Committee Meeting. The representatives of the ECO Member States participating in aforementioned meetings strongly emphasized railway rehabilitation issues.In the same respect, the current state of railway system along the ITI Railway route was discussed during the 10th Meeting of High Level Working Group (HLWG) on ITI Train held on 20-21 August 2019 in Ankara, Turkey. Specifically, the Meeting noted the need for rehabilitation of the ITI railway route, particularly, at its Quetta- Taftan and Taftan-Zahedan segment. To implement the recommendations of ECO’s high level decision making meetings, the initial proposal has been discussed during the internal multiple level meetings at Secretariat during months of April to November 2020 - for matters relating to the project’s budget. Thus, following the decision of the 24th Council of Ministers Meeting (COM) held on 8-9 November 2019 recommending in paras 27-28 of its Report to implement the three months’ durable projects within a year’s time, a possibility has been discussed at above-mentioned Secretarial meetings of following the 2020-proxied pattern of project implementation in year 2021 as well. In specific terms, the ECO Secretariat is prepared to allocate the amount up to US10,000 for the proposed project under the condition that it be implemented during the three months’ period. If the project would set to start from March 2022 it should be completed in May\June 2022, as per ECO requirements for small sized projects that are in line with the decision of the 24 and 25th COM. The key issues to be assessed by the project are as follows: 1. existing capacities at Taftan railway station;
2. study of current transshipment volumes and forecast of future inflows;
3. identifying the need (if any) for installing transshipment facilities;
4. study of alternative transshipment modes (example of China launch of flexible mutli-track container trains);
5. recommendations of most economically and technically feasible transshipment options for Taftan railway station.

An expert opinion of the National Focal Points (Iran, Turkey and Pakistan) will be substantive throughout project’s implementation (as methodologies are important for ECO). Under the same token, useful consultations with relevant authorities in the Member States i.e. national Railways (because project is under ECO platform) and regulatory government bodies i.e. Ministries of Transport/Communications will be indispensable for project while its implementation. The project will likely choose a Consultant/Specialist from Pakistan. Project will require execution of the following activities: a) Engaging railway undertakings and transshipment companies in Pakistan and, on its suggestion, the enroute countries’ transshipment companies as project partners; b) Collection of data on transshipments in its entirety along the ITI railway route (analysis of hurdles wherever transshipments are halted i.e. causes, costs incurred, etc.);d) organizing project’s inception via online to explain project objectives and methods of work to all project partners;e) creating working interaction with NFPs on ITI via Secretariat; g) conducting a field visit of site at Taftan railway for project’s analysis; h) Preparing analysis/evaluations and subsequent reporting of project’s results and conclusions to Project Coordinator (TC Director) at Secretariat, andi) Finalization of project’s final report, upon comments of the Member States. The end product will be in the form of a bankable project document to be delivered to ECO Trade and Development Bank (ECO-TDB) and the international financial institutions and relevant development partners for seeking financial support to implement the projects. |
| **12. Necessary Actions and Assistance Needed in 2022:**1. Recruitment of consultant as per the Terms of reference prepared and published by the Secretariat.
2. For Specialist, to start project activities in March 2022.
3. Preparing a mid-term report in April 2021.
4. Reporting on the project’s results and submitting the final report to the Secretariat in May\June 2022.

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| **13. Expected Outcomes of the Project:**1. Study on the “**Needs-based financial and technical assessment for installing the transshipment facilities, instruments and tools in Taftan railway statio**n”.
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| **“Quantifying the benefits of application of Unified Railway Law on Istanbul-Almaty and Bandar Abbas-Almaty railway”.** | **1. Project Title** |
| **To pilot test on the possibility of applying the provisions of the Unified Railway Law on the Istanbul-Almaty and Bandar Abbas railway routes** | **2. Project Objectives** |
| **ECO US$10,000/ and IsDB/UNECE US$75,000**  | **3. Project Budget (US$)** |
| **GRF and IsDB/UNECE funding US$75,000** | **4.Project Funding Source** |
| **ECO Secretariat** | **5. Project Coordinator** |
| **UNECE** | **6. Partner** |
| **Nine months** | **7. Duration of Project**  |
| **2022** | **8. Project Starting Time** |
| **Quarterly** | **9. Project Progress**  |
| **Nine months**  | **10. Project Completion Time** |
| 1. **Background:**

The project has been proposed to the ECO Secretariat by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) for jointly implementing on Istanbul-Almaty and Bandar Abbas-Almaty railway route. The proposal is at its stage of finalizing the budget (as it comes from UNECE) with the UNECE officials. Upon which act, the complete project proposal will be circulated to all Member States for their relevant feedbacks in the form of comments and suggestions. The initial budget proposal was related to the ECO Secretariat on 22.07.2020 by Mr. Konstantinos Alexopoulos, Chief Transport Facilitation and Economics, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). In the meantime, for information of the Member States the project’s rationale is as follows: ECO railway networks are not covered by one uniform legislative system in the ECO region suitable for their growing freight volumes. Provisions they use in railway differ from the other modes of transport: road transport subject to the Convention on the Contract for the International Carriage of Goods by Road (CMR), maritime transport covered by the Hague Visby Rules and air traffic covered by the Montreal Convention. A large number of freight forwarders and relevant rail companies regret such differences. The lack of a single legal framework puts railway operators at a considerable competitive disadvantage vis-à-vis other modes of transport, especially road and maritime freight. A re-consignment of the goods is necessary at the handover point between the CIM and SMGS freight law systems. This also frequently requires consignment notes to be transferred from CIM to SMGS, which results in additional costs and delays in transporting goods. The fact that there are two freight law conventions means that customers face serious hurdles identifying and enforcing claims in the event of cargo losses. Unified Railway Law (URL) – the provisions for the contract of international carriage of goods by rail – aims at, and is capable of resolving, these problems. It offers railway undertakings and their customers the opportunity to conclude a single contract of carriage for specific international transport of goods by rail and to agree for this contract to apply a single international legal regime by means of a joint declaration (known as an opt-in). The contract of carriage then is accompanied by a single URL consignment note that is subject to just one legal regime. URL establishes a uniform international legal framework for rail freight transport between the participating states falling otherwise under the CIM or SMGS regimes. Its provisions take priority over the national laws and apply to each single international contracts of carriage between those states as well as over CIM and SMGS regulations if the parties to the contract of carriage opt to apply URL to their contract. The use of the URL consignment note will help eliminate the need to re-consign the goods at the border between the CIM and SMGS systems.Thus, the objective of the project is to quantify the benefits from using URL – provisions for the contract of international carriage of goods by rail – in the ECO regional railway transport.The proposed project will consist of the following activities: The project requires execution of the following tasks: a) Engagement of rail enterprises and freight forwards as project partners, b) Agreement on the routes across the dual system for the project along the ECO rail corridors: 2 routes are proposed which cross between CIM and SMGS systems: (i) Istanbul-Almaty (Turkey-Iran-Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan), and (ii) Bandar Abbas-Almaty (Iran-Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan), c) Collection of data on past carriages on the selected routes (scenario i.e. what happened, costs incurred, etc.), d) Project’s first workshop to explain project objectives and methods of work to all project partners to set a basis for the simulations, e) Performance of simulations – proposed at least 25 simulations and preparations of simulation report presenting costs of carriage under dual system, simulated costs under URL and comparisons and comments, f) Project’s second workshop to discuss the simulations – based on their reports – and set basis for real carriage under URL, g) Performance of real carriage – proposed at least 10 carriages and preparation of reports presenting incurred costs, and comparison to carriage simulation of similar scenario, h) Project’s third workshop to discuss the results of the real carriages, agreement of the project results and conclusions, and i) Finalization of project’s report.Estimated project cost items:- Consultants (one per selected route) to support collection of data and preparation of simulation and real carriage reports;- Organization of workshops including travel of consultant, UNECE and ECO Secretariat and other partners, as necessary, to the workshops; - Publication of the report with quantification of the benefits. |
| **12. Necessary Actions and Assistance Needed in 2022:**1. Finalizing the co-funding arrangements by UNECE and circulation of the formal project proposal for views of the Member States.
2. Preparation of ToR for recruitment of consultancy.
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| **13. Expected Outcomes of the Project:**1. Simulation and real carriage reports;
2. Workshops.

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| **Establishment of a common gateway among ECO countries – ECO Gate** | **1. Project Title** |
| **To set up ECO gateways by localizing them at areas/spaces to be assigned by Member States using the minimum five core pillars i.e. sea ports, airports, BCP[[3]](#footnote-3)-adjacent areas with dry port facilities, and logistics centres, encompassing rail, road, inland transport** | **2. Project Objectives** |
| **US$ 130,000/-**  | **3. Project Budget (US$)** |
| **FGPF, GRF** | **4.Project Funding Source** |
| **ECO Secretariat** | **5. Project Coordinator** |
| **Islamic Development Bank and ECO-TDB**  | **6. Partner** |
| **Six months** | **7. Duration of Project**  |
| **2022** | **8. Project Starting Time** |
| **Quarterly** | **9. Project Progress**  |
| **Six months**  | **10. Project Completion Time** |
| **11. Background:**The project has been recommended by the 9th Ministerial Meeting of the ECO Member States (1-3 May 2018, Turkmenbashi) as envisaged in its *Turkmenbashi Declaration*. In specific terms, the ECO decision makers wished to see the complementary networking installed in the ECO region to ensure that those ECO countries endowed with abundant coastal transit transport infrastructures should help ECO’s landlocked countries (LLCs) in their outlets to international markets (recommendations 9-10, *Turkmenbashi Declaration*). The aforementioned mandate has been supported by practice-tested implementation tools proposed by the 5th and 6th Meetings of Heads of Reference Maritime Organizations of ECO Member States who were joined in considering project concept by Heads of Transport Logistics Centers from ECO’s landlocked countries (6 March 2019 and 27 April 2021Teheran). Thus, the project concept has been designed to emerge from four groundwork paradigms of: economy of scale, scope, density and frequency. In aggregate, those form the backbone for the generation of project’s value chains. The latters are expected to proliferate across entire ECO region via effective ECO Gateways while the latters, at the same, will suitably be localized in the ECO Zones.The ECO Secretariat has prepared the draft Project Document shared the latest version on 24 November 2021 with IsDB and secured the latter’s contribution (65000 Us Dollars) as the project partner. |
| **12. Necessary Actions and Assistance Needed in 2020:**1. Facilitative partnership of ECO TDB in implementing the Project.
2. Selection, and recruitment of specialist under ToR to be prepared by the Secretariat.
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| **13. Expected Outcomes of the Project:**Feasibility Study report.  |

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| **“Establishing direct air flights among tourist destinations within the ECO region”** | **1. Project Title** |
| **To develop a mechanism of establishing an operating network among interested civil aviation airlines (public/private) and tour operators of ECO Member States** | **2. Project Objectives** |
| **US$10,000/-**  | **3. Project Budget (US$)** |
| **GRF** | **4.Project Funding Source** |
| **ECO Secretariat** | **5. Project Coordinator** |
| **ICAO** | **6. Partner** |
| **Three months** | **7. Duration of Project**  |
| **2022(March)** | **8. Project Starting Time** |
| **Quarterly** | **9. Project Progress**  |
| **May\ June 2022**  | **10. Project Completion Time** |
| **11. Background:**The project content has been raised during the 1st Meeting of the ECO Working Group on Civil Aviation that has been organized on 23 November 2020 in virtual mode among the representatives of the ten Member States - Focal Points (FPs) on Civil Aviation. The Meeting in its Report reflecting the deliberations under agenda item No. 6: “Air connections among ECO regional touristic destinations” has adopted the decision that ECO Member States may encourage their public and private civil aviation airlines to consider establishing direct air flights to operate among tourist destinations within the ECO region while prioritizing chartered flights.In that regard, the ECO Member States have been requested to forward their proposals regarding the matter through diplomatic channels to the Secretariat. At Ministerial level, the Senior Officials Meeting, which preceded the 9th Meeting of Ministers of Transport of ECO Member States (1-3 May 2018, Turkmenbashi), discussed the matters relating to registering, within the ECO region, of chartered air flights enabling commonly accessible touristic travel of ECO regional passengers across ECO, at full length. To that effect, the Secretariat has circulated (via formal Note Verbale) a brief assessment report reflecting all touristic destinations existing in the ECO region that may potentially serve as base for establishing future passenger transport touristic routes and compile regional tour packages.  |
| **12. Necessary Actions and Assistance Needed in 2022:**1. Consultation for contribution of potential partners
2. Preparation of Terms of Reference
3. Recruitment of consultant
4. Preparation of the final Report of Project Study for validation.
5. Ensure the sensitivizing of results of Project Study among project beneficiaries in consultation with coordinating TC Director.
6. Ensure a sustainable project partner for implementation of the proposed Network in the ECO region.
 |
| **13. Expected Outcomes of the Project:**1. Have the feasible mechanism of establishing an operating Network among interested airlines (public/private) and tour operators developed through Study Project;
2. Recommend viable airline connections among tourist destinations within the ECO region for providing necessary services to intra-regional tourists;
3. Ensure bankability of the project document to evolve from Study Project for seeking financial support of international partner/s capable of funding the establishment of the proposed Network, and
4. Develop a cooperation framework of partnership with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) for the common goal of establishing the regional Network.
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| **Study on “Establishment and Development of "ECO Regional Fiber Optic Network Establishment of ECO regional fiber optic network”** | **1. Project Title** |
| **To explore viable patterns of establishing and developing the ECO regional fiber optic network**  | **2. Project Objectives** |
| **US$10,000/-**  | **3. Project Budget (US$)** |
| **GRF** | **4.Project Funding Source** |
| **ECO Secretariat** | **5. Project Coordinator** |
| **ITU** | **6. Partner** |
| **Three months** | **7. Duration of Project**  |
| **2022 (March)** | **8. Project Starting Time** |
| **Quarterly** | **9. Project Progress**  |
| **May\june 2022**  | **10. Project Completion Time** |
| **11. Background:**The 30th Regional Planning Council Meeting (14-16 January 2020, Tehran) noted the suggestion of the Islamic Republic of Iran proposing the ECO Member States to develop a regional fiber optic network through inter-connecting their national fiber optic networks via ECO region. In specific terms, the 30th RPC recommended that the issue be discussed in a meeting of the Working Group on ICT.In the area of telecommunications, the ECO maintains close collaboration with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). Thus, the 2nd Meeting of Ministers of Communications of the ECO Member States, which was held in December 2017, in Baku, was attended, along with the Ministers of the Member States, by the high-ranking representative of ITU who re-iterated the ITU’s commitment to partnership with ECO. Such sustainable ECO-ITU cooperation enables the ECO Member States to implement, in close consultations with ITU, a small sized project in the form of a study: “Ways and means to establish and develop ECO regional fiber optic network”. As a practical step forward in this direction, the Secretariat may advertise/select/recruit an International Consultant who will fulfill the said Study Project during the first half of 2022 as per ECO practices followed in regard of small sized (SSP) projects.  |
| **12. Necessary Actions and Assistance Needed in 2021:**1. Ensuring partnership for collaboration for funding the study
2. Preparation of Terms of reference (under process in Secretariat)
3. Recruitment of consultant.
4. Prepare and submit the mid-term Report on the fulfillment of Study Project to the coordinating TC Director.
5. Based on feedbacks, prepare and submit the final Report of Project Study, for validation.
6. Ensure the sensitivizing of the results of Project Study among project’s beneficiaries, in consultation with the coordinating TC Director.
7. Ensure a sustainable project partner\s for the implementation of the proposed Network in the ECO region.
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| **13. Expected Outcomes of the Project:**1. Have the feasible pattern of establishing an ECO regional fiber optic network among the ECO Member States’ networks developed through the Study Project;
2. In close consultation with ITU, develop a detailed step- by – step Implementation Plan to develop and install the proposed Network in the ECO region;
3. Prepare, in close collaboration with ITU, the bankable project document designed for the installation of the study-justified Network among the ECO Member States;
4. Ensure, based on the resultant project document, the funding of the project’s installation works;
5. Obtain the formal approval (or signing of the project document by ITU representative) and circulate the project document to ECO Member States to obtain their feedback.
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### Annex II: Proposed Calendar of Events/Meetings 2022

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| **No.** | **Event/Activity** | **Host** | **Date** |
|  | 11th Meeting of ECO Transport MinistersPreceded by its HLEG Meeting | Turkey (Hybrid Mode) |  31 Jan and 02 Feb 2022 |
|  | The 10th Meeting of TTCC | Tbd (In-person) | 2022 |
|  | 10h Meeting of Road Committee of TTCC | Tbd (IN-person) | 2022 |
|  | 7th Insurance Committee of TTCC |  |  |
|  | 8th Meeting of Customs Transit Committee of TTCC | Tbd (In-person) | 2022 |
|  | 15th Meeting of the ECO Heads of Railway Authorities/9th Meeting of the Railway Committee of the TTCC | Iran (IN-person) | 2022 |
|  | 1st Meeting of the permanent working group on KTI railway corridor (PWG-KTI)  | Tbd (In-person) | 2022 |
|  | 15th Follow up session of HLWGM on Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul Container Train | Iran (IN-person) | 2022 |
|  | 2nd HLWG meetings on Istanbul-Almaty and Bandar Abbas-Almaty Container Trains | Tbd (In-person) | 2022 |
|  | The 2nd Ministerial Meeting on KTAI Railway corridor along with its relevant HLEG meeting | Tbd(In-person) | 2022 |
|  | **Fund raising event and banking cooperation for connectivity and transport infrastructure** | **ECO-TDB** | 2022 |
|  | 6th HLWG Meeting on Qazvin-Rasht-Astara (Iran)-Astara (Azerbaijan) Railway | Azerbaijan (In-person) | 2022 |
|  | 7th HLWG Meetings on Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul Road Corridor  | Pakistan (In-Person)  | 2022  |
|  | 5th HLWG Meeting on the Kyrgyz-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran Road Transport Corridor/field study and test run (KTAI) | Tajikistan (In-person) | 2022 |
|  | ECO-IRU-IDB workshops trainings on e-CMR and e-TIR | Tbd (In-person) | 2022 |
|  | 7th Meeting of the ECO Heads of Reference Maritime Organizations | Tbd(In-person) | 2022 |
|  | 2nd Working Group Meeting on Civil Aviation Authorities | Tbd (In-person) | 2022 |
|  | High Level Meeting of private airlines in ECO Region | Tbd (In-person) | 2022 |
|  | 2nd Meeting of ECO-ICT Working Group on establishment of a regulatory framework for ECO region | I.R Iran (In-person) | 2022 |
|  | 3rd Ministerial meeting on ICT preceded by the High Level Experts Group meeting | Tbd (In-person) | 2022 |

**List of abbreviations, acronyms used in draft WPs on Transport and Communications**

ECO – Economic Cooperation Organization

ICT – Information Communications Technology

TC-Directorate for Transport and Communications

RPC – Regional Planning Council

CPR – Council of Permanent Representatives

COM – Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of ECO

TTCC – Transit Transport Coordination Council

TTFA – Transit Transport Framework Agreement

TC – Transport and Communications

ITI – Islamabad – Tehran – Istanbul railway route

TCDD – Taşimacilik A.S. TCDD – Turkish Railway Authority

RAI – Railway Authority of Iran

PR – Pakistan Railway

KTI-Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran Railway route

KTAI – Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran railway route

CMM – common corridor management mechanism

BCP -border crossing point

TEU – Twenty foot equivalent unit

FEU – Forty foot equivalent unit

IRU – International Road Union

UIC – World Railways Union, International Union of Railways

OSJD – Intergovernmental Organization of Railways

OTIF – Intergovernmental Organization for International Carriage by Rail

ESCAP – United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

IsDB – Islamic Development Bank

ITU – International Telecommunications Union

LLCs – landlocked countries

Project stakeholders – the project participating ECO Member States

INSTC – International North South Transport Corridor

UTIKAD – International Association of Transport and Logistics Service Providers

ECOLPAF – ECO Logistics Services Providers Association of Forwarders

1. The acronym “KTI” stands in the present document for “Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway corridor”. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. According to ADB, “economic corridors connect economic agents along a defined geography. They provide important connections between economic nodes and hubs. They do not stand alone, as their role in regional economic development can be comprehended only in terms of the network effects that they induce. What economic corridors can achieve for regional economic integration depends first on what characteristics the specific existing economic networks in which the economic corridors are embedded personify, and second on which characteristics corridor developments are intended to introduce or strengthen”. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. BCP-border crossing point [↑](#footnote-ref-3)