

ECO Sustainable and Resilient Transport Strategy for 2026-2035

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1. Introduction

Transport and connectivity remain the backbone of regional integration, economic growth, and sustainable development, including within the ECO. This is against the fact that the connectivity in the ECO region still faces challenges such as fragmented infrastructure, diverse regulatory frameworks, and geopolitical instability. Recognizing this, the 13th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport mandated the ECO Secretariat to “*prepare ECO sustainable and resilient transport strategy for 2026-2035*”. This document provides a comprehensive roadmap for infrastructure development, regulatory coordination, sustainability, innovation, and institutional cooperation across all modes of transport.

This document is designed to provide Member States with a shared vision, actionable objectives, and clear implementation mechanisms. It aims to ensure alignment with international standards, while taking into account the unique geographical, economic, and social dynamics of the ECO region.

This Strategy is not an international treaty and does not create rights or obligations governed by the international law for the ECO Member States.

2. Strategic Vision 2026-2035

By 2035, the ECO region will achieve milestones towards becoming a fully interconnected, sustainable, and digitalized regional transport network which facilitates intra-regional trade, tourism, cultural exchange, and people-to-people connectivity while contributing to regional peace, prosperity, and sustainable development. It will also serve as a hub connecting neighbouring regions. Deliverables include, among others, completion of priority multimodal corridors, digitalized customs systems, and regional electric Vehicle (EV) infrastructure.

3. Strategic Objectives

- 3.1. **Infrastructure Modernization:** Develop modern, efficient, and resilient transport infrastructure across all modes of transport, particularly the high-traffic corridors and critical infrastructure, ensuring climate resilience and disaster preparedness.
- 3.2. **Regional Integration:** Strengthen cross-border integration and interoperability to facilitate seamless movement of goods and passengers.

- 3.3. **Sustainability, Safety and Security:** Promote environmentally sustainable, safe, secure, and people-centered transport solutions, and reach measurable targets for improving road safety.
- 3.4. **Innovation and Digitalization:** Accelerate the adoption of innovative technologies and digital solutions in the piloted priority corridors by 2028 and the whole ECO region by 2035.
- 3.5. **Policy and Institutional Coordination:** Strengthen coordination and harmonization, including through existing ECO mechanisms and, where appropriate, other arrangements agreed by Member States, for better management of regional corridors and infrastructures.
- 3.6. **Financial Sustainability:** Mobilize resources through innovative financing mechanisms, public-private partnerships (PPPs), and self-sustaining financial models. Organize regular international financing conferences to mobilize necessary funds and financial resources.
- 3.7. **Sustainable Access:** Facilitate access to financial and technological resources for transport development, including through mutually agreed investment cooperation, and facilitate reliable access for landlocked Member States to regional and international markets.

4. Sectoral Strategies

4.1. Road Transport

- 4.1.1. **Corridor Development:** Upgrade and expand ECO-designated international road corridors. Specify priority corridors and identify and remove existing bottlenecks such as border delays, inadequate infrastructure, and missing links. Develop high-capacity port-to-hinterland access roads to prevent bottlenecking at maritime gateways.
- 4.1.2. **Safety and Standards:** Harmonize axle load limits, driving hours, road safety regulations, and vehicle inspection standards across Member States in line with internationally accepted standards applied in the Member States.

- 4.1.3. Green Transport: Member States may consider, where appropriate, measures to support the use of electric and hybrid buses, the development of EV charging infrastructure, and the transition to low-emission freight vehicles, in accordance with national priorities, legislation and available resources.
- 4.1.4. ITS Integration: Gradual implementation of the best practices in Intelligent Transport Systems. Deploy real-time traffic management systems, smart tolling, and accident reporting tools.
- 4.1.5. Resilience and Maintenance: Incorporate climate-resilient infrastructure standards, such as flood-resistant roads and alternative fuel networks.
- 4.1.6. Capacity Development: Organize capacity-building events in corridor management and ITS.
- 4.1.7. Digitalization of procedures: Promote the use of electronic consignment notes (e-CMR) and electronic permit systems (e-Permit) in international road transport operations within the ECO region to enhance efficiency, transparency, and data exchange among Member States.
- 4.1.8. Visa Facilitation: Facilitate visa issuance for international road transport drivers through simplified, and transparent, procedures, in accordance with national legislation and the competence of the relevant national authorities.
- 4.1.9. Unified Road Transport Permit System: Consider the possibility to establish, among the interested Member States, a unified, standardized road transport permit system within the ECO region to facilitate international road transport operations and reduce administrative barriers.

4.2. Railway Transport

- 4.2.1. Network Development: Prioritize the completion of missing links within the ECO railway network and the electrification of key segments, as well as the construction of double-tracking on busy corridors to enhance operational capacity and efficiency, while placing greater emphasis on the operationalization, efficient utilization, and capacity enhancement of existing and ongoing railway infrastructure.

- 4.2.2. Interoperability: Harmonize operational standards and procedures and strengthen coordination among the railway administrations of ECO Member States regarding train operation, wagon acceptance and exchange, operational regulations, transport documentation, and where relevant, coordinate with the competent authorities on customs procedures, in order to facilitate international train movements and reduce unnecessary trains and wagon dwell time at border crossing.
- 4.2.3. Cargo Facilitation: Develop dedicated rail freight corridors with terminals for containerized cargo.
- 4.2.4. Passenger Services: Modernize long-distance passenger trains and introduce high-speed links where economically feasible.
- 4.2.5. Digitalization: Establish electronic data exchange between the Railways along the ECO rail corridors and apply digital documents for the international rail transport in the ECO region, while enhancing the electronic exchange of railway - related information and documents among railway administrations and railway authorities of ECO Member States, including train and wagon information, consignment notes and documents required for cross-border railway operations, in line with international standards and with full respect for national data sovereignty.
- 4.2.6. Private Sector Engagement: Member States may consider, where appropriate, mechanisms for private-sector participation and PPP projects in the railway sector, in accordance with national legislation and market conditions.
- 4.2.7. Research, Training and R&D Validation: Establish the ECO Rail Research Network among relevant institutions across the ECO region and consider the feasibility of establishing a regional cooperation platform or center focusing on innovation in green rail and digital railways, subject to the interest of Member States and separately agreed organizational and financial arrangements. Facilitate also, on a voluntary basis, the piloting and validation of relevant R&D outcomes by interested railway infrastructure managers and

operators, in accordance with national procedures and applicable safety requirements.

- 4.2.8. “Multimodal coordination: Enhance coordination between railway administrations, sea ports, shipping operators and logistics centres to ensure synchronized rail, port and maritime operations, including efficient management of rail-sea transshipment operations.”

4.3. Maritime Transport

- 4.3.1. Port Modernization: Expand container capacity, automate port handling operations, multi-modal port infrastructure and improve intermodal linkages among all ports of the ECO Member States. Consider, where applicable and commercially justified, the development and modernization of relevant liquid-bulk export terminal capacity in accordance with national laws of ECO Member States.
- 4.3.2. Sustainability: Implement eco-friendly port certification standards and incentivize renewable energy adoption. Promote the adoption of internationally recognized environmental standards and sustainable practices across ports, while facilitating transition to renewable and low-carbon energy solutions.
- 4.3.3. Connectivity Expansion: Develop Caspian Sea shipping lanes, ferry services, and inland waterway cargo systems to enhance regional trade connectivity.
- 4.3.4. The Secretariat and Member States may facilitate enhanced road, rail and multimodal connectivity with Gwadar Port, including through supportive transit and trade facilitation arrangements, building on the Gwadar-Gabd-Rimdan road corridor into Iran (through which Pakistan’s first TIR-regime consignment reached Uzbekistan in April 2026) and the proposed Rimdan-Gabd Joint Free Zone, to promote Gwadar’s effective integration into regional and international trade corridors.
- 4.3.5. Digital Ports: Deploy digital port platforms to streamline customs, cargo handling, and vessel management processes, in line with international standards and with full respect for national data sovereignty

- 4.3.6. Regional Cooperation: The Secretariat and Member States are encouraged to support cooperation among ECO ports and transport authorities, including exchange of best practices, harmonization of trade and transit facilitation procedures, strengthening of maritime connectivity, and development of integrated regional logistics corridors, complementing, rather than duplicating, parallel connectivity efforts.
- 4.3.7. Port Modernization: The Secretariat and Member States are encouraged to facilitate investment, cargo generation and transit trade through ECO Ports, including support for the development of its Off-Dock Terminal, including integrated logistics infrastructure, to expand ECO Ports cargo-handling capacity and reduce dwell time for ECO-origin/destination cargo.

4.4. Air Transport

- 4.4.1. Green Airports: Promote investment in energy efficient airport infrastructure and use of sustainable aviation fuels in accordance with applicable ICAO frameworks and national circumstances.
- 4.4.2. Regional Airlines Cooperation: Encourage commercial cooperation between airlines of ECO Member States, including joint ventures and code-sharing, subject to applicable air services agreements, competition rules and regulatory approvals. Explore the possibility of mutual recognition of relevant certificates and licenses among interested ECO Member States, in accordance with ICAO standards, national legislation and applicable international agreements.
- 4.4.3. Encourage the development of air cargo and logistics facilities at airports, where justified by demand, with due regard to applicable customs procedures, aviation security requirements and the responsibilities of relevant national authorities.
- 4.4.4. Promote closer aviation-market cooperation among interested ECO Member States in accordance with applicable air services agreements, competition rules and national legislation.

- 4.4.5. Regional Aviation Resilience: Strengthen cooperation among interested ECO Member States to maintain safe and reliable civil aviation.
- 4.4.6. Facilitate humanitarian, medical, emergency and essential civil aviation operations, including passenger connectivity and the movement of essential goods and medicines, in accordance with international law and national legislation.
- 4.4.7. Equal Regional Participation: Recognize the importance of effective participation of all Member States in the development of sustainable regional aviation connectivity and cooperation.
- 4.4.8. Regional Cooperation: Develop appropriate arrangements, consistent with international law, applicable international obligations and national legislation, to facilitate lawful aviation cooperation among interested ECO Member States, with a view to maintaining regional connectivity and aviation safety.

4.5. Multimodal Transport and Logistics

- 4.5.1. Integrated Hubs: Build multimodal logistics centers with rail, inland water transport, road, and air connections to ports and industrial zones where applicable. Conduct the second phase of the ECO Transport Corridors and ECO Gates Project.
- 4.5.2. Digitalization: Promote the expansion of interoperable single-window and corridor-management solutions across multimodal routes among interested Member States. Transition towards paperless transit operations based on mutually recognized electronic documents and agreed technical solutions.
- 4.5.3. Private Sector Participation: Encourage joint ventures between ECO logistics companies and global operators.
- 4.5.4. Corridor Development: Establish viable multimodal corridors linking China, Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe.

5. Digitalization of Transport Sector

Cooperation under this section will be on voluntary basis, in accordance with national legislation, including on personal data protection and cybersecurity, in line with internationally recognized standards and with full respect for national data sovereignty.

- 5.1. Smart Transport Networks: Develop regional digital-mapping tools for corridor management, traffic flows, and cargo monitoring based on agreed data voluntarily provided by interested Member States. Begin with pilot implementation on agreed corridors by 2028, with further scaling subject to evaluation and the agreement of the Member States concerned.
- 5.2. Customs E-Integration: Implement e-TIR, promote interoperability and electronic data exchange between existing national customs and border information systems of interested Member States, including interoperability with relevant digital port systems, in accordance with national legislation, cybersecurity requirements and national data sovereignty principles.
- 5.3. Passenger Solutions: Explore, in consultation with relevant authorities and operators, the feasibility of voluntary and interoperable digital passenger information and ticketing solutions across transport modes, taking into account data protection, passenger rights and existing commercial systems.
- 5.4. ICT Cooperation: Promote voluntary cooperation among the competent national authorities of Member States on the cybersecurity of transport infrastructure, including through exchange of best practices, capacity-building and training programmes, in accordance with national legislation and without prejudice to national security considerations.
- 5.5. Innovation Labs: Support pilot projects in AI logistics optimization, smart sensors for fleet monitoring, and automated traffic enforcement, as well as pilot testing of interoperable data-exchange and processing solutions. Consider the feasibility of establishing an ECO ITS Center, or other regional cooperation platform, focused on intelligent transport systems (ITS) architecture, big data management and next generation mobility

solutions, subject to the agreement of interested Member States and separately agreed organizational and financing arrangements.

- 5.6. End-to-End Corridor Interoperability: Develop, on a voluntary and phased basis, end-to-end interoperability among existing national and sectoral digital transport systems of interested Member States across road, rail, maritime, air and multimodal transport, including through tools such as e-CMR and e-TIR. Such interoperability shall preserve the autonomy of existing systems, national data sovereignty, ownership and access rights, as well as ICT-security requirements. No single national, sectoral or commercial platform shall constitute a mandatory technological gateway for ECO-wide transport data exchange.
- 5.7. Establishment of the Digital and Customs Office of the ECO in Tashkent, aimed at digitalization of international freight transport, simplifying and harmonizing transport and customs procedures, facilitating electronic data exchange among the competent authorities of the ECO Member States, and reducing the time and costs associated with crossing national borders.

6. Cross-cutting Priorities

- 6.1. Alignment with the regional and international relevant agreements and sustainable development goals (SDGs) in accordance with the national priorities.
- 6.2. Climate resilience and disaster preparedness: Ensure all infrastructural projects include climate resilience measures, such as disaster-resistant designs and renewable energy integration. For port infrastructure, relevant resilience measures may address risks such as storm surge, sea-level rise or decline, and extreme temperatures, taking into account the geographical circumstances of the Member States concerned.
- 6.3. Coordination with BRI, TRACECA, CAREC, and other connectivity initiatives for synergy purposes and supplementary funding opportunities, technical expertise and institutional support, enhancing the region's alignment with global trade and transport standards.

7. Implementation and Monitoring

- 7.1. Financing: ECO partnership with relevant regional and international organizations, financial institutions and developing agencies.
- 7.2. Indicators: Corridor efficiency, emissions, safety, and trade facilitation.
- 7.3. Reviews: Annual technical-level reviews and periodic consideration at the ministerial level and by the Transit Transport Coordination Council (TTCC), in accordance with established ECO procedures.
- 7.4. Capacity Building: Regional training, workshops, and technical assistance.
- 7.5. Monitoring Framework: Member States may provide, on a voluntary basis and within the scope of available data, information on progress against agreed indicators. Secretariat shall compile the information provided for the mid-term evaluations in 2030 and the final impact assessment in 2035.
- 7.6. End-to-End Implementation Monitoring: Conduct, on a voluntary basis, performance monitoring of agreed transport corridors based on agreed indicators and verifiable data provided by the Member States concerned, for the purpose of assessing transit time, bottlenecks and operational performance. Such monitoring shall not involve the transfer of control over national information systems or provide direct access to sovereign data of Member States.

8. Phased Action Plan

- 8.1. Short-term (2026-2028): Priority corridor mapping.
- 8.2. Medium-term (2029-2031): Corridor upgrades, logistics park development, air transport regulatory cooperation and connectivity initiatives agreed by Member States concerned and EV infrastructure expansion.
- 8.3. Long-term (2032-2035): Fully operational multimodal corridors, interoperable railways, smart mobility platforms, and ECO's emergence as a global transport hub.

Annex I: Some Priority Infrastructure Projects (Indicative)

The priority projects will be defined to develop multimodal and integrated networks and logistics on the criteria such as trade and transit potential, regional impacts, transport advantages, reducing the time and cost, removal of the bottlenecks, environmental performance, resilience and readiness for investment, etc. with the consent of all ECO Member States.

Inclusion of a project in this Annex shall not, by itself, create any financial, legal or implementation obligation for any Member State unless separately agreed by the Member State concerned in accordance with its national procedures.

This indicative list is not exhaustive and is without prejudice to additional transport, transit and logistics projects that may be proposed and considered through relevant ECO mechanisms during the implementation period of the Strategy.

1. Road:

- 1.1. Complete the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran and Iran-Pakistan road links by 2030, addressing border facility upgrades and axle load standardization.
- 1.2. Completion of the remaining (Qaisar-Alaman) Infrastructure and Operationalization of the KTAI (Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran) by the end of 2030.
- 1.3. Increase the efficiency with multi-modal transport systems and attract additional cargo volumes to regional Trans-Caspian East-West Middle Corridor through completion of the Azerbaijan – Iran – Nakhchivan (Azerbaijan) – Türkiye route.
- 1.4. Expansion of the existing QTTA Corridor along Pakistan-China-Kazakhstan-Kyrgyzstan to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

2. Rail:

- 2.1. Construction of missing rail links in Afghanistan to connect with Iran, Uzbekistan, Pakistan and Turkmenistan, with due attention to the operational connectivity of Afghanistan's railway network with railway networks of neighboring countries, with a view to enabling regular and efficient cross-border freight train operation.
- 2.2. Completion of Rasht-Astara railway line to ensure seamless connectivity between the Iran and Azerbaijan railway networks, thereby operationalizing the full capacity of the international north-south transport corridor (INSTC) as an important trans-regional route.
- 2.3. Construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway project.
- 2.4. Realization of the Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan railway construction project.
- 2.5. Constructing and completing three new rail projects as follows:
 - a. Iran-Afghanistan-China rail project, connecting to China through Vakhn corridor
 - b. Iran-Afghanistan-Tajikistan-China rail project.
 - c. Pakistan-Afghanistan-Turkmenistan-Kazakhstan Multimodal Transport Corridor

3. Logistics:

- 3.1. Support the establishment and operationalization of three Multimodal Dry Ports in Afghanistan to strengthen regional connectivity, taking into consideration direct rail connectivity, loading and unloading terminals, and necessary operational and logistics services to ensure their effective and sustainable operation.

Annex II: Financing Models

1. PPPs for road corridors, ports, and airports and railway projects. Financing for railway projects may, depending on the specific project and applicable financing model, cover not only the costs of infrastructure development and construction, but also the equipment and facilities required for the commencement and continuity of railway operations, including rolling stock and railway equipment, locomotives, terminals, loading and unloading facilities, and railway information management and data exchange systems.
2. Financing: ECO partnership with relevant regional and international organizations, financial institutions and developing agencies.
3. Sovereign green bonds for sustainable transport where applicable in accordance with the national financial policies and procedures of the Member States concerned.
4. User charges and tolls for cost recovery excluding any charging mechanism for transit regimes carried out in accordance with international law.
5. Mechanisms for domestic revenue generation, such as toll roads and user fees.

Annex III: Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

1. KPIs: Transit time reduction of cross-border and port dwell times, rail freight increase, EV adoption, ports with green standards, in line with international standards and with full respect for national data sovereignty.

Subject to the agreement of Member States, the Secretariat may develop a regional tool for the visualization and monitoring of agreed indicators, based on aggregated or otherwise agreed data voluntarily provided by Member States, without direct access to national information systems or sovereign data.

2. Mechanisms: Annual provision of available information by Member States on a voluntary basis, mid-term evaluation (2030), final impact assessment (2035).

Annex IV: Capacity-Building Programmes

1. Regional training programmes and cooperation among existing relevant
2. training centres for road asset management and road safety, rail operations, aviation safety, and port management.
3. Fellowship and exchange programmes for young professionals.
4. ECO Transport Knowledge Hub as a best-practice repository.
5. Capacity-Building for stakeholders of the transport sector in the Member States.
