ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

INLAND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

<u>Working Party on Rail Transport</u>
(Fifty-eighth session, 27-29 October 2004,
agenda item 5 (b))

FACILITATION OF BORDER CROSSING IN INTERNATIONAL RAIL TRANSPORT

<u>Monitoring of progress made in the facilitation of
border crossing in international rail transport</u>

<u>Note by the secretariat</u>

Following the request by the Working Party at its fifty-seventh session
(TRANS/SC.2/200, para. 18), the secretariat has prepared a report summarizing the results of the
monitoring exercise on selected international railway border stations for consideration by the
Working Party.

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Introduction

At its fifty-third session in 1999, the Working Party on Rail Transport examined the information on border stopping times of trains in international traffic provided by Governments (TRANS/SC.2/192, para. 31-32), and noted that, since 1994 (when this information was first collected), there seemed to have been a general improvement in the situation, although the available data did not allow measuring the significance of this improvement. The Working Party further requested Governments to continue reporting on the 4 items that have been followed since 1994:

(i)   average time spent by passenger and goods trains at main border crossings;

(ii)   the progress made (in minutes) subsequent to the implementation of measures taken by Governments (e.g. for customs, police, sanitary and phytosanitary controls) and railways (e.g. for technical controls) for passenger and freight trains to reduce the delays during border crossing;

(iii)   other measures that are envisaged in future to eliminate delays during the crossing of borders;

(iv)   succinct reports on bilateral and multilateral contacts which have taken place between Governments and railways of neighbouring countries in order to improve the crossing of borders in international rail traffic.

At the same session, with the objective of improving its knowledge on the progress made in this field, the Working Party agreed to collect more detailed information on border-crossing stopping times in the following border-crossing points:

(E-20) Germany-Poland
(E-20) Poland-Belarus
(E-20) Belarus-Russian Federation
(E-55) Germany-Czech Republic
(E-61) Czech Republic-Slovakia
(E-61) Slovakia-Hungary
(E-52) Lökösháza (Hungary)-Curtici (Romania)
(E-95) Giurgiu (Romania)-Ruse (Bulgaria)
(E-70) Svilengrad (Bulgaria)-Kapikule (Turkey)
(E-885) Kulata (Bulgaria)-Promachon (Greece)
(E-15) BelgiumFrance
(E-90) France-Spain
(E-70) France-Italy
(E-25) France-Switzerland
(E-50) Switzerland-Austria
(E-50) Austria-Hungary

It was agreed that data referring to average stopping time of freight and passenger trains should be collected for the next 2 years, and should refer to 3 month periods, and that the detailed definition of the data to be provided would be made by the secretariat after consultation with the countries concerned.

At its fifty-fourth session in 2000, the Working Party referred again to the annual monitoring project and approved the border-crossing monitoring system, as defined in document TRANS/SC.2/194, annex 3. The Working Party asked the secretariat to send the questionnaire for 2001 only to the countries for the following border stations: Ruse, Kulata and Svilengrad (Bulgaria), Promachon (Greece), Lököshaza (Hungary), Curtici and Giurgiu Nord (Romania), Suzemka (Russian Federation), Kapikule (Turkey) and Zernovo (Ukraine). The secretariat was asked to report on the results of this monitoring effort and, in particular, on the possibility of extending the monitoring system to all the stations that had been initially envisaged (TRANS/SC.2/192, para. 31 and informal document No. 7 (2000)).

In 2000 the information obtained from Governments was less coherent and impossible to compare among countries but provided some useful and interesting insights into the procedures and reasons for discrepancies between the scheduled and real stopping time for border controls.[1] In preparation for this monitoring, the secretariat circulated a proposal with a short questionnaire among the concerned countries referring to various issues to be taken into consideration when reporting. The subsequent Informal meeting held in Geneva in June 2000 examined the information provided by the countries and made certain recommendations (TRANS/SC.2/2000/18). Furthermore, the train categories to be distinguished in the monitoring as well as the data to be collected, were also identified and agreed, together with the tabular presentation of replies for both trains leaving and entering the border station.

In 2001 at its fifty-fifth session, the Working Party had the first set of data from 10 mentioned border crossing stations in seven countries for the same period of observation in all countries - from 7 to 20 February.[2] At the same session, the Working Party asked reporting Governments to provide additional information on the principal reasons which caused delays related to customs, police and railway controls (e.g. lack of traction facilities, locomotives, lack of staff, different working hours, etc.).

In 2002, the secretariat provided the information obtained from 10 border stations in six countries[3] and an informal document which summarized the information received from member Governments and provided a brief analysis of the situation in those border stations included in the monitoring for which the complete set of data was available.

Finally, at its fifty–seventh session in 2003, the Working Party took note of the results provided by the monitoring system and asked the Governments of all member countries to provide the information on reduction of actual stopping time and compliance with the Inland Transport Committee's resolution No. 248 for all border crossing stations on the AGC lines on their respective territories.

The information obtained from member Governments in this last round of monitoring that took place from 7–20 February 2004 is presented in documents TRANS/SC.2/2004/8 and Add.1.

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[1] See documents TRANS/SC.2/1999/6 and Adds.1-3; TRANS/WP.5/1999/16; TRANS/SC.2/2000/5, and Adds.1-4 for more details.
[2] See document TRANS/SC.2/2001/15.
[3] See documents TRANS/SC.2/2002/8 and Adds.1-2, as well as informal document No. 4/2002.

Most frequent and common problems

During the duration of the monitoring exercise, a variety of problems were identified. They are related to almost all services involved in operations at border crossings as well as to railway operating companies.

One of the important sources of delays of international trains is a *lack of computerized data exchange between neighbouring customs authorities*. In some countries, additional support in developing adequate integrated information systems for transmitting data between customs authorities, railways and other authorities would greatly improve conditions for faster processing of trains. Due to a lack of electronic data exchange, the stopping time of trains is often extended to allow for verification of documentation and additional manipulations (photocopying) with it. The reduction of the electronic data entry to only one time and subsequent transmission of this information ahead of the train to other border crossing stations on the route, would contribute to an overall reduction of border stopping time and would reduce or completely eliminate most of the repetitive paper work along the way. Also, systematic use of harmonized customs nomenclatures accepted by all custom authorities would additionally reduce the stopping time for freight trains.

Very often delays and excessive stopping times at border stations are due to a *lack of information*. The information that customs and police authorities need to process trains is frequently received incomplete or inaccurate. An exchange or even standardization of information on required documentation for various border controls would be very useful and would further contribute to reduction of border stopping times.

Joint customs and police controls proved to be a useful mechanism for a reduction of border stopping time. The absence of joint controls, common between member countries, greatly increases the stopping time of trains and sometimes causes additional discrepancies from the scheduled stopping times.

The reasons for excessive actual stopping times are often related to *railways controls* or operations at borders. Often it is the lack of locomotives or staff that holds trains at borders, sometimes it is the railway documentation that is incomplete or inaccurate. The lack of adequate *infrastructure* at border stations does not only hamper railways but also other services to carry out their controls efficiently and within the scheduled time. Provision of adequate infrastructure, not only for railway operations but also for customs, police, veterinary, phytosanitary, and other services would, in many cases, with minimal investments improve conditions for border controls and contribute to reduction of border stopping times.

Summary

Both the coverage and, to a certain extent, the content of the monitoring system have changed during this period and thus do not ensure a complete coherency of the reported data. In spite of that, during the monitoring period, a general improvement of the situation could be observed. The improvement is far more evident if actual border stopping time is observed at the same border over the years. When comparing the scheduled and the actual stopping time, the change is less visible and many improvements leave much to be desired.

The results of monitoring showed that a common pattern of work between neighbouring border stations often does not exist. Often trains are held at border stations because the working hours of customs or other authorities are not synchronized for acceptance/delivery of trains. Closer working cooperation and coordination between the involved authorities in neighbouring countries might contribute to a further reduction of stopping time

The data also showed that in many border stations trains had delays at arrival/departure. The discrepancy between the scheduled stopping time for delivery and for acceptance, on the one hand, and the real time spent for border checking, on the other hand, was evident for almost all train categories and in many border stations. Also, it has been shown that in many border stations the actual stopping time is often shorter than the scheduled time for delivery. These inconsistencies should be further looked at when timetables are drawn and some corrective action could contribute to better timeliness of international trains if not shorter time spent at borders

In some stations, the scheduled stopping time at each border station was excessive at three (3) hours. This is not only far longer than the stopping time recommended by the ITC resolution No. 248 which calls for 30 minutes at each border for shuttle trains, but is also very detrimental for overall competitiveness of railways compared to other transport modes.

It is reasonable to assume that an important excess of stopping time for border checking over time scheduled for those controls could be considered as a major source of delays in international railway traffic. The monitoring system showed that procedures have been established to keep these delays within an acceptable level while, at the same time, allowing sufficient time for customs and other authorities to complete their tasks. The replies from Governments further reveal that delays in border controls vary with the type of train and are related to the type of border control, the quantity and type of freight transported and the quality of accompanying documentation.

New security measures and tightened controls after 11 September 2001 implied additional controls and more stringent measures at a large number of borders. Trains, both passenger and freight, are thoroughly controlled for possible illegal imports of people or arms, explosives, etc.

Conclusions

The comparison of results of the monitoring for 27 border stations in 2004 and the ITC resolution No. 248 on the border stopping time of shuttle trains (which sets a maximum of 30 minutes for controls in each of the two neighbouring countries) is shown in Charts 1 and 2. Chart 1 shows the discrepancy between the actual stopping time for trains leaving the country at 27 border stations as reported by member Governments in 2004, and the 30 minutes mark as recommended by the ITC. Chart 2 shows the same information for trains entering the country.

The charts clearly show that in many border stations stopping time for trains exceed by far the 30 minutes mark and that the real time spent is often several hours longer than scheduled or recommended by resolution No. 248.

For trains leaving the country, only in one station the scheduled stopping time is near the 30 minutes mark. In several stations, the real average stopping time by far exceeds the scheduled time while in other stations the real average stopping time is far below the scheduled stopping time and almost at the level of 30 minutes mark.

A similar observation is valid for trains entering the country.

No clear pattern emerges for causing the excessive stopping time at certain border crossing points included in the monitoring system. However, it is evident from some replies that the responsibility for excessive stopping time could be more often attributed to railways than other involved authorities. It could also be observed that the lack of adequate equipment and infrastructure at many border stations, together with a lack of necessary training greatly hampers the efforts of all involved authorities to reduce the border stopping time for international trains.

Some replies point to the fact that local authorities in neighbouring countries are in the best position to identify problems and search for effective solutions. As the situation differs from one border station to another, it might be helpful to identify the particular major problems for each border crossing station and then to recommend concrete remedies for each pair of stations.

Chart 1
Stopping time
TRAINS LEAVING

Legend:
- scheduled
- real avg.

Y-axis values: 0, 30, 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600

X-axis label: Station

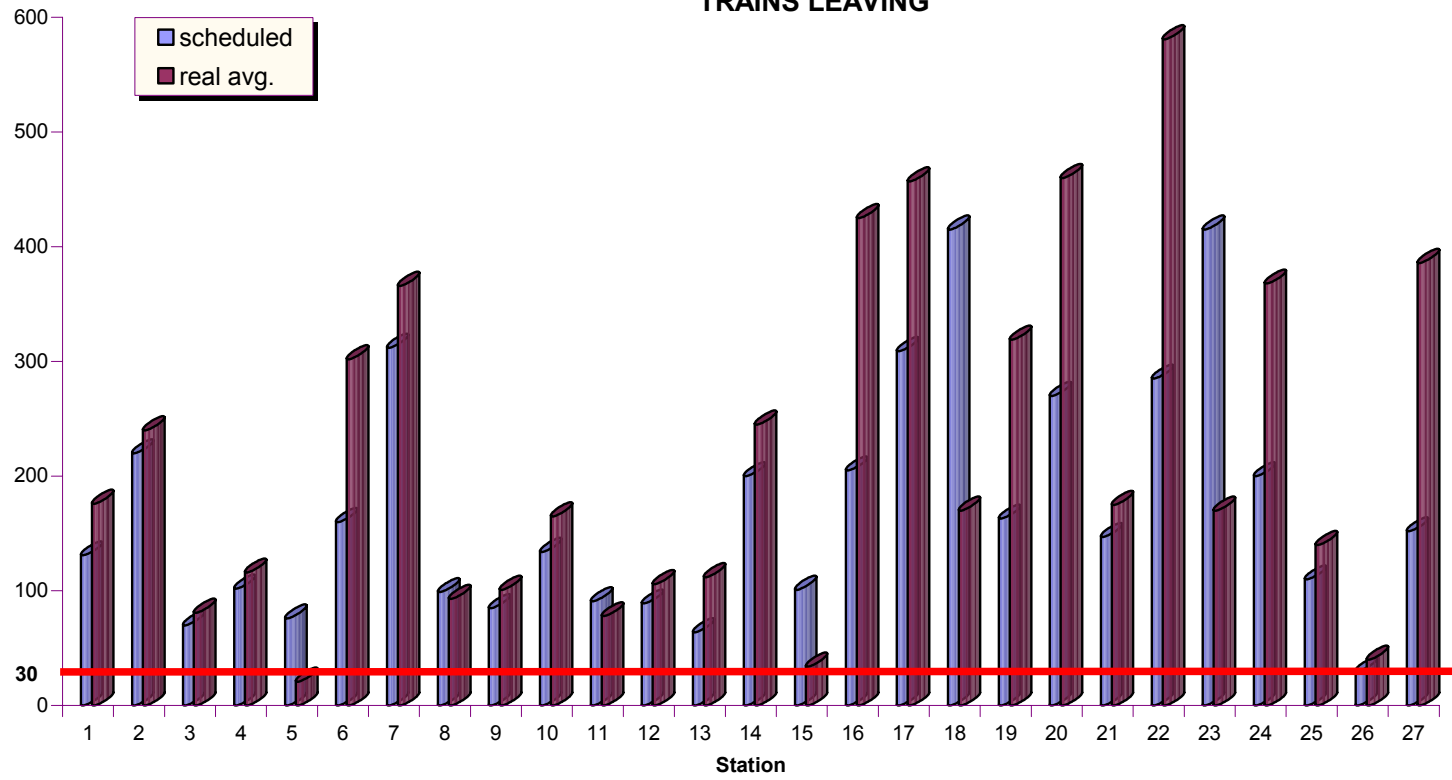Station numbers: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27

**Chart 2
Stopping time
TRAINS ENTERING**

Legend:
- scheduled
- real avg.

Y-axis: 0, 30, 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600

X-axis (Station): 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27

Station