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**Economic Commission for Europe****Inland Transport Committee****Working Party on Rail Transport****Seventy-seventh session**

Geneva, 15–17 November 2023

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

**International Railway Passenger Hubs****Final report of the activities of the Group of Experts on  
International Railway Passenger Hubs****Submitted by the Chair of the Group of Experts on International  
Railway Passenger Hubs****I. Introduction**

1. The Group of Experts on International Railway Passenger Hubs (GE\_HUBS) was established by the Working Party on Rail Transport at its seventy-fourth session, held on 18–20 November 2020 (ECE/TRANS/SC.2/234 paragraph 18). The Inland Transport Committee approved the establishment of this Group of Experts at its eighty-third session, held on 23–26 February 2021. Its primary goal was to facilitate modal shift of passengers to railways for international journeys by creating a set of international railway passenger hubs with similar technical parameters.

2. The European Agreement on Main International Railway Lines (AGC) defines a network of E-railways across the ECE Region. This is supported by the European Agreement on Main Combined Transport Lines and Installations (AGTC) which identifies main combined transport lines, main terminals and border crossing points on the AGC network. There are currently no provisions that define a network of stations (or hubs) in a similar way within legal agreements under the purview of the Inland Transport Committee. Neither is there a similar network of hubs identified in other international legislation. Hence the need for this work and the creation of International Railway Passenger Hubs (henceforth Hubs).

3. The Group held a total of six sessions throughout its current mandate meeting in September 2021, December 2021, May 2022, September 2022, May 2023 and September 2023. Many of these sessions were held with reduced interpretation resources than planned due to interpretation restrictions and restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 Pandemic.



## II. Main activities

4. The Terms of reference for the Group (ECE/TRANS/2021/6) set out a number of key activities to be undertaken during the mandate:

(a) Identify the technical and service parameters necessary for the definition of an “International railway passenger hub or hubs”;

(b) Identify which stations on the AGC network should be defined as an “International railway passenger hub” and its type as appropriate;

(c) Identify what legal instrument or tool should be used to define and implement these “International railway passenger hubs” and draft the necessary legal provisions;

(d) Analyse the legal framework governing international passenger transportation in order to identify restrictions hindering the development of international passenger transport by rail in East – West traffic and prepare recommendations for its improvement;

(e) Prepare a document (recommendations, joint action plan, UNECE ITC resolution) on measures to support international rail carriers in the context of the crisis caused by the pandemic of the new coronavirus infection COVID-19;

(f) Propose a way forward in the form of a report to the Working Party on Rail Transport for consideration.

### **Activity A: Identify the technical and service parameters necessary for the definition of an “International railway passenger hub or hubs”**

5. The Group of experts had a standing agenda item at all its meetings on identifying the technical and service parameters necessary for the definition of Hub. During discussions under these agenda items experts were able to discuss what type of hubs were necessary for international passengers and how they should be defined.

6. In support of this, analysis was carried out by the group of different technical and service parameters across the region in the railways, as well as such parameters used in other transport modes with a focus on the aviation and maritime sectors. A number of iterations were proposed on the types of parameters and whether there should be some form of differentiation between Hubs of different sizes and/or based on the number of international services offered. The group concluded that there was no justification for a differentiation between tiers of Hubs. The final proposed provisions are included in ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2023/10.

7. In preparing ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2023/10, the Group believes that activity A of the mandate has been fulfilled.

8. Furthermore, the Group noted in its activities that to further facilitate passenger movements through stations and Hubs, the Working Party may wish to consider the creation of a Group of Experts on Passenger Information in Stations and Hubs with the aim of harmonizing how this information is provided across the ECE Region. A draft term of reference for such a Group is provided in document ECE/TRANS/SC.2/2023/6.

9. Finally, in its deliberations, the Group noted the importance of the preparation of a guidance note to support the implementation of the decisions and potential legal text that have arisen as a result of this work. The draft guidance note is contained in ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2023/11 and provides further explanation of the technical and service parameters as well as some key definitions. It was agreed that this guidance note should remain a live document and that the Working Party on Rail Transport may wish to update this document further going forward depending on the application of the agreed provisions.

**Activities B: Identify which stations on the AGC network should be defined as an “International railway passenger hub” and its type as appropriate**

10. A fundamental part of the work of the Group was the identification of which stations on the AGC network should be categorised as Hubs. In noting that this activity overlapped significantly with the work in Activity A, as an initial task, the Group decided that it was important to have an agreed definition of what a Hub should be. Following a number of iterations, the final, agreed definition of what a Hub is for the purpose of this work is included in ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2023/9.

11. Under this activity, the Group proceeded to define a list of Hubs on the AGC network. Extensive consultation was held within the Group and externally to gather the possible list of stations. This list is provided in Annex I of document ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2023/9 and identifies the country, city and name of the Hub as well as on which AGC line this Hub sits and which connections are available at each Hub. Some further definitions on these categories are included in ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2023/11.

12. With the finalisation of document ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2023/9 and the relevant additions to ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2023/11 the Group believes that the mandate for activity B has been fulfilled.

**Activity C: Identify what legal instrument or tool should be used to define and implement these “International railway passenger hubs” and draft the necessary legal provisions**

13. In carrying out the task set out in activity C the Group reviewed a number of different options for the form of a legal instrument or tool. From the start, the Group agreed that a non-binding tool or guidelines would not be enough for this activity to succeed and decided that some form of a legal instrument would be the best option. The Group discussed the possibility of creating a new Convention, creating a Protocol to the AGC or just amending the current AGC. The Group noted that the creation of a new legal instrument, through a Convention or a Protocol would require significant time and efforts and it would not enter into force for a long time. As such, the Group agreed that the best solution was the possibility to prepare an amendment proposal for the AGC incorporating the various elements agreed under activities A and B. If the Group was to adopt this amendment proposal it would be recommended to the Working Party on Rail Transport but for it to be an amendment proposal to be considered by the Working Party, it would need to be proposed by at least one Contracting Party to the AGC.

14. The Group discussed at length the form and nature of the possible amendment proposal and agreed, as its final output, to incorporate the amendments in document ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2023/12. This document contains the amendments necessary to the main text and a place marker for the contents of the new annexes III and IV, included in ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2023/9 and ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2023/10. At its sixth and final session, the Group took note that Belgium and Poland, as Contracting Party to the AGC, would put forward the agreed proposed amendment to the AGC to the Working Party on Rail Transport and as such asked the secretariat to prepare the relevant document. The Group thanked Belgium and Poland for making this proposal.

15. With the finalisation of the proposed legal provisions within the documents mentioned above, the Group believes that it has fulfilled the requirements under activity C for this part of the mandate of the Group.

**Activity D: Analyse the legal framework governing international passenger transportation in order to identify restrictions hindering the development of international passenger transport by rail in East – West traffic and prepare recommendations for its improvement**

16. The Group of Experts discussed and shared their knowledge and experience in relation to the legal framework governing international passenger transportation. During the second session of the Group, OSJD presented an analysis that they had undertaken on this subject. As part of the work of the group, this document was made available in English and French, in addition to the original Russian version within document ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2021/7. Experts discussed at length the contents of this document and agreed that it contained a comprehensive analysis of the legal framework across the region. As a result, the experts agreed that the publication covered the requirements of the part of the mandate and thanked OSJD for sharing it with the Group.

17. Having made available document ECE/TRANS/SC.2/HUBS/2021/7 in three languages, the Group believes that it has fulfilled the requirements under activity D for this part of the mandate of the Group.

**Activity E: Prepare a document (recommendations, joint action plan, UNECE ITC resolution) on measures to support international rail carriers in the context of the crisis caused by the pandemic of the new coronavirus infection COVID-19**

18. The Group of experts noted that a workshop had taken place within the framework of the Working Party on Rail Transport at its seventy-fifth session aimed specifically at how the railways were working towards recovery post-Pandemic. The workshop discussions and supporting presentations were a valuable input into the tasks for this activity. In addition to this, a consultant was hired to gather further information on how the railways were working towards this recovery which involved significant assistance and contribution from the members of the Group of Experts through responses to a questionnaire. All this information was gathered within a study focusing on recommendations on support to international rail carriers. Following discussions at the sessions of the Group, participants noted, at the Group's fifth session, the completion of the study titled "Railways at the centre of a post-pandemic recovery: Measures to support international rail carriers" with recommendations going forward and welcomed the fact that the publication had been very well received at the eighty-fifth session of the Inland Transport Committee in February 2023.

19. With the finalisation of the above mentioned study and recommendations, the Group believes that it has fulfilled the requirements under activity E for this part of the mandate of the Group.

**Activity F: Propose a way forward in the form of a report to the Working Party on Rail Transport for consideration**

20. With the preparation of the outputs identified above for activities A to F, the Group believes that it has fulfilled the requirements under activity F for this part of the mandate of the Group.

### **III. Conclusion for the Group**

21. The Group of Experts has successfully completed the tasks in its mandate as set out in the terms of reference of the Group. The Group of Experts:

(a) proposes that the Working Party on Rail Transport adopts the report of the work of the Group, as set out in this document, highlighting the achievement of its mandate;

(b) notes the preparation of the amendment proposals to the AGC as set out in ECE/TRANS/SC.2/2023/5 and thanked Belgium and Poland for proposing these changes to the Working Party on Rail Transport; and

(c) proposes that the Working Party on Rail Transport discuss the creation of the Group of Experts on Passenger Information in Stations and Hubs and consider agreeing to the terms of reference for this Group as provided in ECE/TRANS/SC.2/2023/6.

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