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# REPORT ON TRANS-AFRICAN HIGHWAYS

INTRODUCTION

1. The African transport system is under-developed and backward. Colonial era road development had lifted the national road networks to be generally outward looking. Post independence restructuring of national networks paid little attention to inter-State links. In an effort therefore to promote inter-State road communication development, the Economic Commission for Africa launched a programme of development of a number of major trunk highways and their respective feeder links, which together would form a coherent continental network, known as the Trans-African Highways (TAHs).

2. The ECA's efforts to promote and develop inter-State communication by road, which is considered vital if the African region is to be economically integrated, has caused the emergence of the Trans-African Highway Project as a major project of the Commission; and the launching of the major subregional Trans-African Highways, (namely the Lagos-Mombasa Trans-African Highway, the Algiers-Lagos Trans-Sahara Road, the Cairo-Gaborone Trans-East African Highway, and the Tripoli-Windhoek Trans-Central African Highway and the Trans-West African Highway Network made up of Dakar-N'Djamena and Lagos-Nouakchott) aroused the hopes and interests of African Governments and induced some international agencies to respond with much needed technical and financial assistance.

3. The development of these highways and their respective feeder link systems should stimulate economic activities in the region, provide international links at a reasonable cost, and result in the expansion of intra-African trade. It should promote tourism and generate employment and income not only through construction and maintenance work, but also through the auxiliary services created as a result of construction. The project should help develop better relations and economic co-operation among the countries concerned.

4. The Trans-African Highway system, which is of major interest to African countries, constitutes a road network which covers a major portion of the continent with a total of over 35,000 km of main, and 50,000 km of feeder highways.

5. Intergovernmental Co-ordinating Committees were established at subregional level to promote the Trans-African Highway Project. The strategy the ECA adopted in its endeavour to promote institutional infrastructure (i.e. the establishment of ministerial co-ordinating committees) appears to have paid off splendidly. These co-ordinating committees, made up of the transport ministers of the countries traversed by the particular highways, always responded enthusiastically to the issue of transport development needs in Africa in general and those of their own respective subregions in particular. Member countries readily adopted resolutions concerning:

(a) Co-ordination of work programmes designed by ECA for implementation of the Trans-African Highway Programme;

(b) Exploration of possibilities, jointly and severally, of mobilizing internal and external resources, and technical assistance, for the implementation of TAH projects; and

(c) Standardization and harmonization of regulations and procedures for travel and trade along the Trans-African Highway.

## II. Trans-African Highway Programme

6. The Trans-African Highway System consisting of the major Pan-African highways spanning the continent from east to west and north to south, are at various stages of development; and when completed, would form the backbone for a coherent, truly continental road network. The Trans-African Highway Project is making slow and steady progress towards full implementation and the fulfilment of its prime objective, the removal of both physical and non-physical barriers to the smooth and free access and flow of traffic on the system. The nature of the five Trans-African axes and the major constraints considered detrimental to their construction (and of the attainment of that goal) are indicated below.

### Trans-Sahara Road

7. The Trans-Sahara Trans-African Highway connects Algiers on the Mediterranean coast of North Africa to Lagos on the Atlantic Coast of West Africa passing through Niger, with spurs running through Mali and Burkina Faso. Algeria, and especially Nigeria have improved their respective programmed sections, while missing links are to be found in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, (as well as the southern part of Algeria). Shifting sands in the Sahara, and lack of water holes are the major construction problems faced by member countries in the Sahel section of this crucial breakthrough traversing the Sahara barrier.

### Lagos-Mombasa Trans-African Highway

8. The Lagos-Mombasa Trans-African Highway connects Nigeria with Kenya passing through, from west to east, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Zaire and Uganda.

9. Segments of this major highway inside Zaire, and to some extent in the Central African Republic are the major missing links; but both member countries are making major efforts to upgrade those missing links, at least to all-weather standard. The highway meets the minimum standard (at least "all-weather") in Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria, while Cameroon needs to improve some sections especially the Tibati-Faumban highway of over 300 km. Maintenance of the existing all-weather sections of the Lagos-Mombasa leaves a lot to be desired.

10. The recently completed road inventory should determine precisely the current status; and, even more important, -the technical and financial resources required to improve the Lagos-Mombasa Highway System, (main highway and feeder links) to all weather standard.

### The Cairo-Gaborone Trans-East African Highway

11. The Cairo-Gaborone Highway connects Egypt with Botswana passing, north to south, through the Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

12. Major improvements to this highway are required in the Sudan, particularly in the section from Khartoum to the Egyptian border. Other missing links of this highway are located between Gedaref and Galabat/Metema on the Ethiopian/Sudanese border, between Metema and Chilga in Ethiopia, Moyale-Isiolo in Kenya, Arusha-Dodoma-Iringa in Tanzania, and Zimba-Livingstone in Zambia. Member States are making efforts to improve all of these missing links, with varying time frames, and varying degrees of success.

Tripoli-Windhoek Trans-Central African Highway

13. The Trans-Central African Highway extends from Tripoli, Libya on the Mediterranean to Windhoek, and on to Walvis Bay on the Atlantic Coast of Southern Africa passing through Chad, Cameroon, Congo, Zaire and Angola. Libya and Congo are making extensive efforts and rapid progress to complete construction to all-weather and bitumen standard of their section of the Tripoli-Windhoek Trans-African Highway; while Cameroon and Angola have long improved their respective sections. Segments requiring upgrading exist in the Central African Republic, but the major missing link is in Chad, where civil strife continues to interfere with the normal progress of transport development.

Trans-West African Highway Network

14. The West African Subregional Trans-African Highway is made up of the Dakar-N'Djamena Sahelian Trans-African Highway which connects Senegal with Chad passing through Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon, and the Lagos-Nouakchott Trans-African Highway which connects Nigeria to Senegal along the Atlantic coast of West Africa passing through Benin, Togo, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea Bissau and Gambia. These two highways and their feeder networks together make up the Trans-West African Highway Network which thus connects all 16 countries of the West African subregion and may emerge, when all sections are eventually upgraded to all weather standard, undoubtedly as the best subregional highway network in Africa.

15. The land-locked Sahelian countries of the Dakar-N'Djamena, particularly Mali and Burkina Faso, need to improve their sections, where major missing links exist. For the Lagos-Nouakchott Coastal Trans-African Highway, segments of it inside Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Guinea Bissau constitute areas where road sections and major bridges are still missing.

16. These are then indications of some of the major works that are required to be tackled before the Trans-African Highways Networks become a reality. To determine precisely the extent of missing links and the resources that need to be mobilized from internal and external sources, the ECA Conference of Ministers in resolution 275 (XII) has requested the Executive Secretary of ECA to prepare a preliminary road network plan for Africa as a whole and invite bilateral and multilateral agencies to give assistance to the Executive Secretary of ECA to prepare a preliminary road network plan for Africa as a whole and invite bilateral and multilateral agencies to give assistance to the Executive Secretary in the preparation of the plan. Accordingly the Executive Secretary has approached a friendly nation, Italy, for assistance, and that country has responded positively, intending to provide technical assistance for the study of the master plan. Negotiations have been going on, and are now at an advanced stage, for the realization of resolution 275 (XII).

17. The greater portion of the proposed African Highway Network has already been constructed on the basis of national priorities of the countries concerned and the implementation phase is envisaged as linking up or interconnecting existing national networks, to be followed up by determination of priorities so that economically justifiable projects would be selected and implemented in accordance with national and regional needs.

External Assistance

18. A number of international agencies and bilateral donors are co-operating with ECA in the effort to promote an improved and efficient road transport system in the region:

(a) A pre-feasibility study of the Mombasa-Lagos Trans-African Highway was financed by Great Britain, and was carried out by T.P.O'Sullivan and Partners in the 1970's. In the words of Robert Gardner, then Executive Secretary of ECA and one of the pioneers of the Trans-African Highway Programme, this was "... an impressive study which contained a wealth of information, and represented a significant contribution towards the realization of improved land transport systems across Africa;"

(b) In related developments, the UK is also assisting in the promotion of road safety, and the improvement of highway maintenance standards;

(c) The study of the legal and administrative barriers to travel and trade along the Mombasa-Lagos Highway was jointly financed by the Governments of France and Great Britain;

(d) Belgium financed the feasibility study of the Kisangani-Kasindi Highway, a segment of the Lagos-Mombasa Trans-African Highway (800 km) in Zaire;

(e) Belgium is also financing the road inventory study of the whole Lagos-Mombasa Trans-African Highway, under the auspices of the Governing Council of the L/M Trans-African Highway Authority;

(f) The Government of France has financed the feasibility study of the Bossembele-Garoua Boulai Highway (450 km) in the Central African Republic, a section of the TAH;

(g) The Federal Republic of Germany has financed the feasibility study of Tibati-Foumban highway in Cameroon (325 km), a section of the TAH;

(h) In a related development, the Government of Italy and ANAS, the State agency responsible for roads and road transport have indicated that Italy is prepared to finance the study of the African Highway Master Plan in response to the resolution adopted by the ECA Conference of Ministers in Nairobi in 1975, (which should co-ordinate and harmonize Trans-African Highway projects);

(i) The African Development Bank has financed the study of the Bemenda-Ekok Trans-African Highway segment in Cameroon;

(j) The Government of Canada, through its International Development Agency (CIDA) has financed the pre-feasibility study of the Cairo-Gaborone Trans-East African Highway;

19. Other assistance, indirectly tied to the Trans-African Highway effort and very important indeed in the promotion of efficient, convenient and safe highway transportation in Africa, includes the joint ECA/World Bank/France/Germany/UK co-operation efforts to organize a series of regional highway maintenance conferences and subregional road maintenance seminars. ECA has produced, with joint

assistance of the three governments the "ECA Highway Maintenance Handbook for Africa" and is producing the African Highway Code with Britain's Transport and Road Research Laboratory. An off-shoot to that handbook, the "Highway Maintenance Trainer Manual" is being produced with the co-operation of the Federal Republic of Germany's Carl Duisberg Foundation. ECA and the four Nordic countries jointly organized the First Road Safety Conference in Nairobi in 1984, and Finland and Norway are co-operating with ECA in the production of the compendium of papers of that first ever congress of its kind in Africa.

20. ECA also works very closely with the International Road Federation, the International Road Transport Union, and the Economic Commission for Europe's Trans-European Motorway Project, all aimed at providing much needed linkages between African and international organizations engaged in the development of efficient and effective land transportation.

Travel and Trade Facilitation

21. International road transport in Africa continues to be hampered not only by lack of good road connections but also by obstacles of an administrative and legal nature relating to cross-border circulation of persons and goods.

22. In an effort to tackle this continuing and at times worsening menace to the freedom of smooth flow of traffic across frontiers, the ECA at the request of member countries, has been able to establish Interstate Facilitation Commissions, (IFC's) as subsidiary bodies of intergovernmental highway authorities.

23. The primary objective of IFC's is to work towards the provision of maximum freedom of transit in their subregion in the first instance, and eventually extend this freedom to be in effect throughout the region, with particular attention paid to the freedom of unrestricted access to road users on the Trans-African Highway system. This would include, but would not necessarily be limited taking a census of existing treaty arrangements among member countries regarding customs, immigration, exchange control, etc., in the effort to bring about common acceptance by all member States of the relevant agreements where this is at present lacking. Facilitation Commissions would also endeavour to bring about accession to relevant international conventions and agreements governing international travel and trade, including importation of goods, immigration, foreign exchange facilitation, visas and other border formalities. IFC's would also promote road-side development items such as lodging, dwelling and in general all the facilities required for the convenience of the travelling public.

24. The task of the IFC's is not at all easy and simple, as the barriers to rapid "through" movement of persons and goods could not be destroyed easily. Unless and until the concerted effort and the political will of all member States are fully mobilized to achieve substantial uniformity and standardization of facilities and systems, international transport by road will continue to suffer.

25. Inter-State Facilitation Commissions have now been established for the Cairo-Gaborone Trans-East African Highway Authority and the Lagos-Mombasa Trans-African Highway Authority. Documents have been prepared and forwarded to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to establish and IFC for the West African subregional Trans-African Highway Networks; and the ground work has been finalized for the establishment of an IFC for the Tripoli-Windhoek Trans-Central African Highway Authority (in formation).