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Meeting of the Technical Committee on
Transport and Communications of the PTA
for Eastern and Southern African States

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ROAD TRANSPORT

- A. AFRICAN HIGHWAY MASTER PLAN AND THE PTA
HIGHWAY NETWORK

- B. HIGHWAY SAFETY AND THE AFRICAN HIGHWAY CODE

A. AFRICAN HIGHWAY MASTER PLAN AND
THE PTA HIGHWAY NETWORK

1. The African road system is relatively underdeveloped and backward, and is generally made up of fragmented national networks of varying quality, with very little evidence of a visible effort to develop inter-State connexions. The Preferential Trade Area (PTA) of Eastern and Southern African States is no exception to this fact.

2. In recognition of this gross inadequacy and inefficiency of the African highway system as a continental network, the ECA Conference of Ministers, the DAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government and the United Nations General Assembly have shown their concern at various opportunities and fora. As a result, ECA has been: (a) mandated to prepare an African road network plan for the continent as a whole, (b) urged to promote the development of major arterial trans-African highways and subregional network, and (c) entrusted with the unique responsibility of providing leadership for the United Nations Transport and Communications Decade, which aims at the promotion, inter alia, of the development and integration of the African transport infrastructure; the harmonization of national traffic regulations, and the elimination of the non-physical, administrative and legal barriers to the freedom of movement of persons and goods throughout the region. Looking back at the origin of the African road system, it shall be recalled that the pre-independence era road development of most African countries was characterized, as a colonial legacy, by its outward-looking orientation, since roads then were built primarily for penetration of territories and for purposes of administrative control, and then were used for mineral and other resources exploitation and extraction, and raw materials and produce evacuation.

3. Post-independence activities in road network development, although very extensive, emphasized the improvement of national networks, with little regard to inter-State connexions and international travel and trade.

4. It was in recognition of this gross lack of adequate regional transport facilities and the vital importance of roads and road transport for intra-African trade and for socio-economic development, that ECA effectively responded to the needs of African Governments, and embarked upon the promotion of the trans-African highway theme: a programme of development, step by step, of selected major trans-African highways and their feeder links. ECA's approach to this systematic development of an African highway network was in the first instance to promote the development of subregional networks, with a view to subsequently interconnecting those to form the continental network, the African Highway Master Plan. Towards that end, ECA, with the collaboration of member Governments, has launched the following major highways:

- (a) The Lagos-Mombasa Trans-African Highway;
- (b) The Cairo-Gaborone Trans-East African Highway;
- (c) The Algiers-Lagos Trans-Saharan Highway
- (d) The Dakar-N'Djamena Trans-Sahelian Highway; and
- (e) The Lagos-Nouakchott Trans-Coastal Highway.

(The last two were later merged to form the Trans-West African Highways Network, TWAHN).

Four more major trans-African Highways have also been identified:

- (f) The N'Djamena-(Massawa) Djibouti Trans-African Highway;
- (g) The Tripoli-Windhoek Trans-Central African Highway;
- (h) The Nouakchott-Cairo Trans-North African Highway; and
- (i) The Beira-Lobito Trans-Southern African Highway.

5. ECA has pursued the development of these highways further with the establishment of intergovernmental institutions. The most outstanding achievements in the institution building and strengthening effort are the establishment, in 1980, of the Lagos-Mombasa Trans-African Highway Authority, based at Bangui, Central African Republic; and the Cairo-Gaborone Trans-East African Highway Authority in 1981, with permanent headquarters as yet to be located. ECA also succeeded in 1982 to persuade the Transport Commission of ECOWAS to strengthen the competent department of that institution to act as the responsible body for the implementation of the TWAHN project.

6. The establishment of subregional highway institutions must essentially lead to the ultimate formation of a continent-wide over-all entity that would cater to Africa as a whole; and provide co-ordination of effort, standardization of designs, traffic rules and regulations, signs and markings. Towards that end, a restructuring of the Trans-African highway system with east-west and north-south orientation has been proposed by some member States as follows:

(a) North-south trans-African highways

- (i) Cairo-Gaborone
- (ii) Tripoli-Windhoek (to Walvis Bay)
- (iii) Algiers-Lagos
- (iv) Monrovia-Tangier (to Europe via the Strait of Gibraltar)

(b) East-west-oriented trans-African highways

- (i) Rabat-Cairo (to middle East, Asia and Europe)
- (ii) Dakar-Djibouti (to Arabia via Bab el Mandeb)
- (iii) Monrovia-Lagos-Mombasa
- (iv) Beira-Lobito

7. The following trans-African highways should then be of particular interest to the PTA area:

- (a) Cairo-Gaborone Trans-East African Highway;
- (b) Mombasa-Lagos (Monrovia) Trans-African Highway;

- (c) Beira-Lobito Trans-southern African Highway;
- (d) Dakar-Djibouti Trans African Highway;
- (e) Tripoli-Windhoek Trans-Central African Highway.

8. Segments of these highways within the confines of the PTA, and their respective feeder links, together with the national networks of primary, secondary and farm-to-market type rural feeder roads of member States should constitute the PTA Highway Master Plan project.

9. The objective of a PTA Highway Master Plan would be to improve economic co-operation among PTA member States. The greater portion of the PTA highway system may already be in place, built on the basis of national priorities. Activities required to complete the PTA network (which is an integral but important component of the African Highway Network), would include identification of substandard segments of a network which would provide at least one connexion with adjoining member States, technical and economic investigation required to determine priorities for improvement of economically justifiable projects; and mobilization and channelling of resources. The ultimate aim would be to integrate national networks of member countries into the PTA master network, as a very important component of the African Highway Master Plan.

10. As improvement of infrastructure by itself would be of little international value if inter-State travel and trade is to continue to be hampered by non-physical administrative and legal barriers a tremendous amount of work needs to be carried out to eliminate or at least reduce to a minimum, border crossing formalities.

11. The Trans-West African Highways Network next door is emerging as perhaps the best subregional road network. The PTA Highway Master Plan proposal too provides member States with an excellent opportunity to make determined efforts to see their network emerge as another commendable subregional road system. An outline of preliminary activities required to upgrade the PTA network into a sound subregional road system would be as follows:

- (a) Determination of the precise definition of the PTA Highway Network agreed upon by member countries;
- (b) Examination of the current status of the major highways and their respective feeder links, to determine substandard segments; and the necessary studies (feasibility, detailed engineering) to upgrade those particular roads to all weather standards;
- (c) Computation of the technical and financial resources required;
- (d) Recommendation on ways and means required to mobilize and channel resources for implementation of priority projects.

12. Road transport is the fundamental basis for the development of all other sectors of the economy. By far the most practical and versatile means of transport, road development enhances and facilitates the declared African aim of utilizing the continent's immense natural and human resources, and is an indispensable prerequisite to genuine regional co-operation and integration.

13. The African highway system continues to suffer from poor organization, inadequate maintenance, insufficient trained manpower, and lack of funds. Africa does not generally manufacture its own heavy duty road building equipment or even parts. It has not developed capable indigenous construction enterprises in sufficient quantity, and therefore continues to rely heavily on expensive expatriate contractors that invariably export the profits they may have intentionally exaggerated in the first place. Africa therefore needs a regional highway institution to safeguard its interests. Until time is ripe to establish an all-African highway institution, however, subregional institutions could play this role within their territorial jurisdiction.

14. The establishment of an intergovernmental highway co-ordinating committee would therefore be a first step in the right direction, with commensurate delegated authority to draw up a PTA Highway Master Plan, establish a permanent PTA highway institution whose primary responsibility would be to implement the PTA Highway Master Plan project in collaboration with member countries.

Recommendations

15. The Transport Committee of the PTA might wish take concrete steps to improve road transport in the Preferential Trade Area of Eastern and Southern Africa by:

1. Declaring the establishment of a PTA highway system, consisting of all major trans-African highways and their respective feeder links traversing the Area, (combined with) national networks agreed upon by members for inclusion in the PTA network, as an integral component of the African Highway Master Plan.
2. Drawing up a phased programme of action for upgrading the whole of the PTA Highway Network to at least all-weather standard within the life of the United Nations Transport and Communications Decade in Africa.
3. Constituting a special highway co-ordinating committee made up of member States and ECA, for the implementation of the PTA highway programme.

B. HIGHWAY SAFETY AND THE
AFRICAN HIGHWAY CODE

16. African countries, including countries in the Preferential Trade Area of Eastern and Southern Africa have expended, during the last two decades, a considerable amount of their scarce resources to build, expand and modernize their road network. This is only logical and perfectly understandable as the development of an efficient transport infrastructure is an indispensable component of the over-all development effort, and would certainly further the physical cohesion of the PTA member States.

17. This expansion of road networks, in turn, has led to an increase in motor vehicle registrations each year. As roads are improved, the number of kilometres increase, and speeds increase. This leads to the undesirable side-effect: increasing number of deaths, injuries and property damage, caused by road traffic accidents. The problem is aggravated by immoderate use of alcohol on highways, which in turn reduces inhibition, which control driving behaviour. The total lack of any significant and meaningful safety programmes in Africa has worsened the situation.

18. Industrialized nations have been able to arrest and reverse the ever-rising trend of road traffic accidents, while Africans continue to pay in human lives. Europe and America have succeeded to check traffic fatalities and injuries because they constantly improved highway design, increased public awareness of traffic hazards, established and practised highway safety programmes, enacted stringent legislation against drinking and driving, and enforced the use of occupant protection measures. By sustained research and applications, industrialized nations are still finding new methods to reduce further the number of road accidents.

19. Africa needs to wage a protracted war against this rising menace to safe driving on its highways and streets. African Governments have the inherent responsibility of safeguarding the public travelling on its highways, because highway transportation, unlike rail, water and air transportation, (which operate on predetermined schedules on their own somewhat exclusive right-of-way, and in conditions of very little traffic congestion), is more hazardous and accident prone.

20. One recognized method to combat traffic accidents is by means of the Highway Code. The trans-African highway theme aims at promoting inter-State trade, so it is obvious that the fight against the rising road accident rate could not be limited to individual national efforts, if it is to have a regional impact. Consequently, a collective effort by the entire membership would be required if it is to be effective.

21. The current ECA project of an African Highway Code ¹⁾ attempts to mobilize African and international know-how and expertise, to reconcile and harmonize different national traffic laws and regulations, eliminate any inconsistencies therein, and attempt to produce a practical document acceptable to the whole, or a great majority of: (a) road users, (b) law enforcement agencies, (c) education and health authorities, (d) research experts and (e) the interested public in general.

1) E/CN.14/TRANS/153

22. It puts special emphasis on children in traffic, the alcohol problem, the management of accident situations, and perhaps more important, the need to formulate and implement safety programmes.

Child safety

23. Children are the most vulnerable victims of road accidents simply because they have not as yet developed adequate self-responsibility for their own safety in traffic. The African Highway Code would therefore emphasize the need for parents and teachers to initiate safety education at home and in school so that youngsters may acquire practical knowledge of safe pedestrian behaviour while very young.

Abusive use of alcohol

24. It has been irrefutably established by scientific investigation that alcoholics and problem drinkers, invariably a small minority of the general public, account for a very large part of the traffic problem. What is more, appreciable percentages of those whose licences have been suspended or revoked for alcohol-related offences continue to drive, mainly because there is either low-risk of apprehension or punishment is trivial, or both. Yet, stringent drinking and driving legislation in some countries, notably Sweden, has resulted in dramatic reduction of the casualty toll on highways.

25. Drinking immoderately impairs driving ability and accounts for more than half of all severe accidents, because excessive drinking and driving usually ends up in violent crashes, and the victims of abusive drinking are innocent bystanders by and large.

26. The Code, in its declared aim to instill awareness and influence behaviour and attitudes to the increasing hazards of traffic accidents in Africa, will advocate that nations and subregional intergovernmental institutions promulgate and enforce legislation against abusive use of alcohol while driving, and that law enforcement agencies and highway patrols use the accepted blood and urine tests to detect excess alcohol on the spot if adequately equipped, but also use other simpler methods to detect signs of alcohol impairment, such as general behaviour, appearance, odor of breath, clarity of speech, and general attitudes; and show no leniency to apprehend and prosecute offenders, since permissiveness may end up in the death of innocent bystanders.

Accident management

27. The seriously injured victim of a traffic accident is interested only in rapid but safe transit to a place where he could obtain proper care. This involves a life sustaining and life saving operation which would require the establishment of rural emergency medical services at dense population centres, and at reasonable intervals on heavily trafficked highways.

28. The Code will enumerate the steps required for proper accident management, including care of the impaired while in transit, so that victims of traffic crashes receive prompt and adequate emergency care.

Highway safety programmes

29. While vehicle ownership in Africa is undoubtedly growing, sometimes beyond all expectation, and is causing accidents and fatalities to rise exorbitantly, highway

safety programmes are conspicuously lacking. One of the important objectives of the Code is to promote the establishment, development and operation of effective programmes to reduce road accidents, deaths and injuries throughout the region.

30. The development and implementation of programmes to achieve a reduction in traffic accidents would also involve a campaign to remove roadside obstacles, and where such removal is difficult, or impossible to alternatively shield those hazards to make them less lethal, and to provide impact absorbing cushions to protect vehicles and occupants, and allow drivers to recover control of the vehicle quickly.

31. The Code will make concrete recommendations to make road-sides absolutely free from obstacles and/or provide suitable protections; and to give positive guidance and sufficient information about actual or possible hazards well in advance.

Recommendations

32. The PTA Transport Committee might wish to endorse the production of the African Highway Code, and to pass a resolution calling on the international community to support this project with technical and financial assistance, and call on PTA member States, African intergovernmental highway organizations, and in effect the whole of Africa to support, accept and implement the African Highway Code.