



**24<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Greater Mekong Subregion  
Subregional Transport Forum (STF-24)  
Via web-based conferencing  
21 January 2021**

**SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS**

**Introduction**

1. The Twenty-fourth Meeting of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Subregional Transport Forum (STF-24) was virtually held on 21 January 2021. The Forum, with the theme “*Forging Greater Transport Connectivity Toward the Visions of GMS 2030*”, was jointly organized by the Ministry of Transport (MOT) of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The objectives of the forum were to: (i) review the status and update the pipeline of GMS transport sector projects in the GMS Regional Investment Framework (RIF) 2022; (ii) brief the STF on the key thrusts and principles in the draft GMS Economic Cooperation Program Strategic Framework 2030 (GMS 2030) and COVID-19 Response and Recovery Plan 2021-2023 that have a bearing on the transport sector; (iii) review the progress of the GMS Cross Border Transport Facilitation Agreement (CBTA) “Early Harvest” implementation and updates on possible future efforts in transport and trade facilitation; (iv) update the STF on the work and plans for the Greater Mekong Railway Association (GMRA); (v) discuss recent initiatives to improve road safety regimes in GMS countries and railway planning and financing; (vi) update the STF on the activities of development partners in the GMS transport; and (vii) discuss other matters that have a bearing on the GMS transport sector. (The meeting program and agenda is attached as **Appendix 1**).

2. The Forum participants included delegations from the Kingdom of Cambodia, the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the Kingdom of Thailand, the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, and ADB. Representatives from development partner organizations also attended the Forum. (The list of participants is attached as **Appendix 2**).

3. The Forum was graced by His Excellency Le Dinh Tho, Deputy Minister of Viet Nam MOT as keynote speaker, chaired by Mr. Le Tuan Anh, Director General of the International Cooperation Department MOT, Viet Nam and co-chaired by Mr. Hiroaki Yamaguchi, Director, Southeast Asia Department Transport and Communications Division, ADB.

**Opening Session**

4. Mr. Le Din Tho, in his keynote speech, welcomed and thanked all participants of the virtual meeting. He emphasized the importance of the transport sector in GMS cooperation and cited some of its recent achievements, among others, progress in the “Early Harvest” implementation of the CBTA, the transport investment and technical assistance projects in GMS RIF 2022 — 53 with financing worth \$48.9 billion, 12 of which worth \$641 million already completed’ and the identification for viability assessment of 9 priority railway links to complete GMS rail connectivity. He noted the negative impact of COVID-19 pandemic to the GMS transport sector and encouraged the Forum to discuss and propose solutions for the transport sector’s recovery from the pandemic.

5. In his opening remarks, Mr. Le Tuan Anh, Chair, appreciated all participants especially the ADB for its support and cooperation in organizing the virtual meeting. He stated that in the coming period, GMS transport sector will continue to be the key factor to support the successful implementation the GMS Economic Cooperation Program Strategic Framework 2030 (GMS-2030). He outlined the proposed GMS 2030 transport program innovative strategies in six new areas, as follows: (i) regarding railways, strategies and masterplans will be developed with prominence given to private sector investment, concessions, maintenance, and operations; (ii) shift emphasis toward developing and expanding capacity in sea, river, and dry ports; (iii) promote inland waterways, coastal shipping, and passenger services; (iv) promote the development of international and secondary airports; (v) help to integrate urban transport into urbanization strategies and planning; and (vi) considerations for the social, environmental, and resettlement effects of transport projects, as well as road safety, will be priorities.

6. Co-chair Mr. Hiroaki Yamaguchi, in his opening statement, thanked the government of Viet Nam for hosting and chairing STF-24. He noted that the theme of STF-24, *“Forging Greater Transport Connectivity Toward the Visions of GMS 2030”* is in line with the draft new GMS-2030 due for endorsement in March 2021 during the 7<sup>th</sup> GMS Summit of Leaders. He stated that as countries and the region begin to recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, rebuilding the economic base, protecting the peoples’, livelihoods and industry from the pandemic, the transport sector remains important. He pointed out that it is the job of STF to identify and deliver key elements of change in the transport sector that will launch the region into the next decade. Mr. Yamaguchi then proceeded to the outline the objectives and topics of STF-24 meeting.

7. Copies of opening statements of Keynote Speaker, the Chair and Co-Chair are in **Appendix 3**.

### **Session 1. Review of the Pipeline of GMS Transport Sector Projects in the GMS Regional Investment Framework (RIF) 2022**

8. Mr. Anthony Gill, Senior Regional Cooperation Specialist in ADB Southeast Asia Department first gave an overview of the 24<sup>th</sup> GMS Ministerial Conference-endorsed RIF 2022 Third Progress Report and Update, highlighting the overall updating process, progress in implementation and financing and of the future of RIF. His presentation is in **Appendix 4**.

9. Mr. Vasim Sorya, Undersecretary of State, Ministry of Public Works and Transport, Cambodia presented Cambodia’s progress report on its transport projects in RIF 2022 further to the 2020 Updates, among others, the #4 investment project: Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville Expressway Project achieved 33.3% implementation progress as of January 2021 and is expected to be completed in 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2022. His presentation is in **Appendix 5**.

10. Ms. Zhihui PENG, Director, International Cooperation Division of Transport Department, Yunnan Province, PRC reported updates for the 4 PRC transport projects in RIF 2022. Her presentation is in **Appendix 6**.

11. Mr. Sengdarith Kattinasack, Director General, Department of Planning and Cooperation, Ministry of Public Works and Transport of Lao PDR presented an overview of the progress of 22 Lao PDR transport investment projects in RIF 2022. Overall, 59% or 13 projects are still seeking financing, 8 are ongoing and 1 completed. Rail and Road & Bridges projects are showing satisfactory progress while border crossing facilities as well as Port/waterways projects are slow moving. He highlighted their request for ADB technical assistance support for border crossing facilities especially the most congested Thanaleng Border Crossing Infrastructure Improvement

Project and for JICA support for a feasibility study of Vientiane-Ha Noi Expressway. Lao PDR presentation is in **Appendix 7**.

12. Mr. Aung Myo Oo, Chief Engineer, Department of Highways, Ministry of Construction, Myanmar reported updates for the 12 Myanmar transport projects in RIF 2022. His presentation is in **Appendix 8**.

13. Mr. Danai Ruengsorn, Director, Bureau of International Highways Cooperation, Department of Highways, Ministry of Transport, Thailand presented Thailand's progress report on its transport investment and technical assistance projects in RIF 2022 further to the 2020 Updates, among others, the GMS Highway Expansion Phase 2 Project has an overall progress of 93.43% by December 2020 compared 49.79% in its last report. His presentation is in **Appendix 9**.

14. Mr. Le Hoai Phuong, official from Viet Nam Ministry of Transport reported updates for the Viet Nam transport projects in RIF 2022. His presentation is in **Appendix 10**.

15. In the interest of time, the Co-Chair suggested to combine open discussions for sessions 1 and 2 since both sessions relate to general GMS strategy frameworks.

### **Session 2. Presentation on the Transport Sector-Related Aspects of the Proposed New GMS Economic Cooperation Program Strategic Framework 2030 (GMS 2030) and GMS COVID-19 Response and Recovery Plan 2021-2023 (GMS COVID-19 Plan)**

16. Mr. Anthony Gill briefed the Forum on the strategic thrusts and principles of the draft GMS 2030 and GMS COVID-19 Plan and expounded on their transport-related aspects. During his presentation he covered the proposed people-centered strategic pillars in the strategy: community, connectivity, and competitiveness; and the proposed vision, mission, and six innovative approaches, such as promoting an enhanced spatial approach. This demand-driven and regional approach will expand and widen economic corridors, maximize their network effects to South and East Asia and the world, promote agglomeration economies, and will involve a multi-sector, multi-thematic, and multi-stakeholder approaches to ensure transformation of transport corridors into economic corridors. He stressed that a spatial approach with a multimodal transport system, robust policies, and regulations, increased private sector participation and growing market demand will involve linking industrial hubs, border/ rural areas and nodes, major cities and urban centers, and major trade routes and maritime gateways. He also highlighted the need to ensure health interventions and safe migration along the economic corridors. His presentation is included as **Appendix 11**.

17. No intervention was put forward when floor was opened for Sessions 1 and 2 open discussion.

### **Session 3. Report on the Progress of the CBTA “Early Harvest” Implementation and other Plans for the Field of Transport and Trade Facilitation**

18. Mr. Nazrul Mohammad Islam, Transport Specialist at Southeast Asia Department, ADB, presented the progress of Early Harvest Implementation of the GMS CBTA. His presentation included the following: (i) overview of the GMS CBTA, (ii) GMS CBTA “Early Harvest” package, and (iii) conclusion. The first part covered the objective of the GMS CBTA, which is to allow unimpeded travel for agreed goods, passengers and vehicles; its constraints, which include inefficient cross-border trade processes, weak institutional arrangements and complex coordination among sectors; and its benefits, such as its complementarity to regional

commitments, provision of transit solutions, potential for expansion, better investment returns and competitive advantage on business and trade. During the second part, the presenter went through the “Early Harvest” package and initial findings after its review, including rapid increase of traffic and land-based trade; as well as the responses to COVID-19, including enhanced communication, temporary trailer swap measures, accelerated process for the GMS Road Transport Permit, use of electronic customs clearance and digital tracking, strengthened border crossings, and potential single stop inspection. Mr. Islam stressed the demonstrated economic case of the initiative, the need to keep trade, investment and tourism open to revitalize economies, ensure health and well-being of people, strengthen regional coordination to respond to COVID-19, and achieve common standards in border crossings. The third part of Mr. Islam’s presentation is about the Mekong Institute’s progress monitoring which included the following: (i) objective and mechanisms used for the monitoring – including data gathering, national-level workshops and reporting to ADB and CBTA Joint Committee, (ii) progress in terms of number of permits issued per country, and (iii) Mekong Institute recommendations in accelerating the CBTA EH implementation. His presentation is in **Appendix 12**.

19. In Session 3 open discussion, the following comments were given:

- **PRC** has actively promoted and accelerated the implementation of the GMS CBTA Early Harvest Program, including the issuance of 184 permits to 22 domestic firms. Transportation Authorities in Guangxi and Yunnan have taken measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19. It was suggested that GMS countries continue to promote cross-border transport facilitation and carry out more feasible activities within the Joint Committee. PRC is pleased to see Thailand and Myanmar have started to implement their bilateral agreement towards full participation in CBTA in 2021. PRC is also working with Myanmar to conclude a memorandum of understanding (MOU) as soon as possible.
- **Myanmar** updated on their current implementation of CBTA. Appreciated those involved in facilitating the Myanmar/Thailand bilateral agreements and now working with PRC on an MOU to later proceed to arrange similar MOUs with other countries.
- **ESCAP** shared their experience in electronic tracking of vehicles where they have done extensive work in SASEC Program. It has good potential during pandemic as it deepens digitalization among countries. ESCAP suggested that ADB set up a digital platform which can electronically address customs issues as well as integrate transport issues.
- **Co-Chair** noted GMS countries great interest in GMS CBTA and Early Harvest program and ADB is willing to consider GMS countries’ requests for help to facilitate their CBTA implementation including as suggested by ESCAP on electronic vehicle tracking systems to help address customs issues.

#### **Session 4. Updates on the Greater Mekong Railway Association (GMRA)**

20. Mr. Ba Myint, Chairman of GMRA and Managing Director of Myanmar Railways, Ministry of Transport and Communications briefed the forum on the activities of the GMRA, its mission and goals, and the various support TA projects. He gave updates on the various priority activities of the Association, including the work related to the identified nine priority railway links to be developed and the finalized Cross Border Rail Framework Agreement. Finally, he presented a new technical assistance (May 2020-December 2023) that aims to have as its final outcome, a GMRA that is functioning with adequate capacity and funding. His presentation is in **Appendix 13**.

## **Session 5. Recent initiatives to improve road safety regimes in GMS countries**

21. There were two presentations for Session 5. First presentation was by Mr. Shihiru Date, Senior Transport Specialist of the Southeast Asia Department of ADB, regarding recent initiatives to improve road safety regimes in GMS Countries highlighting the case of Myanmar which had the following components: (i) improving road crash data accuracy; (ii) school safety, community enforcement, animal control; (iii) simple construction safety actions; (iv) low cost approaches for engineering; (v) overseas and in country training; and (vi) post-crash response actions. His presentation is in **Appendix 14**.

22. Mr. Michael Anyala, Senior Road Asset Management Specialist from ADB Sustainable Development and Climate Change Department provided the second presentation which covered ADB safety road support and initiatives for the whole Asia Pacific which include the following: (i) Building road safety capacity; (ii) incubate standalone road safety support; (iii) promote Safe Systems Approach; (iv) work with partners and DMCs to address road safety; (v) support sub regional road safety initiatives; (vi) develop and disseminate knowledge products and tools; and (vii) support the implementation of Asia Pacific Road Safety Observatory (APRSO) initiatives. His presentation is in **Appendix 15**.

23. In the open discussion, **PRC** expressed appreciation for this knowledge-sharing event and strongly agreed that road safety is a key issue in GMS as also recognized in GMS 2030. PRC agreed that road safety is a behavior modification and road engineering issue and that they have been implementing major road safety initiative since 2004 to address these issues. A new five-year plan initiative will begin soon. This will focus on village roads and adopting new and smart technologies for a more convenient, efficient and safer road network. PRC indicated that they are always happy to share their experiences in this regard.

24. The **Co-Chair** acknowledged that each country has a road safety program and agreed that a special event to share approaches and even challenges would be a good idea.

## **Session 6. Railway planning and financing**

25. Session 6 also had two presentations. Mr. Tien Thinh Nguyen of Viet Nam Railways gave the first presentation which covered the following: (i) an overview of Viet Nam railway network, its current status including its urban railway initiatives; (ii) Viet Nam national railway development plan, where 2020-2030 will focus on developing the railway infrastructure and investment in new important routes; and (iii) research and investment in Viet Nam railway infrastructure system and the connection in GMS, among others, the status of connecting railway Lao Cai (Viet Nam) North Hekou (PRC) and most recent plans to connect Viet Nam/Cambodia through Ho Chi Minh City Moc Bai/Bavet Phnom Penh City. His presentation is in **Appendix 16**.

26. Mr. Ba Myint of Myanmar Railways gave the second presentation on (i) rail sector development activities in Myanmar, highlighting the Yangon-Mandalay Railway Line Improvement Project and Yangon Circular Railway Line Upgrading Project; and (ii) planning for international railway connectivity in Myanmar particularly the missing links in the Trans-Asia Railway Network (with PRC, India and Thailand). His presentation is in **Appendix 17**.

## **Session 7: Statements/Updates from Development Partners**

27. Mr. Sandeep Raj Jain, Economic Affairs Officer, Transport Connectivity and Logistics Section, Transport Division, UNESCAP presented UNESCAP's smart railway solutions to support railways in addressing challenges due to pandemic. His presentation is in **Appendices 18**.

28. Mr. Francois Carcel, Transport Specialist of Agence Française de Développement (AFD) informed the Forum on AFD strategy & activities in GMS Transport sector including their ongoing projects with Viet Nam (Hanoi Metro Line 3 project) and future pipeline with Myanmar and Viet Nam. His presentation is in **Appendix 19**.

29. Sr. Col. (Ret.) Saranyu Viriyavejakul, D.Sc., Vice President, NEDA of Thailand, presented the key features and updates on specific ongoing and pipeline projects supported by NEDA in GMS member countries. His presentation is in **Appendix 20**.

30. Mr. Tao Ren, Senior Loan Officer, European Investment Bank (EIB), presented EIB Activities in GMS Transport Sector pointing out that GMS 2030 connectivity thrust and principles are in line with EU-ASEAN connectivity strategy and EIB transport policy update. His presentation is in **Appendix 21**.

31. Mr. Shige Sakaki, Transport Sector Coordinator for Viet Nam, The World Bank shared on WB activities in the GMS region particularly about a recent study they started to help address some of the issues arising from the new railway being built under the Belt and Road initiative that will connect PRC, Lao PDR and Thailand.

32. The Chairs appreciated the development partners' continued support for the GMS transport sector and found the information shared very useful.

## **Session 8. Other Matters**

33. Cambodia agreed in principle to host the next STF meeting (STF-25) but timing and appropriate arrangements will be coordinated with the ADB as STF Secretariat in due course. It is hoped that the next meeting will already be face-to-face in Cambodia.

## **Wrap Up and Closing Session**

34. On the country presentations on their RIF projects and Early Harvest implementation of CBTA, the Co-chair remarked that it is good to note some progress made in these areas under this very challenging pandemic situation. Regarding the GMRA, he hoped that the new TA (with PRC grant) will make headway in transforming GMRA into a standalone entity and continue to plan and carry out activities that will connect GMS countries via rail. The APRSO initiative reported under Road Safety session is indeed an interesting development that can hopefully make universal data comparison more valid. For railway planning session, he noted that countries have different structures of their railway institutions and would be a potential topic for sharing and discussion in future STF meetings. He again expressed appreciation for the support and participation of development partners which he pointed out to be more than the usual number attending STF meetings. He looked forward to physically meeting for the next meeting given Cambodia's agreement in principle to host STF-25.

35. The Chair sincerely thanked the country delegations, the development partners, the secretariat including IT team, and all participants for their active participation in the meeting, which

he noted has been very fruitful and successful despite the limitations of a virtual format. He looked forward to further cooperation and in coming time and in forging greater transport connectivity under the vision of GMS 2030. He then formally closed the meeting.