



NINTH MEETING OF THE RAILWAY WORKING GROUP

10–12 June 2025
Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic

Venue: Sheraton Hotel Bishkek

Background

With support from Asian Development Bank (ADB), CAREC member countries formulated a regional strategy for Central Asian Railways, *Unlocking the Potential of Railways: A Railway Strategy for CAREC, 2017–2030* (the Strategy), to serve as a guiding document for the sound, long-term development of CAREC railways.

CAREC member countries are now working on implementation of the Strategy, for which ADB mobilized a technical assistance (TA) project with the financial support of the People's Republic of China Poverty Reduction and Regional Cooperation Fund (PRCF), and the United Kingdom Fund for Asia Regional Trade and Connectivity (ARTCF) and ADB TA funds. TA activities commenced in May 2019, focusing on transport modeling and rail sector assessments. Subsequently, the TA has financed a series of additional project studies, including a traffic study for the rail corridor between the People's Republic of China, Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan; and prefeasibility studies of cross-border railway projects in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Pakistan; and provision of advisory support for preparation of railway commercialization, reform and investment programs in Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan.

Much of this work has drawn attention to the importance of providing efficient railway links to ports and inland terminals, the advantages of operating block train shuttle services between ports and inland terminals, and the need for efficient border crossing points. At its 6th meeting on 17 and 18 October 2022 in Almaty, Kazakhstan, the RWG agreed to include prefeasibility studies of (i) Uzbekistan–Turkmenbashi Block Trains and Ferry Services, and (ii) the Uzbekistan Northwestern International Freight Corridor. At its 8th meeting on 22–24 May 2024 in Baku, Azerbaijan, the RWG included two further prefeasibility studies on (i) Improving port-railway connectivity at Pakistan's main ports; and (ii) Augmenting the capacity of Mongolia's north-south railway. At this 9th meeting, the findings of the prefeasibility studies in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Pakistan will be presented, together with an update on plan to develop a direct railway link between the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan (CKU Railway). Further sessions will examine rail-port connectivity, terminal design and the establishment of block-train services.

The main objectives of the 9th meeting of the RWG are to:

- Report on progress achieved and ongoing and planned TA activities
- Share experiences and lessons on selected topics
- Agree on next steps in TA implementation

Meeting agenda

Day 1 (10 June)

- 0830-0900 Registration
- 0900-0910 **Opening remarks**
Mr. Bekzhan Rysmendeev, Deputy Minister of Transport and Communications
- 0910-0920 **Introduction to objectives and agenda of the RWG meeting**
Mr. Jurgen Sluijter, Senior Transport Specialist, ADB
- 0920-1000 **Session 1: Update on TA activities and work plan**
Progress with approved prefeasibility studies and knowledge support activities and update on the 2025 work plan.
Mr. Tyrrell Duncan, Railway Specialist (TA Team Leader)
- 1000-1030 Coffee break and group photo
- 1030-1200 **Session 2: Best practices for port–railway connectivity**
This interactive session discusses international best practices for port-rail connectivity and identifies operational improvements and investments needed to improve the performance of port-connecting railway corridors in Central Asia. These discussions will inform the following sessions on port-railway connectivity and feed into the TA workplan.
Mr. Udo Sauerbrey, Railway Sector Specialist (TA Core Team)
Mr. Adrian Sammons, Senior Transport Specialist (Maritime Transport and Ports), ADB
- 1200-1315 Lunch
- 1315-1500 **Session 3: Establishing block-train services: Study on Uzbekistan–Turkmenbashi Block Trains and Ferry Services**
Presentation of the findings of the prefeasibility study on establishing container block trains services between Tashkent and Turkmenbashi Port, identifying the potential for introducing such services, the main obstacles to be addressed, and possible next steps. This session discusses the key principles of block-train services and main requirements to make these services cost-efficient. How do block-trains differ from regular freight train operations and what does this imply for rail operator, infrastructure manager, terminal operator, shipping company and their clients?
Mr. Tyrrell Duncan, Railway Specialist (TA Team Leader)

Mr. Adrian Sammons, Ports and Shipping Specialist

1500-1530 Tea break

1530-1600 **Session 4: A roadmap for port–railway connectivity, Pakistan**
Briefing on the findings of TA mission to Pakistan in January 2025, covering the potential to for Pakistan Railways to attract high freight volumes, the constraints that currently limit this role, the types of investments and operational improvements needed for Pakistan Railway to realize this opportunity, and the roles of Pakistan Railways and the private sector.

Mr. Adrian Sammons, Ports and Shipping Specialist

1600-1650 **Session 5: Key principles of rail terminal design**
Rail terminals are the crucial link between modes to provide time- and cost-efficient transshipment of cargo and containers, whether it is located inland or in seaports. On the basis of various examples, this workshop presents the key requirements of rail terminal design to ensure a seamless transfer of cargo.

Mr. Udo Sauerbrey, Railway Sector Specialist (TA Core Team)

1650-1700 **Wrap-up Day 1**

1830-2100 **Reception (Tashrabat Hall, 2nd floor, Sheraton Hotel)**

Day 2 (11 June)

0830-0900	Registration
0900-0910	Introduction to Day 2 of the RWG meeting Mr. Jurgen Sluijter, Senior Transport Specialist, ADB
0910-1000	Session 6: Update on proposed CKU Railway Briefing on the status of the proposed project, including the alignment, technical features and challenges; time frame for implementation; freight market to be served; planned operating characteristics and service quality; gauge change, terminals and handling, and overview of project feasibility and operational and financing responsibilities. Mr. Ruslan Doskozhaev – Expert of the Ministry of Transport and Communications of the Kyrgyz Republic
1000-1030	Coffee break
1030-1200	Session 7: Approaches to investment viability assessments Economic and financial viability assessments are crucial to make decisions on large scale investments in rail transport infrastructure. Based on practical examples, this session presents approaches to prepare freight traffic projections, how to estimate economic and financial costs and benefits, and the practical limitations of economic and financial evaluations. Mr. Holger Eiletz, Transport planner/-economist (TA Core Team)
1200-1330	Lunch
1330-1430	Session 8: Uzbekistan Northwestern International Freight Corridor Presentation of the findings of the prefeasibility study on long-distance cross-border railway services connecting to Kazakhstan's Caspian Sea ports, identifying the potential for introducing such services, the main obstacles to be addressed, and possible next steps. Mr. Tyrrell Duncan, Consultant (TA Team Leader) Mr. Udo Sauerbrey, Railway Sector Specialist (TA Core Team)
1430-1530	Session 9: TA planning and identification of new TA activities Interactive session to review of earmarked and newly proposed prefeasibility and knowledge projects for support through the TA. Mr. Tyrrell Duncan, Consultant (TA Team Leader)
1530-1600	Coffee Break
1600-1630	Presentation UIC

'Cross-border operations and rail corridor development from UIC perspective'

Philip van den Bosch, Special Advisor to the Freight Director, UIC

1630-1655

Wrap-up (Summary of Proceedings)

Mr. Jurgen Sluijter, Senior Transport Specialist, ADB

1655-1700

Closing remarks

Day 3 (12 June)

Visit locomotive depot and wagon repair plant

0930 Pick-up from hotel (transportation by bus)

0930-1030 Visit locomotive depot

1030-1045 Transfer

1045-12:00 Visit wagon repair plant

Lunch