



Summary of Proceedings

Nineth Meeting of the CAREC Railway Working Group 10–12 June 2025, Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic

Introduction

1. At the 15th CAREC Ministerial Conference in Islamabad in October 2016, the CAREC member countries endorsed the CAREC Railway Strategy, titled “*Unlocking the Potential of Railways: A Railway Strategy for CAREC 2017–2030*” (the Strategy). The Strategy was developed to serve as a guiding document for the long-term development of CAREC railways. The CAREC strategic vision for railway transport is “*to be a mode of choice for trade: quick, efficient, accessible for customers, and easy to use throughout the region by 2030*”.
2. The Strategy was formulated by the Railway Working Group (RWG), which was set up by the decision of the 14th Transport Sector Coordinating Committee (TSCC) in Ulaanbaatar in April 2015. The RWG consists of representatives of railway agencies from CAREC member countries, supported by expert organizations such as the Organization for Cooperation of Railways (OSJD) and International Union Railways (UIC), as well as CAREC development partners.
3. CAREC member countries are now working to implement the Strategy, for which ADB mobilized a technical assistance (TA) project. TA activities commenced in May 2019 and aim to provide support to member countries through knowledge sharing, prefeasibility studies and other initiatives.

Meeting Objectives

4. The nineth meeting of the RWG (the Meeting) was held in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic on 10-12 June 2025 to report on progress achieved in TA implementation, to share knowledge and experience, and to agree on next steps. The Meeting was attended by representatives from CAREC member countries and was supported by ADB. The Meeting agenda and list of participants are in Appendices 1 and 2.

Opening remarks

5. On behalf of the Kyrgyz Republic, the CAREC chair for 2025, the meeting was opened by the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Transport and Communications, highlighting the key developments in the Kyrgyz Republic’s rail sector.

Session 1: Update on TA activities and work plan

6. RWG participants were informed about the progress made in various TA activities as agreed at earlier RWG meetings, in particular two prefeasibility studies completed in May 2024 on Uzbekistan–Turkmenbashi Block Trains and Ferry Services and the Uzbekistan Northwestern International Freight Corridor, as well as ongoing studies on port-rail connectivity in Pakistan and the second north-south rail corridor in Mongolia.

Session 2: Best practices for port–railway connectivity

7. This session discussed international best practices for port-rail connectivity and identified operational improvements and investments needed to improve the performance of port-connecting railway corridors in Central Asia.

Session 3: Establishing block-train services: Study on Uzbekistan–Turkmenbashi Block Trains and Ferry Services

8. The session presented the findings of the prefeasibility study on establishing container block trains services between Tashkent and Turkmenbashi Port and discussed the key principles of block-train services and main requirements to make these services cost-efficient.

9. Turkmenistan Railway Agency indicated that it wishes to proceed with introducing of the block train service on a pilot basis. This would examine two modalities for use of platform wagons: (i) wagons to proceed the full distance between Tashkent to Turkmenbashi, and (ii) transshipment from Uzbek wagons to Turkmen wagons at the border (Turkmenabat).

Session 4: A roadmap for port–railway connectivity, Pakistan

10. Briefing on the findings of TA mission to Pakistan in January 2025, covering the potential for Pakistan Railways to attract high freight volumes to and from the seaports, the constraints that currently limit this role, the types of investments and operational improvements needed for Pakistan Railway to realize this opportunity, and the possible roles of Pakistan Railways and the private sector.

Session 5: Key principles of rail terminal design

11. 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 session presented the key requirements of rail terminal design to ensure a seamless transfer of cargo.

Session 6: Update on the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan (CKU) Railway

12. Briefing on the status of the proposed project, including the alignment, technical features, challenges and timeframe for implementation.

Session 7: Approaches to investment viability assessments

13. Economic and financial viability assessments are crucial to make decisions on large scale investments in rail transport infrastructure. Based on practical examples, this session presented

approaches to prepare freight traffic projections, how to estimate economic and financial costs and benefits, and the practical limitations of economic and financial evaluations.

Session 8: Uzbekistan Northwestern International Freight Corridor

14. This session presented the key findings of the prefeasibility study on long-distance cross-border railway services connecting to Kazakhstan's Caspian Sea ports, identifying the potential for introducing block-train services, the main obstacles to be addressed, and possible next steps.

Session 9: TA planning and identification of new TA activities

15. In this interactive session RWG participants provided suggestions for prefeasibility studies and knowledge support to be provided through the TA. The following proposals have been raised: (i) study of multimodal corridor for container transport service between PRC, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Poti, (ii) development of a railway code for Tajikistan, (iii) a pre-feasibility study of the northern section of the second north-south rail corridor in Mongolia between Kushig Valley and the Russian border, and (iv) development of a guidance note on human resource management in railway organizations, addressing staff restructuring, assessment of skill needs, and staff training and development programs. The TA team will follow-up to discuss the proposals in more detail with respective counterparts.

Development partners

16. An online presentation by UIC on its initiative to develop a so-called Corridor Handbook, a guide for freight rail corridors.

Site visits

17. On 12 June, RWG participants visited Bishkek Station II and other railway facilities to learn about the Kyrgyz Republic's rail passenger operations to Issyk-Kul Lake.

Conclusion and Appreciation

18. Participants expressed satisfaction with the meeting program and endorsed the TA planning for 2025 and beyond. Participants thanked all who contributed to the program and expressed appreciation for the efforts of the CAREC Secretariat for organizing the event.

19. The next RWG meeting is tentatively planned for May 2026.