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## Background paper

### Improvement of Transport Data Collection Mechanism

#### *SEETO Key Users focus*

➤ **Introduction – Transport data as cornerstone of the SEETO and SEE2020 Strategy objectives**

One of the main objective of SEETO and of the recently adopted SEE2020 Strategy when it comes to the dimension transport, is to improve the utilization rate of transport infrastructure on the SEETO Comprehensive Network by removing physical and non-physical bottlenecks as well as to harmonise the regional transport policy with the EU transport regulatory framework for creating common market conditions and safety standards. In fulfilling these objectives, SEETO should systematically follow and track the progress made by the Regional Participants in the various transport policy aspects.

The work performed during the annual data collection process in SEETO in preparation of the most important document, *SEETO Multi Annual Plan*, and other analytical reports, is becoming more and more demanding in terms of making it more useful for the region as a whole. Key lessons learnt from the implementation of SEETIS III<sup>1</sup>, recommendations of REBIS project,<sup>2</sup> EC Technical Assistance<sup>3</sup>, as well as the cooperation with several regional organizations such as RCC and CEFTA, including the SEE 2020 indicators on transport, bring ‘wind of change’ in transport data needs and in the collection process.

This background paper aims to inform the SEETO Regional Participants with the possible changes that are expected to be introduced in the prospective development of data collection mechanism, following the recommendations given in the EC Technical Assistance 2014 Task A Deliverables as well as to give a clear picture of the future steps. By focusing on the SEETO National Coordinators Key Users which are the essential providers and users of the data, their contribution is very much needed to create a more solid basis for upgrade of the current information system. Additionally, it will provide possibility for the Key Users to engage and use SEETO cooperation and SEE 2020 results and activities in their every day work.

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<sup>1</sup> SEETIS- South East Europe Transport Information System, is a GIS based system that serves as a check-in point for all transport related and project data.

<sup>2</sup> Regional Transport Study is being carried out through WBIF financed project and shall deliver among other things, transport model and traffic projections and priority action plan for physical and non-physical improvements on the SEETO Comprehensive Network

<sup>3</sup> EC Technical Assistance for SEETO Strategic Work Programme is consisted of: support to Improvement of transport analysis, Flagship axes initiative and Road Safety auditing trainings.

➤ **Data Collection Mechanism – current state and improvements in years**

Established from the beginning of SEETO, data collection mechanism is undergoing continuous challenges requiring changes and updates of the questionnaires and the methods that data are collected. With the undertaken steps during the past years SEETO maintains the South East Europe Information System in an efficient and effective way that is accessible to all participants and other users approved by the Steering Committee.

- *2006 Year* – The creation of the first questionnaires in Excel files collected by email and manually managed to provide analysis for the MAP.
- *2007 year* – Created the first database in Microsoft Access 2000. Secretariat was submitting manually the data received by email from the National Coordinators.
- *2011 year* – Created the Web-GIS Application, central scalable data storage, accessible from web browser and submitting data online. A set of analysis and predefined queries are available per each transport mode, per participants and a list with reports can be produced and printed by users itself. For the first time, was integrated the spatial data infrastructure (SDI) which catalogs and provides access to diverse geospatial resources; extends the value and use of GIS within the framework of standards and policies.

With SDI solution the main aim of SEETIS is completed: **Collect – Manage – Produce – Share.**

➤ **Tracking the progress in transport policy through SEETIS**

To conclude in short, SEETIS is the largest regional **GIS database** of collecting and managing data about traffic, condition of infrastructure and priority projects in the SEETO Comprehensive network. It has been updated and upgraded throughout the years according to the users and region's needs and lately the current online questionnaires are harmonized with TENtec too.

However, all the above mentioned system improvements are undertaken under the boundaries of the transport framework as standing alone. On the basis of the expected outcomes from the current EC Technical Assistance on improvement of the data collection and information system, SEETIS should undergo another update to be able to accommodate new data entries and queries with a final goal, to be used better by SEETO in producing various **economic, financial and social analysis** on the transport system in the region, as well as to serve better to the users for their planning purposes.

In order to achieve this goal of comprehensive assessment and monitoring of the overall transport system, which include not only the traffic trends and infrastructure projects, but also the policy reforms, it is essential that the system is fed with information flow on the measures and actions the national authorities are undertaking, too.

The exchange of information for latest transport policy developments between SEETO and national authorities is done on various ways, but not on a systematic manner, except perhaps in the field of railways, where regulatory check-list do exist and are fulfilled by the national authorities on annual basis. The creation of such check lists for the other transport modes, as well as short questionnaires for other horizontal areas (included in the SEE2020 key strategy actions for dimension transport) such are: co-modality, use of ITS, energy efficiency in transport, environmental aspects etc. will help tracking the progress in all these sectors, but moreover, it will also help in identifying and streamlining further assistance needed, to be delivered under SEE2020 or beyond. The implementation of the Action Plan under the Flagship axes initiative could be also monitored in this way. Therefore, the system is useful not only for SEETO and SEE partners, but also for EC, RCC and IFIs.

➤ ***First step towards the goal- SEETO Key users meeting (supported by RCC)***

As the task shall be completed in several steps, it is time-wise important to start with the initial activity in 2014. The data collection efforts are focused on the managing in a thoughtful way and secured manner. The steps forward foreseen for the future are in developing the new techniques and methods of analysis too which makes us to believe that through these new endeavours can be taken the first steps toward achieving the goal.

A regional workshop is envisaged to be held in the region with the SEETO **key users** (representatives from the national authorities in every transport mode directly involved in filling and usage of SEETIS), which brings around 3 participants per Regional Participant. The event is supported by the **Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) under the SEE2020 Strategy, dimension Transport**. It will have multiple aims:

- to raise the awareness of the SEE 2020 Strategy key strategy actions for transport, review the information to be collected by 15<sup>th</sup> of September through the indicators grid on transport qualitative indicators prepared by OECD, and create further channels for next cycle of preparation of the Regional Action Plan (RAP) for transport under the SEE2020 Strategy
- to familiarize the SEETO key users with the novelties to be introduced with regards to the process of data collection and information exchange, on the basis of the EC TA Project recommendations, SEE 2020 transport indicators and SEETO-CEFTA synergies for transport and trade statistics
- to engage the key users from the very beginning in the creation of the system, ensuring that they understand their role in the process and act as "creators" who use it in their daily work, rather than just be simple "collectors" of data, taking it as a burden or overload

➤ ***The future view***

SEETO National coordinators and Key users remain the main beneficiaries of the SEETIS, therefore, SEETO should address their real-needs from a regional transport database.

The collaborations and experiences with other regional transport projects, as SEETAC, ACROSSEE and lately REBIS, the common of which is the collection, managing and transport modelling, brings SEETO to a forward thinking about its own data collection. The Technical Assistance offered from the European Commission to SEETO in 2014, SEE 2020 transport indicators and SEETO-CEFTA initiatives for creation of joint transport and trade statistic brochure require not just the improvement of the data collection mechanism but also extending the type of the data collected from SEETO.

Further assistance and extensive cooperation with other international and regional organisations will be needed with regards to the following issues:

- Collect additional data for calculating the capacity field as recommended from REBIS
- Analysing the whole data traffic network and define the sections for spot surveys need
- Introduce the need for new data type as economic, environmental and social data serving for prediction of demand in transport
- Come up with better visualisation of transport data providing clear transport traffic and infrastructure spatial patterns
- future policy check-lists and questionnaires for every transport mode, and ensuring the appropriate capacity on national level for gathering and processing the relevant information

In this process, it will be crucial that SEETO Secretariat engage in a regular, consistent and systematic, -albeit not necessarily formalized in legal terms- cooperation with several organisations in addition to the cooperation and guidance from the EC (DG MOVE, including TENtec Unit). Those organisations include, but are not limited to: **RCC, OECD and International Transport Forum (ITF), CEFTA Secretariat, as well as IFIs**. Having a broad forum for exchange of relevant data and information, perhaps under the umbrella of RCC, will facilitate the further sustainable economic planning and attracting real investments in the region of Western Balkans based on substantive research and analysis in the fields of transport, trade, and competitiveness.