Regional transport connectivity: state of the play

"BIMSTEC Connectivity: Now and the Future"
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United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific is one of the five UN regional Commissions reporting to the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

ESCAP has 53 members and 9 associate member in Asia and the Pacific and beyond.

The Commission provides a forum for all governments of the region to review and discuss economic and social issues and to strengthen regional cooperation.

Intergovernmental cooperation and policy dialogue

Committee on Transport
Ministerial Conference
Working Groups on AH, TAR

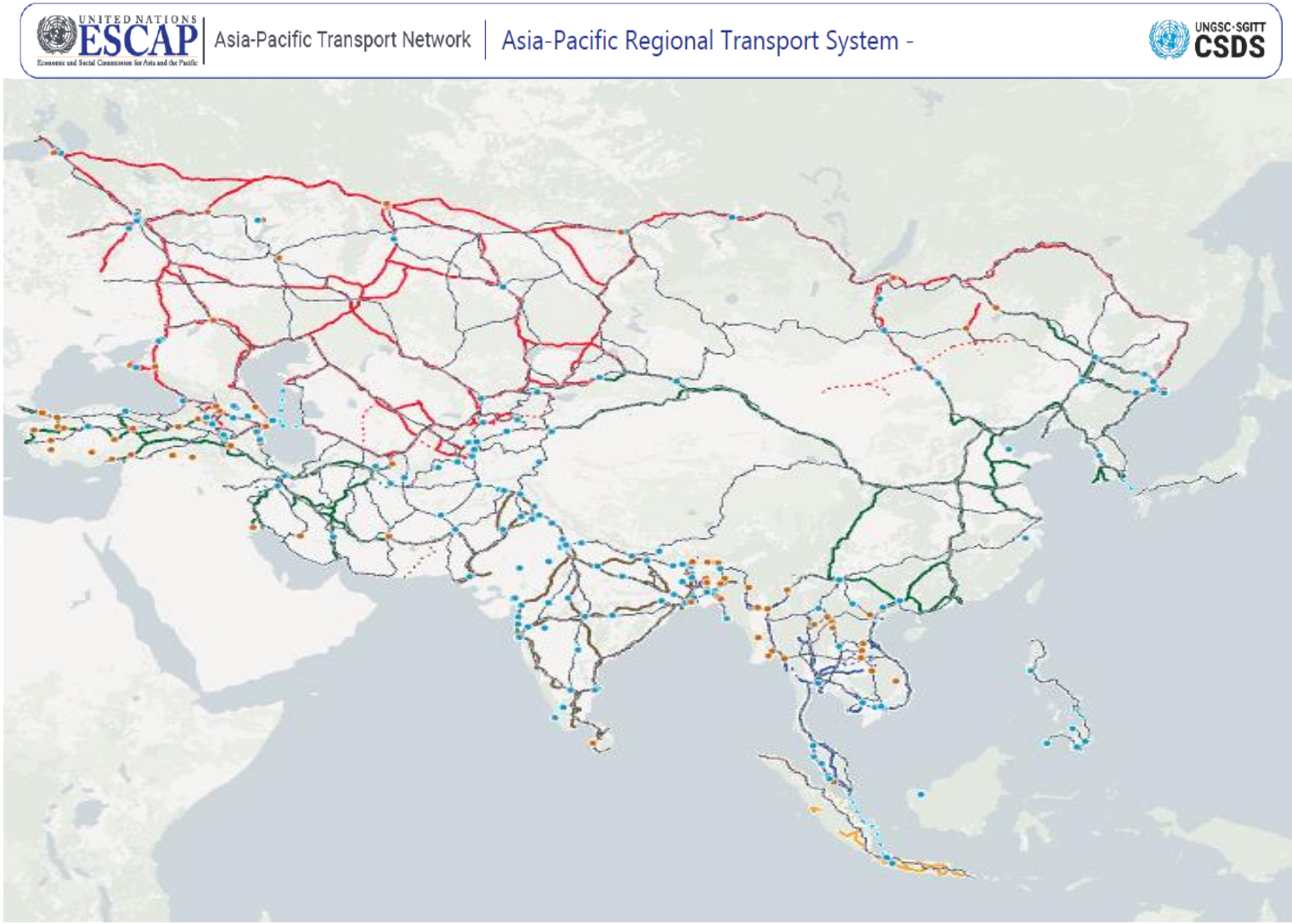
Capacity building programmes

Operational connectivity
Transport Facilitation Models
Private Public Dialogue

Analytical work and data collection

Specialized monographs, bulletins and periodic assessments of transport connectivity in the regio

BIMSTEC in the context of the regional transport connectivity in Asia and the Pacific



Asian Highway Network	• 30 Parties • 145,000 km • 32 countries
Trans Asian Railway Network	• 21 parties • 118,000 km • 28 countries
International Dry Ports	• 17 parties • 250 dry ports

BIMSTEC in the context of the regional transport connectivity in Asia and the Pacific

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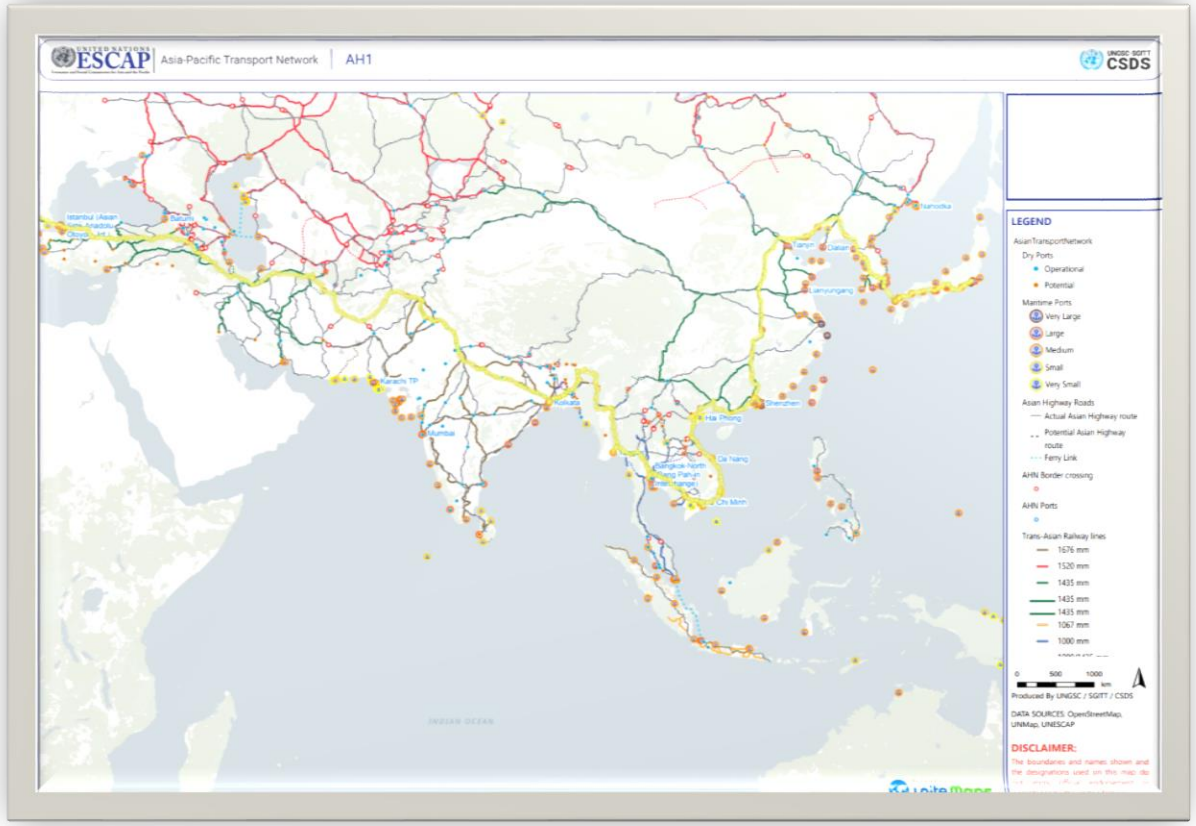
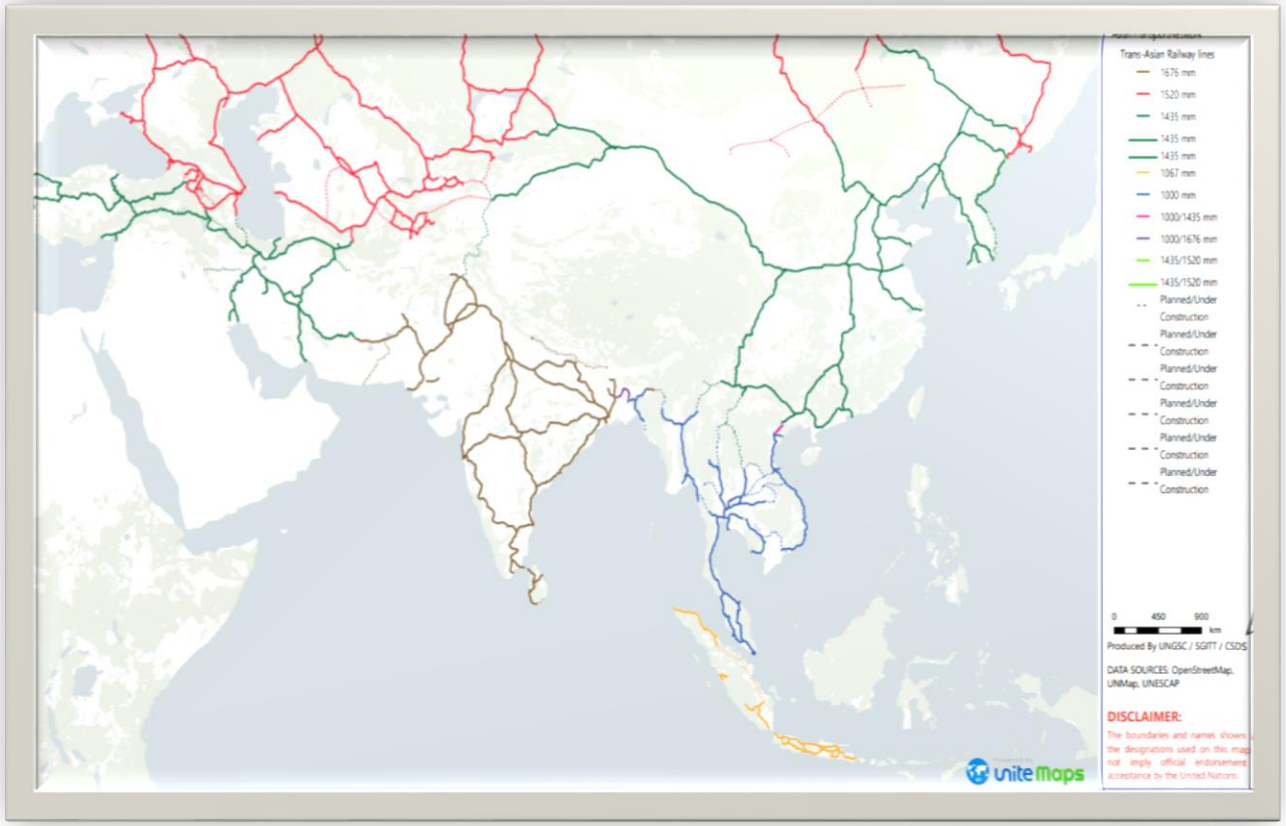
UNITED NATIONS ESCAP Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific | Asia-Pacific Transport Network | Asia-Pacific Regional Transport System - UNGSC·SGITT CSDS

Asian Highway Network



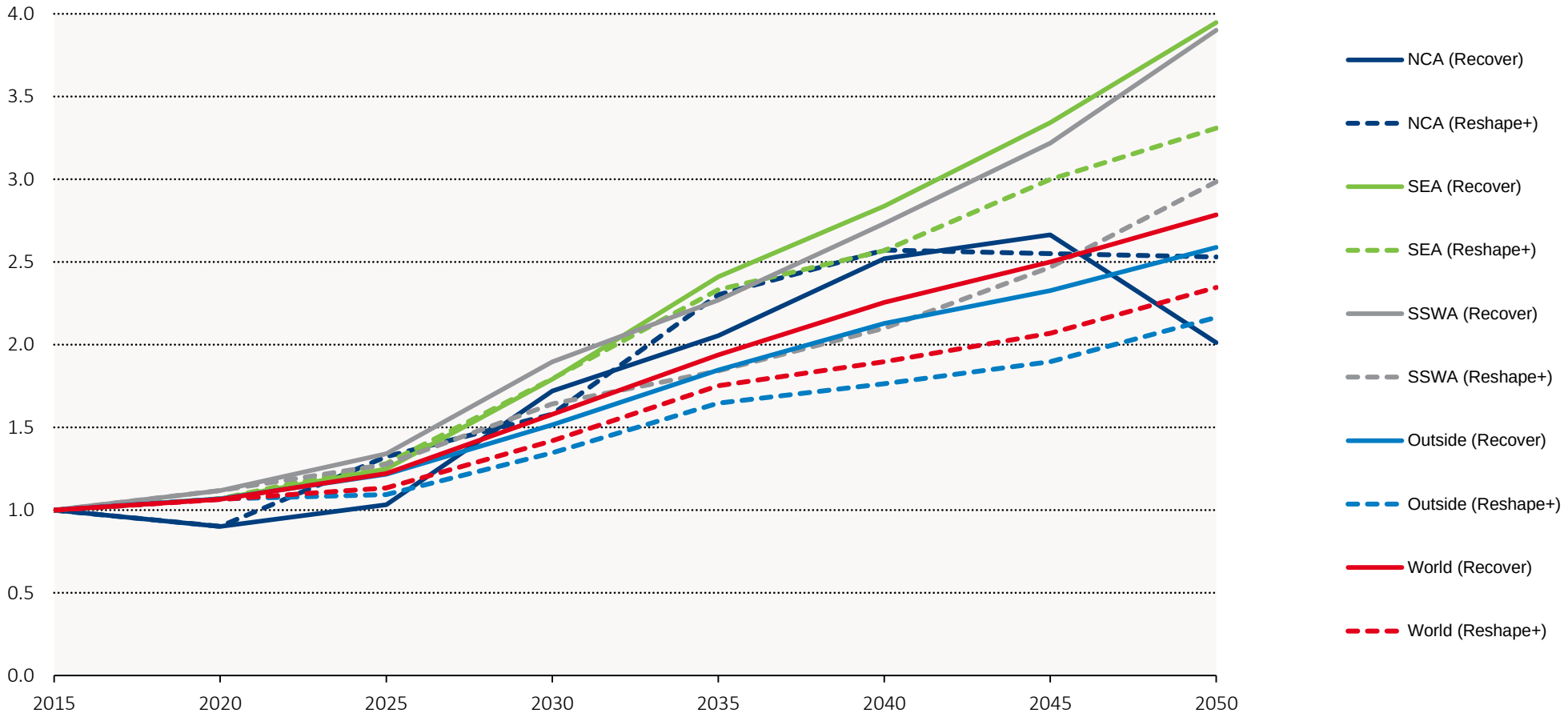
Trans Asian Railway Network



Ongoing development of the Asia-Pacific Transport Network

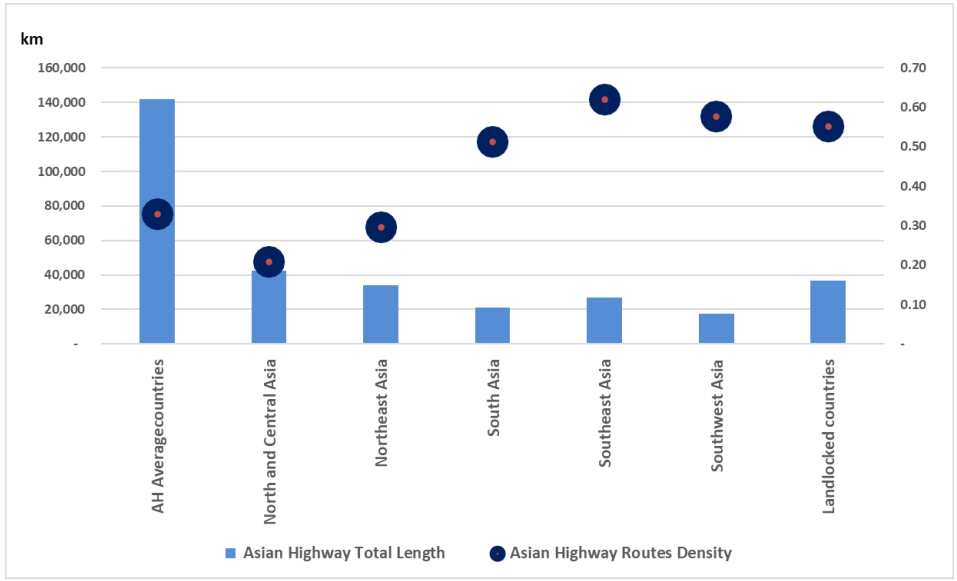
	Asian Highway Network	Trans-Asian Railways	Dry Ports
2017	Addition of route AH35 by Mongolia Updating of routes AH43 by Sri Lanka	Amendment to the railway routes in Cambodia Amendment to the railway routes in Thailand	Removal of 1 dry port by Thailand
2019	Updating of routes AH1, AH3, AH6, AH31, AH32, AH33, AH34 and AH42 by China Updating of AH5 by Georgia Addition of route AH 9 by the Russian Federation Addition of route AH88 by the Islamic Republic of Iran	Amendment to the railway routes in the Islamic Republic of Iran Amendment to the railway routes in the Russian Federation	Addition of 7 new dry ports by India Addition of 1 new dry port by the Russian Federation Update of dry port list by Kazakhstan
2021	Updating of route AH21 by Cambodia Updating of route AH52 by Pakistan	Amendment to the railway routes in Myanmar Amendment to the railway routes in Tajikistan Amendment to the railway routes in Türkiye	Update of dry port list by Myanmar Addition of 19 dry ports by the Russian Federation

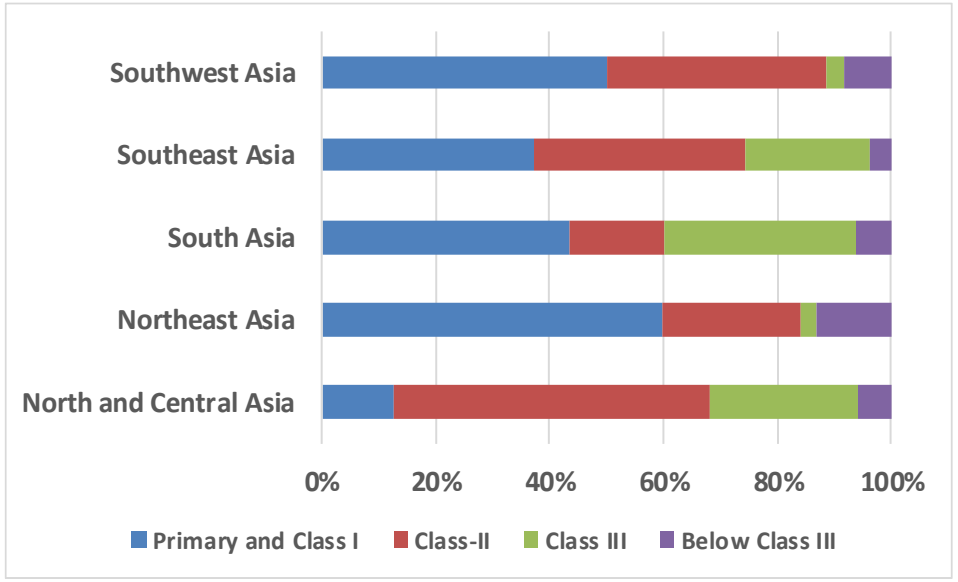
Relative growth in freight activity in Asia and the world (index=2015)



Source: ITF Transport Outlooks for North and Central Asia, Southeast Asia and South and South-West Asia, 2022

Asia-Pacific infrastructure connectivity challenges (road)





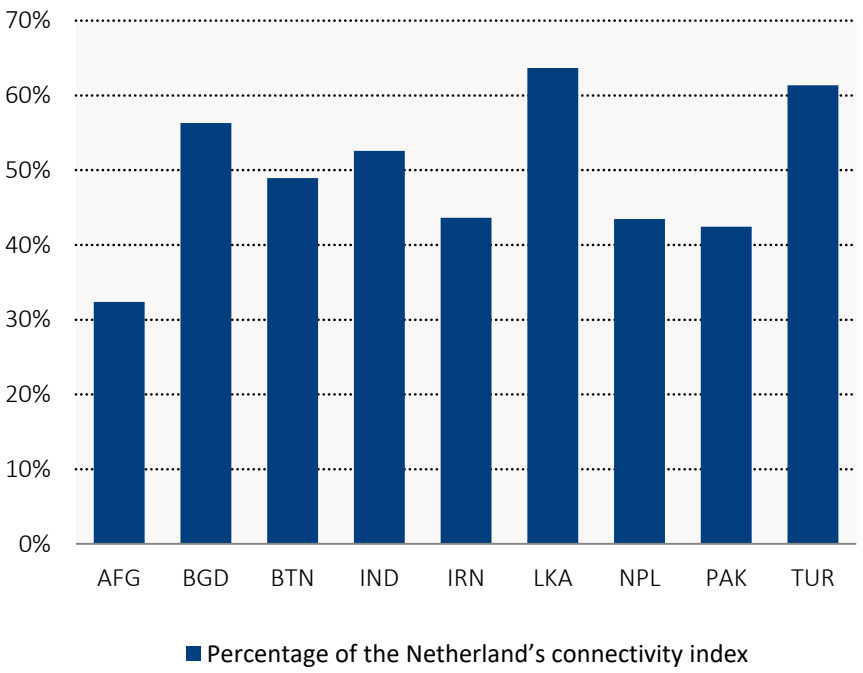
Asia-Pacific operational connectivity challenges

International road transport	International rail transport	Port Development and Maritime Transport
❑ Road transport permits & traffic rights ❑ Visas for professional drivers & crews ❑ Temporary importation of road vehicles ❑ Insurance of vehicles ❑ Vehicle weights & dimensions ❑ Vehicle registration & inspection certificates	❑ Standards for railway infrastructure, facilities and equipment ❑ Break-of-gauge ❑ Different legal regimes for railway transport contracts ❑ Coordination of regulatory controls and inspections at border-interchange stations	❑ Dealing With Growing Demand For Maritime Transport ❑ Changing Infrastructure Requirements ❑ Increased Port Competition ❑ Harnessing the ICT Potential ❑ Decarbonization And Environmental Regulations ❑ Resilience

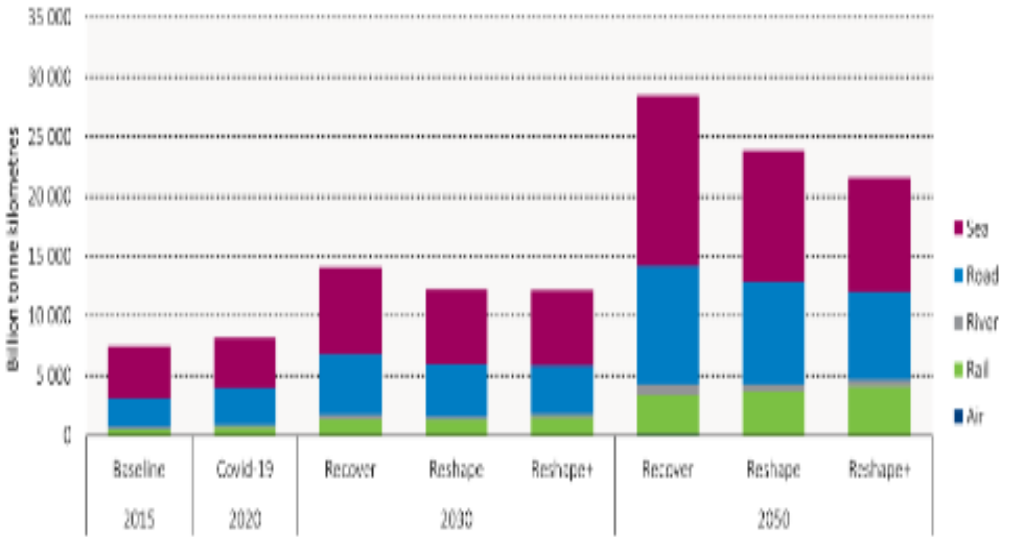
ESCAP, Regional Strategic Framework for the Facilitation of International Road Transport; Regional Cooperation Framework for Facilitation of International Railway Transport; ESCAP Regional Forum on Sustainable Maritime Connectivity, 2023

Sustainable freight transport in South Asia in the post-pandemic context

Connectivity gap for South and Southwest Asia countries
(*percentage of the index of the most connected country in 2021*)



Non-urban freight demand by mode and scenario for South and Southwest Asia to 2050



Note: Figure depicts ITF modelled estimates. *Recover*, *Reshape* and *Reshape+*, which refer to the three scenarios modelled, which represent increasingly ambitious post-pandemic policies to decarbonise transport.

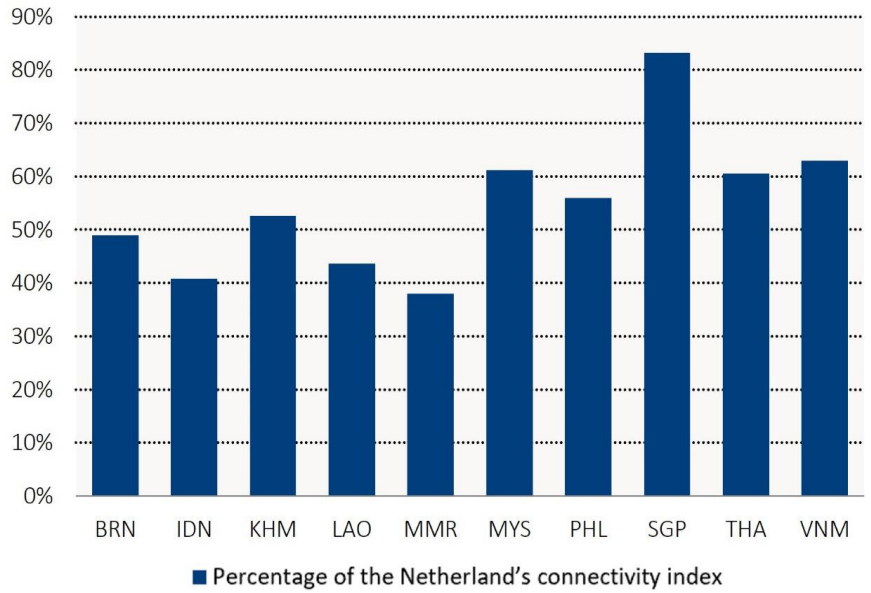
International Transport Forum

ITF South and Southwest Asia Transport Outlook

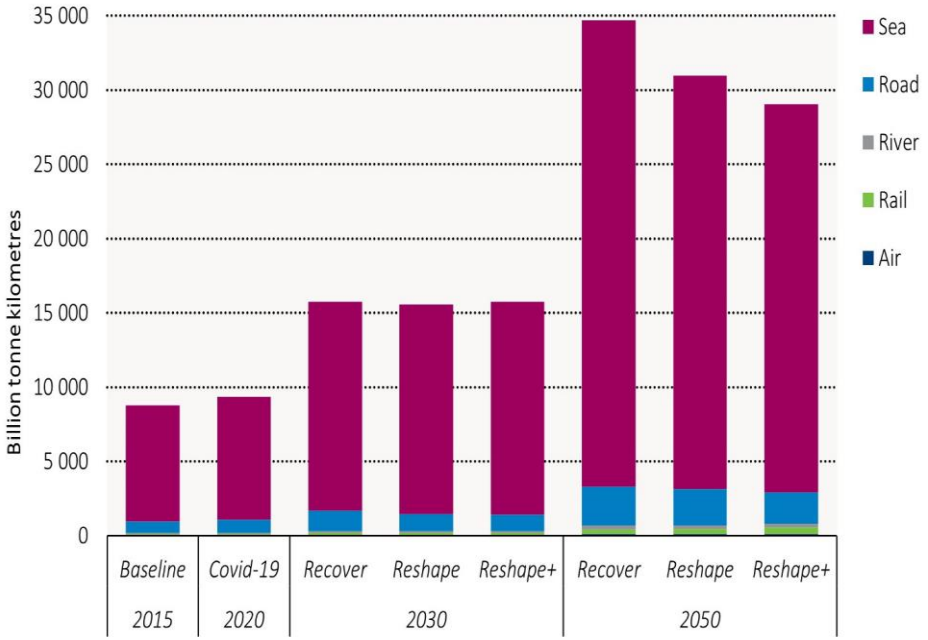
Sustainable freight transport in Southeast Asia in the post-pandemic context

Connectivity gap for Southeast Asian countries

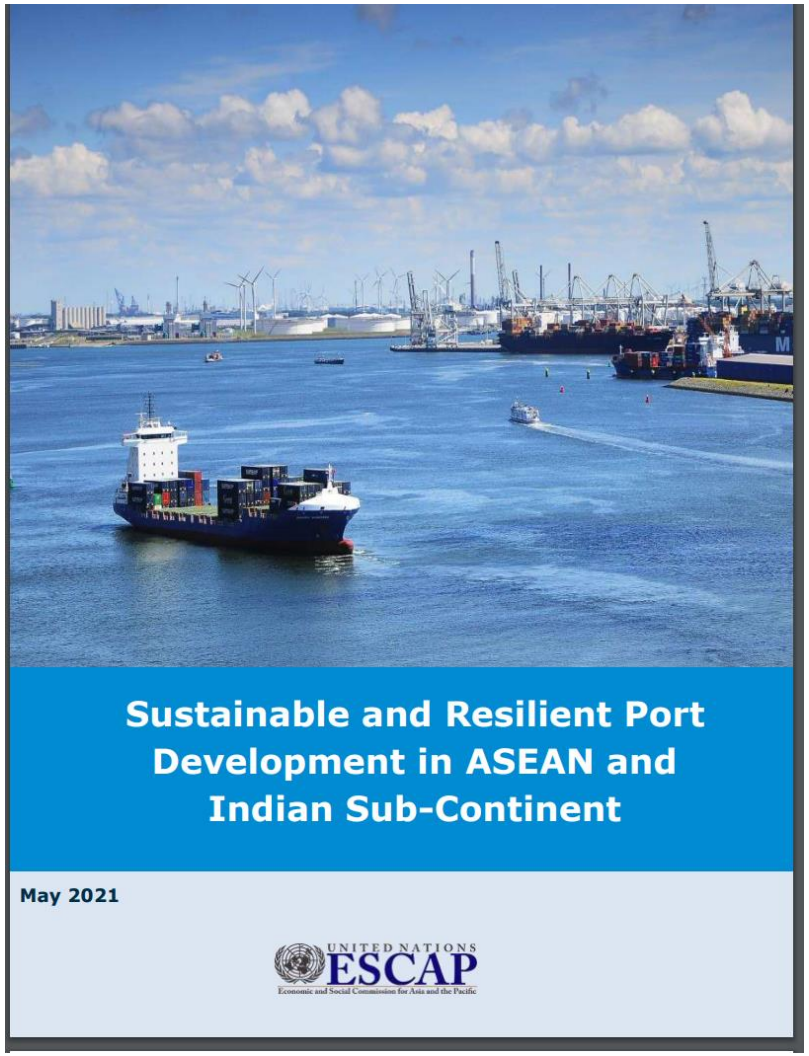
(*percentage of the index of the most connected country in 2021*)



Non-urban freight demand by mode and scenario for Southeast Asia to 2050



Enabling sustainable port development



	Challenges in sustainable port development	ISC	ASEAN
Political	[1] Political focus on economic indicators rather than sustainability and resilience indicators for ports and port developments.	X	X
	[2] Institutional complexity that reduces effectiveness		X
	[3] Lack of capacity by the government (need external assistance from cooperation frameworks)	X	X
	[4] High turnover of government representatives in the port sector, and therefore common changing of priorities		X
	[5] Uncoordinated planning at regional level (ASEAN, GMS, ACMECS, …), but also at national/provincial levels		X
Economic	[6] Budget restrictions for port development projects from the public sector, worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic	X	X
	[7] Focus only on the traditional port role, as opposed to its new and expanding functions	X	X
Social	[8] Lack of use of recognized standards in capacity building activities	X	X
	[9] Stakeholder management: lack of mechanisms allowing for interaction between different stakeholders (e.g. society and government)	X	X
	[10] Ageing labour force		X
	[11] Lack of 21st century skills in training & education programmes	X	X
Technological	[12] Lack of qualified personnel at all levels: weak in engineering technology, insufficient experience in port management		X
	[13] Lack of data collection and monitoring on sustainability & resiliency indicators	X	X
	[14] Need for digital transformation & capacity building on ICT skills		X
	[15] Lack of integrated system which make information sharing available for all stakeholders	X	X
Environmental	[16] Physical constraints (e.g. limitations of river ports, draught)	X	X
	[17] Limited reporting on environmental and social indicators	X	
	[18] Moving from an approach of measuring environmental indicators to taking action regarding these indicators in the port	X	
Legal	[19] Complex governance structures	X	X
	[20] Lack of proper regulatory instruments providing clear guidelines on sustainable & resilient port developments at country level		X
	[21] Labour issues		X
	[22] Environmental rules and regulations differ between countries and often serve as a minimum to comply with.	X	

Recommendations for multilateral transport agreements

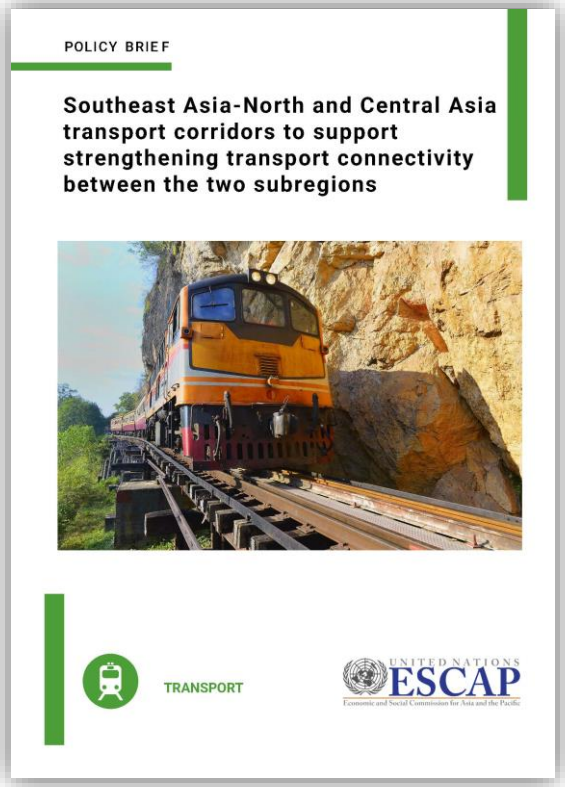
- **Sub-regional agreements on transport (SRAs) are different in structure and in nature:**
  - Comprehensive agreements
  - Agreements covering particular issues
- **SRAs contain many similar provisions related to road transport facilitation**
- **In some cases, their provisions are harmonized and contain no legal conflict**
- **In some cases, the provisions of SRAs are of declarative nature which impose no concrete obligations**
- **Difficulties in implementation remains the key issue for SRAs efficiency**

ESCAP's comparative study on subregional agreements in Asia and the Pacific (2015)

Model multilateral/bilateral Agreement on International Road Transport

Intergovernmental Agreement on International Road Transport along the Asian Highway Network

Operationalization of the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan- Islamic Republic of Iran (KTI) rail corridor



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Thank you for your kind attention!

For more information:

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