



Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program

Welcome and Opening Statement

Ms. Vicky Tan
Director
Regional Cooperation and Operations Coordination Division
Central and West Asia Department
Asian Development Bank

*Roundtable Seminar on Ways Forward for Corridor-Based
Transport Facilitation Arrangements in the CAREC Region*
Beijing, People's Republic of China
2–3 July 2012

Distinguished participants, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen:

On behalf of the Asian Development Bank, I would like to welcome the delegations from the 10 CAREC member countries to this Roundtable Seminar. I would like to thank the Government of the People's Republic of China for hosting this Seminar, and all the country delegations as well as our resource persons and consultants for taking time from their busy schedules to participate in this very important CAREC event. This is the first seminar on transport facilitation under the CAREC Program. I would like to thank the ADB Institute for co-sponsoring this seminar with ADB.

Transport facilitation aims at more efficient movement across borders by removing nonphysical barriers, which relate to legal, regulatory, administrative, documentary, organizational, and other hindrances that adversely affect the efficiency, speed, and cost of cross-border transport. These barriers needlessly increase transport costs, and consequently, the price of raw materials and commodities. In extreme cases, these barriers make it extremely difficult for cross-border transport of goods, people, and services.

The 10-year strategic framework for CAREC—CAREC 2020—which was endorsed by the member countries at the 10th Ministerial Conference in November 2011, emphasizes the importance of transport and trade facilitation in achieving CAREC 2020's strategic objectives of expanded trade and improved competitiveness. For the eight landlocked countries of CAREC in particular, cross-border transport facilitation is as important as physical connectivity, since the cost and time to move goods and people across borders will always be a significant factor in accessing markets both inside and outside the region. Although cross-border trade in CAREC countries still accounts for a relatively small portion of total trade, transport facilitation and trade facilitation measures—such as the exchange of traffic rights, simplification of cross-border procedures and documentation, easing of visa requirements, and the development of adequate and efficient border facilities—will be important factors in promoting trade expansion with regional partners and beyond.

This seminar is a first, but important, step toward operationalizing CAREC 2020's future directions in transport facilitation. As part of CAREC 2020's action plan for 2011-2015, it is envisaged that relevant transport facilitation agreements will be formulated, and, possibly, implemented on a pilot basis, along selected CAREC corridors and associated border crossing points. The selection of pilot projects will be based on the interest and willingness of countries to participate, the volume of international trade passing through the corridor, and the readiness of transport and border infrastructure to handle increased cross-border traffic.

At their meeting in Beijing in September 2011, the CAREC National Focal Points discussed, among other things, proposals to pursue cross-border transport facilitation in the region. There was an overall consensus on the need to remove nonphysical barriers to interstate and transit trade. The National Focal Points agreed that, as a first step, ADB would organize information sharing workshops on ongoing and planned transport facilitation arrangements in CAREC countries to formulate recommendations on measures to address nonphysical barriers to the movement of goods and people along CAREC corridors. Thus, this seminar is the first such knowledge sharing activity in line with the overall thrust of CAREC 2020 in the area of transport facilitation, following the direction provided by the CAREC National Focal Points.

More specifically, the objectives of this roundtable seminar are as follows:

- first, to take stock of and learn from existing transport facilitation arrangements in the CAREC region, particularly those effective in CAREC transport corridors;
- second, to learn from international good practice on region- and subregion-wide transport facilitation arrangements; and
- third, and most important, to generate feasible and practical recommendations on moving forward on corridor-based transport facilitation in the CAREC region.

Distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen:

We have a full agenda in the next one and a half days.

Following my brief words, my colleague, Ronnie Butiong will deliver a presentation that was prepared by Mr. Hong Wang, Director of the Transport and Communications Division in ADB's Central and West Asia Department, will offer a strategic overview of the CAREC transport sector. His presentation will summarize the transport and trade facilitation strategy, focusing on the six CAREC corridors.

In Session 1, we will discuss in detail the experience of CAREC member countries on cross-border transport arrangements at the bilateral, plurilateral, and multilateral levels. Each country delegation will share its country experience, focusing on ongoing and planned arrangements, their strengths and weaknesses, benefits derived or expected to be derived, and future directions, including suggestions for further transport facilitation in the CAREC region, with your neighboring countries and beyond. We look forward to your presentations.

In Session 2, we will be informed of the key constraints to cross-border transport in the CAREC region based on the latest report of the CAREC Corridor Performance Measurement and Monitoring mechanism, and the views of private sector users of CAREC corridors. The two presentations in Session 2 are expected to provide a clear justification of the urgent need for transport facilitation measures in the CAREC region.

In Session 3, international experts will present internationally accepted good practices on transport facilitation, focusing on the key elements of a transport facilitation agreement. During this Session, we will also hear some important lessons learned from international experience in finalizing and implementing cross-border transport agreements.

Session 4 will reinforce the lessons learned presented in Session 3 as resource persons from the Ministry of Transport of Viet Nam and the International Transport Department of the Business National Federation of Road Freight Transport of Argentina will share their insights in planning, finalizing, and implementing cross-border transport facilitation arrangements. We are most grateful to Mr. Nguyen Van Thach and Ms. Silvia Sudol for joining us in this Seminar.

Tomorrow's session will be devoted to recapping what we will learn today, drawing lessons, and charting the way forward for transport facilitation in CAREC. The CAREC Secretariat will work very hard tonight, and, possibly, tomorrow early morning to put together a substantive draft summary of today's proceedings and, most importantly, draft recommendations on possible approaches for better transport facilitation in the CAREC region and required next steps to be pursued by CAREC member countries. We will consider these tomorrow, and look forward to your very active participation in the discussions.

Distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen:

Let me conclude by once again thanking all of you for being here and for preparing for this important Seminar. I am confident that all of us will benefit from the exchanges of knowledge that will take place in the next one and a half days. I am certain that this Seminar will be extremely fruitful and that we will make important progress now that CAREC is in its second decade.

Thank you for your attention and I wish you all a highly successful seminar.