

Twelfth Meeting of the GMS Subregional Transport Forum
Da Nang City, Viet Nam
12-14 August 2008

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

Introduction

1. The Twelfth Meeting of the Subregional Transport Forum (STF-12) was held in Da Nang City, Viet Nam on 12-14 August 2008. The Meeting was jointly organized by the Ministry of Transport of Viet Nam and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The objective of the Meeting was to discuss recent developments, key issues, and future plans in the GMS transport sector, with particular focus on maximizing the development impact of the network and on the problems that remain as regards the conduct of transport and trade operations along the GMS economic corridors and possible ways of addressing them. The meeting also included a site visit to the border at Lao Bao (Viet Nam)-Dansavanh (Lao PDR) to observe actual operations at an East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC) border crossing point, as well as a visit of the Da Nang Port. (The Meeting Program and Agenda is attached as **Appendix 1.**)

2. The Meeting participants included delegations from the Kingdom of Cambodia, the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), the Union of Myanmar, the Kingdom of Thailand, the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, and ADB. Representatives from the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), the GMS Environment Operations Center (EOC), Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and the Public-Private Infrastructure Advisory Facility (PPIAF) also attended the Meeting. (The list of participants is attached as **Appendix 2.**)

3. The Meeting was chaired by Mr. Pham Thanh Tung, Director General, International Cooperation Division, Ministry of Transport, Viet Nam, Director General of Land Transport, Land Transport Department of Thailand and co-chaired by Mr. John R. Cooney, Director, Infrastructure Division, Southeast Asia Department, ADB.

I. Opening Session

4. H.E. Mr. Le Manh Hung, Vice Minister of Transport of Viet Nam, welcomed the participants and formally opened the meeting (a copy of his welcome speech is attached as **Appendix 3.**) Emphasizing that the Government of Viet Nam gives great importance to cooperation under the GMS Program, particularly in the transport sector, he said he was glad to see much progress achieved in the last 10 years in the development of the GMS transport corridors. Moreover, this progress is not limited to the transport infrastructure but also includes the required software, particularly the GMS Cross Border Transport Agreement. He also noted that transport development must be well coordinated with other sectors such as agriculture, tourism and human resource development in pursuing overall regional economic development.

5. Mr. Pham Thanh Tung, Chair, gave his welcome remarks, noting that the meeting is being held in Da Nang City, which is the starting point of the GMS East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC), and is thus reflective of the thrust of the GMS Program to build connectivity and competitiveness in the subregion.

6. Mr. John Cooney, Co-Chair, in his opening statement (copy attached as **Appendix 4.**), explained the purpose of the meeting in light of recent developments in the GMS Economic Cooperation Program, particularly the directions set by the recently held Third GMS Leaders' Summit (Vientiane, Lao PDR, 30-31 March 2008). The Summit, which had as its theme,

“Enhancing Competitiveness through Greater Connectivity”, focused on ways to deepen economic cooperation among the GMS countries to ensure that the increased connectivity among them is translated into expanded markets, enhanced competitiveness, improved access to social services, and greater environmental sustainability. In line with this broad objective, the meeting will therefore not only look into the progress of the work on the infrastructure side of the emerging GMS transport network but also consider other complementary elements, such as the safe, effective, and efficient utilization of the infrastructure through the institution of rational and harmonized rules and regulations and the provision of supporting facilities and services as well as addressing trans-boundary challenges that go with increasing connectivity, such as the transmission of communicable diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS; illegal migration of workers; trafficking; and environmental degradation.

7. The GMS country delegations, led by Vice Minister Hung, expressed their appreciation to Mr. Cooney (who is due to retire from ADB this year) for his work and significant contribution to the transport and other infrastructure development efforts in the GMS while he served as an ADB official.

II. Country Presentations

8. The GMS delegations presented their respective country reports, which provided updates on the priority projects that are being pursued by their countries under the GMS Transport Sector Action Plan adopted at STF-11 in May 2007 in Bangkok and further endorsed and adopted by the Third GMS Leaders’ Summit as part of the Vientiane Plan of Action for GMS Development (2008-2012). The purpose of the session was to produce a further refined list of priority projects for the medium term, including relevant information, such as specific timeframe, estimated cost, financing status and other details, which will be useful in monitoring progress regularly. Presentations were made by the following participants: (i) Mr. Hong Sinara, Deputy Director General of Public Works, Ministry of Public Works and Transport, and Mr. Vasim Sorya, Director of Planning Department, Ministry of Public Works and Transport, Cambodia; (ii) Mr. Li Guangling, Deputy Director General, Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Transportation, PRC; (iii) Mr. Math Sounmala, Director General, Department of Planning and Cooperation, Ministry of Communications, Transport, Post and Communication, Lao PDR; (iv) U Ba Saw, Deputy Superintending Engineer (Civil), Ministry of Construction, Myanmar; (v) Mr. Silpachai Jarukasemratana, Director General of Land Transport and Dr. Siriphan Jitprasithsiri, Director of International Highways Development Group, Bureau of International Cooperation, Ministry of Transport, Thailand; and (vi) Mr. Nguyen Van Thach, Deputy Director General, International Cooperation Department, Ministry of Transport, Viet Nam. (The country delegations’ respective reports are attached as **Appendices 5A-5F.**)

III. Updates on the Emerging GMS Transport Network

9. Mr. Peter Broch, Transport Economist, Infrastructure Division (SEID), Southeast Asia Department, ADB gave a presentation on the emerging GMS Railway network and its role and significance for the overall GMS Transport Network, as well as some of the key issues in its development. (A copy of his presentation is in **Appendix 6.**)

10. Participants supported the suggestion made by the Lao PDR delegation that a review of the region’s overall railway development master plan be made to ensure that all efforts in this area are consistent with one another, are well coordinated, and are moving toward a well defined overall goal. Mr. Cooney agreed that there is a need to review and update the GMS

Transport Sector Strategy, particularly as regards its railway aspects, in light of significant changes that have taken place in the last two years.

11. Mr. Broch also gave a presentation on the emerging Viet Nam Expressway transport network and discussed its role and significance for the overall GMS Transport Network. (A copy of his presentation is in **Appendix 7**.) Mr. Cooney noted Viet Nam's ambitious expressway development plans and advised that since ADB and other development partners would not be able to provide all the needed financial resources, the Government of Viet Nam could consider leveraging such funds to generate private sector funding through BOT and similar arrangements, such as the options that could be worked together with the Public-Private Infrastructure Advisory Facility (PPIAF).

IV. Mitigating the Negative Impacts of Transport Development

12. Ms. Lisa Studdert, Health Specialist, Social Sectors Division, Southeast Asia Department, ADB Viet Nam Resident Mission gave a presentation on efforts to mitigate the negative impacts or risks of transport development, particularly the risks of the spread of HIV/AIDS and human trafficking associated with large transport infrastructure projects. She shared some of findings and recommendations of the case studies done by ADB and other development partners on the GMS experience with these issues and challenges. (A copy of her presentation is in **Appendix 8**.) She said that work is currently being done on the setting up of an accessible single database on information, research results, and other materials on these social and human resource aspects of regional infrastructure development.

V. Updates on the GMS Economic Corridors

13. Mr. Paul Apthorp of Strategic Development, TNT Express Worldwide N.V. gave a presentation on some updates on the GMS Economic Corridors, including the key issues and recommendations arising from the discussion of the GMS Cross Border Transport Agreement (CBTA) at the Business and Investment Dialogue held as part of the Third GMS Summit, particularly as regards the role of the private sector and effective public-private mechanisms in the effective implementation of the customs transit regime under the CBTA. (A copy of his presentation is in **Appendix 9**.)

14. Mr. Apthorp noted that the CBTA is a good and pioneering agreement but that its implementation needs to be expedited to minimize costly transshipment of goods at the borders, which continues to take place. He commented that this is still the biggest problem, from the point of view of transport operators' perspective, in GMS cross border transport. But to be able to achieve all the intended benefits of the CBTA, countries and their transport industries must accept common international standards and speed up the CBTA's implementation. As a means toward this, he gave the recommendation arising from the Business Investment Dialogue to bring together the transport operators in the GMS countries to form a regional industry body, a regional freight transport operators association, that would set the set standards and act as an industry licensing or qualifying body. He suggested that this move could be initiated through the GMS Business Forum. He stressed three points: (i) need to build trust; (ii) to disseminate information; and (iii) to make players realize that they all stand to benefit from the CBTA. It was noted, however, that the CBTA already has the standards imbedded in it; what is really needed is to ensure that they are recognized and followed, that the National Transport Facilitation Committees (NTFC) are properly equipped to generate support for and to effectively implement them, and that their memberships are broadened to include private sector operators.

VI. Remarks/Updates from Development Partners

15. Mr. Paul Reddel, Regional Program Leader, East Asia and Pacific of the Public-Private Infrastructure Advisory Facility (PPIAF) gave a presentation on the nature and profile of the PPIAF and its activities in helping countries in finding and implementing options for the efficient delivery of vital infrastructure projects, focusing on its transport infrastructure-related activities. (A copy of his presentation is in **Appendix 10**.) Mr. Cooney strongly advised the participants to consider the possible options for mobilizing funding for infrastructure development that are being offered by or that have been applied in various cases in PPIAF's experience.

16. Mr. Andreas Zurbrugg, First Secretary of AusAID-Hanoi, said that the Government of Australia is committing new resources amounting to about 420 million Australian Dollars to assist countries in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific in infrastructure development and related efforts. He noted that although Australia has no experience in terms of facilitating land border transport, it may be able to contribute in terms of its substantial experience in immigration and sea-based transport. He expressed particular interest in collaborating with other donors on possible regional training workshops on the CBTA.

17. Mr. Hozumi Katsuta, Project Formulation Advisor on Transport Infrastructure of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Vietnam Office said that the Japanese Government is providing assistance for logistics systems improvement in the region, particularly to the CLMV countries. He said that he was impressed by the fact that the private sector is participating in the meeting, noting that it is important to hear its recommendations, as it has an important role in the development of the corridors. He also noted that JICA is not only assisting to promote regional integration but also help the less developed countries to catch up with their more developed neighbors in the region.

18. Mr. Hiroshi Suzuki, JICA/JBIC Executive Advisory Economist, Department of Investment and Cooperation, Ministry of Economy and Finance, Cambodia, noted that JBIC has been providing assistance to key transport infrastructure development in the subregion, citing as examples the Da Nang Port Project and the Mekong International Bridge. He emphasized, however, that the objective is not just infrastructure development but the overall economic development of the subregion. He noted the key role of foreign direct investment in this regard, particularly in spurring the growth of the less advanced countries in the subregion. He gave three important factors in attracting FDI, namely: (i) good infrastructure; (ii) development of the required software (e.g., policies, regulations); and (iii) widely providing information on investment opportunities and other relevant information to potential investors.

19. Mr. Pavit Ramachandran, Component Leader, Strategic Environmental Assessments of the GMS Core Environment Program's (CEP) Environment Operations Center (EOC) gave a presentation on the activities of the EOC, as the implementing arm of the CEP, in relation with transport sector development, particularly with the development of the GMS transport/economic corridors, which intersect with or straddle key biodiversity corridors in the region. (A copy of his presentation is in **Appendix 11**.)

VII. Improving Efficiency in the GMS Transport Network

20. Mr. Apthorp of TNT gave a presentation describing some of TNT's experience in its operations in the GMS. He noted that there have been substantial improvements along the EWEC and other corridors, e.g., in terms of travel and processing times, but that substantial problems and challenges still exist (e.g., delays due to transshipment and some cumbersome border procedures). He also shared some of the measures and systems that they employ to

address them. He noted that traders' main concern is to ensure that goods get to their destinations on time, and this can be addressed by significantly making the border crossing facilities and procedures regular and efficient. (A copy of his presentation is in **Appendix 12.**)

21. Participants pointed out the need to address the remaining issues delaying the implementation of the CBTA at the border crossing points, as well as the need to coordinate and harmonize the policies and activities of the many agencies involved in cross border transport. A point was also made regarding possible duplications between the work of the STF on one hand and the National Transport Facilitation Committee (NTFC) and the CBTA Joint Committee (JC) of the CBTA on the other. The ADB representatives informed that coordination meetings among the agencies and other stakeholders involved with the CBTA implementation issues are being organized and will be held soon. PRC also suggested that another meeting of the JC of the CBTA be held soon, given that its last meeting was held in Beijing in early 2007.

VIII. Presentation on Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) Technology

22. Mr. Shinichi Ishii of Nomura Research Institute, Ltd. gave a presentation on the new Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology and systems and their potential benefits for GMS cross-border trade and security. (A copy of his presentation is in **Appendix 13.**)

IX. Consideration of the Matrix of Priority GMS Transport Projects for the Medium Term

23. The meeting discussed a proposed matrix showing the priority GMS transport projects and the countries involved that will be pursued in the medium term. The matrix which was adopted by the meeting, and which already includes the suggestions and comments made by the country delegations, is in **Appendix 14.**

X. Other Matters

24. In line with the tradition of rotating the venue of the STF among the GMS members according to the alphabetical order of country names, the Cambodia delegation said that they will make the appropriate consultations with their authorities for the holding of the Thirteenth Meeting of the STF in Cambodia, and will advise ADB of the outcome as soon as possible.

XI. Adoption of the Draft Summary of Proceedings

25. The Summary of Proceedings of the STF-12 was adopted *ad referendum*.

XII. Acknowledgements

26. The GMS countries and the ADB expressed their sincere thanks and appreciation to the Government of Viet Nam, in particular, to the Ministry of Transport, for the warm hospitality and excellent arrangements provided to the Twelfth Meeting of the Subregional Transport Forum.

12th Meeting of the GMS Subregional Transport Forum (STF-12)

Furama Resort, Da Nang City, Viet Nam
12-14 August 2008

PROVISIONAL PROGRAM and AGENDA (Annotated)

Meeting Theme: Defining the GMS Transport Network's Role in Enhancing Competitiveness

The Meeting will discuss recent developments, key issues, and future plans in the GMS transport sector, with particular focus on maximizing the development impact of the network and on the problems that remain as regards the conduct of transport and trade operations along the GMS economic corridors and possible ways of addressing them. [The meeting will also include a site visit to the border at Lao Bao (Viet Nam)-Dansavanh (Lao PDR) to observe actual operations at an East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC) border crossing point, as well as a possible visit of the Da Nang Port.]

First Day

0800-0830

Registration

0830-0845

Opening Session

Welcome Remarks

H.E. Mr. Le Manh Hung
*Vice Minister
Ministry of Transport, Viet Nam*

Opening Remarks

Mr. Pham Thanh Tung
*Director General
International Cooperation Division
Ministry of Transport, Viet Nam
Chair*

Mr. John R. Cooney, *Director, Infrastructure Division (SEID),
Southeast Asia Department, Asian Development Bank (ADB)
Co-Chair*

0845-1015

Session I: Country Reports on Priority GMS Transport Projects Under the GMS Transport Sector Action Plan

[First Part: Cambodia, People's Republic of China, Lao PDR]

[The session will update the Forum on the priority projects that will be pursued by the GMS countries under the GMS Transport Sector Action Plan adopted at STF-11 in May 2007 in Bangkok and further

endorsed by the Third GMS Leaders' Summit held in Vientiane on 30-31 March 2008. The session is envisaged to produce a further refined list of priority projects for the medium term, with relevant information, such as specific timeframe, estimated cost, financing status and other details. A guide outline/format for the report will be circulated and the countries will be requested to send copies of their report a reasonable time prior to the meeting. Thirty (30) minutes will be allotted for each country, which will include the presentation and open discussion.]

1015-1020

Group Photo Session

1020-1040

Coffee/tea Break

1040-1210

Session I: Country Reports on Priority GMS Transport Projects Under the GMS Transport Sector Action Plan

[Second Part: Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam]

1210-1330

Lunch

1330-1430

Session II: Some Updates on the Emerging GMS Transport Network

Presentations:

Mr. Peter Broch, Transport Economist, Infrastructure Division (SEID), Southeast Asia Department, Asian Development Bank (ADB)

Part 1: The Emerging Viet Nam Transport Network and its Relation with the GMS Transport Network

[The presentation will provide an outline of the emerging Viet Nam Expressway transport network and discuss its role and significance for the overall GMS Transport Network.]

Discussion

Part 2: The Beginnings of a GMS Railway Transport Network

[The presentation will provide an outline of the emerging GMS Railway network and discuss its role and significance for the overall GMS Transport Network.]

Discussion

1430-1530

Session III: Mitigating the Negative Impacts of Transport Development

[The session will discuss one of the negative impacts to improved subregional transport, i.e., the risk of wider spread of HIV/AIDS and ways and means of effectively addressing this risk in the light of the Joint Initiative among major development financing agencies.]

Presentation:

Ms. Lisa Studdert

Health Specialist, Social Sectors Division, Southeast Asia
Department, Asian Development Bank (ADB) Viet Nam Resident
Mission

Discussion

1530-1545

Coffee/tea break

1545-1645

Session IV: Updates on the GMS Economic Corridors

[This session will present the key issues and recommendations arising from the discussion of the GMS Cross Border Transport Agreement at the Business and Investment Dialogue held as part of the Third GMS Summit (30-31 March, Vientiane, Lao PDR), particularly as regards the role of the private sector and effective public-private mechanisms in the effective implementation of the customs transit regime under the CBTA.]

Presentation:

Mr. Paul Apthorp

Strategic Development, TNT Express Worldwide N.V.

Discussion

1645-1700

First Day Wrap Up

Co-Chairs

1900

Dinner Hosted by ADB

(Venue: Gallery Room, Furama Resort)

Second Day

0900-1000

Session V: Remarks/Updates from Other Development Partners

Moderated by Co-Chairs

1000-1015

Coffee/tea Break

1015-1100

Session VI: Improving Efficiency in the GMS Transport Network

[The session will discuss, from the point of view of a private transport operator, the required complementary inputs, facilities, services that are needed to make the transport corridors, the EWEC in particular, a truly useful and efficient means for enhancing trade and economic activity in the GMS. This session will be very informal and hopefully

interactive.]

Presentation:

Mr. Paul Apthorp

Strategic Development, TNT Express Worldwide N.V.

Discussion

1100-1115

Session VII: Presentation on Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) Technology as a Means for Facilitating Trade and Enhancing Security at Border Crossing Areas

[This session will provide an introduction to RFID systems and their potential benefits for GMS cross-border trade and security as well as global value chain activity.]

Presentation:

Mr. Shinichi Ishii

Nomura Research Institute, Ltd.

1115-1145

Session VIII: Consideration of the Matrix of Priority GMS Transport Projects for the Medium Term

[This session will review the matrix of priority GMS projects arising from the country reports and discussions in the morning of the first day of the meeting. The matrix will serve as the guide for future monitoring of the projects.]

1145-1200

Session IX: Other Matters

[Further issues that may be raised for discussion.]

1200-1215

Wrap Up of the Meeting

Co-Chairs

1215-1315 ^{a/}

Lunch

1330-

Observation Tour of Da Nang Port

1900-

Dinner hosted by Viet Nam
(Venue to be confirmed)

Third Day

Site Visit to Lao Bao – Dansavanh Border Crossing Point

^{a/} Draft summary proceedings of the meeting will be circulated by the end of day 2. Please submit comments to the Secretariat.

A.M. *Travel from Da Nang to Lao Bao*
- Visit and observe operations at border crossing facilities at Lao Bao-Dansavanh

Lunch in Lao Bao

P.M. *Travel from Lao Bao back to Da Nang.*

**Greater Mekong Subregion
Twelfth Meeting of the Subregional Transport Forum (STF-12)
Furama Resort, Danang, Viet Nam
12–14 August 2008**

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**SPEECH DELIVERED BY H.E.Mr. LE MANH HUNG
VICE-MINISTER OF TRANSPORT MINISTRY
AT THE STF 12, Da Nang 12-14/8/2008**

- Distinguished guests,
- Ladies and Gentlemen!

I have a great honor being here today to attend and give a welcome speech at the 12th Sub-region Transport Forum organized jointly by the Asian Development Bank and Ministry of Transport of Viet Nam from 12-14 August 2008 at Da Nang City- the starting point of the East-West Economic Corridor. As a hosted country, I would like to express my sincere welcome to all participants from 6 member countries of the GMS region, from ADB and other international development partners to attend this Forum.

May you know that, The Government of Viet Nam gives a great attention to regional cooperation under the GMS cooperation program, particularly in the transport sector. We are very glad to see much progress have been achieved during last ten year. The GMS cooperation of developing transport infrastructure corridors with great support from ADB, three major corridors among others have been put into operation well.

The East-West Economic Corridor in the Vietnamese territory starting from Da Nang Port, following HW1 and HW9 to Lao Bao border checkpoint have been put into operation since end of 2005. Especially, with the completion of 2nd Friendship Bridge crossing Mekong River at Savanakheth (Lao PDR) and Mukdahan (Thailand), the effectiveness of this corridor have been improved substantially. We could see there are several industrial and processing zones being created along this corridor to contribute significantly into socio-economic development and poverty elimination for people in the poor areas. Under the STF 12 program, a trip along East-West Corridor Section in Viet Nam and visit Lao Bao-Densavan Border Checkpoint will be provided to participants to demonstrate the effectiveness of Sub-regional cooperation. There could be a nice surprise for anyone who passed these border checkpoints last five years to see much progress happened on this corridor, especially at the border check point.

The southern transport corridor under the GMS road network starts from Bangkok-Phompenh- Neakluong-Ba Vet-Moc Bai- HCMC and ends at Vung Tau province in Viet Nam. The section in the Vietnamese territory upgraded and expanded. HW 22 from Moc Bai to HCMC with total length of 80km upgraded up to level 3 of road technical standard and put into operation since 2004. I have known that the section in the Cambodian territory have been upgraded completely. Along this corridor, border economic zone have been developed substantially. At presently, with financial support from ADB and other donors, the southern coastal corridor from Ca Mau to Lork (Cambodia) and the north-south transport corridor from Hai Phong to Lao Cai to YueNan province of China could be constructed in this year.

Distinguished guests,

Along with physical transport development, the Cross Border Transport Agreement have been entered and signed by 6 member countries to facilitate smoothly cross border of goods and people among country's members. Viet Nam and Lao have been carrying out the initial step of single stop inspection at the Lao Bao- Densavan Border Checkpoints and Viet Nam and Cambodia are going to carry out this procedure at the Moc Bai-Ba Vet Border Checkpoint.

As you may know that, in order to boost regional economic development faster and explore potential aspects of the region, road transport sector alone cannot do well, it must be well cooperated with other sectors such as agriculture, tourism and human resource development. I highly appreciate and totally agree with the idea made by Organizers to include issues of railway network development in the region, the involvement of private sector to the infrastructure development and measures to mitigate negative impacts causing by transport development in to this event's agenda. From my point of view, this is right time and this Forum is a right place for participants to discuss logistic development strategy along transport corridors in order to improve effectiveness and make full use of these corridors. This is a starting point for shifting initial purposes of these corridors from transport to economic corridors in compliance with instructions made by our Leaders at the 3rd GMS Summit held in Vientiane, Lao PDR on March, 2008.

Taking this opportunity, on behalf of Ministry of Transport of Viet Nam, I would like to my great thanks to all GMS countries' cooperation and to the ADB for its financial support to transport infrastructure development of Viet Nam as well as speeding up the implementation of CBTA to facilitate border crossing for people and goods.

Last but not least, I wish you enjoy your time in Da Nang City and wish the Forum is successful.

Thank you for your attention!

**Greater Mekong Subregion
Twelfth Meeting of the Subregional Transport Forum
Da Nang City, Viet Nam, 12-14 August 2008**

Opening Remarks

By

Mr. John Cooney

**Director, Infrastructure Division
Southeast Asia Department
Asian Development Bank**

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Participants and Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my honor and pleasure to co-chair this twelfth meeting of the GMS Subregional Transport Forum. I wish to thank our host, the Government of Viet Nam, for the graciousness and hospitality they have accorded the participants and the excellent arrangements for the meeting, which is being held in one of the most progressive cities of the country.

I particularly wish to thank His Excellency, Mr. Le Manh Hung, Vice Minister of Transport, for warmly welcoming us, and our meeting's Chair, Mr. Tung, Director-General of the International Cooperation Division of the Ministry of Transport, for his initiative, cooperation, and guidance in the organization and conduct of this meeting.

Our meeting is taking place amidst key developments in the GMS Economic Cooperation Program. Since the last meeting of the Forum in May last year, there have been a number of landmark events in the GMS. You are, I'm sure, aware that the Third GMS Leaders' Summit was held just last March in Vientiane, Lao PDR. The Summit had as its theme, "Enhancing Competitiveness through Greater Connectivity", and focused on ways to deepen economic cooperation among the GMS countries to ensure that the increased connectivity among them is translated into expanded markets, enhanced competitiveness, improved access to social services, and greater environmental sustainability.

Thus, while the Leaders saw the need to fine-tune the GMS Program so that it will better harness the opportunities from increasing globalization and regional integration as well as address the softer aspects of regional development, such as the environment and social issues, they also emphasized the continued need for infrastructure development. Infrastructure,

particularly transport infrastructure, underpins connectivity. It is the basic ingredient of the economic corridors that we are developing, which are in turn a key means toward attaining sustained competitiveness for the GMS. Thus, we can see clearly the critical role that the GMS transport network plays in the achievement of an integrated and competitive GMS.

Among the needs in the transport sector that the Leaders identified in their last Summit are: (i) the acceleration of the completion of GMS transport corridors; (ii) the development of other transport modes, particularly railways as these are environmentally and cost effective, and also promote energy efficiency; (iii) giving further attention to other important aspects of cross-border transport, such as international road safety standards and insurance; (iv) the development of the subregional road system to support tourism; (v) the extension of transport connectivity to the poor and remote areas; and (vi) strengthening economic corridor development.

Needless to say, our efforts in the transport sector are intertwined with efforts in other areas. As emphasized by the Leaders at the Summit, improved physical connectivity must be translated into increased trade, investment, and tourism in the subregion. Moreover, the safe, effective, and efficient utilization of the infrastructure must be ensured through the institution of rational and harmonized rules and regulations and the provision of complementary facilities and services. We will also need to proactively address trans-boundary challenges that go with increasing connectivity, such as the transmission of communicable diseases, illegal migration of workers, and environmental degradation.

Our meeting will therefore not only look into the progress of the work on the infrastructure side of the emerging GMS transport network, and try to establish a system for regularly monitoring such progress, but also consider the other complementary elements I have mentioned. Thus, we have invited a practitioner from the private sector, Mr. Paul Apthorp, to help provide us a better perspective on the further requirements of a smoothly and efficiently operating subregional transport network.

We at the Asian Development Bank have anticipated the need to consolidate all the initiatives toward addressing these requirements. This is why we have put together a multi-year technical assistance program to support transport and trade facilitation efforts in the GMS, and to promote private sector participation. This assistance package will accelerate the activities under ongoing initiatives, such as the GMS Cross-Border Transport Agreement and the Strategic Framework

for Action on Trade Facilitation and Investment. Likewise, it seeks to integrate efforts to speed up transit movements across borders with efforts to develop and improve the whole chain of logistics services needed to carry out efficient trading activity. ADB has put together a team based in our Thailand Resident Mission to backstop these efforts. Thus, our Country Director in Thailand, Mr. Jean-Pierre Verbiest, is joining our meeting precisely to interface their efforts with ours.

Moreover, we will benefit from a discussion in one of our sessions focusing on an important issue associated with increased transport connectivity, namely, the risk of a wider spread of HIV/AIDS and ways and means of effectively addressing it. Ms. Lisa Studdert, Health Specialist at the Social Sectors Division of ADB's Southeast Asia Department, will walk us through this issue.

We therefore have a full and interesting meeting ahead of us, addressing very relevant and critical issues. By the time we depart we should have set very clear directions and identified specific actions to further advance GMS cooperation in the transport sector. Our work, in harmony with other priority sectors of GMS cooperation, will have a profound bearing on the realization of the GMS vision – the creation of an integrated, prosperous, and harmonious subregion.

Thank you and good morning.