People’s Republic of China: Developing Multimodal Passenger Transport Hubs
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The increasing size of cities and growth of intercity travel have led to increases in the average length of passenger journeys in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Longer trips mean that an increasing number of journeys will be multimodal, involving the use of more than one mode to complete a single trip, and requiring interchanges between modes. These interchanges can be at train stations, bus stops, tram stops, airports, or anywhere that two or more transport modes come together. These transfer points play an important role in transportation, and can become a bottleneck if not adequately developed. Well-designed and integrated multimodal transport hubs are therefore needed to reduce inefficiencies, reduce travel times, and improve travel experience. This technical assistance (TA) specifically focused on multimodal hubs being developed around railway stations since such hubs represent the major area of opportunity and expansion in the PRC. The TA explored the most efficient ways of achieving integration between modes such as bus, taxi, urban rail, intercity rail, and nonmotorized transport.

Expected Impact, Outcome, and Outputs

The expected impact of the TA was to improve the efficiency and usability of multimodal hubs in the PRC. The outcome of the TA was the development and implementation of policy recommendations, measures, and actions for integrated multimodal passenger transport hubs. The expected outputs were (i) illustrated multimodal hub development guide published, (ii) recommendations for performance assessment completed, and (iii) policy recommendations for improving interagency coordination developed. The design framework of the TA was adequately formulated to assist the government with the planning and implementation of multimodal passenger hubs in urban areas.

Delivery of Inputs and Conduct of Activities

Owing to the specialized nature of the terms of reference (TOR), the assignment was advertised twice but only two national firms expressed interest. The contract with the national consulting firm was concluded in August 2012. Consultants were fielded from August 2012 to February 2015. The TA was implemented by a national consulting firm (18 person-months), two individual international consultants (5.8 person-months), and one individual national consultant (1 person-month). All individual consultants were from the University College London. The actual consultants’ inputs were almost the same as expected. There were savings in the TA costs, owing to lower rates for the international consultants. The sums allocated for international training and contingency were also partially utilized.

The cooperation between the national consulting firm and the individual international consultants was limited in the beginning but improved during the course of the TA. It was decided that the international consultants will focus more on developing the illustrated guidebook which highlights best practices and the national team will focus on the more detailed report that will present the planning and design ideas to improve multimodal hubs and also develop policy recommendations for improving interagency cooperation. This segregation of responsibilities helped avoid unnecessary overlap and ensured two high quality publications.

The performance of the national firm was generally satisfactory. However, difficulties were experienced in delivering the outputs since this was their first assignment with the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Also two of their main experts were not part of the core staff of the firm, but had been contracted for this assignment. As a result, the outputs of the national firm were considerably delayed and several extensions had to be provided to the national firm in order for them to complete their work. There were also submission delays owing to poor translation. The outputs were very difficult to review and required considerable re-work to ensure a good quality in English.

ADB monitored the work progress of the consulting teams closely through its review missions, and provided strong guidance on the study methodology and direction of the TA. ADB also ensured that the outputs of the consultants were subjected to independent peer review by international experts and internally within ADB. This helped raise the standard of the outputs. The finalization of the two publications also resulted in the extensions as all publication costs were charged to the TA.

The Ministry of Transport (MOT), the executing agency, performed satisfactorily by providing feedback during consultation meetings and workshops. The overseas study group consisted of senior members from the MOT who
benefited from the visits to world class multimodal hubs in a number of cities in the United States (i.e., Los Angeles, New York, and Washington). The group also met with the team from the World Resources Institute and exchanged ideas for improving the passenger amenities in hubs and supporting transit-oriented developments. They gained firsthand experience on high quality multimodal hub operations.

The executing agency also ensured a high level of participation in the review workshops by inviting senior ministry officials as well as experts from various transport institutes in the PRC. This helped in providing a variety of perspectives and sharing of ideas which was very useful for developing the final outputs of the TA.

Evaluation of Outputs and Achievement of Outcome

Outputs and outcome were delivered at a cost less than the approved TA amount, but with a 2-year extension. The TA produced a high quality illustrated multimodal hub development guide which provides examples of best practices in multimodal hubs internationally and from within the PRC. The publication presents ideas for improving multimodal hubs by enhancing the quality of the journey experience for passengers. The TA also developed a framework for evaluating the performance of multimodal hubs. The framework included a scoring system against various criteria grouped under the themes of strategic planning, hub organization and operational efficiency. The TA also published a report on design principles and planning guidelines for multimodal hubs. This report provides a good reference to assist government agencies and transport professionals in planning and designing multimodal hubs. The publications were disseminated through a formal publication launch, online photo essays, and news articles. Printed copies were distributed to various relevant stakeholders, while e-copies were uploaded in ADB’s website and may be downloaded for free.1 The outputs were also translated in Chinese to maximize audience reach. MOT officials were highly receptive to the recommendations of the TA and acknowledged the usefulness of the TA outputs in supporting improved multimodal hub designs in the PRC.

Overall Assessment and Rating

The TA is rated successful. It produced high quality outputs and achieved the outcome within the cost, although with some delays. All the planned activities were implemented. Relevant international experience was effectively shared and documented in the outputs for wider dissemination. It is expected that the results of this TA will help the PRC in designing the next generation of world class multimodal hubs.

Major Lessons

The TA benefited greatly from the involvement of leading academics that were hired as international consultants and peer reviewers. The academics provided fresh insights and ideas which were appreciated by various stakeholders.

The inexperience of the national firm resulted in considerable delays. There is a need to attract more qualified national firms to participate in ADB TA projects in the PRC. Also, the implementation schedule of all TA projects should include advance action to minimize delays. For instance, the TOR can be advertised and expressions of interest can be sought even before the approval of the TA to minimize the time needed for recruiting a consulting firm. Specialized translation teams should be recruited to ensure high quality translation of the outputs. The development of publications based on the project’s outputs is often part of the TA financing to support the various publication-related tasks (e.g., proofreading, design, translation, and printing). A separate divisional budget for funding these publication-related activities may be established to ensure that the implementation of the main TA is not delayed.

Recommendations and Follow-Up Actions

It is recommended that (i) similar TA projects in the PRC should involve leading academics and researchers to ensure that high quality knowledge outputs are developed; (ii) independent peer review of outputs should be encouraged to ensure quality and validation of the findings; (iii) the assignment should be widely advertised through various channels in order to attract qualified and experienced national firms to participate; (iv) implementation should be carefully planned to minimize time overruns; and (v) introduce a separate divisional budget for supporting activities to develop the publication from TA outputs.

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