

Next Generation Waterborne Transport and Multimodality Action Plans 2025 - 2027 for the Western Balkans



2024

List of Abbreviations

Annex I	Annex I to the Transport Community Treaty
BCPs/CCPs	Border Crossing Points/Common Crossing Points
CADAS	Common Accident Data Set
CARE database	Community database on road accidents resulting in death or injury
CEFTA	Central European Free Trade Agreement
CONNECTA	Technical Assistance to Connectivity in the Western Balkans
DEBO	Designated Body
DG MOVE	Directorate General for Mobility and Transport
DG NEAR	Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Commission
eCMR	Digital version of the freight document CMR
eFTI	Electronic freight transport information
EIB	European Investment Bank
EMSA	European Maritime Safety Agency
ERA	European Union Agency for Railways
EU	European Union
EU DEL(s)	European Union Delegation(s)
EU Member State(s)	European Union Member State(s)
EVR	European Register of Vehicle
eQMS	Electronic Queuing Management System
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IFI	International Financing Institutions
IM(s)	Infrastructure Manager(s)
IPA	the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
ITS	Intelligent Transport Systems
IWW	Inland Waterways
JASPERS	Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions
JBCPs	Joint Border Crossing Points
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
LCs	Level-crossings
MNSW	Maritime National Single Window
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MoT(s)	Ministry(ies) of Transport
NIB	National Investigation Body
NS	Network Statement
NSA	National Safety Authority
OTIF	Intergovernmental Organisation for International Carriage by Rail
PIU	Project Implementation Units

PSO	Public Service Obligation
RAMS	Road Asset Management System
RIAMS	Railway Infrastructure Asset Management System
RIMN WB	Rail Infrastructure Managers Network of the Western Balkan
RAP	Rail Action Plan
RINF	European Registers of Infrastructure
RIS	River Information Services
RISM	Road Infrastructure Safety Management
RRA	Railway Regulatory Agency
RP_s	Regional Partners
RSC	Regional Steering Committee
RSA	Road Safety Audit
RSI	Road Safety Inspection
RU	Railway Undertaking
SEE Parties	Southeast European Parties: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia
SEED	System for Electronic Exchange of Data
TA	Technical Assistance
TAIEX	Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument of the European Commission
TCT Secretariat	Transport Community Permanent Secretariat
TEN-T	Trans-European Transport networks
ToR	Terms of Reference
TSI(s)	Technical Specification(s) of Interoperability
TTF	World Bank Trade and Transport Facilitation Project
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VTMIS	Vessel Traffic Monitoring and Information System
WBIF	Western Balkans Investment Framework
WBRSO	Western Balkans Road Safety Observatory

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

Foreword

As we celebrate the fifth anniversary of the entry into force of the Treaty Establishing the Transport Community, 2024 marks an important milestone towards a more connected, resilient, and integrated transport network across the Western Balkans and beyond. Over the past five years, we have undertaken a concerted effort to lay the foundations for sustainable, modern, and efficient transport systems through the development and implementation of the comprehensive Action Plans. Created through joint efforts of the Transport Community, the governments from the region and their experts, these Action Plans are the result of the authorities' commitment to integrating their transport markets into the EU. They have also served as strategic roadmaps for aligning the transport policies and frameworks of our regional partners with EU standards and best practices.

While the success of this period is both undeniable and commendable, it is equally important to recognise that progress has not been uniform across the region. The varying pace and scope of implementation across our regional partners shows the need for renewed efforts and collective commitment. This divergence in progress serves as a reminder that, although we are moving in the right direction, there is still considerable work to be done to achieve full alignment and deeper integration within the Transport Community.

A New Political Reality and Unprecedented Momentum

The current political and institutional context provides us with a unique and unprecedented opportunity to accelerate progress. Today, we are witnessing a new political reality – one that is characterised by advancements in the EU integration process for the Western Balkans and the active participation of our observing participants, namely Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. This evolving political landscape, coupled with the rollout of the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, has created fertile ground for deeper regional cooperation and a renewed sense of commitment in aligning with EU transport legislation. Moreover, 2024 witnessed the TEN-T Regulation revision which aims to reduce the environmental and climate impact of transport and to increase the safety and the resilience

of the TEN-T network. Finally, for the first time, this revision also regulates the integration of the six Western Balkan partners into the newly established Western Balkans-Eastern Mediterranean European Transport Corridor. In this context, it is not only necessary but essential to speed up the transposition of the EU acquis and to pursue reforms with greater determination.

A Critical Juncture and New Opportunities

As we approach the conclusion of the first generation of our Action Plans, and with the anticipated adoption of the Next Generation of Action Plans, we are presented with a unique opportunity to accelerate the transposition of the EU acquis and intensify our reform efforts. The need to act has never been greater, and the time has come for a renewed commitment to change. Now is the time for a new start, a new beginning.

A New Start, A New Momentum

The first five years of the Transport Community's work have demonstrated that meaningful progress is possible when there is political will, regional cooperation, and a shared vision for the future. The Green Lanes initiative, jointly steered by the Transport Community and CEFTA, is an illustrative example of this. However, we must also acknowledge that the disparities in implementation across our regional partners must be addressed with a sense of urgency. Success in the implementation of the Treaty and the associated Action Plans should not vary so widely from one partner to another. All regional partners must fully embrace the opportunities presented by the Transport Community. The disparities in implementation must be closed if we are to move forward as a united and cohesive Transport Community.

The Next Five Years: A Decisive Leap Forward

The next five years will be crucial in shaping the future trajectory of the Transport Community. This period represents a critical phase in our mission to foster greater connectivity, enhance economic resilience, and align with EU standards across all transport sectors. To fully capitalise on the new thinking that informs the Next Generation of Action Plans, we must advance the transposition of the EU acquis across all modes of transport, including road safety, railways, road, inland waterways, and maritime transport.

It is the time for a new way forward. The Transport Community is uniquely positioned to lead the region through this critical period of transformation. By working in concert and leveraging the momentum we have built over the past five years, we can ensure that the Western Balkans and our observing participants are fully integrated into the broader European transport network. The next five years offer a window of opportunity to implement the necessary reforms and to ensure that these reforms translate into tangible benefits for the citizens of the region

Measuring Success: From Reforms to Real Impact

In the coming years, the success of our collective efforts will be measured not solely by the passage of reforms but by their effective implementation and the real-world benefits they deliver. The alignment with EU legislation will not only enhance regional connectivity and improve transport safety, but it will also serve as a catalyst for economic growth, job creation, and sustainable development. These objectives are within our reach, but they will only be realised if we commit to speeding up our efforts and intensifying our focus on implementation.

Responsibility for a Shared Future

As we enter this new phase, it is imperative that we approach the challenges ahead with a sense of shared responsibility and unwavering commitment. The Transport Community will continue to provide support and guidance to our regional partners, but the ultimate responsibility for seizing this moment rests with each partner.

Once again, as we jointly shaped the Next Generation of Action Plans which offers a clear and comprehensive roadmap for achieving full alignment with EU transport legislation, it is up to each regional partner to take ownership of this process and to drive it forward. The Transport Community Permanent Secretariat remains committed to assisting each of our regional partners as per their needs on this way forward.

The next five years will define the future of transport in the Western Balkans and beyond. Let us ensure that they count. By embracing this new start and committing to a new way forward, we can jointly shape a future of a more connected, prosperous, and successful region.

Introduction

The first generation of five Action Plans (2020-2024) on Rail, Road, Road Safety, Transport Facilitation, and Waterborne and Multimodality was prepared to serve as a roadmap for the region to prioritise measures for improving transport across all modes and further facilitate the movement of goods and passengers. Moreover, it served to assist the regional partners in meeting the requirements stipulated under Annex I of the Transport Community Treaty.

The overall progress in the implementation of the first generation of Action Plans has been moderate and varies among Action Plans. The identified measures were/are in line with the commitments of the Transport Community Treaty (notably with regards to the acquis in ANNEX I) and other strategic documents (mentioned below) from both the region and the European Union. The same approach was used when drafting the Next Generation Action Plans.

During the 5th Ministerial Council in Skopje on 12 December 2023, it was announced that 2024 would mark the final year for the monitoring of the first-generation Action Plans (2020-2024) and that the process of drafting the Next Generation Action Plans for the period 2025–2027 would begin. The Next Generation of Action Plans are guided by insights gained from the existing Action Plans (2021-2024) and anticipate legal and strategic shifts in the upcoming period of 2025–2027.

The Next Generation Action Plans includes several ongoing measures from the previous action plans (2020-2024), primarily actions that were not fully accomplished during the indicated period, while excluding measures already completed by the regional partners. The Next Generation Action Plans are based on important lessons learned from the implementation of the previous Action Plans, resulting in clearer and more realistic objectives. Moreover, the Next Generation Action Plans include measures based on an updated EU legislative framework, as defined in the revised version of ANNEX I of the TCT, as well as other recent strategic documents, EU policy papers, and declarations/joint statements.

The measures identified within the Next Generation of Action Plans are defined based on the following documents:

- Transport Community Treaty
- Strategy for Smart and Sustainable and Smart Mobility in the Western Balkans from July 2021
- Transport Community Declarations from Summits, including declarations from Regional Conferences, such as the ITS Conference
- The New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans and the relevant Priority Actions for Integration into the EU single market
- EU Road Safety Policy Framework 2021-2030 -Next steps towards Vision Zero
- Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021-2030
Comprehensive Roadmap for Enhancing Green Lanes
- Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans

The Next Generation Action Plans (2025-2027) of the Transport Community were developed through close cooperation and coordination with all relevant stakeholders: regional partners, representatives from the European Commission, members of technical committees from all relevant sectors, and other pertinent institutions.

Draft versions were completed and endorsed at the technical level for Rail, Road, Road Safety, Waterborne and Multimodality, and Transport Facilitation in June 2024. The Next Generation Action Plans are expected to be endorsed by the Regional Steering Committee (RSC) at the 25th RSC meeting in Brussels in November 2024 and at the upcoming 7th Ministerial Council meeting to be held in Belgrade on 17 December 2024.

The Next Generation Action Plans of the Transport Community will continue to serve as a roadmap, outlining key steps and milestones with associated timeframes. Identified measures and actions will guide all regional partners and relevant stakeholders in achieving the objectives outlined in the strategic documents.

Overall, the Next Generation Action Plans aim to offer better and more sustainable services, enhance competitiveness, improve resilience, introduce smart transport systems, make the transport sector in the Western Balkans greener and safer, improve connectivity, reduce identified physical and non-physical bottlenecks, lower CO₂ emissions, and reduce overall travel costs. At the same time, the implementation of identified measures will further enhance the process of transposing the relevant legislation. Furthermore, they aim to improve maintenance practices, ensuring that the overall network meets the requirements of the TEN-T Regulation.

In particular, the full implementation of the Next Generation Action Plans will further support the region substantially achieve important milestones derived from Annex I of the Transport Community Treaty.

On this basis, the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat will continue to produce its annual progress report, including monitoring the implementation of the Action Plans and the progress in transposing EU legislation as outlined in ANNEX I of the TCT. The scoring mechanism will follow the previously agreed-upon mechanism, with specific indicators for each phase of progress.

The Transport Community Permanent Secretariat will continue to play a vital role in supporting and assisting regional partners in their efforts to implement the measures defined under each Next Generation Action Plan, aiming to improve the EU transposition rate and the transposition rate of the acquis. Moreover, the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat will continue to coordinate its activities with other supporting institutions, as well as with technical assistance offered through various EU instruments.

4. Next Generation Waterborne and Multimodality Action Plan

Waterborne transport has been a crucial driver of economic development, facilitating trade and connections between nations, ensuring the secure supply of energy, food, and commodities, and serving as a key means of transport for imports and exports. In the Western Balkans, enhancing waterborne transport and multimodality is vital for regional integration, economic growth, and sustainable development.

The first Action Plan for Waterborne Transport and Multimodality provided a list of short and medium-term activities aimed at addressing critical issues in maritime transport, Inland waterways as well as multimodality aspects and promoting their efficient use by targeting appropriate measures per the Transport Community Treaty and its Annexes I.4 and I.5.

The overall progress in implementing the first-generation Action Plan for Waterborne Transport and Multimodality was slow to moderate.

Regarding actions related to infrastructure, digitalisation, and green initiatives in ports, 30% of the planned measures for maritime ports have been implemented. Key achievements include the establishment of the Centre of Excellence for Maritime Affairs (CEMA), improvements to the Port Community Systems (PCS) in the ports of Durrës and Bar, the establishment of the Vessel Traffic Monitoring and Information System (phase I) in Montenegro, Montenegro's full membership in the Paris Memorandum of Understanding on Port State Control (Paris MoU), and the improved performance of the Albanian fleet, leading to its removal from the Paris MoU Blacklist.

For inland waterways, 20% of the planned actions have been implemented. Notable progress includes the reconstruction and modernisation of the River Port of Brčko in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the commencement of the project to remove sunken vessels in the Danube River, the implementation of Aids to Navigation (ATON), River Information Services (RIS), and Vessel Traffic Monitoring Systems (VTS) in Serbia, as well as the upgrade of the Iron Gate II Lock.

This Next Generation Action Plan outlines the priorities for the transposition of the EU Acquis outlined in Annex I.4 and I.5 of the Treaty, upgrade of port infrastructure, protection of the environment including decarbonisation, improvement of digitalisation, sustainability, human elements, and multimodal transport for Western Balkan Regional Partners, in full implementation of the Transport Community Treaty and its Annex I.

4.1. Content

The Next Generation Action Plan on Waterborne Transport and Multimodality for Western Balkan consists of four pillars:

- Promoting green and smart waterborne transport
- Promoting a safe and secure waterborne transport
- Improving navigability, port infrastructure and multimodal systems
- Enhancing the attractiveness of the workforce in waterborne sector

4.2. Promoting green and smart waterborne transport

Identified measures are in line with the Paris Agreement, which will gradually improve the overall waterborne transport conditions, mainly by making this sector greener, as well as improving the overall processes by deploying smart technology systems. Additionally, listed measures will reduce the administrative burden on ships and promoting the use of digital information will enhance the sector's efficiency, attractiveness, and environmental sustainability, integrating it into the digital multimodal logistics chain.

Action	Regional partners concerned, and deadlines		Relation with the TCT Annex I – European Union Legislation /New Growth Plan
	Transposition	Implementation	
Taking measures toward the path to zero-emission in waterborne transport. Development and implementation of EU legislation	All Regional Partners Q4 2026	All Regional Partners Q2 2027	Directive (EU) 2016/802 of 11 May 2016 Regulation (EU) 2023/1805 of 13 September 2023 Regulation (EU) 2023/1804 of 13 September 2023
Transposition of the EU Acquis on-port reception facilities for the delivery of wastes from ships.	Albania, Montenegro Q3 2026	Albania, Montenegro Q4 2026	Directive (EU) 2019/883 of 17 April 2019
Establish and upgrade the digital systems for monitoring navigation and smart solutions in ports.	Albania, Montenegro Q4 2025	Albania, Montenegro Q1 2026	Regulation (EU) No 2019/1744 of 17 September 2019 Regulation (EU) No. 1679/2024 repealing Regulation (EU) No. 1315/2013.
Transposition and implementation of legislation on ship reporting formalities.	Albania, Montenegro Q4 2025	Albania, Montenegro Q1 2026	Directive 2010/65/EU of 20 October 2010, as amended Regulation (EU) 2019/1239 of the Council of 20 June 2019
Transposition and implementation of legislation on Vessel Traffic Monitoring & Information Systems	Albania, Montenegro Q1 2026	Albania, Montenegro Q2 2026	Directive 2002/59/EC of 27 June 2002 as amended

Transposition and implementation of legislation on electronic freight transport information and implementation of digital solutions to improve multimodality.	All Regional Partners Q3 2027	All Regional Partners Q4 2027	Regulation (EU) 2020/1056 of 15 July 2020 as amended
Transposition and implementation of legislation on combined transport	All Regional Partners Q3 2027	All Regional Partners Q4 2027	Council Directive 92/106/EEC of 7 December 1992, as amended

Expected outcomes:

Enhanced progress in achieving the zero-emission targets. Improved waste management systems through upgraded port reception facilities, establishment and upgrade of digital navigation systems and smart port solutions, streamlined ship reporting formalities, upgraded vessel traffic monitoring and promoted digital solutions for multimodal transport integration.

4.3. Promoting a safe and secure waterborne transport

The general aim is to eliminate substandard shipping, protect passengers and crews, reduce the risk of environmental pollution, and ensure that operators adhering to good practices are not commercially disadvantaged compared to those neglecting vessel safety. Recognising the strategic importance of waterborne transport to the region's economy. Efforts in waterborne safety, security, and environmental protection significantly enhance the international legal framework, ensuring harmonised application across the region.

Action	Regional partners concerned, and deadlines		Relation with the TCT Annex I – European Union Legislation /New Growth Plan
	Transposition	Implementation	
Taking measures to improve the fleet's performance in line with the Memorandum of Understanding on Port State Control.	Albania, Montenegro Q4 2026	Albania, Montenegro Q4 2027	Directive 2009/16/EC of 23 April 2009 as amended
Safety Acquis including the incorporation of the latest amendments to Port State, Flag State, Accident investigation and ship source pollution Directives	Albania, Montenegro, Serbia Q3 2026	Albania, Montenegro, Serbia Q4 2026	Directive 2009/21/EC of 23 April 2009, as amended Directive 2009/16/EC of 23 April 2009 as amended
	Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia Q3 2027	Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia Q4 2027	Directive 2009/18/EC of 23 April 2009, as amended Directive 2005/35/EC of 7 September 2005 as amended
	All Regional Partners Q2 2027	All Regional Partners Q4 2027	Directive 2009/15/EC of 23 April 2009 as amended

Taking necessary measures to enhance Waterborne Security in line with Annex I of the Treaty.	Bosnia and Herzegovina Q3 2027	All Regional Partners Q4 2027	Regulation (EC) No 725/2004 of 31 March 2004, as amended Directive 2005/65/EC of 26 October 2005 as amended
Taking necessary measures to enhance Waterborne Cybersecurity in line with the European Union Agency for Cyber Security waterborne sector recommendations.	All Regional Partners Q4 2026	All Regional Partners Q3 2027	Directive (EU) 2022/2555 of 14 December 2022

Expected outcomes:

Enhanced safety and operational environment by aligning the sector with the latest safety and security standards. Improved fleet performance as defined under the Memorandum of Understanding on Port State Control, transposing and implementing the newly approved EU Safety Package.

4.4. Improving navigability, port infrastructure and multimodal systems

The actions listed below will further enhance navigability through dredging, channel deepening, and improved waterway management, which not only facilitates smoother vessel passage but also reduces transit times and operational costs. Upgrading port infrastructure, including modernising terminals, improving berthing facilities, and implementing advanced cargo handling technologies, supports operational efficiency.

Action	Regional partners concerned, and deadlines		Relation with the TCT Annex I – European Union Legislation /New Growth Plan
	Transposition	Implementation	
Construction and upgrade of the new port facilities and intermodal terminals and smooth transfer of the processes and services.	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia Q3 2027	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia Q4 2027	Regulation (EU) No. 1679/2024 repealing Regulation (EU) No. 1315/2013.
Rules applicable to the transport of goods or passengers with a view to establishing freedom to provide such transport services	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro Q3 2027	All Regional Partners Q4 2027	Council Regulation (EEC) No 3577/92 of 7 December 1992, as amended Council Regulation (EC) No 1356/96 of 8 July 1996
Improving the Good Navigation Status in line with new TEN-T regulation.	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia Q3 2027	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia Q4 2027	Regulation (EU) No. 1679/2024 repealing Regulation (EU) No. 1315/2013.

Improvement of effectiveness in ports for smooth integration to multimodal mobility and logistics systems.	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia Q3 2027	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia Q4 2027	Regulation (EU) No 2024/1679 of 13 June 2024
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Expected outcomes:

Increased regional connectivity and economic growth by enhancing ports' capacities, efficiency, and attractiveness for shipping and logistics. Upgraded port equipment and infrastructure, making waterborne transport more attractive. Further strengthened the development of multimodal transport, enabling continuous integration into broader mobility and logistics systems.

4.5. Enhancing the attractiveness of the workforce in waterborne sector

The general aim is to standardise and improve working conditions, ensuring equitable opportunities and promoting regulatory consistency. This will not only enhance labour rights and protections but also foster a more stable and predictable working environment for maritime professionals.

The listed measures are essential for stimulating interest in careers within the waterborne transport sector, attracting skilled individuals to the sector, and ultimately addressing the looming labour shortage issue.

Action	Regional partners concerned, and deadlines		Relation with the TCT Annex I – European Union Legislation /New Growth Plan
	Transposition	Implementation	
Finalise the process of mutual recognition of professional training and qualifications in line with Annex I of the Treaty.	Serbia Q2 2026	Serbia Q3 2026	Directive 2022/993 of 8 June 2022
	Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, North Macedonia Q3 2027	Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, North Macedonia Q4 2027	Directive (EU) 2017/2397 of 12 December 2017 as amended
Legislation concerning working hours of the ships' crew in line with Annex I.	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro Q2 2027	All Regional Partners Q3 2027	Directive 1999/95/EC of 13 December 1999. Council Directive 2014/112/EU of 19 December 2014
Improve training and certification systems through collaboration between universities, training centres, CEMA and industry in compliance with Annex I.	All Regional Partners Q3 2027	All Regional Partners Q4 2027	Directive 2022/993 of 8 June 2022
Provide technical assistance, training, and capacity-building to regional partners to strengthen human resources and institutional capacities in waterborne transport.	All Regional Partners Q4 2027	All Regional Partners Q4 2027	Directive 2022/993 of 8 June 2022

Expected outcomes:

Increased attractiveness of careers in the waterborne transport sector. Increased the number of the working force in onshore and offshore activities, improved workforce mobility and established standardised working conditions. Enhanced crew training and certification systems through collaboration among academia, training centres, and industry stakeholders.

4.6. Concluding Remarks

The Waterborne Transport and Multimodality Action Plan is essential for promoting legislative reforms following Annex I.4 and I.5 of the Treaty and ensuring compliance with the extended TEN-T Network in the Western Balkans. Implementing these measures across all pillars is expected to raise the transposition of maritime and inland waterway legislation.

Key actions, such as implementing market access requirements, improving port infrastructure, and resolving 30% of bottlenecks on navigable rivers, will increase the transport of passengers and goods by waterborne transport by 10%, promote sustainable transport, and support intermodal exchanges.

The completion of telematic systems—including the National Maritime Single Window (NMSW) and Vessel Traffic Monitoring System (VTMIS) improve compliance with the revised TEN-T Regulation, ensuring that the VTMIS in one regional partner and MNSW in two regional partners becomes fully operational following Annex I.4 of the Treaty and the TEN-T Regulation.

Finally, enhancing training and certification systems and improving the working conditions in the waterborne sector will increase interest by attracting younger talents and professionals, potentially expanding the workforce. One regional partner is expected to initiate mutual recognition of seafarer certification with the EU, while another will complete the process for professional qualifications.