

**Webinar « Driving Connectivity in Central
Africa: Transforming Transport and Logistics
for a Sustainable Regional Integration »**

Concept Note

16 July 2025

Executive Summary

Central Africa remains one of the least connected regions on the continent, despite its immense potential. This webinar seeks to facilitate a strategic dialogue among policymakers, experts, and development partners around the urgent modernization of transport infrastructure and logistics services. Aligned with the accelerated implementation of the AfCFTA, PIDA, and the Central Africa Master Plan for Industrialization and Economic Diversification (PDIDE-AC), the event will help identify levers for action to durably connect the region to regional and continental corridors. The outcomes will inform the design of an ambitious, inclusive, and innovative regional roadmap that places connectivity at the core of development.

Context and Rationale

a) Continental Context

The Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) entered into force in 2019, and trading under the AfCFTA officially commenced on January 1, 2021, reaffirming the commitment of African countries to progressively eliminate non-tariff barriers to trade in goods, liberalize trade in services, and cooperate on trade facilitation measures.¹

However, without harmonized regulatory frameworks and modern, efficient, interconnected, and competitive multimodal transport infrastructure, the full potential of AfCFTA cannot be realized. The weaknesses, inefficiencies, and fragmentation of transport networks (roads, railways, ports, multimodal platforms) remain major obstacles to the smooth flow of trade across the continent.

According to the African Development Bank (AfDB), logistical fragmentation could lead to an annual loss of up to 2% of Africa's GDP, whereas improving regional connectivity could boost intra-African trade by 33% by 2045 (ECA, 2023).

Robust transport and logistics services are essential to:

- ✓ Reduce logistics costs, which currently represent a substantial share of total product costs in Africa;
- ✓ Facilitate the integration of regional markets under the AfCFTA;
- ✓ Maximize the potential of regional value chains, especially in priority sectors such as agro-industry, livestock, and pharmaceuticals;
- ✓ Support the development of special economic zones and industrial corridors;
- ✓ Improve market access for local producers and entrepreneurs.

¹ The AfCFTA is expected to lead to a substantial increase in intra-African trade by 2045, with projections indicating a rise of up to 49.1% in the agri-food sector (African Development Bank, ECA 2023).

Launched in 2010, the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) established a strategic framework to advance integrated, efficient and resilient infrastructure across the continent. Following PIDA PAP 1 (2012–2020), Phase II (2021–2030) adopts an integrated corridor approach, factoring in cross-cutting themes like gender, climate, rural connectivity, and youth employment. However, Central Africa accounts for only about 6% of projects in this phase, highlighting the need for more balanced investment at the continental level.

b) Specific Realities and Needs of Central Africa

At the subregional level, the need for efficient transport infrastructure was identified as early as 2004 through the Consensual Master Plan for Transport in Central Africa (PDCT-AC). This framework was reinforced by the PDIDE-AC, adopted in 2021, which recognizes mobility and connectivity as one of its five core pillars².

Despite these frameworks, the region still suffers from fragmented infrastructure, lack of interoperability among national networks, and high logistics costs – reaching 40 to 60% of merchandise value (ITC).

Several national and regional initiatives are underway, supported by instruments such as the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and UNCTAD programmes, including corridor management mechanisms aimed at reducing the time and cost of cross-border trade. However, these efforts require better coordination and alignment with regional priorities.

As the region reaches the mid-point of its Decade of Industrialization and Diversification (2021–2030), it is necessary to assess the status of infrastructure and logistics interventions to recalibrate priorities.

c) Global Opportunities

Recent technological advancements present new opportunities to bridge infrastructure gaps. Emerging disruptive technologies and smart mobility solutions (e.g., port digitization, smart roads and corridors) offer innovative ways to reduce logistical costs and delays, enhance trade flows, and improve transport safety. These tools also support a rethinking of traditional transport models, fostering improved connectivity among value chain actors and next-generation special economic zones.

Climate imperatives are simultaneously reshaping transport priorities. The 2023 UN General Assembly resolution on sustainable transport systems encourages a transition to low-emission infrastructure, with a Decade Plan (2026–2035) focusing on intermodal integration and carbon footprint reduction.

² The PDIDE-AC sets out a strategic vision to position Central Africa as a world-class manufacturing and defense base; a pivotal hub for integrated logistics, green, energy, digital, and financial solutions; and a constellation of regional innovation and research hubs focused on the sharing and integration of talent and knowledge, data and software, technologies and future-ready expertise.

These transformations also offer indirect benefits by expanding job opportunities for youth and women, improving mobility, and enhancing access to essential services in remote areas.

Objective

The overall objective of the webinar is to initiate consultations and stimulate in-depth reflection on the urgent need to develop next-generation transport and logistics systems in Central Africa. It aims to identify key challenges and constraints, clarify regional priorities, and highlight transformative opportunities to better connect the region to the mobility and connectivity highways of the future.

Specific objectives:

1. Identify critical gaps in existing transport and logistics systems, highlighting bottlenecks that impede regional integration and economic competitiveness;
2. Gather stakeholders' perspectives (public institutions, private sector, development partners, civil society) on investment priorities, necessary reforms, and innovative approaches;
3. Explore relevant international experiences, including high-performing corridors (e.g., ASEAN, Latin America) and integrated infrastructure governance models;
4. Propose strategic directions and coordination mechanisms to support the development of a coherent regional roadmap for transforming the sector.

Participants

The subregional dialogue will bring together key stakeholders involved in the transformation of infrastructure and logistics services in Central Africa. Participants will include representatives of:

- Public administrations (Transport, Industry, ICT, Planning and Economic Development ministries);
- Regional Economic Communities (RECs), intergovernmental organizations, and development partners;
- UN agencies, the private sector, civil society, academia, and media.

Special attention will be given to engaging digital actors, including tech start-ups and logistics-focused fintechs, whose innovations can help to modernize transport services, streamline supply chains, and enhance the efficiency of regional corridors.

Format

The webinar will be held virtually.

Thematic presentations will be delivered by national and international experts and high-level officials to assess the current state and future prospects of major transport infrastructure projects in Central Africa and beyond, with a focus on AfCFTA implementation. Special emphasis will be placed on the PDCT-AC to review its original vision and assess progress made within and outside the CEMAC zone.

Expected Outcomes

Key outcomes of the webinar include:

- A situational analysis of the regulatory framework and quality of road, maritime, fluvial, rail, digital, and space infrastructure in Central Africa, and their role in trade facilitation and regional integration;
- Identification of country-specific challenges to improving physical and digital connectivity and trade flow efficiency;
- Examination of priority actions for connecting Central Africa to regional and continental mobility and connectivity corridors, taking into account technological innovations and regulatory harmonization;
- Collection of stakeholder contributions to inform strategic recommendations and guide future policy decisions and roadmap development for next-generation transport and logistics systems.

Date

The webinar will be held virtually on 16 July 2025, from 09:30 AM to 12:30 PM (GMT+1).

Working Languages

The working languages will be French and English, with interpretation available in Portuguese and Spanish, to accommodate Lusophone and Hispanic countries in the region.

Contacts

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Annex

Provisional Agenda

Time (GMT+1)	Activity	Speaker(s)
09h30 AM – 09h35 AM	Welcome remarks	Director, ECA/SRO-CA
09h35 AM – 10h00 AM	Opening statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ECCAS Commissioner for Spatial Planning and Infrastructure• CEMAC Commissioner for Infrastructure and Sustainable Development• BDEAC Infrastructure Department Representative• AfDB Transport Infrastructure Expert• Representative, Ministry of Entrepreneurship, Trade, and SMEs, Gabon
10h00 AM - 10h20 AM	Keynote: “Investing in Productive Capacities and Trade for a Resilient Future”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A representative from the Economic Diversification and Policy Reforms Section of ECA’s Subregional Office for Central Africa
10h20 AM - 10h30 AM	Introduction and Objectives of the Webinar	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chief, Economic Diversification and Policy Reforms Section, ECA/SRO-CA
10h30 AM - 11h30 AM	Panel Discussion: <i>“Driving Connectivity in Central Africa: Transforming Transport and Logistics for a Sustainable Regional Integration”</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ECA Division of Technology, Innovation, Connectivity, and Infrastructure• Expert on Next-Generation Transport Systems• BDEAC or CEMAC Representative (PDCT-AC)• AfDB Expert on Smart Mobility• Africa Global Logistics (AGL) Representative
11h30 AM – 12h10 PM	Interactive Discussion	Participants Moderated by ECA/SRO-CA

12h10 PM – 12h20 PM	Key Takeaways	Director, ECA/SRO-CA
12h20 PM – 12h30 PM	Closing Remarks	President, BDEAC