



**Asia-Pacific  
Economic Cooperation**

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**2021/SOM1/CTI/026**

Agenda Item: XI

## **Business Mobility Group Convenor's Report – Endorsed**

Purpose: Information  
Submitted by: BMG Convenor



**First Committee on Trade and Investment  
Meeting  
3-4 March 2021**

## **BUSINESS MOBILITY GROUP (BMG) CONVENOR'S SUMMARY REPORT TO CTI 1 2021**

### **1. How does the Forum's work contribute to CTI's Objectives of:**

*Please provide a brief list of the forum's work under each sub-heading. Please refer to Appendix A for further detail on CTI's objectives.*

#### **a. Support for the Multilateral Trading System**

The Business Mobility Group (BMG), through the operation of the APEC Business Travel Card (ABTC) Scheme, provides streamlined entry between APEC economies for eligible business persons to conduct trade and investment related activities. The ABTC Scheme thereby facilitates business mobility for the benefit of APEC economies, and in turn supports the APEC multilateral trading system.

#### **b. Regional Economic Integration, including taking forward the Putrajaya Vision 2040 and contributing to the development of the Implementation Plan in 2021**

At the first virtual Senior Officials Meeting (SOM 1) of APEC 2021 New Zealand, the BMG reaffirmed its commitment to the following key actions to help reduce transaction costs and other barriers of doing business in the APEC region in support of the Bogor Goals:

- Modernization of the ABTC to the extent feasibly possible by actively pursuing:
  - the Virtual ABTC to increase the accessibility, efficiency, integrity, security and usability of the ABTC Scheme,
  - an APEC-wide Online Lodgment functionality to reduce the burden and timeframes in assessment of ABTC applications and increase efficiencies in the operation of the Scheme APEC economy-wide,
  - future automation and integration between the ABTC System, which facilitates operational cooperation, and member's individual border management systems, to improve the efficiency, convenience and desirability of the service;
- Improvement of the consistency and accessibility of ABTC processes, regulatory requirements and availability of public information across member economies as far as possible, so that use of the ABTC is a seamless, convenient business travel experience regardless of the origin or destination of the travel; and
- Consideration of broader developments in business mobility and their interaction with the ABTC (e.g. e-gates, biometrics, face-on-the-move and e-visa related technology) in order to inform avenues for development of business travel facilitation (including of the ABTC) in future years, including through a survey of the future of the ABTC Scheme.
- Consideration on the changes and challenges with the resumption of international travel Post-COVID-19 and how the ABTC Scheme can facilitate and support COVID-recovery with the resumption of business mobility.

#### **c. Trade Facilitation and Connectivity**

The BMG continues to contribute to the Connectivity Blueprint by reviewing, developing and promoting the ABTC to further encourage the number of active cardholders along with an aim to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the ABTC Scheme. As of 31 December 2020, there were 367397 active ABTCs across the APEC region, which is a decrease due to COVID-19.

#### **d. Inclusion**

The ABTC Scheme enables cardholders with the opportunity to more easily engage in business trade and investment activities across APEC by removing the need to obtain entry permissions to each individual economy prior to each individual business trip. The ABTC

Scheme seeks to stimulate business within and between APEC economies, providing for increased employment opportunities for peoples APEC economy-wide, which has clear ties to social inclusion and shared prosperity.

To support and further stimulate inclusion and inclusive growth, and therefore support implementation of the Action Agenda on Economic, Financial and Social Inclusion, the BMG has agreed to provide IATA guest status and access to BMG from 2019 - 2021.

## **2. Forum Main Objectives/Deliverables expected for 2021**

In 2021, the BMG expects to:

- Move all Australian ABTC holders to the Virtual ABTC. All economies will accept the Virtual ABTC in their Economy from 1 March 2021.
- Continue to update communication products related to the Virtual ABTC in support of economies moving to the virtual platform in 2021.
- Continue work towards implementation of the APEC-wide Online Lodgment Service, with Australia mapping and establishing technical requirements for connectivity of a shared platform to be implemented through an initial pilot with a number of participating economies;
- Continue focus on ensuring that cardholders of ABTCs remain 'low immigration risk', bona-fide business travellers, through:
  - the BMG Integrity in the ABTC Scheme Workshop meeting that was established in 2018, and which focusses exclusively on collaborative measures to ensure the integrity of ABTC applicants and facilitate communication between economies about integrity and processing issues;
- Continue to turn their minds to how we can further innovate the Virtual ABTC to ensure it continues to evolve and remain relevant including a potential expansion of the Virtual ABTC to non-business travellers.

## **3. Planned private sector engagement in 2021**

The BMG Convenor has continued to engage with the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) on the Virtual ABTC as APEC business persons and its leaders are best placed to inform their own economy's business associations on the use of the Virtual ABTC.

## **4. Planned cross-fora collaboration in 2021**

- The BMG will continue to promote the APEC counter-terrorism initiative, the Passport Checking Service (PCS), formerly known as the Regional Movement Alert System (RMAS) launched in 2005. The BMG will also seek support and gauge economies' interest in attending a future workshop on the PCS and its benefits to APEC economies.
- The BMG will continue to engage with senior leaders of ABAC to leverage support in helping to promote the Virtual ABTC and, more generally, wider promotion of the ABTC Scheme.
- The BMG will seek avenues in cooperation with the Policy Partnership on Women (PPWE) in the Economy to explore ways to promote the ABTC Scheme among business women to

encourage inclusivity and greater uptake of the ABTC among this cohort APEC economy-wide.

**5. Main outcomes from most recent plenary meeting**

- The BMG continues to support the implementation of the Virtual ABTC and the Australian ABTC holders use of the virtual platform from 1 March 2021. The BMG members are working towards being able to accept and use the Virtual ABTC;
- Updates provided on the work of the Online Lodgment Working Group in the progress of the connectivity to allow development of the connection between the ABTC System and economies existing online systems, along with other relevant ABTC System enhancements to increase efficiency of the operation of the Scheme APEC Economy-wide;
- The BMG will be re-circulating a COVID-19 response survey intersessionally and will be reported on during SOM3 2021.

**6. Was quorum<sup>1</sup> reached at the most recent plenary meeting?**

Quorum was reached at the BMG Plenary meeting of SOM1 2021 with 18 economies in attendance.

**7. What is your Forum doing to maintain/increase its relevance to APEC member economies and increase participation from its members?**

- The members of the BMG continue to look at ways to modernize, and enhance efficiencies in the ABTC Scheme in order to remain relevant within APEC and for subscribers to the Scheme. The Group continues to support and work towards the introduction of the Virtual ABTC. The Virtual ABTC will provide additional accessibility, efficiency, integrity, security and usability measures to the physical card, along with adapting the Scheme to modern technology options now available to leverage in improving the service, rather than having to carry a physical card.
- The BMG also discussed how APEC can best support business mobility and the resumption of more regularized international travel and COVID-recovery across the APEC Economy. A COVID-response survey will be circulated intersessionally and will be reported on during SOM3 2021.

**8. Decision points needed from CTI**

- Seek the CTI's endorsement of the Business Mobility Group (BMG) Convenor's Report.

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<sup>1</sup> Quorum requires 14 economies or more. Quorum is measured by member economies (not including private sector) participating. Remote participation is counted.