



Brussels, 12 February 2024.

TIME RELEASE STUDY (TRS)

An overall update on TRS activities and initiatives

(Item XIV. on the Agenda)

SUMMARY

Purpose of document

The Permanent Technical Committee (PTC) will be updated on various activities and initiatives related to the Time Release Study (TRS). The main updates will be on the progress of developing the new TRS Database System, the status update of the TRS CLiKC! e-learning module and the TRS Guide (Version 3, 2018). Additionally, the PTC will be briefed on capacity-building assistance extended on TRS, particularly by the SECO-WCO Global Trade Facilitation Programme (GTFP).

Action required of the Permanent Technical Committee

The Permanent Technical Committee is invited to:

- take note of the status and provide guidance on the project to develop a new TRS Database System, including the change in funding position of the World Bank Group;
- take note of the progress made and provide guidance on updating the TRS CLiKC! e-learning module and the TRS Guide (Version 3, 2018);
- take note of the capacity building assistance extended on TRS, particularly by the SECO-WCO Global Trade Facilitation Programme; and,
- take note of the presentation made by Zambia where they will share their experience with TRS implementation.

I. Background

1. The WCO Time Release Study (TRS), a widely recognized and strategic tool implemented by many Customs administrations in collaboration with other trade stakeholders, to measure the actual time taken, primarily from the arrival until the physical release of cargo, has been gaining more traction in recent years. This could be

due to the implementation timeline that the members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) have committed to under Article 7.6 of the WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation (TFA).

2. Acknowledging its significance and the growing demand for implementation, as well as its expanded scope at regional levels, and drawing from broader implementation experiences, capacity-building assistance has been extended through multiple sources, and several initiatives have been considered to remain relevant and ensure that Members' expectations and needs are appropriately met.
3. Thus, the PTC will be updated on the status of various activities and initiatives considered in relation to TRS and will seek guidance, where required.

II. Status updates

The WCO and the World Bank group (WBG) joint project to develop the new TRS database system:

4. At its 235th/236th Sessions, the PTC approved the development of the new TRS database system project with financial support from and in collaboration with the WBG, based on the proposed approach (*please refer this [weblink](#) for further details*).
5. In April 2023, the WBG issued an Expression of Interest (EOI) for the proposed TRS project on the WBG's newly launched eProcure website ([link to the advertisement](#)). Concurrently, the project proposal underwent scrutiny and evaluation by the WBG's procurement unit for review and approval. Unfortunately, the proposal did not receive approval, citing recent policy changes within the WBG concerning Information Technology (IT) related projects. According to the updated policy, the WBG will refrain from assuming ownership or direct involvement in IT development projects. Instead, the WBG will be outsourcing all IT related projects to relevant beneficiaries or entities through established formal arrangements, collaborations, or programs (grants, loans, etc.), in alignment with WBG policies.
6. In early January of this year, the WBG formally confirmed that the initial commitment and funding arrangement would no longer be feasible due to the aforementioned policy change. However, the WBG also indicated that they would explore new alternatives, potentially involving a grant agreement/program with the WCO under which the development of the new TRS database system need to be carried out by the WCO. This arrangement would not only encompass the TRS development project but also consider other priority needs of the WCO. The WBG further conveyed that if the concept proposal, slated for submission to the WBG's management by the end of March 2024, is approved, it will take at least a year to finalize and endorse the scope and all details.
7. Given that the alternative option being explored by the WBG would entail an additional year or more, the WCO is internally considering an approach to mitigate further time loss. As of today, this approach involves seeking funding support from internal donors and other interested parties/organizations.

Progress Status on the Update of the TRS Guide (Version 3, 2018) and the WCO CLiKC! TRS E-learning Module

8. In recent years, the implementation of TRS by WCO Members, in collaboration with other stakeholders, has seen steady growth, guided by the methodology outlined in the current TRS Guide. However, the rapid evolution of the international trade environment, the emergence of new procedures and technologies, and the growing pressure to reduce

costs and time in the cross-border flow of goods, underscores the necessity of keeping the TRS Guide current. Furthermore, with the implementation of TRS both at the national, bilateral, and regional levels, there is a wealth of maturity, experiences, and lessons learned that could be shared for the benefit of the global Customs community.

9. Consequently, the proposal to update the TRS Guide (Version 3, 2018) received support during the 241st/242nd Sessions of the PTC. Subsequently, the current TRS Guide has been formally disseminated to WCO Members and relevant stakeholders for their input, utilizing a prescribed template. Presently, input is being received, reviewed, validated, and consolidated by the Secretariat.
10. Additionally, with funding support from the WCO-SECO GTFP, the process of updating the TRS e-learning module in CLiKC! began in October 2023. Progress on the update has significantly advanced, and in accordance with funding timeline obligations, completion is aimed for April 2024. To facilitate this, technical support for the module's content is being provided by the WCO TRS accredited Technical and Operational Advisor from Malaysia.

Update on the TRS Capacity Building Assistance:

11. Examining the WCO mission database has revealed an increase in capacity building activities and assistance provided by the WCO since 2018. On average, approximately 13 (thirteen) TRS missions were conducted/delivered by the WCO under various funding sources. This trend highlights a significant number of TRS capacity building assistance carried out through WCO projects and programmes mainly due to the availability of committed funding support. Please refer to the table below for further details:

Year	WCO Projects/Programmes	WCO Internal Donors (CCFs/Reserves)	External Donor	Total Delivered
2018	1	4	1	6
2019	3	9	3	15
2020	5	8	2	15
2021	6	5		11
2022	8	3	1	12
2023	13	2	3	18
2024	3			3 (Delivered)
	5 (In preparation with definite funding)	9 (In preparation with no funding support)		14 (in preparation)
2018 to 2024 (February)	WCO region-wise TRS missions delivered: ESA – 23, AMS – 16, WCA – 15, A/P – 15, EUR – 11, MENA – 2			

12. Hence, to showcase as a reference on the capacity building assistance provided by WCO projects/programmes on TRS, the SECO-WCO GTFP will provide updates to the PTC on its recently completed 4-year Phase I programme, which supported the beneficiary Customs administrations of Bangladesh, Bolivia, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jordan, Moldova, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Serbia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

13. Additionally, a representative/delegate from the Zambia Revenue Authority will offer insights into their experience with TRS implementation under the support of the WCO/Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Joint Project.

III. Action required

14. The PTC is invited to:

- take note of the status and provide guidance on the project to develop a new TRS Database System, including the change in funding position of the World Bank Group;
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