

Business Mobility Group
Report for the
CTI ANNUAL REPORT TO MINISTERS

For AMM’s information

(a) Key outcomes and achievements in 2023

- During 2023, the Convenor participated in the Sub-Committee on Customs Procedures (SCCP) *Advancing Gender Equality in APEC Customs Administrations Workshop*, on 16-17 February 2023, SOM1. Following BMG member interest in further exploring issues on gender and inclusivity in BMG, the Convenor discussed opportunities for collaboration on gender-mainstreaming issues with Chair of the Policy Partnership on Women and the Economy (PPWE). As a first step, the second meeting of the BMG on 29-30 July, included discussion on gender as it related to the ABTC and business travel facilitation, and a presentation from the PPWE Chair. Members committed to investigating issues such as data gaps and continuing the discussion at future meetings of the BMG.
- The BMG also held group and bilateral discussions throughout 2023 on issues and potential solutions associated with ABTC pre-clearance processes. The Convenor confirmed that ABTC Operating Framework provides a standard for processing pre-clearances of two (2) weeks after receipt of a request or within three (3) weeks of the request where further information is required. It was acknowledged that many economies had experienced challenges with catching up on the pre-clearance requests as borders re-opened post-COVID-19 and that some were continuing to struggle with their applicant backlogs. Barriers include adequate and skilled resources to undertake pre-clearance assessments, as well as inadequate applicant data with which to inform assessments. Despite this, a number of economies made extraordinary in-roads with clearing tens of thousands outstanding foreign applications during 2023, and the Convenor’s office is leading initiatives to identify emerging applicant data requirements to support economies’ collective needs.
- Multiple opportunities were taken by economies to share and discuss cross-border travel facilitation activities and contactless travel innovations over 2023, including intentions to transition to the virtual ABTC. Economies shared lessons and improvements in data used to inform risk-based approaches to border management following the lifting of COVID-19 travel restrictions and endorsed the U.S.-led BMG effort to create a [BMG Contactless Travel Innovations Compendium](#). Economies also shared insights into their growing rate of digitalisation to improve the efficiency and simplicity of cross- border travel.

- These discussions were enhanced at BMG2 in Seattle, by a presentation from Delta Airlines on its “Red Coat Program”, as well as from Boeing Company, on its Confident Travel Initiative and efforts to help stakeholders make decisions that would protect travelers, thereby encouraging travel. An outcome of these discussions was for Thailand to develop a concept paper, in consultation with the USA, on a study or capacity building workshop on how to use technologies to support the business traveler’s journey.
- The BMG also engaged in a productive discussions on the BMG’s shared leadership model, as well as the role and responsibilities of the Convenor. It was acknowledged that the APEC Business Travel Card (ABTC) and, hence the BMG, are unique in APEC. Economies endorsed a shared leadership model, for the term of the existing BMG TOR, where Australia would continue to hold the convenor’s role, supported by a deputy convenor from a volunteer economy selected by consensus. Implementation of the model remains under consideration.

(b) Work undertaken by fora in pursuit of the [Putrajaya Vision 2040](#), including through the [Aotearoa Plan of Action \(APA\)](#)

The BMG contributes to the Putrajaya Vision 2024 and all three APA economic drivers through:

- enhancement and digitalization of the ABTC Scheme, including through seeking to improve transparency, simplicity, and reliability of the Scheme
- sharing innovations and best practices associated with safe and seamless cross-border travel facilitation and people-to-people connectivity, in consideration of economic resilience and recovery
- advancing inclusivity in the ABTC Scheme, including MSMEs and bona fide businesswomen.

Supporting inclusivity and the advancement of gender equality

The BMG continues to explore opportunities and barriers to advancing inclusivity in the ABTC Scheme, including MSMEs and bona fide businesswomen. This includes discussions and activities on gender and the uptake of the ABTC; data gaps to report such information; the importance of gender equality in the ABTC and frontline staff at international ports; and, the implementation of policies and practices that support the advancement of inclusivity associated with the ABTC.

This focus directly aligns with ‘*Strong, Balanced, Secure, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth*’ within the Putrajaya Vision 2040, and the APA to: “*Build on APEC’s Agenda on Advancing Economic, Financial and Social Inclusion to enhance economic inclusion for all.*”

Online lodgment

The APEC Business Travel Card (ABTC) facilitates short-term business travel within the APEC region by streamlining the entry process into APEC economies. It helps facilitate business to business interaction to boost economic growth in the region. Australia continues to work with Singapore and Thailand on a pilot to facilitate online lodgment. The progress

towards online lodgment for economies will further streamline the application process for economies and business travelers. This directly aligns with the objectives of the Putrajaya Vision 2040: “*We will promote seamless connectivity, resilient supply chains and responsible business conduct*” and APA to: “*Improve digital connectivity in the region*”.

Virtual ABTC

The BMG continues to explore ways to modernize the ABTC Scheme through initiatives aimed at digitalizing and enhancing its efficiency and integrity. This includes ongoing work to transition all member economies to the virtual ABTC. This focus directly aligns with ‘Innovation and Digitalisation’ within the Putrajaya Vision 2040 and the APA to: “*Adopt new and emerging technologies to stimulate growth, connectivity and digital transformation*”.

(c) Work Undertaken by the fora in response to Ministerial, SOM and CTI direction

- In 2021, the CTI requested all APEC sub-fora to conduct a review of their terms of reference (ToR). During the CTI review in August 2021, the United States identified the BMG was the only sub-fora that allowed for a permanent Convenor. The CTI agreed to return the ToR to the BMG with instructions to incorporate a shared leadership model.
- Over the course of 2021-2023, a number of models were presented and considered.
- On 28 July 2023, a new leadership model was endorsed by BMG, and states that, until the terms of reference sunsets on 31 December 2025:
 - Australia will continue to be Convenor of the BMG, and
 - the Convenor will be supported by a Deputy Convenor from a volunteer economy, selected by consensus of the BMG, for a one-year term.
- At the 29-30 July 2023 BMG meeting, further consideration was given to the implementation of the deputy convenor function. It was proposed that should consensus not be reached on a deputy convenor, the role would fall to the APEC host economy, commencing in 2025.
- Following discussions with the Republic of Korea, as 2025 host (who was not present at the Seattle meeting), a revised terms of reference has been drafted for consideration and endorsement of the BMG, ahead of submitting it to the CTI for approval.

(d) Key Issues Under Discussion by the Fora (if any); &

- Delays in in ABTC pre-clearance processing times remains an issue and is under active discussion. At the 29-30 July meeting, the Convenor suggested opportunities to confirm and share data with each economy on its backlogs and clearance timeframes, with a view to voluntarily sharing these across all economies, data privacy legislation and policies permitting. The Convenor committed to develop a draft a template for sharing statistical information, and to hold a virtual, intersessional meeting to continue the exchange of information and lessons learned.
- Issues with virtual ABTC application and ABTC system outages also arose in 2023. The Convenor sought advice on the impact of such outages on economies’ virtual ABTC holders, including risks at borders. The Convenor’s office is preparing a discussion paper

on risks and issues associated with the virtual ABTC that will be circulated with a survey to economies to seek feedback on their processes and implications (contingency plans) should the virtual ABTC be unavailable for technical reasons.

- The USA raised that as it was a transitional member and its ABTC holders do not have pre-cleared economies shown on their cards, there are occasions that its ABTC holders have not been allowed to use APEC lanes per agreed policy. The Convenor's office and APEC Secretariat agreed to investigate options to communicate information about each economies' practices associated with APEC lanes for ABTC holders.

(e) Items to submit to Senior Officials or Ministers (if applicable)

- Revised BMG Terms of Reference 2022-2025 (ToR).