BUSINESS MOBILITY GROUP (BMG)

Report for the

CTI ANNUAL REPORT TO MINISTERS

For AMM's information

(a) Key outcomes and achievements in 2022

- During 2022, the BMG Convenor attended the Safe Passage Taskforce Meetings and provided SPTF members with a progress report on BMG's work during 2022, including the BMG-endorsement of the proposal: *Voluntary Principles for the Interoperability of Vaccination Certificates in the APEC Region (Australia)* on May 18th. The Convenor also provided BMG members with an update on the progression of work within the SPTF.

- The Convenor, with the assistance of the APEC Secretariat, requested members to provide updated information regarding APEC economies' entry information and ABTC contact information, which has been added to the APEC.org website. The purpose of this is to assist with improving the communication and outreach of information to ABTC holders and applicants.

- The ABTC System User Guide provides a standardized process for users of the ABTC System. A review was undertaken by Australia, Japan, New Zealand and Thailand following BMG1 2022. The ABTC System User Guide was then reviewed by all members intersessionally. A final version (version 3.4) incorporating feedback was circulated to members for consideration at BMG2 2022. Consensus was reached on this version of the guide and endorsed by BMG members. However, members noted the guide is a living document and further edits may be required subject to technical advice and system enhancements.

- At BMG2 2022, Australia presented its concept note: *Performance Review Study of the ABTC Scheme*, which received in-principle approval for funding by the APEC Budget and Management Committee. A draft Project Proposal has been circulated to members for consideration. The project proposes to engage a qualified expert to research and analyze the performance of the ABTC Scheme over the past three to five years, and present the findings and recommendations in a final report. The findings and recommendations will be used to direct enhancements in the operation of the Scheme, as well as outline metrics for on-going collection of data by BMG members and reporting at BMG meetings. The project is co-sponsored by Japan, New Zealand and Thailand.

- BMG2 of 2022 included an interactive panel discussion on "Post COVID-19 pandemic recovery and future proofing pandemic travel facilitation". Panelists comprised representatives from ABAC, IATA, The Commons Project Foundation and New Zealand and suggested ways to further innovate the ABTC Scheme as contactless transactions continue to increase. Panel members suggested ways for the BMG to move forward, including continued roll-out of the virtual-ABTC and conducting a pilot project that consolidates selected border arrival documentation on a digital platform. Consideration of the future work of the BMG and possible opportunities to enhance the digitalization of the ABTC, will be further explored by BMG members.

- Among SOM1 outcomes was to explore alternative ways to display the work of the BMG. The Work Program Tracker was transitioned to a work plan that directly links with the BMG terms of reference (ToR), Putrajaya Vision 2040 and the Aotearoa Plan of Action. The BMG Work Plan 2022-2025, was considered by BMG members and a number of suggestions were made. The work plan will be edited and recirculated intersessionally.
- During 2022, the United States, in consultation with the BMG Convenor, led discussions to update the BMG ToR to include a shared leadership model as directed by the CTI. As consensus was not reached after consideration of the first proposal intersessionally, a new proposal was circulated to members to consider two alternative options. The BMG discussed the two options at the BMG2 meeting. Consensus was not reached at the meeting – preferences were divided, a number of economies abstained seeking further time for consideration, and one BMG member was absent. The proposed ToR governance options have been recirculated to economies seeking confirmation of their preferred option. Members are aware the report to the CTI is due 31 December 2022.
- During 2021 and 2022, Thailand proposed several approaches to expanding access to the ABTC. These proposals did not reach consensus. At the BMG2 meeting, Thailand presented a paper to explain its concept of "inclusivity" and to promote discussion. This led to a proposed adjustment to the definition in Attachment 1 of the ABTC Operating Framework. As economies had limited time to consider this new proposal during BMG2 2022, the paper and proposed amendment has been circulated for endorsement intersessionally.

(b) Work undertaken by fora in the implementation of the Putrajaya Vision 2040, including through the Aotearoa Plan of Action (APA)

Kindly refer to the "Collective Actions" (in the APA) for the relevant fora

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 is working 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 Aotearoa Plan of Action to: "*Improve digital connectivity in the region*".

Virtual ABTC:
The BMG will continue 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 Aotearoa Plan of Action to: "*Adopt new and emerging technologies to stimulate growth, connectivity and digital transformation*".

ABTC System User Guide:

The user guide standardizes the process for users of the ABTC System. Economies have collaborated to progress this work, which supports capacity building in a digital economy and facilitates compatibility of standards and systems, while supporting discussion and sharing best practices. This directly implements the APA action to: *"Collaborate to develop an innovative digital business environment, including through frameworks and understandings on best practice that encourage the development, application, uptake and management of new technologies".*

(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
- In September 2021, the BMG endorsed a revised ToR providing members one year to present a ToR incorporating a shared leadership model.
- At BMG 1 2022, the United States presented a revised ToR that incorporated a shared leadership model for the BMG to consider. Further revisions were made following feedback; however, no consensus was reached.
- The BMG Convenor held further discussions with the United States intersessionally to consider alternative models.
- Two models were presented to members and discussed at BMG2 2022. Several economies either abstained or indicated they required additional time to consider the options. One BMG member was absent. The proposed options were recirculated to economies after the meeting, seeking confirmation of their preferred option.
- Final responses from economies are being sought and will be collated and reviewed by the Convenor to assess next steps.

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

- Economies have reported delays in ABTC pre-clearance processing times during the COVID-19 pandemic. There were also reports from cardholders that the virtual ABTC has not been accepted for travel to some economies. At BMG 2, members discussed ways to deal with backlogs, temporary measures and mitigating future delays. The Convenor suggested a working group to consider how the BMG can further collaborate to share ideas and best practices and to improve communication to ABTC holders. This will be further considered intersessionally by members.
- A revised BMG Terms of Reference, which incorporates a shared leadership structure, continues to be discussed by BMG members. Members are aware the report to the CTI is due 31 December 2022.

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

- Update to the BMG Terms of Reference 2022-2025 (ToR): By 31 December 2022, the BMG to submit an updated ToR taking into account a shared leadership model, for CTI and Senior Officials' approval.