



Timing Trade, Syncing Systems: A Primer on Time Release Studies for Swift Cargo Clearance

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FOREWORD

Efficient transport and trade corridors are vital to South Asia's regional integration and economic transformation. Yet persistent border inefficiencies, fragmented logistics, and weak institutional coordination continue to slow the movement of goods across borders. Every extra day that cargo spends at the border increases costs for traders, weakens competitiveness, and erodes investor confidence. Reducing the time and cost of cross-border cargo movement is no longer just a technical issue—it is key to unlocking South Asia's trade potential.

The World Bank is supporting this agenda through integrated corridor development, streamlined clearance procedures, and digital trade systems. Tools such as Time Release Studies offer actionable insights by pinpointing where delays occur, how long processes take, and how reliably goods move. "What gets measured gets done"—TRS is a proven measure that can help South Asia reduce clearance times and boost competitiveness.

The ACCESS knowledge series, *Beyond Borders—Perspectives on Regional Connectivity in South Asia*, provides analysis to turn evidence into action. By strengthening the evidence base, it equips governments and stakeholders with practical tools to design and deliver reforms that make regional trade faster, cheaper, and more predictable.

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Introduction

In today's geopolitically dynamic and economically interdependent environment, the ability to move cargo through ports with speed and predictability has become a **core determinant of trade competitiveness**. Global supply chains now span multiple countries, and disruptions at one port or border can ripple across entire network. Efficient cargo clearance is therefore no longer just a matter of national interest, it is a regional policy priority linked to cooperation, economic resilience, and mutual trust among trading partners.

Within this framework, **Time Release Studies (TRS)**, developed by the **World Customs Organization (WCO)**, provide governments with a **data-driven methodology** to measure clearance times and align operational performance with international trade facilitation standards. By offering objective metrics, TRS supports targeted reforms that directly improve clearance processes while reinforcing regional economic integration.

The foundation of TRS lies in the **WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA)**, particularly **Article 7.6**, which encourages members to periodically publish the average time taken to release goods. This provision promotes transparency, comparability, and knowledge-sharing through the WTO Trade Facilitation Committee.

The WCO's TRS tool provides a standardized approach to measure the interval between the arrival of goods and their release. By examining clearance procedures across land, sea, and air entry points in import, export, and transit movements, TRS produces **evidence that can guide administrative, procedural, and technological improvements**. The exercise is not limited to Customs but extends to all border agencies, allowing for a comprehensive picture of clearance performance.

The results generate benchmarks for specific ports and agencies while highlighting priority areas for reform. International experience illustrates its impact: in Japan, clearance times for sea cargo dropped from 7 days (1991) to 2.6 days (2009), and for air cargo from 2.2 days to 0.7 days over the same period.

Such improvements directly contribute to lowering inventory carrying costs, reducing port storage charges, and accelerating delivery cycles. Beyond these operational efficiencies, they also reinforce corridor reliability, deepen regional value chains, and position economies as more attractive destinations for global manufacturers seeking predictable and competitive logistics ecosystems.

As per WCO, conducting a periodic TRS' can help:



Ultimately, **institutionalizing TRS is a deliberate policy choice** that strengthens trade governance. For South Asia, making TRS a recurring feature of trade facilitation strategies will help countries reduce clearance times, build predictability into supply chains, and advance collective competitiveness at the regional level.

Institutionalization

Across South Asia, Time Release Studies (TRS) are gaining traction as both diagnostic and performance management tools, with India demonstrating early leadership in operationalizing TRS at scale. The sequencing of country experiences begins with India not only because of its pioneering role, but also due to its sustained implementation, which provides a valuable reference point for understanding how TRS can evolve from a pilot initiative to a mainstream regulatory practice.

In **India**, the first TRS following the WCO methodology was conducted by Jawaharlal Nehru Custom House (JNCH) in the year 2013. It has since then expanded to other ports and there has been a conscious effort to institutionalize the time release study across all ports in the country. Largely all the TRS conducted by all ports examine the processes of Customs, Terminal Operators, Port/Airport Authorities, Other cross-border trade regulatory agencies, Traders, Customs House Agents (CHAs), Carriers, Warehouse operators, Custodians, and others with a stronger focus on Customs activities.

To implement the various provisions of the Trade Facilitation Agreement efficiently, the National Committee on Trade Facilitation (NCTF)—established to oversee the TFA's implementation in India - has developed the National Trade Facilitation Action Plan (NTFAP). This plan outlines short-, medium-, and long-term targets for various government agencies involved in cross-border trade. As a part of that plan, to comply with article 7.6, NTFAP mandates conducting the TRS on a regular basis across ports. The primary objective, as per the action plan 2024-2027 is to bring down the overall cargo release time:

- i. For imports - Within 48 hours for Sea Cargo, Inland Container Depots, and Land Customs Stations, and within 24 hours for Air Cargo;
- ii. For exports - Within 24 hours for Sea Cargo, Inland Container Depots, and Land Customs Stations, and within 12 hours for Air Cargo.

The national TRS in India is led and conducted by Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) and is also complemented with third-party consulting services to ensure transparency and robustness. These

annual studies present average national import and export release time for the respective calendar years, based on the detailed quantitative analysis of bills of entry and shipping bills filed during the sample period of first week of January, at 15 major customs stations, representing all four port categories. The geographical coverage is representative of India's overall trade ecosystem as it covers approximately 80 percent of the bills of entry and 65 percent of the shipping bills filed with the customs automated system.

In **Bangladesh**, one of the efforts in this direction has been the Bangladesh Trade Facilitation Project, of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), that conducted the first-ever agro-focused TRS in 2021-22 focusing on import and export of agricultural goods and food items under Harmonized System (HS) Chapters 1-24. In 2022, another Time Release Study was conducted covering Benapole land port, Chattogram seaport and Dhaka airport, supported by WCO and State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) of the Government of Switzerland through the WCO-SECO Global Trade Facilitation Programme (GTFP). And more recently, in 2023, National Board of Revenue (NBR), with support from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), led the TRS at three land ports - Sonamasjid, Akhaura and Tamabil. These successive efforts reflect Bangladesh's growing institutional commitment to TRS, supported by strong partnerships and yielding actionable insights to improve border efficiency and regulatory transparency.

In 2024, **Bhutan** conducted its first TRS, led by the Department of Revenue and Customs (DRC) with support from the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The study covered five key land ports along the Bhutan-India border—Phuentsholing, Pasakha, Samtse, Gomtu, and Pugli—demonstrating both ambition and operational relevance through its broad geographic scope. Strong institutional ownership, driven by the DRC's leadership, ensured that the TRS was well aligned with ongoing customs modernization efforts. The findings provided practical insights into clearance times and procedural bottlenecks, laying the groundwork for targeted reforms. Bhutan's experience illustrates how TRS can build institutional capacity, improve border performance, and support alignment with international standards, even in smaller economies.

Nepal demonstrated an early commitment to conducting TRS. In 2016, the Department of Customs, in collaboration with the World Customs Organization and the ADB, conducted a TRS at Biratnagar Customs, its second that year following a similar study at Mechi Customs. Although limited in geographic scope and carried out intermittently, these efforts reflect Nepal's intent to use TRS to measure performance and inform policy reforms.

Taken together, these country experiences show that TRS is steadily evolving from a technical diagnostic tool into a regionally embedded mechanism for advancing trade facilitation reforms, strengthening institutional accountability, and promoting data-driven decision-making across South Asia.

Countries outside South Asia—ranging widely in size and institutional capacity, such as Nigeria, Eswatini, South Africa, New Zealand, Singapore, and Australia—have recognized the value of conducting TRS. Nigeria completed a TRS in 2024, while Eswatini and South Africa undertook a joint study in 2023. New Zealand carried out its TRS in 2022, and Singapore conducted studies in both 2018 and 2020. In the case of Australia, TRS conducted in 2016, reported an import release time of just 0.3 days prior to arrival of sea cargo - indicating that all documentary clearances were completed before the physical arrival of goods at the port.

TRS Methodology and Role of Customs Automated Systems

TRS, as per the standardized methodology, takes average cargo release time as the performance indicator for both import and export cargo. This performance indicator is in line with the TFA provisions and adopts the WCO's definition of cargo release time as "the average release time is represented as the arithmetic mean of the time taken between arrival of the cargo at the port and its final release into the economy/final departure from the port via a standardized system. The lower the release time the better the performance."

Most TRSs internationally and in South Asia use import declarations (bills of entry) and export declarations (shipping bills) as their units of study because these documents provide easily accessible electronic data from customs systems.

The strength of a TRS relies on the sanctity of the data sourced from centralized Customs systems as well as local port-level systems.

In India, **ICEGATE** (Indian Customs Electronic Gateway) is the official e-governance initiative by the Customs Department that aims to streamline the process of customs clearance, improve efficiency, and enhance trade facilitation. **ASYCUDA** (Automated System for Customs Data), an integrated customs management system developed by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), is used by Bangladesh and Nepal Customs to automate import and export procedures. In case of Bhutan, **e-CMS** (e-Customs Management System) is its national system for automating customs processes and digitizing cargo clearances.

Given that most of the customs clearance is handled in an electronic environment, precise timestamps indicating stage-wise progress of documentary clearance are readily available from respective customs automated systems. This data is augmented with additional information about logistics/physical movement of cargo, obtained from the respective port authorities. Therefore, the findings of any TRS are significantly more robust than those reported by a survey-based assessment of trade facilitation.

Import of some commodities requires additional clearance or no objection by the concerned regulatory authorities, duly empowered under the relevant statutes. The ecosystem of these cross-border regulatory agencies is very large in South Asia—the major ones include Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, Animal Quarantine and Certification Service, Plant Quarantine Information System, Drug Controller General, Wildlife Crime Control Bureau and Textile Committee in India; Bangladesh Food Safety Authority

and Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution in Bangladesh; Department of Food Technology and Quality Control, Department of Livestock Services, Plant Quarantine and Pesticide Management Centre in Nepal; Bhutan Food and Drug Authority and Bhutan Standards Bureau in Bhutan, among many others.

TRS usually also analyses the cargo release time of the import declarations that are referred for no-objection certificate or clearance to some of these other regulatory agencies known as Partner Government Agencies (PGAs) or Other Government Agencies (OGAs) in trade facilitation parlance. Some of these agencies have digitized clearance systems and have on boarded the single window systems in their respective countries, which is the case for major PGAs in India. In other cases, such as Bhutan, the OGA clearance process is largely manual, where clearances are sought before the arrival of goods/ filing of declaration, in which case it falls outside the scope of measurement of a standard TRS.

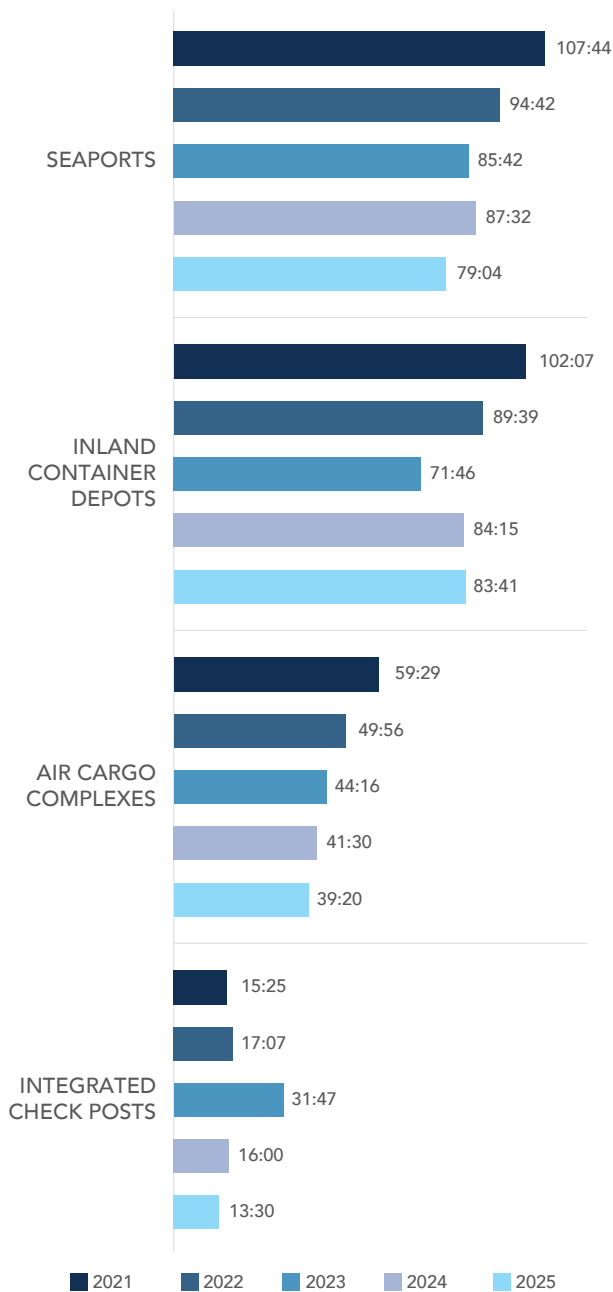
Findings to Track, Measure, Improve and Integrate

The WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) recommends the use of TRS as a means to evaluate the efficiency of border processes, assess stakeholder expectations, and identify areas for targeted improvement. When conducted systematically, TRS evolves from a diagnostic tool into a strategic policy instrument for continuous reform and regional integration.

National-Level Benefits:

India's Experience: India's annual TRS has become a driver of iterative improvements. Between 2021 and 2025, import release times were reduced by 27% at seaports, 18% at dry ports, and 34% at air cargo complexes. These measurable gains demonstrate that “what gets measured gets done”, and that TRS can serve as a foundation for evidence-based policymaking and institutional reform.

INDIA: Import Release Time



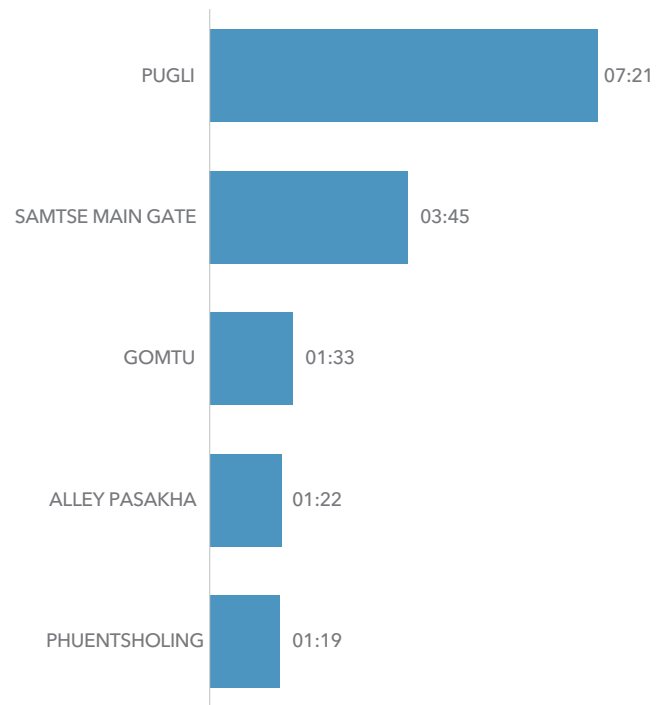
Source: India National TRS 2025 (Time in hh:mm)

Baseline Creation for Other Countries: For countries where TRS is not yet a regular practice, the exercise establishes a baseline to track performance and set measurable targets. Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal, by conducting their own TRS, have begun to identify clearance gaps and prioritize reforms in line with national trade facilitation agendas.

Bhutan's Leapfrogging Potential: Bhutan's first TRS in 2024, conducted following the rollout of the electronic Customs Management System (e-CMS), highlights how

smaller economies can leapfrog by digitizing early and embedding performance measurement from the start. TRS has already revealed opportunities such as dedicated manpower allocation and separate lanes for imports and exports, which can directly reduce congestion at border gates.

BHUTAN: Import Release Time



Source: Bhutan TRS 2024 (Time in hh:mm)

Building Blocks for Deeper Cooperation: TRS can evolve into a regional benchmarking and harmonization platform. Regular TRS results can serve as the building blocks for interoperable digital systems, mutual recognition of inspections, and pre-arrival processing across borders. For landlocked countries like Nepal and Bhutan, this is particularly strategic, as it can significantly reduce dependency costs, improve connectivity, and strengthen integration with regional and global supply chains.

The TRS must be understood as a **performance tracker, not a fault-finding exercise**. Its ultimate value lies in enhancing transparency, improving efficiency, and fostering trust between governments, border agencies, and the private sector. Institutionalizing TRS and embedding its findings into National Trade Facilitation Action Plans will be key to sustaining momentum. At the regional level, making results available, while respecting national discretion, can accelerate convergence of trade processes and unlock

the benefits of **predictable, competitive, and connected supply chains in South Asia.**

Accelerators of Trade: What drives efficiency



Pre-arrival processing



Embracing digital customs



AEO Program

(i) **Pre-arrival processing** is a cornerstone of modern trade facilitation that allows customs and border agencies to initiate risk assessments and documentation checks before goods physically arrive at the border. By enabling electronic submission of documents in advance, this measure reduces cargo dwell time, mitigates port congestion, and ensures immediate release upon arrival.

For regions like South Asia, where seamless movement of goods across multiple jurisdictions is critical, pre-arrival processing can serve as a **policy lever for deeper economic integration.** It enables synchronized clearance protocols along corridors, reduces duplication of procedures, and builds institutional trust among neighbouring states. Embedding pre-arrival processing in national trade facilitation strategies is therefore central to building a **digitally enabled, transparent, and regionally harmonized trading environment.**

(ii) **Embracing digital customs** is no longer optional, it is essential for building an integrated, future-ready trade ecosystem. India's *Turant Customs* initiative, anchored on the principles of being faceless, contactless, and paperless, illustrates how technology can transform clearance processes—eliminating the need for physical interface between traders and customs officials. Through e-document submission, automated assessments, and virtual hearings for queries and adjudications, the system has the potential to reduce the scope for delays, discretion, and corruption, while ensuring standardized decision-making across ports.

From a regional perspective, digital customs enable real-time data exchange, coordinated risk management, and seamless transit of goods—all prerequisites for resilient supply chains in the face of pandemics, geopolitical disruptions or other shocks. Policymakers should **prioritize investment in interoperable digital systems** and establish protocols for **cross-border data sharing**, ensuring South Asia moves toward a future-ready and integrated trade ecosystem.

(iii) Trusted trader frameworks, often referred to as the **Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) program**, play a pivotal role in expediting cargo clearance. By shifting the paradigm from “verify, then approve” to “trust, then verify,” these programs recognize compliant and secure importers and exporters as reliable trade partners, offering them benefits like deferred duty payments, fewer inspections, and faster processing. This incentivizes greater compliance and operational excellence within the private sector.

In South Asia, however, AEO adoption remains uneven. India leads with nearly 6,000 AEO-certified entities, while other countries lag behind due to limited institutionalization and low awareness. Bhutan has yet to register its first authorized compliant trader despite enabling provisions in its Customs Manual 2024¹-Chapter 13, according to which Authorized Compliant Trader status can be granted based on the trader's history of compliance with customs regulations, financial solvency, and adherence to security standards.

The **policy priority now lies in expanding AEO participation, building awareness, and integrating these programs with other government agencies** (e.g., food safety, plant quarantine, drug control) to accelerate end-to-end clearance. Equally important is the conclusion of **Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs)** between countries, so that trusted traders recognized in one jurisdiction are accepted as low-risk operators in another. With wider adoption of MRAs, South Asia stands to gain through reduced clearance delays, improved supply chain security, and a stronger foundation for a harmonized, trusted, and resilient regional trading system.

Friction Points: Addressing Systemic Delays in Cargo Clearance



Lack of a Robust Risk Management System



Inter-Agency Dependencies



Delayed Duty Payment



Amendments in Declaration After Filing

- (i) **Lack of a robust Risk Management System (RMS)** can hinder cargo clearance and weaken border control efficiency. For instance, in Bhutan, as noted in its 2024 TRS, the current sequence, where customs valuation is conducted before risk assessment, diverges from international best practices, which advocate for risk assessment as an early-stage filter to determine the level of scrutiny required for each shipment. A well-designed RMS should be equipped with high-quality data inputs and automated tools to classify consignments into green (low risk), amber (moderate risk), and red (high risk) channels based on predefined risk parameters. This allows green channel cargo to move swiftly through the clearance process, reducing delays for compliant traders, while enabling authorities to concentrate resources on high-risk shipments where detailed valuation and examination are most needed.

Extending risk-based decision-making to **Partner Government Agencies (PGAs)/ Other Government Agencies (OGAs)** can further streamline **inter-agency coordination**, creating a unified and responsive border control ecosystem that benefits both trade facilitation and regulatory enforcement.

- (ii) While customs authorities manage the bulk of the cargo clearance process globally, certain categories of goods, particularly those involving food, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, and other regulated items, require prior approval from specialized bodies known as **Participating Government Agencies (PGAs) or Other Government Agencies (OGAs)** before customs can issue clearance. These **inter-agency dependencies** often introduce delay in clearance of import declarations referred to PGAs/OGAs for No Objection Certificates (NOCs). Several factors contribute to this lag:

the physical distance between ports and PGA/OGA laboratories, infrequent sample collection cycles due to limited manpower, and capacity constraints stemming from inadequate training and outdated infrastructure. A major bottleneck is also the requirement for hard copy documentation or delays in submitting supporting documents, which undermines otherwise digitized customs workflows.

To support harmonized trade facilitation, it is essential that PGAs/OGAs across countries digitize their processes, enhance lab and field capacities, and integrate their systems with national single windows. Only then can the clearance chain become truly seamless and interoperable across borders.

- (iii) **Traders prefer to defer duty payment until the physical arrival of goods**, so that they can confirm the exact quantity and condition of the shipment, especially in scenarios such as short landings in case of air cargo, where cargo may arrive in smaller quantities than expected. This cautious approach stems from a desire to avoid overpayment and the process of seeking refunds for duties paid in excess. While this ensures accuracy in payment, it inadvertently delays the initiation of the clearance process.

As a result, even minor discrepancies in cargo arrival can lead to significant hold-ups, highlighting the need for greater adoption of digital pre-payment solutions, policy adjustments for refund mechanism, as well as enhanced predictability and efficiency within regional supply chains.

- (iv) **Amendments² in the import declaration after filing**, while facilitated by simplified procedures and lower associated costs, remain a notable source of delays in cargo clearance. For instance, in India, with the reduced penalty for amendments compared to late filing of import declaration, there has been a positive shift toward the timely submission of import declaration, as seen in the consistently high share of advance filings. However, the frequent need for amendments post-filing suggests underlying issues that merit attention. These could include the non-availability of complete shipping documents at the time

of filing or possibly gaps in the knowledge or competence of customs brokers who prepare the declarations. Each amendment triggers additional scrutiny, processing time, and administrative overhead, slowing down the overall clearance process.

To address this, it is essential to analyze the root causes behind such amendments and assess whether they can be minimized through better data-sharing mechanisms between countries, improved pre-arrival documentation practices and harmonizing documentation standards between countries, or targeted joint capacity building and sensitization programs for customs brokers and importers in the region - fostering smoother, faster, and more accurate trade documentation.

These are just some of the many accelerating and decelerating factors that influence the speed of cargo clearance. The impact of each factor varies significantly depending on the country context, the level of port infrastructure, the capacity of border agencies, the nature of commodities traded, and broader geopolitical dynamics. While some delays stem from procedural inefficiencies or limited digitalization, others may arise from external risks or complex regulatory requirements. Similarly, practices like pre-arrival processing, trusted trader programs, and robust risk management systems can accelerate clearance but require tailored implementation based on local conditions. Understanding this variability is essential for designing effective, context-sensitive trade facilitation strategies.

Interspatial comparisons

Interspatial comparisons of cargo release times, whether across different countries or even among ports within the same category, must be approached with caution. While average release times do vary significantly across port categories, they also show notable variation within the same category of ports, reflecting differences in infrastructure quality, procedural complexity, staffing levels, technological readiness, and the involvement of partner government agencies. The World Customs Organization’s Time Release Study (WCO TRS) Guide (2018) emphasizes that “it is not meaningful to compare TRS results among different countries since trade conditions such

as infrastructure, border procedures, IT development, resource availability, and border agency capacity are rarely, if ever, identical in reality”.

Consequently, using TRS as a simplistic benchmarking tool across geographies may lead to misleading conclusions. Nevertheless, acknowledging these caveats, selected average release times from foreign ports may still offer broad reference points to inform policy dialogue or assess directional trends, especially when considering long-term improvements or identifying systemic inefficiencies in a country’s trade facilitation framework.³

Average Import Release Time for Select Ports/Countries

	Singapore ⁴	Australia ⁵	New Zealand ⁶	Bangladesh ⁷	South Africa and Eswatini ⁸
Year	2020	2021	2022	2022	2023
Port	Singapore	Sydney (sea)	Chattogram Seaport	Chattogram Seaport	Oshoek/ Ngwenya border post (land crossing)
Equivalent Import Release Time	7 hours 27 minutes	Neg. 3 days = -72 hours	7 days and 7 hours = 175 hours ⁹	7 days and 7 hours = 175 hours	34 minutes
Measurement of Import Release Time	Docking (initial measurement point) to gate-out (last measurement point)	Arrival to Clearance	Arrival of ship to release of cargo	Arrival of ship to release of cargo	Arrival of goods (Mark for Arrival) at the border to their exit (Mark for Exit)

Beyond the Border: Strategic Value of a Periodic TRS

The institutionalization of Time Release Studies (TRS) should be regarded not merely as a diagnostic exercise, but as a **strategic policy instrument** for accelerating cargo clearance, enhancing transparency, and improving the competitiveness of South Asian economies in global and regional markets.

By systematically measuring the actual time taken for customs and other border procedures, TRS provides policymakers with **granular evidence on where bottlenecks persist, how reforms are performing, and which processes require further streamlining**. When implemented consistently, TRS creates a reliable evidence base to prioritize reforms, allocate resources more efficiently, and track progress toward trade facilitation goals.

There is growing evidence from both global and regional contexts that comprehensive TRS-driven reforms—combining streamlined clearance procedures, digital systems, and coordinated border management - can significantly reduce border and documentary compliance times. While attempts to quantify the economic value of time savings remain limited, some studies offer valuable insights. For example, transaction-level import data from Peru show that each additional day of delay increases costs by approximately 1.6% for all firms at airports, and by 0.7% and 0.9% for small and large firms, respectively, at seaports¹⁰. In Central Asia, gravity model estimations suggest that a 10% reduction in inbound border time can increase trade among Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) countries by 1–2%¹¹.

With South Asia's annual merchandise trade exceeding USD 1.4 trillion, and as TRS adoption expands across the region, there is a compelling case for future research to translate time savings into measurable cost reductions. The potential benefits extend beyond cost savings: faster delivery cycles improve reliability for exporters, reduce working capital burdens for traders, and enhance the region's attractiveness for foreign direct investment in time-sensitive sectors.

To translate this potential into tangible outcomes, South Asian governments could consider the following:

- 1. Institutionalize TRS:** Establish TRS as part of national regulatory and policy frameworks. Conduct studies at regular intervals, annually or as feasible, to ensure continuity and comparability. This creates a culture of performance monitoring within border agencies.
- 2. Translate Findings into Policy Action:** Use TRS results as an input for revising and updating National Trade Facilitation Action Plans and ensure alignment with obligations under the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). This linkage will help move TRS beyond technical reporting into actionable reforms.
- 3. Enable Regional Benchmarking:** Under regional groupings such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) or the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), publish TRS outcomes to set performance targets, and promote best practice exchange. Benchmarking can also drive corridor-level reforms for faster and more predictable cross-border trade.
- 4. Foster Public-Private Accountability:** Share TRS findings proactively with chambers of commerce, logistics providers, and other private sector actors. This will build trust, enhance transparency, and create joint ownership of the reform process. Engaging businesses in dialogue based on TRS evidence can also help ensure that reforms are practical and responsive to trade realities.

For South Asia, where uneven institutional capacities and fragmented clearance systems hinder trade, embedding TRS into a recurring, collaborative framework is essential. Coupled with **mutual recognition arrangements, interoperable digital platforms, and coordinated risk management**, TRS can serve as the backbone of a more predictable and competitive regional supply chain, advancing both national reform agendas and cross-border economic integration.

END NOTES

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Disclaimer:

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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The Accelerating Transport and Trade Connectivity in Eastern South Asia (ACCESS) program is a World Bank initiative aimed at facilitating regional connectivity and trade across Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal. The program supports investments in digital systems for trade, green and resilient transport infrastructure, and institutional and policy strengthening for transport and trade facilitation. Complementing the lending program, the ACCESS knowledge and convening platform develops, curates, and shares analytical findings, and fosters evidence-based dialogue.

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ABOUT THE SERIES

The ACCESS knowledge series, "Beyond Borders - Perspectives on Regional Connectivity in South Asia", aims to present in-depth technical studies and empirical data addressing crucial barriers to cross-border connectivity and trade.

The knowledge series will explore a broad spectrum of issues related to transportation, trade facilitation, logistics, digital connectivity, climate resilience, non-tariff barriers, and more.

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