



**Asia-Pacific
Economic Cooperation**

Advancing Free Trade
for Asia-Pacific **Prosperity**

Capacity Building Workshop on Improving the Utilization of APEC Business Travel Card

APEC Business Mobility Group

February 2022



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Economic Cooperation**

Capacity Building Workshop on Improving the Utilization of APEC Business Travel Card

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FINAL REPORT

APEC Business Mobility Group

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I. Introduction

The Capacity-building Workshop on Improving the Utilization of the APEC Business Travel Card (ABTC) was held in Bandung, Indonesia, on 14–15 September 2021. The initiative was proposed under the Business Mobility Group (BMG) and co-sponsored by Chile, the People's Republic of China, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and Viet Nam. A total of 185 participants from 21 member economies (approximately 51 percent female and 49 percent male) registered in the workshop. These participants were representatives from different groups consisting of policymakers, private sector workers, experts, researchers, and academia. Experts from the International Air Transport Association (IATA), private sectors (ABAC, Indonesia Chamber of Commerce, ExportNZ and ManufacturingNZ, Meat Industry Association-New Zealand), think tanks (Center for Strategic and International Studies-Indonesia), Research Institution (Washington Core, L.L.C), and Academia (Assumption University, Thailand) also participated in the workshop.

At the workshop, the participants reviewed current challenges on implementing the ABTC scheme and discussed how the ABTC could remain relevant during and the post-pandemic. Participants also evaluated the approach in processing and verifying ABTC applications taken by members and some initiatives by the BMG to improve the ABTC and facilitating the movement of people in the region in the post-pandemic world.

The panels noted the importance of cross-border mobility in trade and economic growth and the negative impact of travel restrictions in the APEC region. They recommended that economies would need to find suitable solutions that allow safe resumption of international travel, such as ongoing efforts to establish international standards and norms and harmonized procedures including vaccines certification, recognition, and validation, among others.

In addition, the panels discussed ways to accelerate ABTC processing time, further refining the scheme and making it more user-friendly for business. They suggested some recommendations to improve the uptake and utilization of the ABTC and foster people mobility in the post-pandemic world: (i) Expediting and improving the application process by adopting advanced digital technology to simplify procedures and pre-clearance process; (ii) Strengthening ABTC data and network infrastructure and improving system integrity and security towards a fully integrated travel passport; (iii) Expanding ABTC utilization and benefit by creating a “second-tier” visa card scheme for broader applicants including travelers from

middle management of private companies, SME owners, and professionals ; (iv) Standardizing health and safety protocols among economies and considering the addition of more features for the virtual ABTC such as integrating a health passport, linking it for use in virtual e-wallet, etc; and, (v) Encouraging more economies to adopt the virtual ABTC and capacity-building activities to ensure successful practices of the virtual ABTC.

II. Opportunities and Challenges on ABTC Application and Utilization

The panels emphasized the strong correlation between cross-border business travel and economic growth. Thus, underscoring the role of the ABTC scheme in facilitating cross border travel to foster business activities and investment opportunities. In 2019, the number of cardholders was accounted for 380,000 or approximately 0.1% of all the non-resident arrivals. This shows a potential opportunity to promote the use of ABTC throughout the region.

Accordingly, the workshop panelists identified some opportunities and challenges related to ABTC utilization as follow:

- a. The COVID-19 Pandemic brought significant impacts to the reduction in numbers of cardholders and lowered the ability to utilize and benefit from the ABTC. On the other hand, there are opportunities in the future development of ABTC that include digitizing the ABTC scheme, encouraging cross fora collaboration and expanding ABTC cardholders.
- b. The most highlighted issue was the lengthy pre-clearance processing time. The panels revealed that this is mainly due to pre-clearance steps taken by each economy. The real-time processing mechanism by the introduction of Virtual ABTC (VABTC) is expected to significantly reduce this process. Although, this may also lead to revising the ABTC Operating Framework.
- c. The issuance of the Virtual ABTC provides a secure, up-to-date version of ABTC and an opportunity for future enhancements. The VABTC will assist economies in managing card issuance and revocation and enable cardholders to instantly enjoy travel facilitation within the APEC region from which the respective pre-clearances have been granted. Currently, nine economies have transitioned to the VABTC.
- d. The ongoing ABTC systems enhancements such as online forms and online lodgment will provide greater opportunities to eliminate manual data errors and reduce processing delays. It will also assist economies in handling a larger volume of applications. The

program is under a pilot project with some economies, and it will require MoU among participating economies.

- e. The workshop raised the need for The Business Mobility Group (BMG) to explore potentially leveraging VABTC as a mobile wallet or proof of vaccination.
- f. Participants stressed the importance of cross-border mobility's benefits and the significance of alleviating travel restrictions to support the resumption of cross-border travel. However, synchronizing health and safety protocols among economies is not an easy undertaking. The panels advised identifying opportunities where the risks were manageable.

III. Lesson learned and Best Practices from APEC Economies

Speakers from China; Indonesia; Korea; and Viet Nam shared regulatory and policy approaches and aspects related to ABTC application process (requirements, verification, and processing time), promotional strategies, technical and institutional challenges, and evaluation and review mechanism. In the ABTC pre-clearance process, participants learned about economies' varied approaches and policy frameworks. While China is able to print the ABTC card, Indonesia, for instance, is unable to do so. This has resulted in a longer processing time. The adoption of advanced technology and innovation in the ABTC and the introduction of VABTC is a welcome innovation that might speed up and simplify the processing procedure. All economies have also seen a significant decrease in ABTC applications because of the Pandemic.

Speakers presented some important points as follow:

- a. China joined the ABTC Scheme in 2002 and currently is the largest ABTC holder (approx. 53,077 in 2021). China utilizes online lodgement and technology to accelerate pre-clearance phases and streamline China's three-tiered inspection and management system.
- b. Indonesia entered the Scheme in 2002 and is currently granted the ABTC for senior government officials and bonafide business persons. The ABTC is done manually, although Indonesia is currently developing an online lodgement system to accelerate the pre-clearance process. Indonesia is also transitioning to the Virtual ABTC since July 1 2021.
- c. Korea shared responsibility in processing ABTC applicants between the Ministry of Justice and the Korea International Trade Association to lessen the burden of the immigration office. The efficient card system, developed through public-private

cooperation, and the creation and integration of an advanced IT system are responsible for the short pre-clearance processing time for foreigners in Korea.

- d. Viet Nam joined the Scheme in 2005. The prerequisite for the ABTC issuance includes board directors of state-owned enterprises, private sectors, and senior-level officials. For the pre-clearance process, an applicant from a member economy will need a recommendation from appropriate authorities, which will take around 21 days to complete. Viet Nam is also in contention to adopt the VABTC.

IV. Recommendations

The workshop panelists underlined a strong correlation between cross-border travel and economic growth and the negative impact of travel restrictions in the APEC region. Thus, finding suitable solutions that allow safe resumption of international travel is necessary, such as ongoing efforts to establish international standards and norms and harmonized procedures, including vaccines certification, recognition, and validation.

In addition, panelists discussed ways to accelerate ABTC processing time, further refining the Scheme and making it more user-friendly for business. Some recommendations from panelists to improve the uptake and utilization of the ABTC and foster people mobility in the post-pandemic world are as follow:

- a. Expediting and improving the application process by adopting advanced digital technology to simplify procedures and pre-clearance process;
- b. Strengthening ABTC data and network infrastructure and improving system integrity and security towards a fully integrated travel passport;
- c. Expanding ABTC utilization and benefit by creating a “second-tier” visa card scheme for broader applicants, including travelers from middle management of private companies, SME owners, and professionals;
- d. Standardizing health and safety protocols among economies and considering the addition of more features for the virtual ABTC, such as integrating a health passport, linking it for use in a virtual e-wallet; and,
- e. Encouraging more economies to adopt the virtual ABTC and capacity-building activities to ensure the success of the virtual ABTC.

V. Summary of speakers' presentations and feedbacks

a. Session 1 Overview on the APEC Business Travel Card (ABTC) and Current Trends

Mr Emmanuel A. San Andres, APEC Policy Support Unit (PSU), introduced the study of cross-border mobility in the APEC Region conducted in late 2020. He revealed that non-resident arrivals in the APEC region have grown around 4% per year, reaching 544 million arrivals in 2019. However, the border stringency measures taken by economies amidst the Pandemic brought an immediate hit on the economy. The drop in cross-border mobility also cost around \$500 to \$800 billion lost in trade and about \$1.2 trillion lost in the APEC region's economic output. He also suggested that economies need to harmonize standards and transparency with border policies to promote safe cross-border travel in the post-pandemic Era.

Ms Younkyung Kim, from the International Air Transport Association (IATA), touched upon the enormous economic hit caused by the Pandemic on the global air transport industry. She explained that the Asia Pacific region imposes the most rigid restrictions. Thus, until July 2021, the international traffic in the Asia Pacific had dropped at only around 5% compared to its performance in 2019, making it the worst performer among other regions. For this reason, the IATA has been engaging economies in safely reopening borders by encouraging and advocating to replace quarantine with practical testing tools, adopting international standards of health certificates, and utilizing the IATA travel pass as a valid representation of test results and a proof of vaccination.

Mr James Tetlow, a Senior Researcher from Washington CORE, L.L.C., provided an overview on the 2014 ABTC study conducted in 11 economies, covering a wide range of variables in terms of size, population, development status and location in both Asia and the Americas. The study also showed that each economy has its own approach for the applications process, typically about eight to nine steps, regardless of any notable differences between economies. Some economies such as Peru, Malaysia, and Indonesia required certification from industry associations, which also played a valuable role in assisting applicants' processes. He noted some of the notable challenges identified in the study included the slow pre-clearance processing. Economies also indicated that communication through the ABTC system can be slow, non-responsive, or lack clear contact points, while card-printing issues were common. He then explained that some study recommendations had been implemented, such as capacity-building activities, performance monitoring, and online guidance for border officials. The expansion of ABTC uses, and its eligibility is also being explored through discussions

with PPWE to increase the adoption of women-led businesses and possibly allow use for leisure travel.

In the Q and A session, participants were aware of the difficulties of harmonizing health and safety protocols between two economies to reopen borders, let alone 21 economies. The lack of transparency, communication, and harmonization are the main factors in making travel very difficult. On the other hand, participants were also aware of cross-border mobility's benefits and eased the travel restrictions. In this regard, the panels advised identifying opportunities where the risks were manageable. Perhaps, having a single vaccine certification system that every party recognizes could be a starting point to advance the dialogue.

b. Session 2: Lesson Learned from APEC Member Economies on Improving ABTC Utilization, including Challenges, Opportunities, and Best Practices

Mr Myeongkyu Seo, Ministry of Justice, Korea, shared Korea's approach in the ABTC scheme operations. He explained the shared responsibility between the Ministry of Justice and the Korea International Trade Association in processing ABTC applicants to lessen the burden of the immigration office. The fast pre-clearance processing time for foreigners in Korea is due to the efficient card system through public-private partnership and the development and integration of an advanced IT system.

Mr Truong Trong Minh, from the Ministry of Public Security, Viet Nam, shared its domestic regulations and policies. He explained that board directors of state-owned enterprises, private sectors, and senior-level officials fall under the ABTC criteria. An applicant from a member economy will require a recommendation from competent authorities for the pre-clearance process, which will take around 21 days to complete. Currently, Viet Nam is still reviewing the regulation on issuing the ABTC for business in response to new developments, including the consideration to transform to VABTC.

Mr Wihadi Sutrisno, from the Ministry of Law and Human Rights, Indonesia, shared Indonesia's approach to the ABTC scheme. He explained that Indonesia has been issuing ABTCs since May 1, 2004, which only Indonesian citizens can be given. The ABTC would be granted for senior government officials and top-level management of private holding companies. ABTC holders will have a special lane similar to diplomatic and official passports in several checkpoints and be treated as multiple visa holders for 60 days (not extendable). A large amount of ABTC processing is done manually.

However, an online lodgement system is under development, so the applicants are not required to physically visit the premise for time efficiency and streamlining the process—Indonesia has been transitioning to VABTC since July 1 2021. However, the VABTC is yet known in the Indonesian business community due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Ms Song Ying, ABTC Team of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, shared key factors on China's sharp increase in ABTC holders. China entered the ABTC Scheme in 2002, and currently, there are approximately 53,077 ABTC holders in China. This number is by far the biggest ABTC cardholder within one economy. She explained that China is one of the first economies to implement an online lodgement for ABTC applications. The use of technology accelerates the pre-clearance process and streamlines China's three-level review and management system. She also added that China always cooperates with other economies to ensure timely processing time.

Participants learned different approaches and policy frameworks among economies and various alternative systems in the ABTC pre-clearance process in the discussion. While China could print the ABTC card by itself, Indonesia, for instance, could not. This will add a lengthy processing time for some economies. The adoption of advanced technology and innovation in the ABTC and the introduction of VABTC is a welcome innovation that could speed up the processing time and simplify the process. It is also noted that all economies have faced a significant slump in ABTC applications since 2020 because of the Pandemic.

c. Session 3: What Businesses Expect from ABTC

Ms Catherine Beard, Executive Director of ExportNZ & ManufacturingNZ, New Zealand, relayed the views from New Zealand business travellers. According to Ms Beard, the card is a valuable asset for reaching overseas clients. However, the persistence challenge thus far is a lengthy processing time for both applying and renewal processes. She also lamented the lack of clear signage for immigration special lanes at airports. She suggested utilizing technology and welcoming the BMG to transform the physical card into a virtual one. She also hopes that the Scheme could add more features, such as proof of vaccination, or mutually recognize health certificates for the future of cross-border travel.

Mr Nicholas Ho from ABAC Hong Kong, China also conveyed similar praise about the card. Mr Ho stated that the business community is desperate to get back to travel. Thus,

he suggested that the ABTC could play its role with the already established infrastructures, background data, and company information to facilitate business travellers. He then pointed towards its importance for APEC in harmonizing standards of testing infrastructure and verification and validation on certified laboratories as a starting point to restart the cross-border travel safely.

Mr Bernardino M. Vega, Vice-Chair for International Relations, Indonesia Chamber of Commerce, shared the views with the previous speakers. He also mentioned the card's extensive renewal time and its expiry alongside the passport. He suggested adopting a similar mechanism by showing proof that the ABTC could adopt vaccinations implemented in Indonesia to standardize safety protocols among economies.

Ms Sirma Karapeeva, Chief Executive Officer, Meat Industry Association, New Zealand, also shared the same perspectives with previous speakers on the significant role of the ABTC in reducing the cost of doing business. She shared the difficulties businesses face to stay afloat during these trying times. She also valued face-to-face meetings and active engagement with overseas clients, which a virtual arrangement could not replace. She then suggested adding vaccination passports into the Scheme to support the borders' safe and seamless reopening.

Participants learned that getting the card would be long and tedious in the Q and A session. The value of the ABTC has made travelling within the region more accessible. It has reduced the time, complexity, and costs associated with numerous and frequent visa applications and hold-ups at the immigration lines. Secondly, there was a consensus that a virtual ABTC could be an opportunity and the way forward for future travel in the digital era.

d. Session 4: Reopening Borders: Current Development and Future Engagement of ABTC in the post-COVID-19 Era

In session 4, participants discussed the opportunities and challenges of ABTC implementation with the resumption of international travel post-COVID19. Three officials from Australia, Chile, and Thailand shared their perspectives on how the ABTC scheme can facilitate and support economic recovery, including discussions on the current development of Virtual ABTC (VABTC). Ms Kimberley Stamatis, Convenor of the APEC Business Mobility Group, moderated this session.

Ms Jessica Perez Flores from the Commissioner of Policía de Investigaciones de Chile explained Chile's border control, security operations, and mechanism. She shared that checking the validity of the documents and providing the data analysis in a short period to analyze any security threat is part of her responsibility at the border. ABTC has its special lane with established standard security procedures. However, the new Virtual ABTC will force immigration officers to redevelop the established border security control. She was curious about dealing with security and wondered if there was a study related to its implementation. She also wondered how to perform the process to validate VABTC at the border to identify any vulnerability, as no economy or individual has implemented the VABTC due to the Pandemic.

Mr Simon Harris, Acting Assistant Director of the North Asia and APEC Policy Section, Department of Home Affairs Australia and Australia representative in the BMG, shared updates of the BMG work and current development of the ABTC scheme. He explained that Australia hosts and manages the ABTC system and stores all the information for ABTC applicants for all economies. Currently, the ABTC scheme has around 350,000 active cardholders, which is down about 12% due to the significant impact of COVID-19. He then explained that nine economies have transitioned to the virtual ABTC, while others will join soon. Economies can either be fully transitioned, such as Australia with no physical cards printed or transitioned under a hybrid model, which provides both physical and mobile apps. Virtual ABTC is directly linked to the ABTC system. Therefore, it gives the applicant and the application up-to-date information on the ABTC and its status, including what privileges they have and hopefully, soon, some prompts about when they might need to renew the ABTC. He then added that the BMG is fortunate to have begun digitizing the ABTC scheme since before the Pandemic.

Nevertheless, the pandemic underscores the need and impetus to further strengthen the rationale to modernize and digitize the ABTC. He also shared the current BMG work in exploring the potential for the virtual ABTC to leverage existing platforms such as the mobile wallet or a vaccination certificate. Another initiative is an online lodgment system. This will help economies with the automation and efficiencies of processing applications.

Mr Pratit Santiprabhob, Vice President for Information and Communication Technology, Assumption University of Thailand, shared a new initiative to increase the scheme uptake in the future. Realizing the strong correlation between people and business travel to economic growth, the BMG works on a second-tier card called APEC Frequent Travel Card (AFTC). The AFTC could facilitate a broader applicant pool that includes travellers

from middle management of private companies, SME owners, and professionals, such as architects, engineers, scientists, researchers, healthcare professionals, and academics. However, these will be considered higher-risk profile groups requiring additional security measures.

In the discussion, participants learned that the long pre-clearance processing time is mainly due to a pre-clearance process for each economy to receive and process the application. The card will only be available once all economies approve (or decline) the pre-clearance. The introduction of VABTC is expected to significantly reduce the pre-clearance process since it will take place in real-time. The BMG is extending the card to make it easier for women who are not generally in senior positions and other minority groups within APEC that may not be eligible in the criteria because of their position. The panels also reiterated that the ABTC is a visa that allows the cardholder to be considered a low-risk profile to enter an economy. Regarding future travel through the post-COVID-19 perspective, the ABTC holder might still need additional documents depending on the respective economy's health and safety protocols.

e. Session 5: Next Steps and Recommendation

In this final session, the discussants and participants discussed a set of recommendations drawn from the previous sessions. This session was moderated by Dr Yose Rizal Damuri, Head of the Department of Economics, Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

Mr Nicholas Ho suggested strengthening the ABTC data infrastructure network as an encrypted, secure, and trusted platform to host and facilitate the data for all business cardholders. Mr Ho also envisioned that the virtual ABTC could be a fully integrated travel passport – not just visa-free, special lane, or official channels but can also be combined with different economies' digital passports or airport information integration.

Mr Emmanuel A. San Andres presented the 2020 Mid-Term Review that the ABTC has significantly reduced pre-clearance processing times from around 115 days in 2006 to just, on average, 17 days in 2019, although that there is a wide variation among economies. He also suggested standardizing health protocols and deciding which mechanism is acceptable for everyone. He also emphasized that the ABTC only

represented 0.1% of total airport arrivals in the region. Thus, the ABTC may be developed further as an instrumental element in driving economic growth and promoting cross-border and people mobility in the region.

Mr Andi Setiawan, from the Ministry of Law and Human Rights, Indonesia, reminded that there are approximately 390,000 active ABTC holders in 2019, which were only around 0.1% of all APEC travelers in the same years. This number has shown that since its inception in 1999, the utilization of the ABTC to facilitate business travel has not been as significant as it was intended. He also reiterated the issue of long processing time that has been discussed in almost all sessions. He then pointed out that the main challenge is creating a balance between travel facilitation and border security. Improving the border clearance for easing travel is vital to encourage people to travel between economies. On the other hand, securing the border is also essential to prevent unwanted or unauthorized travelers from entering the economies. The other main concern is the system operability between economies and the requirement of various data elements in different economies.

Mr James Tetlow agreed with the previous speakers that the processing time remains a challenge, as stated in the 2014 study. Thus, the virtual ABTC may help resolve several of these issues. He added that it is also important to continue working with economies that may be slower to adopt the virtual ABTC. Capacity-building activities could also be explored for economies looking at successful practices. He also suggested integrating virtual health apps in the virtual ABTC. He recommended conducting an interim step, where each participating economy can put forward information about the data required for business travelers, such as tests, vaccine certificates, and other supporting information.

f. Closing

Mr Farid Amir, Director for APEC and International Organizations Negotiations, Ministry of Trade, delivered the closing remarks. He stated that the workshop was very helpful in exploring ways to enhance awareness about different measures, technical and institutional challenges, evaluation, and review mechanisms related to the ABTC. He noted that the panels shared their valuable insights with the participants, provided many good suggestions, emphasized the important role of the ABTC in facilitating ease of access for business travel, and underscored the role of the ABTC in facilitating the pre- and post-pandemic cross-border travel. Mr Farid also encouraged economies to

discuss the potential establishment of travel bubbles and quarantine arrangements or mutual recognition of vaccination certification documents without undermining the global requirements set by ICAO and WHO. When the time is right, all these practical solutions would be the answer in facilitating seamless people-to-people connectivity in the region.

Appendix A: Desk Research on APEC Business Travel Card

By: Muhammad Adi Rahman

1. Review of the ABTC

The APEC Business Travel Card (ABTC) was established to facilitate business-related travels and is regarded as one of APEC's most remarkable and tangible outcomes¹. The establishment of the ABTC dates back to 1996 when the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) called the leaders to endorse a travel card mechanism scheme to respond to the need for a streamlined entry for business-related movements within the Asia-Pacific region (ABAC, 1996). APEC Ministers welcomed the initiative in a joint statement in the following year. They noted the value of the ABTC to enhance the movement of business people within the APEC region². The ABTC system was established in 1997 with three-member economies – Australia, Korea, and the Philippines – for the initial trial. This initiative, reiterated by the leaders in 1998, urged economies to improve the ABTC and expand the availability of multiple entry visas or permits to business travellers³.

Despite a steady increase in the application rate and the number of participating economies, how the ABTC scheme operates and its benefits to business travellers and governments have remained essentially unchanged in the first decade of its establishment. The work to improve the ABTC framework has started to be a major discussion among BMG members when in the 2008 report to the APEC economic leaders, the ABAC advised member economies to “consider adopting new technology such as a contactless chip” to improve the system. ABAC also urged economies to enhance the system by some additional measures, including shortening pre-clearance processing times, extending the card's validity term, and encouraging transitional and non-participating economies to join the ABTC scheme.

By June 2013, the membership of ABTC was expanded with 19 economies fully participating in the arrangement, including Australia; Brunei Darussalam; Chile; China; Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; Japan; Korea; Malaysia; Mexico; New Zealand; Papua New Guinea; Peru; the Philippines; Russia; Singapore; Chinese Taipei; Thailand; and Viet Nam. Canada and the United States are transitional members of the initiative.

¹ Supporting Continued Growth in Trade and Facilitation: End to End Review of the APEC Business Travel Card Scheme Final Report (2014)

² APEC Ministerial Meeting Joint Declaration, Vancouver, 1997

³ APEC Leaders Joint Declaration, Kuala Lumpur, 1998

On September 1, 2015, the validity of the ABTC was extended from three to five years⁴. This new policy has dramatically enhanced the user experience by lowering the frequency they had to apply for new cards. As a result, the expansion increased consumer and economic efficiency by reducing the processing time, printing, and delivery costs.

Despite a noticeable increase of 25% from 2019 to 2020⁵, the growth of active ABTC holders was somewhat inconsistent among APEC economies. From 2018 to 2019, several economies faced decreasing numbers of active cardholders, while others experienced stable growth in ABTC holders. This data indicates that there may have been challenges while increasing the number of ABTC holders. At the same time, economies also had to improve their efficiency and mitigate risks in their application mechanism. Some of the factors contributing to the gap could include the divergence of domestic regulation and technological adaptation, overburden or irrelevant application requirements, and limitation of data to be used in the verification process. Furthermore, in terms of the processing time, the ABTC application process currently takes a while from when applicants submit their registration documents to the time, they obtain their card.

2. Trends and analysis of ABTC utilization

Based on the BMG data as of January 2020, out of the 19 fully participating members, a total of 330,017 people is active ABTC holders. However, referring to the data acquired from the Indonesian immigration agency in the last five years (2015–2019), there has been an uneven growth of ABTC holders in the 19 fully participating APEC economies. It has been recorded that, five economies (Chile, Korea, Mexico, Russia, and Singapore) showed a positive and significant increase in the growth of the ABTC cardholders. In comparison, 16 other economies, including Indonesia, have experienced a growth slowdown and tended to decline, as shown in Table 1. Furthermore, the growth of ABTC cardholders may decline sharply amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic.

⁴ Business Mobility Group - APEC. <https://www.apec.org/Groups/Committee-on-Trade-and-Investment/Business-Mobility-Group>

⁵ the BMG 2020 Report

Table 1: Growth of ABTC Card Holder Among Fully Participating Members

	Year				
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Australia	36	3,443	5,959	7,131	6,118
Brunei Darussalam	-	41	48	49	42
Chile	27	446	522	1,128	1,444
China	56	9,947	17,033	18,108	17,824
Hong Kong, China	246	6,163	10,085	14,315	14,062
Indonesia	38	590	1,188	1,727	1,619
Japan	-	2,868	9,312	11,305	10,898
Korea	345	8,811	12,682	17,288	22,443
Malaysia	82	2,927	6,259	6,169	7,780
Mexico	26	270	377	530	632
New Zealand	16	1328	3146	3696	3364
Papua New Guinea	1	21	60	100	85
Peru	12	273	611	599	546
Philippines	16	155	354	348	297
Russia	5	173	304	552	864
Singapore	43	7000	14408	15808	17444
Chinese Taipei	169	2,543	3,833	5,967	5,617
Thailand		2585	3168	3569	3507
Viet Nam	210	3447	4065	5227	4042

An ABTC cardholder may be granted entry in a designated port as shown in Table 1. Indonesia also includes a seaport as a port of entry.

It will take 150–180 days from the application process for the user in a fully participating economy to receive the ABTC card (six months). Due to the number of steps that must be crossed in the ABTC card application phase, it takes to complete the ABTC process varies. The pre-clearance stage, which includes submitting and verifying the documentation by the Domestic Immigration Office, is the first step in the process. This data reaffirmed the APEC Business Travel Card Scheme Review Final Report (2014) findings, showing concerns about unequal adoption levels on utilizing technology among economies. Even though e-government services are overgrowing across the region, ABTC applications are predominantly paper-based, requiring administrative personnel to manually enter all data into the ABTC system.

Table 2: Number of Submissions and approved applicants for ABTC Card in Indonesia

Indonesia							
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Submissions	1049	1522	1388	1478	1302	391	75
Approved	1329	1503	1829	1958	1656	313	56

source: ABTC application – Immigration Agency Indonesia

The immigration agency in Indonesia also revealed an unsynchronous number of submissions and approval (Table 2). There were cases where the number of requests was less than the number approved. This is because the ABTC application process requires an extensive process, thus creating ‘backlog’ applications to which applicants may get approvals only in the following year. There are possibilities that economies may refuse entry to ABTC holders. This issue was pointed out in the 2014 study that recommends applicants should be informed why their application was rejected with options to appeal and investigate further.

3. Conclusion

An in-depth follow-up study should be considered to report the progress of the ABTC and assess the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic in business-related travel within APEC economies and suggest the way forward. The first comprehensive “end-to-end” analysis of the ABTC scheme was convened in 2014. Thus, another study should be considered to review and assess the development of the ABTC and suggest plans to mitigate the severe impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic. A comprehensive follow-up study could provide foundations for the BMG work and harness possible opportunities to implement the arrangement successfully in the future and contribute to the Putrajaya Vision 2040. The new study might also reveal facts and figures of a significant, albeit uneven growth of ABTC applications in the past few years and consider a pathway to efficient end-to-end service for business travellers in the APEC region.

Appendix B: List of Participants

Economy (of Participants)	# Male	# Female	Total
Australia	1	3	4
Brunei Darussalam	3	6	9
Canada	1	1	2
Chile	0	1	1
China	0	1	1
Hong Kong, China	2	3	5
Indonesia	34	35	69
Japan	3	3	6
Korea	3	2	5
Malaysia	15	7	22
Mexico	0	1	1
New Zealand	2	3	5
Peru	0	9	9
Papua New Guinea	4	5	9
Russia	0	2	2
Singapore	1	1	2
Chinese Taipei	2	0	2
Thailand	5	2	7
The Philippines	8	3	11
United States	3	4	7
Viet Nam	4	5	9
Total	91	97	188

Appendix C

1. Pre-Survey Result



Are you ABTC/VABTC holder?

	Response percent	Response count
Yes	6.78%	8
No	93.22%	110

In your opinion, what are the top 5 priorities to improve ABTC?

	1	2	3	4	5	Score	Rank
Simplify application and renewal process	29.06% (34)	29.06% (34)	17.09% (20)	17.09% (20)	77.69% (9)	3.55	1
Capacity building to improve VABTC operations	23.08% (27)	29.06% (34)	19.66% (23)	20.51% (24)	69% (9)	3.39	2
Ensure a widespread awareness	28.21% (33)	22.22% (26)	23.08% (27)	12.82% (15)	13.68% (16)	3.38	3
Additional benefits for VABTC holders	11.11% (13)	8.55% (10)	15.38% (18)	34.19% (40)	30.77% (36)	2.35	4
Expand eligibility to include high skilled workers and/or digital nomad	8.55% (10)	11.11% (13)	24.79% (29)	15.38% (18)	40.17% (47)	2.32	5

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being extremely well-versed, how would you rate your knowledge of ABTC?

Rating	Response percent	Response count
1	11.01%	12
2	36.70%	40
3	37.61%	41
4	12.84%	14
5	1.83%	2

Average rating: 2.58

How much do you agree or disagree with the following?

- All travelers entering APEC Economies should be required to have vaccine passports

	Response percent	Response count
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
Disagree	5.08%	6
Not sure	10.17%	12
Agree	50.85%	60
Strongly agree	33.90%	40

2. Vaccine Passports would be an effective method to ensure safe resumption of overseas/cross border travels

	Response percent	Response count
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
Disagree	2.54%	3
Not sure	12.71%	15
Agree	53.39%	63
Strongly agree	31.36%	37

2. Post-Survey Result



	Response percent	Response count
Male	30.48%	32
Female	69.52%	73

Questions	Average Ratings	Out of
1. How relevant was this project to you and your economy?	4.44	5
2. Rate your level of knowledge of and skills in the topic prior to participating in the event	2.48	5

3. Rate your level of knowledge of and skills in the topic after participating in the event	4.40	5
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4. The objectives of the training were clearly defined

	Response percent	Response count
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
Disagree	0.00%	0
Neutral	0.93%	1
Agree	53.70%	58
Strongly agree	46.30%	50

5. The project achieved its intended objectives

	Response percent	Response count
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
Disagree	0.00%	0
Neutral	1.85%	2
Agree	51.85%	56
Strongly agree	46.30%	50

6. The agenda items and topics covered were relevant

	Response percent	Response count
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
Disagree	0.00%	0
Neutral	0.93%	1
Agree	54.21%	58
Strongly agree	44.86%	48

7. The content was well organized and easy to follow

	Response percent	Response count
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
Disagree	0.00%	0
Neutral	3.70%	4
Agree	40.74%	44
Strongly agree	55.56%	60

8. Gender issues were sufficiently addressed during implementation

	Response percent	Response count
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
Disagree	1.85%	2
Neutral	12.96%	14
Agree	51.85%	56
Strongly agree	34.26%	37

9. The trainers/experts/facilitators were well prepared and knowledgeable about the topic

	Response percent	Response count
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
Disagree	0.00%	0
Neutral	0.00%	0
Agree	45.37%	49
Strongly agree	54.63%	59

10. The materials distributed were useful

	Response percent	Response count
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
Disagree	0.00%	0
Neutral	4.63%	5
Agree	51.85%	56
Strongly agree	43.52%	47

11. The time allotted for the workshop was sufficient

	Response percent	Response count
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
Disagree	3.70%	4
Neutral	4.63%	5
Agree	56.48%	61
Strongly agree	36.11%	39