

# New measures to help logistics sector

Policies rolled out to maintain flow of goods as outbreaks threaten supplies

By XU WEI  
xuwe@chinadaily.com.cn

With COVID-19 lockdowns posing a threat to supply chains, China has adopted stronger measures to ensure unimpeded logistics — especially for daily necessities and key production materials — to shore up economic growth and protect public well-being.

As the country grapples with its biggest COVID-19 challenge since the early days of the pandemic, policymakers have bolstered steps to secure vital supply lines for businesses while putting in place measures to contain the virus.

All provincial regions, except for the Tibet autonomous region, have been hit by COVID-19 outbreaks since March 1. As of April 19, there had been more than 500,000 infections in March and April, according to the National Health Commission.

Wu Chungeng, head of the Department of Road Transportation at the Ministry of Transport, told a news conference on April 19 that measures to contain outbreaks adopted by local authorities have clogged up truck routes in some areas and choked off supplies, heaping pressure on the domestic supply chain.

He gave highways as an example. On April 18, traffic volume was down 39.46 percent year-on-year. For trucks specifically, there was an 8.13 percent decrease over the same period.

The situation is particularly severe in the Yangtze Delta region — which includes Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Anhui provinces and Shanghai — where truck traffic declined 20.85 percent year-on-year.

Wu said the ministry has identified the key challenges facing the logistics sector, including sweeping policies that bar trucks from regions categorized as medium and high-risk, and the closing of highway toll stations and service areas.

To resolve gridlocks in the national transportation network, the central government has rolled out policies and convened special meetings to maintain the operations of the logistics sector.

In one document released on April 10, the Joint Prevention and Control Mechanism of the State Council, the Chinese Cabinet's COVID-19 body, pledged to ensure the orderly operation of key transportation networks.

The document warned local authorities against closing or blocking highways, roads or waterways, saying that ports, train stations, airports and highway service areas cannot be closed arbitrarily.

The outbreaks have already taken a toll on economic growth, as manufacturing activities contracted in March for the first time in five months.

The purchasing managers' index for the manufacturing sector stood at 49.5 in March, compared with 50.2 in February, data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed, declining after rising for four consecutive months.

Zhao Qinghe, a senior statistician with the NBS, said in a statement that logistical gridlocks in March delayed the shipment of goods, with suppliers facing their longest delays since March 2020 — an indicator that manufacturing supply chain stability has been hit by the epidemic.

Premier Li Keqiang has underscored unimpeded logistics as a key



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factor underpinning the stability of commodity prices.

More coordinated measures must be taken to ensure the proper operation of key transport corridors and ports, and more targeted measures must be considered to help truck drivers and logistics operators and reduce costs, he said in a meeting earlier this month.

In another meeting with the governors of five provinces this month, Li called on authorities to give high priority to ensuring the orderly operation of key transportation networks and ports and to ensure the unimpeded operation of domestic and international logistics, while warning of mounting downward pressure facing the economy.

A document released on April 11 stressed the need to set up logistics distribution centers in areas hit hardest by the pandemic, and for

truck drivers to be placed in closed-loop management to prevent the spread of the virus.

Local authorities must set up nucleic acid testing sites for truckers and provide catering for those stranded in areas under lockdown, or who are staying in highway service areas.

It urged financial institutions to prioritize both businesses and self-employed individuals in the logistics sector by offering inclusive loans and lowering interest rates.

Wu said the ministry will prioritize the supply of daily necessities and ensure smooth delivery to communities and businesses.

Other key measures include placing truck drivers under closed-loop management and issuing nationally recognized traffic passes.

The government will focus on ensuring unimpeded logistics in

Shanghai, the epicenter of the latest outbreaks, and the Yangtze River Delta region, one of China's manufacturing powerhouses, he said.

As the Port of Shanghai is the world's largest container port, the outbreak has fueled worries about possible disruptions to global supply chains and foreign trade.

Wu said that about 25,000 workers at the port now operate in bubble environments to ensure normal operations and that port congestion has improved, even compared to the first two months of this year.

Li Cong, vice-president of Zongteng Group, an overseas warehousing and logistics provider, said the recent lockdowns have affected international supply chains, preventing many exporters from delivering products to the ports.

He said many exporters have had to shut down their factories, and the

cost of international shipping is also at a historic high.

Zhang Guoqiang, a researcher at the National Development and Reform Commission's Comprehensive Transport Institute, said that ensuring unimpeded logistics is integral to the economy, and that the government must give greater policy priority to the growth of the sector.

"This is mainly because the sector is labor-intensive and highly competitive, which means that profit margins of businesses are very thin," he said, adding that the sector's importance to economic growth and the job market cannot be overstated.

In addition to protecting the logistics sector from the fallout of the lockdowns, the government should also extend tax cuts and fee reductions to the sector, he said.

## Policy Digest

### Farming must continue in areas with no cases

Agricultural and health authorities in regions with no COVID-19 cases must not prevent farmers from working their fields in the name of epidemic prevention, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and the National Health Commission said.

In guidelines released on Friday, the two departments stated that spring farm work is at a vital stage, and local authorities must ensure the work is not disrupted while containing COVID-19 strictly.

In regions with no cases, authorities should encourage farmers to get vaccinated, follow epidemic prevention requirements and engage in farm work while enhancing measures for self-protection.

Authorities are further prohibited from setting up sentry posts and blocking passage between villages and their surroundings without permission.

They should also clear away any existing obstacles to ensure that farmers are able to return to their homes in time and that the transportation of agricultural materials and produce is not held up.

The notice offered guidance for farmers in regions where there are COVID-19 cases to help them safely carry out farm work and prevent transmission.

As for farmers trapped in cities struck by serious outbreaks but who need to return to the countryside to work, local authorities should help facilitate this by clarifying the requirements they need to meet and procedures they need to follow.

Those who are already locked down in urban or rural areas, however, are not permitted to leave for farm work until the lockdowns are lifted.

### Water conservation campaign begins May 15

This year's National Urban Water Conservation Publicity Week is scheduled for May 15 to 21 and is entitled "Building cities that conserve water to promote green and low-carbon development", the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development said.

Local authorities should make use of traditional and new media to promote water conservation to families, neighborhoods, companies, schools and other institutions, the ministry said.

They should enhance the public's desire to take part in urban water conservation through various means, such as posters, pamphlets, sharing water conservation tips with school students and engaging in technology exchange.

The National Urban Water Conservation Publicity Week falls around May 15 every year.

### Departments promoting vocational education

The Vocational Education Week is scheduled for May 8 to 14, according to the Ministry of Education.

A notice issued by the ministry and nine other departments announced a series of national campaigns to promote vocational education during the week, adding that vocational schools and associated institutions should also plan their own activities.

In doing so, schools should strictly follow epidemic control requirements and organize activities carefully, the notice said.

It also encouraged activities to take place online, such as by organizing online campus tours.

WANG QINGYUN

# Three-year action plan strives to improve employment for disabled

By XU WEI

The central government has rolled out a three-year action plan centered on helping disabled people find jobs, pledging to ramp up vocational training measures and set up better job services.

The action plan (2022-24), which was unveiled by the General Office of the State Council earlier this month, pledged to create 1 million jobs for the disabled and improve

their ability to find jobs and start businesses.

Key measures include creating jobs for the disabled at government departments, public institutions, State-owned enterprises and private businesses.

The plan is the latest effort to help the country's 85 million disabled achieve their full potential.

Yang Lixiong, a professor of social security studies for the disabled at the Renmin University of

China, said it was still difficult for the disabled to find work, and most of the jobs they did find were low-pay and required little expertise.

Citing official figures showing that about 8.61 million had jobs in 2020, and about 85 percent were either working in the agricultural sector, or on flexible payrolls in other sectors, Yang noted that the plan prioritizes the mobilization of assorted sectors in creating jobs for the disabled that offer decent,

better-paid employment.

State-owned enterprises were urged to take the lead in helping the disabled find jobs, saying that companies that failed to assume their responsibilities must contribute to a fund that would benefit the disabled.

The plan highlighted the importance of private business, which accounts for 90 percent of companies in China and over 80 percent of urban employment, in job crea-

tion and added that the government will encourage leading e-commerce companies and courier services to increase recruitment of disabled workers.

Yang said that another highlight of the plan is that it offers targeted, detailed measures to help the disabled, including those living in rural areas as well as college graduates, enhance their professional skills.

Vocational schools will be encouraged to develop training

programs tailored for the disabled, and vocational colleges will receive incentives to expand enrollment.

Those eligible will be offered subsidies and allowances while receiving professional training.

Yang said that a human resources development system featuring special education, rehabilitation services, and professional training and services should be developed.

Professional training should continue even after the disabled find a job, and improved public awareness and stronger legislation are required to phase out job discrimination, he said.