

A Comparative Analysis of Uzbekistan's Railway System: Bridging the Gap with Developed Countries

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ABSTRACT: Usually, countries transport a significant part of goods by water (in the case of foreign trade, this is especially noticeable), but Uzbekistan not only does not have access to the sea itself, but even its neighbors do not have such luxury. Therefore, railway transport plays a key role in trade. The only problem is that Uzbekistan has already outgrown its current railway system.

KEYWORD: materials cooperation, initial prices, transport communications.

The country is getting stronger, finding new economic partners, developing relations with the old ones, so the topic of improving the railway infrastructure is increasingly emerging. The Trans–Afghan railway "Termez—Mazar-I—Sharif—Kabul-Peshawar" stands apart. A new transport corridor with a transit potential of up to 20 million tons of cargo should link the European Union, Russia, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and further Southeast Asian states. In the summer of 2022, a research expedition was held to study the route with a length of more than 700 km, and in 2023 it is planned to create a project office and prepare a feasibility study of the project.

In recent years, there has also been a trend towards closer cooperation with Russia. Back in 2018, President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev said that it was planned to increase trade turnover between the countries and reach figures of \$ 10 billion. Already in 2022, Russia became the main partner in foreign trade, ahead of China and as close as possible to these indicators. This indicates that high-tech non-raw materials cooperation within the countries of the Eurasian Economic Union is in demand and increases the competitiveness of all EAEU members.

In 2021, Uzbekistan received 20 modern Russian metro cars manufactured by Metrovagonmash (part of the Russian company Transmashholding) In general, three quarters of all locomotives of the country were produced on the territory of present-day Russia: 70% in Soviet times, and another 5% in recent years.

It is important to develop the railway transport network of Uzbekistan right now. Russia can become a partner in this key direction for the country. The Russian Federation has already demonstrated the success of its vision of solving the problem by developing a rail transport network and creating one of the most efficient railways in the world in its country. And the agreements reached between the two countries will promote the use of the best Russian practices in Uzbekistan.

In 2021, Transmashholding and Toshkent Metro signed a memorandum on cooperation in the development of the Tashkent metro, which will be valid until 2032.

Their international trade depends on transit through other countries. The need to cross additional borders and overcome long distances to major markets, together with burdensome transit procedures and inadequate infrastructure, significantly increases the overall costs of transport services and other transaction costs, which leads to a decrease in the competitiveness of landlocked developing countries, slows down their economic growth and, as a result, negatively affects their ability to ensure sustainable development.

Countries without access to the sea lag behind countries with a coastline in almost all areas in terms of overall macroeconomic indicators, trade and structural diversification, the ability to support trade, infrastructure, social development, the quality of public administration and the environment. Such States are highly dependent on the transit of goods through neighboring territories, which imposes an additional cost on the initial prices of exported and imported goods. In order to compete in the foreign market, countries are forced to lower prices to the detriment of their interests, to go to rather expensive import deals.

Air transportation also cannot serve as an adequate substitute for sea transportation due to its high cost. They do not have sufficiently coordinated rules and procedures for cargo transfer, and the volume of cross-border investments and private sector participation are limited. Under the influence of all realities, a limited range of goods, in particular, agricultural products and mineral resources, increasingly characterizes the export structure of most of these countries.

This fact is confirmed by the indicators of the Economic Complexity Index (ECI), which assesses the level of industrial diversity in relation to other countries. The share of these goods in exports currently ranges from 33 percent to 95.6.

The program laid the foundation for establishing partnerships between landlocked and transit countries. Moderate economic growth was achieved in a ten-year period with an average annual increase in GDP by 4.5 percent and an increase of 6.5 percent after 2013.

The logical continuation of the plan was the adoption of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014-2024. Its documents are being consistently implemented in Uzbekistan, as well as in all 32 landlocked developing countries.

The Central Asian region is tasked with ensuring free and affordable access to sea transportation, reducing operational and transport costs associated with border crossing. In addition to price changes, a plan has been defined to revise the procedure for passing administrative checks for cargo and the registration process in order to reduce time costs. This dictates the need to expand the current transit infrastructure.

Over the past period, a lot of work has been done on the formation of modern road transport infrastructure, the opening of new routes to world markets, the creation of modern transport communications connecting our country with other regions of the world. Much attention was paid to the construction of railways and the creation of a unified railway network in Uzbekistan. The first step was the construction of the Navoi—Uchkuduk—Sultonvaistog—Nukus railway line with a length of 700 km, as well as the only modern combined railway-automobile bridge in Central Asia with a length of 681 m across the Amu Darya. Then the Tashguzar — Baysun — Kumkurgan railway line was built with a length of 223 km, which allowed us to reduce the distance of freight and passenger transportation to 170 km and freed us from the need to pay for transit, on the contrary, to earn money on it.

In recent years, a new railway network with a total length of more than 1,200 km has been laid in Uzbekistan, more than 3,800 km of roads have been modernized and reconstructed, and almost 1,100 km of railway lines have been electrified. As a result, the total length of railways covering all regions of our country amounted to 6,500 km.

Highways are an important resource in the development of international communications. Last year alone, almost 256 kilometers of highways were reconstructed, 94.4 kilometers of highways of international and national significance were overhauled. Currently, the total length of the highway network in the republic exceeds 183 thousand kilometers. Of these, more than 42.6 thousand kilometers are highways of international, national and local significance. This also includes the Uzbek National Highway, which is about three thousand kilometers long.

This year, the National Airline of Uzbekistan celebrated its 25th anniversary. Over the past years, the industry has implemented many major projects. The ground infrastructure of airports has been modernized, the fleet of aircraft has been completely updated and new aircraft have been mastered. New routes have been opened, terminals and air terminals with high capacity have been built, advanced technologies have been introduced. Today, all 11 airports of the republic have the status of international. Uzbekistan airlines regularly land and take off in more than 50 cities in Europe and Asia, operate charter flights from Alaska to New Zealand.

Regional integration, consistent and coordinated regional policy open up opportunities for Uzbekistan to strengthen ties in the field of transit transport and ensure the expansion of trade within the region, coordination of common regulatory policy, cooperation of border authorities and coordination of customs procedures.

The incentive to expand trade activity is the gradual development of a holistic, high-quality regional infrastructure. Currently, Uzbekistan, for example, relies on a more technological level of production and avoiding resource dependence on foreign trade. Thus, the task has been set to establish the export of already processed cotton yarn and finished textile products. This more development-oriented method of selling domestic resources will bring the country more profit than commodity trade.

"The development of road transport links - one of the important directions of the Silk Road economic project — is a priority of our bilateral cooperation," Chinese President Xi Jinping said at the time. "We attach great importance to Uzbekistan as a regional transport hub and are interested in increasing cooperation with Uzbek partners in this area, continuously strengthening infrastructure relationships in the region in order to create the best conditions for the development of both countries."

During a state visit to Turkmenistan on March 6-7, 2017, President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev and President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov signed a joint statement in which the heads of state highly appreciated the opening of the Turkmenabad—Farab road and railway bridges. Their use will increase the transit potential of the two countries and create favorable conditions for a multiple increase in the volume of cargo transit through Turkmenistan and further the Trans-Caucasian Transport Corridor to the countries of Southern and Central Europe, the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia.



The defined Strategy of Uzbekistan's actions confirms the intention to consistently continue the creation and development of state and regional platforms to ensure sustainable economic growth. Without access to the sea, the development of alternative ways of integration is the most important task for our country, determining the future of Uzbekistan.

It is known that Uzbekistan has been famous since ancient times as a state located on the Great Silk Road connecting the West and the East. To date, this ancient way continues to exist in a new form, connecting peoples. Currently, the modernization of the country's economy and renewal, the formation of qualitatively new structures, the integrated development of regions is associated with the improvement of the transport and communication system.

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