

DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE IN CENTRAL ASIA AND ITS ROLE IN REGIONAL INTEGRATION

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Annotation: This article presents an analytical approach to the development of transport infrastructure in Central Asia and its important role in regional integration. The impact of transport infrastructure on regional trade, investment flows, labor migration, and political cooperation will be studied. Particular attention is paid to the geographical location and transit potential of Uzbekistan, as well as the prioritization of the transport sector in the country's development strategy until 2030. The article analyzes the possibilities of deepening regional integration processes in Central Asia through the improvement of transport infrastructure.

Keywords: Central Asia, transport infrastructure, regional integration, transit potential, Strategy of Uzbekistan 2030, economic integration.

Introduction. Transport infrastructure is one of the decisive factors in economic development, the expansion of trade relations, and the deepening of regional integration. Without an effective transport system, the free movement of goods, services, and human capital will not be ensured, which slows down economic growth and limits cooperation between states. Therefore, the development of transport infrastructure has become a strategic priority for many countries today.

This issue is especially relevant for the Central Asian region. Since not all countries of the region have access to the sea, their access to foreign markets directly depends on transport and transit corridors. Insufficient development of transport infrastructure leads to increased trade costs, disruption of logistics chains, and weakening of economic ties within the region. On the contrary, modern and interconnected transport networks create important conditions for strengthening regional integration in Central Asia, integrating domestic markets, and deepening integration into the global economic system.

Uzbekistan occupies a special place in this process. Geographically located in the center of the region, Uzbekistan borders all the countries of Central Asia and, naturally, has the potential to act as a transit and logistics center. The open and pragmatic regional policy pursued in recent years has further strengthened Uzbekistan's role in the transport sector, transforming it into a regional link.

The definition of the development of transport and logistics infrastructure as one of the priority areas in the Strategy "Uzbekistan-2030" also confirms the strategic importance of this issue. The Strategy aims not only to develop the national economy but also to achieve sustainable and deep integration in Central Asia through the modernization of transport networks, increasing transit potential, and expanding regional cooperation. In this regard, the

development of transport infrastructure is one of the main drivers of integration processes both for Uzbekistan and for the entire region.

In the "Uzbekistan - 2030"¹ Strategy, deepening the country's integration into global transport and logistics networks and significantly increasing the potential of the national transport system is defined as a priority task. The Strategy provides for the following main goals:

- It is planned to bring the volume of transit cargo transportation through the territory of the republic to 16 million tons, as well as to reduce the duration of railway transportation in the northern direction by 40 percent.

- The task was set to triple the volume of passenger and freight transportation services and bring the electrified section of railways to 65 percent.

- In the aviation sector, it is planned to increase the number of flights by 4 times.

- A total of 56 thousand kilometers of roads will be built and repaired throughout the country.

- It is planned to transition to market principles in tariffs for transport services and attract private and foreign operators to the sector.

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- A total of 5.5 thousand kilometers of cement-concrete pavement roads are planned to be built from district centers to rural settlements.

- The construction of highways on the Tashkent - Samarkand and Tashkent - Fergana Valley routes is planned on the basis of public-private partnership.

Uzbekistan is a country with unique geographical and political advantages for its formation as a transport hub in Central Asia. The fact that Uzbekistan borders all the countries of the

¹ O'zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidentining Farmoni, 11.09.2023 yildagi PF-158-son "O'zbekiston — 2030" strategiyasi to'g'risida <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/-6600413>

region naturally makes it the main transit zone. This geographical location allows the country to integrate transport flows within the region, coordinate trade corridors, and strengthen interstate economic ties. As a result, Uzbekistan has the potential to become an important transport and logistics center not only at the national, but also at the regional level.

Uzbekistan's strategic advantage as a transit country is linked to its main transport corridors located in the north-south and east-west directions. These routes will allow Central Asian countries to connect with the markets of China, Russia, South Asia, and the Middle East. The growth of transit potential plays an important role in reducing transport costs, shortening delivery times, and increasing trade volumes for the countries of the region. The open and constructive regional policy pursued by Uzbekistan in recent years has brought cooperation in the field of transport to a new level. Strengthening trust between states has created favorable conditions for the implementation of joint infrastructure projects, the development of transport corridors, and the coordination of transit processes. This further strengthened Uzbekistan's role in the regional transport system.

In practice, this process is reflected in large railway projects. In particular, the initiative to develop the Southern Route through Afghanistan will serve to connect Central Asia with the ports of South Asia and expand the region's access to sea routes. In addition, the construction of modern logistics centers in Uzbekistan contributes to the effective management of cargo flows, the development of multimodal transportation systems, and the intensification of regional trade.

The simplification of border procedures and the digitalization of customs procedures are also important factors strengthening the role of Uzbekistan as a transport hub. The reduction of time and costs at border crossing points has a positive impact on the deepening of trade and economic integration, activating transport links within the region. Thus, Uzbekistan is becoming one of the main drivers of regional integration in Central Asia through transport infrastructure.

The Strategy "Uzbekistan-2030" defines the development of transport infrastructure as one of the priority tasks as a roadmap for the country's long-term economic development. In the strategy, the modernization of the transport and logistics sector is aimed not only at increasing the efficiency of the national economy, but also at maximizing the involvement of the transit potential of the region. This is an important factor in strengthening Uzbekistan's position as a transport hub in Central Asia and ensuring its connection to global logistics chains.

The strategy primarily provides for the digitalization of transport infrastructure and the introduction of advanced technologies. The implementation of digital logistics systems will make it possible to optimize cargo management and tracking, simplify customs procedures, and increase the transparency of transport processes. This, in turn, accelerates transit processes, strengthens and unites economic ties between the countries of the region. This increases economic efficiency through the formation of production chains and the expansion of mutual exchange of products and services. Improvement of transport infrastructure will serve to bring domestic markets closer together and increase competitiveness.

The effective functioning of transport networks contributes to increasing trade volumes and attracting new investments. Reducing logistics costs in the region creates a favorable environment for foreign and local investors, which stimulates economic growth. Furthermore, the development of transport systems will expand international trade corridors and facilitate the

more active integration of Central Asia into the global economic system. As transport infrastructure develops, labor migration between the countries of the region becomes easier. This, in turn, contributes to the effective management of labor flows and the regulation of migration processes, strengthening social and economic ties. Easy and safe transport corridors ensure consistency between labor markets.

Cooperation in regional transport projects strengthens political trust and dialogue between states. Jointly implemented infrastructure projects not only combine economic interests, but also play an important role in creating an atmosphere of stability and security in the region. Thus, transport infrastructure will become an important instrument of regional political integration.

In conclusion, the development of transport infrastructure stands out as one of the key drivers of regional integration in Central Asia. Uzbekistan is geographically the heart of the region, and its transit potential and strategic location are of great importance for the effective functioning of the regional transport system. The definition of the transport and logistics sector as a priority in the Development Strategy of Uzbekistan until 2030 will further strengthen the country's role in regional integration. By modernizing transport infrastructure, increasing transit potential, and implementing digital logistics systems, Uzbekistan will not only develop the national economy but also ensure the effective integration of Central Asia into the global economic system.

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