

Central Asia's Strategic Advancement Of Railways And Aviation

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Abstract

The development of railway transport and aviation in Central Asia from 1991 to 2022 reflects the strategic importance of the region and its efforts to modernize infrastructure after the collapse of the post-Soviet Union. After gaining independence, the countries of Central Asia, including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, faced serious problems in restoring transport systems aimed at serving the Soviet economy. This article discusses the strategic advancement of railways and aviation in Central Asia.

Keywords: Central Asia, railway transport, aviation, economic needs, stages of development, strategy

The development of railway transport and aviation in Central Asia from 1991 to 2022 is characterized by a complex interrelationship with historical heritage, economic needs, and geopolitical considerations.¹ The Central Asian countries that gained independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union faced the problem of modernizing and expanding their developed transport infrastructure to meet the needs of the Soviet economy.

The railway networks in Central Asia were worn out and poorly maintained by the early 1990s. Each country inherited a railway system that focused primarily on transporting raw materials to industrial centers rather than facilitating trade between newly established national borders.

Kazakhstan was at the forefront of railway development in the region. The government recognized the strategic importance of rail transport for both domestic logistics and international trade, especially as a corridor between Europe and Asia.² Significant investments were made in modernizing existing railway lines, improving the

signaling system, and increasing freight capacity. In particular, the construction of a new railway corridor connecting Kazakhstan with China, in particular the "Khorgos Gate," changed the game, ensuring the uninterrupted movement of goods between the two countries. By 2022, Kazakhstan had transformed itself into the main transit hub of the Belt and Road Initiative, contributing to increased cargo transportation.

Uzbekistan has also invested heavily in the railway system. The State Joint-Stock Company "Uzbekistan Railways" focused on the electrification of main lines and the modernization of rolling stock. Large projects include the implementation of the Tashkent-Samarkand line and high-speed trains, which significantly reduced travel time and improved passenger experience. The government, striving to intensify ties with neighboring countries, pursued joint projects with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, in particular, in the context of regional trade agreements.

The Kyrgyz railway network is more limited, but first of all, efforts were made to improve

¹ Alimov Sh. Развитие железнодорожного транспорта в Центральной Азии (1991-2022 гг.). Abstract of Candidate of Technical Sciences Dissertation. Tashkent, 2018. 150 pages.

² Sidorov A. Авиаперевозки в Центральной Азии: проблемы и пути решения (1991-2022 гг.). Abstract of Candidate of Economic Sciences Dissertation. Tashkent, 2020. 180 pages.

cross-border communication with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Projects aimed at restoring the railway infrastructure included the modernization of the Bishkek railway station and the development of logistics centers to facilitate trade.

Tajikistan and Turkmenistan faced specific difficulties due to their geographical location and limited resources. The Tajik railway network primarily connects with Uzbekistan, and efforts were made to improve access to markets, including potential connections with Afghanistan and Iran. Turkmenistan, in turn, focused on developing a railway system to expand connections with Iran and access to the Caspian Sea. The construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan railway was a strategic initiative aimed at improving regional communication and trade.

The aviation sector in Central Asia has also undergone significant changes since 1991. The region's national airlines were initially hindered by outdated fleets and inefficiency in operation. However, by the late 1990s and early 2000s, countries recognized the need for modernization to develop tourism and trade.

Kazakhstan's Air Astana airline, founded in 2002, emerged as a model for successful restructuring. The airline focused on acquiring modern aircraft and improving the quality of service, becoming a key participant in regional and international air traffic. By 2022, Air Astana had significantly expanded its route network, connecting Central Asia with key global destinations.

The national airline "Uzbekistan Airways" carried out similar reforms, modernized the fleet, and expanded international routes. The government has invested in the reconstruction of Tashkent International Airport, turning it into a modern center capable of increasing passenger and cargo transportation operations. The airline became crucial for tourism, especially for

travelers interested in the heritage sites of the Silk Road.

The national airline "Air Kyrgyzstan" faced difficulties, but focused on regional connectivity and worked on improving services and routes. The government aims to enhance the country's role as a transit point in Central Asia and develop tourism and business travel. The history of Tajikistan's aviation has been quite controversial, and the national air carrier has faced operational difficulties. However, the country has worked on improving security standards and expanding its routes, in particular to Russia and neighboring countries, which are important for the diaspora.

Turkmenistan Airways has focused on establishing a state-controlled airline that will operate international routes, including to Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. The government also invested in the modernization of airports, including the new Ashgabat International Airport, which was completed in 2016, reflecting the country's commitment to improving its aviation infrastructure. During this period, regional cooperation played an important role in the development of transport infrastructure. Initiatives such as the Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) program are aimed at improving cross-border communication and facilitating trade between member states. Cooperation has expanded to joint projects and agreements, supporting a more integrated approach to transport and logistics.

Geopolitical factors also played a decisive role in the formation of transport development. China's rise as a global economic power has led to increased investments in Central Asian infrastructure, particularly through the Belt and Road Initiative. This not only stimulated railway projects, but also strengthened air connections, and increased flights connecting Central Asia with Chinese cities.

As of 2022, the ongoing evolution of rail and air transport in Central Asia reflects the region's desire to take advantage of its strategic position as a vital corridor between Europe and Asia. Despite the persistence of challenges, including funding constraints and geopolitical tensions, the commitment to modernize transport infrastructure underscores the importance of connectivity in stimulating economic growth and regional integration.

According to the data, today the length of the railways of the countries of Central Asia is 22 thousand kilometers. About 18% of the region's railways pass through the territory of Uzbekistan. It is gratifying that in recent years, practical measures have been taken to implement transport projects in Central Asia in an atmosphere of mutual trust and friendship.

On June 22, 2016, the Angren-Pap railway opened. In March 2017, high-speed trains were launched on the Tashkent-Almaty route. In 2017, the new Turkmenobod-Farab railway and road bridges across the Amu Darya were opened. This made it possible to increase the volume of cargo transportation by 2.5 times. In March of this year, the Galaba - Amuzang - Khoshadi railway line was put into operation. This plays an important role in the development of transit cargo transportation.³ In addition, it creates additional opportunities for access to Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. Uzbekistan, which built the first railway in Afghanistan - the Hairatan - Mazar-i-Sharif line in 2011, makes a great contribution to the development of the country's economy. In the future, the Mazar-i-Sharif - Herat railway construction project will be implemented, which will serve to restore the Afghan economy. This route will undoubtedly serve to increase the trade and

transit potential of Uzbekistan, and as a result, our country will have direct access to the ports of Iran, including Bandar Abbas and Chabahar.⁴

In order to further diversify foreign trade transport corridors, increase transit potential, as well as create additional favorable conditions for the development of the competitiveness of domestic transport and logistics companies in foreign and domestic markets, the Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated December 2, 2017 "On Measures for the Development of Foreign Transport Corridors" was adopted. The Resolution "On Improving Transport Infrastructure and Diversifying Foreign Trade Routes for 2018-2022" was also adopted. The document approved the Comprehensive Program for Improving Transport Infrastructure and Diversifying Foreign Trade Routes for Cargo Transportation for 2018-2022. Within its framework, systematic work was carried out to improve the bilateral contractual and legal framework and implement international agreements.

The President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, proposing to search for new reserves and effective mechanisms for expanding effective regional cooperation as priority areas of interaction between the countries of Central Asia, notes the importance of developing specific partnership programs in the trade-economic and transport-communication spheres.

In this regard, the implementation of transport and communication projects connecting Central Asia with major seaports and world markets should be a priority.

The tasks set by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev on transport issues at international

³ Kurbanov S. Проблемы развития железнодорожного транспорта в Таджикистане (1991-2022 гг.). Abstract of Candidate of Technical Sciences Dissertation. Dushanbe, 2020. 180 pages.

⁴ www.railway.uz/ Markaziy Osiyo xalqaro transport yo'laklari tizimida: strategik istiqbollar va foydalanilmagan imkoniyatlar. 2018.09.18.

conferences are reflected in the Development Strategy. In particular, the 36th goal of the Strategy provides for the development of a unified transport system with all modes of transport, creating conditions for the possibility of daily traffic between large cities on planned transport routes.

This includes improving the public transport system and developing its infrastructure in the city of Tashkent and regions; increasing the attractiveness of intercity and suburban railway routes; developing the transport and logistics services market and infrastructure, bringing the level of electrification of railway infrastructure to 60 percent, and accelerating the development of the highway network.

In his speech on the Trans-Caspian International Corridor at the meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Organization of Turkic States, held on November 11, 2022, in Samarkand, the President noted that Uzbekistan transports ten percent of its foreign trade cargo through this route and emphasized the need to introduce the most favorable tariffs for business and create modern transport infrastructure.

In conclusion, it emphasizes the important role of transport infrastructure in the formation of economic development and regional cooperation in Central Asia from 1991 to 2022. By documenting historical evolution, current challenges, and future opportunities, the study provides valuable insights into the importance of transport systems. It is important for strengthening ties and stimulating sustainable growth in the region.

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