



Afghanistan Policy Page

A one-page brief from the [Afghanistan Congressional Communications Hub](#) on a major issue concerning U.S. policy and engagement in Afghanistan.

11 March
2010

Modes of Transport

Take Aways

The poor quality of Afghanistan's transport infrastructure hurts international trade and inhibits economic growth – which are vital components of the U.S. development strategy in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is a landlocked country, currently reliant on air or overland modes of transport that prevent the efficient transfer of container freight and natural resources.

Key Facts

Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation:
Dr. Raz Mohammad Alami

Afghanistan has around 60 airports, and there are four Afghan airlines operating international flights:

- **Ariana** – Government controlled, est. 1955 and expanded through a joint venture with Pan-Am during the 60s and 70s. Its fleet was almost totally destroyed during the coalition invasion post-9/11.
- **Pamir Air** – est. 1995 as Afghanistan's first private airline. Pilgrims traveling to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj are a significant part of its business.
- **Kam Air** and **Safi Airways** – both privately owned, est. 2003 and 2006 respectively, in response to the increased demand for flights from the international community working in Afghanistan.

Major destinations for direct international flights to/from Kabul include:

- Dubai, Frankfurt, Istanbul and Ankara, Moscow, Jeddah and Riyadh, Kuwait, Delhi, Islamabad, Almaty (Kazakhstan), and Dushanbe (Tajikistan).

Kabul International Airport is the major international air transport hub, and has undergone considerable expansion and renovation since 2001, including opening a new terminal in 2008 funded by Japan.

Less than 30% of Afghanistan's 26,000 miles of road is paved.

- The estimated cost for transporting goods and raw materials in Afghanistan is 25-50% of their sale price. In most healthy economies this figure is less than 10%.

Key Issues

Roads and Highways – The majority of the \$2.2 billion international aid since 2001 in the transport sector went to improving Afghanistan's roads and highways. This can was intended for quick impact on economic growth and improved mobility for security forces.

- **Automobiles** – Vehicles are a popular form of small-scale investment because other assets such as real estate and agricultural land remain insecure. Cars are also used to store value in the absence of effective banking systems. The UN ranks Afghanistan as the second lowest country in the world for vehicles per capita.
- **Buses and Taxis** – Many Afghans rely on hired taxis, informal carpooling, and private bus operators for regional travel in Afghanistan.
- **Trucks** – The vast majority of cargo is transported on heavy trucks, often dangerously overloaded, causing wear-and-tear damage to many of Afghanistan's roads.

Airline Industry – The Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation is responsible for regulation of the airlines industry, and works with international partners and donors for the rehabilitation, organization and management of Afghan Airspace.

- In November 2009 the ministry produced a 'Civil Aviation Master Plan', setting out plans for the reconstruction of the civil aviation system. Its goals include: raising capacity within the sector's technical workforce; building and reconstruction of aviation infrastructure; and promoting private sector investment.
- Air transport is by far the quickest means of travel due to Afghanistan's mountainous terrain, and often the safest. The airspace over Afghanistan is quite crowded by fixed- and rotary-wing civilian and military aircraft, as well as drones.

Trains – Afghanistan does not have a nationwide rail system. There are currently two short border crossings into Afghanistan from railways in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Goods must be transferred to trucks, adding time and cost to international shipping.

- A railway link from Herat in western Afghanistan into Iran is under construction.
- Several rail links with Pakistan are proposed: extensions of railways near the Khyber Pass to Kabul and Quetta to Kandahar.
- A nationwide rail system is proposed, which would allow considerable trade though Afghanistan. Serious technical concerns remain, primarily the use of different gauge rails in by Afghanistan's neighbors.

Shipping – Afghanistan is landlocked but has access to neighboring countries' ports.

- A bilateral treaty signed with Pakistan in 1965 allows tariff-free transit of goods to Afghanistan from the port of Karachi, although the treaty is occasionally in dispute.
- Afghanistan has a treaty with Iran for port access at Chabahar and Bandar Abbas.
- Afghanistan's border with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan is largely defined by the Amu Darya (Oxus) River, which is open to barge traffic.

Major Transport Challenges and Opportunities

- **Security** – Road transport remains hazardous due to militant and criminal activity, and illegal roadblocks often collect tolls adding to the cost of travel. Furthermore, coalition forces are often targeted with roadside bombs causing civilian casualties.
- **Potential Regional Trade Hub** – Afghanistan has the potential to play a key role as a transit route in Central Asia for goods going to ports in Pakistan and the Caspian, and onwards to South and East Asia, the Middle East and Europe. However, its weak infrastructure currently constrains or prevents the transport of major commodities such as oil, gas, and fresh water. Billions of dollars worth of natural resources in Afghanistan are currently unable to efficiently reach international markets.

Possible Questions

- What is being done to encourage private sector investment in the transport sector?
- What are the most cost-effective investments in which the international community can make in partnership with the Afghan Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation?

Further Reading

[Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation](#)
[ANDS](#)

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