

Roads in Afghanistan

Take Aways

- The World Bank classifies Afghanistan's road system as one of the **worst in the world**.
- Improved transport is fundamental for Afghanistan's **economic growth**.
- **Afghanistan lacks strong road maintenance capabilities**, which is crucial for sustaining costly infrastructure development.
- Local village-level participation is crucial for construction projects' stewardship, and to foster links with the national government.
- The **majority of casualties suffered by coalition forces** are from roadside ambushes and IEDs.
- **Secure, dependable supply routes** are some of the most significant strategic elements of the U.S. and coalition efforts in Afghanistan.

Key Issues

Shattered Infrastructure – Decades of war destroyed Afghanistan's road networks, and the deteriorating security situation has caused significant delays and higher costs for road reconstruction. **Fewer than 30% of its 26,000 miles** of roads are paved. Roads are often targeted by the Taliban, and used in ambushes and IED attacks against coalition forces.

Economic Development – Afghanistan is deeply landlocked; Kabul is over 1,200 miles from the nearest seaport, Karachi, in Pakistan. The Afghan government has put a high priority on road reconstruction to foster economic growth by improving access to local and international markets for its largely agriculture-based economy. USAID reports that paving roads improved travel times and enabled farmers to get more produce to market without damage. E.g. Walnut exports increased from 270 tons in 2008 to 2,000 tons in 2009.

International Assistance – Some analysts, including the GAO, worry that international actors constructing roads in Afghanistan have not conducted sound impact evaluations during the planning stages, coordinated their construction efforts, or assessed the effectiveness of their results.

The Ring Road – Approximately 60% of Afghans live within 30 miles of the 1,925 mile Ring Road, which connects Afghanistan's major cities. USAID leads the Ring Road reconstruction, which is 90% completed and nearly two years behind schedule.

Sustainability and Maintenance

- **Significant human and financial resource constraints** – The Ring Road alone will cost at least \$200 million per year in upkeep, and many Afghan engineers have emigrated.
- **Fragmented institutional structure** – The Afghan ministries of Transport, Public Works, and Rural Rehabilitation & Development have competing stakes but low actual capacity in the transportation sector.
- **No sustainable revenue collection** – The Afghan government lacks a comprehensive legal framework and means of fee collection enforcement.

U.S. Road Maintenance Assistance – USAID is working to foster capacity in the Afghan Ministry of Public Works for road maintenance. However, while two thirds of the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds are used for road construction, the Department of Defense Financial Management Regulations prohibits any CERP funds to be used for infrastructure maintenance. New CERP-funded roads can deteriorate if they are not coordinated with the Afghan government.

Possible Questions

- How are the impacts of international assistance in the road construction sector being studied before, during, and after road construction projects to ensure maximum effectiveness?
- What is being done **to develop a fiscally sustainable road maintenance program in Afghanistan?**
- What is being done **to encourage Afghan ownership of road construction projects?**
- What strategies exist to provide security for Afghanistan's roads?

Top Key Facts

- **\$1.7 billion provided by the U.S. for road construction since 2002 through DoD and USAID funding.**
- **63% of total CERP budget (approx. \$800 million) dedicated to road construction (though none for ongoing maintenance).**
- **90% of Ring Road (1,384 miles) is complete at a total cost of \$2.5 billion.**
- 1,840 miles of new regional roads have been completed.
- **\$200 million per year:** minimum yearly maintenance cost of the Ring Road.
- **75% of coalition forces casualties are from roadside bombs**

In the News: David Sedney, U.S. assistant defense secretary for Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that, despite recent road construction, the lack of roads and entry points are "huge limiting factors in our ability to deliver supplies throughout Afghanistan." (*World Tribune*, Jan 7 2010)

Further Reading

- [U.S. GAO Report on Internationally-Funded Roads](#)
- [World Bank: Transportation in Afghanistan](#)

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