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## **ML1 Project of CPEC and Pakistan's Connectivity with Central Asia through Rail and Road**



### **Summary**

1. CPEC, initiated in 2013 as a joint economic venture between Pakistan and China, is an essential component of the China's Belt and Road Initiative.
2. This paper outlines national development and regional integration as a result of successful completion of the project. It also underlines the ML1 project under the umbrella of CPEC. The other areas covered under the study include:
  - Refurbishing and construction of new bridges
  - Upgrading the signaling and telecom system
  - Enhanced trade and economic opportunities
  - Enhanced trade and economic growth
  - Road Connectivity



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## Abstract

A major infrastructure project under the China – Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the ML-1 (Main Line 1) project aims to modernize Pakistan’s railway network, particularly its main rail artery from Karachi to Peshawar. With an estimated cost \$6.8 billion, this project is expected to improve Pakistan’s transportation capabilities, shorten travel time and boost the effectiveness of both passengers and freight movement as part of Pakistani border connectivity strategy with Central Asia. It will also serve as a catalyst for the integration of regional economies. The ML-1 upgrade would improve the country’s internal logistics network and provide new opportunities for investment and trade by offering smooth rail and road access to the Central Asian states via Pakistan’s northern regions. Through multibillion dollar investment in CPEC, China is enabling Pakistan to build its economy on solid footings thereby opening vistas of seamless opportunities. This will enhance the geo-economic significance of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by positioning Pakistan as a major transit hub. It is anticipated that the project will increase economic activity, promote regional collaboration and open up trade prospects between South and Central Asia and beyond. China-Pakistan bilateral relations present unique example of mutual trust and respect in contemporary world of international relations.

**Key Words:** *China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), ML1 Project, Bel and Road Initiative (BRI), CPEC progress, CPEC and Regional Cooperation, CPEC and Economic Boost*



## 1. CPEC: a harbinger of sustainable economic development and regional connectivity

China Pakistan bilateral relations present unique example of mutual trust and respect in contemporary world of international relations. The relationship between both countries has endured hardship and challenging environment over the course of more than seven decades and proved its resilience against all odds. The all-weather China Pakistan friendship reached its zenith with the inception of China Pakistan Economic Corridor in July 2013. An essential component of the China's Belt and Road Initiative, CPEC offers extended avenues of national development and regional integration. The conceptual framework depicted through the idea of "1+4" referring to; 1) Gwadar Port, 2) transport infrastructure, 3) energy, and 4) industrial cooperation surrounding the core of CPEC. A glance over the past ten years of CPEC reveal increased economic development in the South Asian country coupled with greater avenues for regional connectivity and integration breaking the barriers of isolation amid deteriorating national development. Beyond cementing China Pakistan bilateral ties by realizing China's BRI vision or supporting Pakistan's economic development, CPEC projects promise greater connectivity avenues for landlocked Central Asian Republics who seek greater access to deep-water ports located in Pakistan. Over the course of one decade, China has invested \$25.4 billion in key areas of CPEC and created 200,000 jobs to stabilize Pakistan's economic outlook.<sup>1</sup>

The completed transport infrastructure projects under CPEC include: KKH Phase II (Havelian – Thakot section) – Havelian to Mansehra section inaugurated on 18 November 2019 and Mansehra to Thakot section inaugurated on 28 July 2020; Peshawar to Karachi Motorway (Multan-Sukkur section) – completed and inaugurated on 05 November 2019; Orange Line Metro Train Lahore – completed and inaugurated on 25 October 2020; Cross Border Optical Fiber Cable (Khunjrab-Rawalpindi) – completed and inaugurated in July 2018; Pilot Project of Digital Terrestrial Multimedia Broadcast (DTMB) – pilot project inaugurated in April 2015; and Hakla to D.I. Khan Motorway – completed and inaugurated on 05 January 2022. Under construction projects are: Zhob to Quetta (Kuchlak N-50) – groundbreaking held on 29 March 2019; Khuzdar-Basima Road N-30 – work began in October 2019; Hoshab to Awaran Rod section M-8 – began in June 2021; KKH Alternate Route Shandur to Chitral Road –

<sup>1</sup> Sohail Mahmood, "A decade of CPEC: sustaining the promise of friendship and prosperity," *PIVOT* 5, no. 3 (October 2023): 05-07.





groundbreaking held in April 2021; and Nokundi to Mashkhel road – groundbreaking held on 20 May 2021.<sup>2</sup>

The transport infrastructure projects in pipeline are: up-gradation and dualization of ML-1 and establishment of Dry Port near Havelian – PC-1 approved by ECNEC on 05 August 2020; up-gradation of D.I. Khan (Yarik) – Zhob N-50 Phase-I – PC-1 approved by ECNEC on 12 April 2017; KKH Alternative Route Gilgit-Shandur Road – PC-1 approved on 04 June 2021 with a cost of Rs. 49.9 billion; Realignment of KKH Phase-I Thakot to Raikot section; Peshawar to D.I. Khan Motorway – PC-1 approved with a cost of Rs. 276 billion; Awaran to Khuzdar road section M-8 – PC-1 approved on 26 May 2021 at the cost of Rs. 32 billion; Dir Expressway – PC-I approved with a cost of Rs. 38.9 billion; and DTMB-A – digitalization of existing three sites of PTV. Long term projects are: Mirpur-Muzaffarabad-Mansehra road, Karachi-Pangur road, Quetta Mass Transit, and Greater Peshawar Region Mass Transit.<sup>3</sup> However, despite all the progress, CPEC is challenged from various fronts such as geopolitical and security risks, governance deficit, economic growth disparities, and geographical constraints.

### **1.1 ML1 project of CPEC**

Termed as strategic, the ML1 project is one of the major transport infrastructure projects under the China Pakistan Economic Corridor. It envisages up-gradation and dualization of the Main Line – 1 (ML-1) railway from Karachi to Peshawar and Taxila to Havelian along with the establishment of dry port near Havelian. The estimated length of the project is 1733 km. The plans include laying a new track along the existing pathway with subgrade for 160km/h, refurbishing and construction of new bridges, upgrading the signaling and telecom systems on modern lines, transforming level crossings into underpasses or fly overs, locomotive purchase, track overhaul, electrification, and protecting the track through fencing. The aim is to increase the speed from 65-105 km/h to 120-160 km/h. The project also includes the establishment of dry port near Havelian and up-gradation of Walton Training Academy. The project is a proposal of the Ministry of Railways Pakistan which will be implemented by the same through financing from Chinese Government Concessional Loan and supervised by an international agency hired through the process of competitive bidding. Its estimated

<sup>2</sup> <https://cpec.gov.pk/progress-update>.

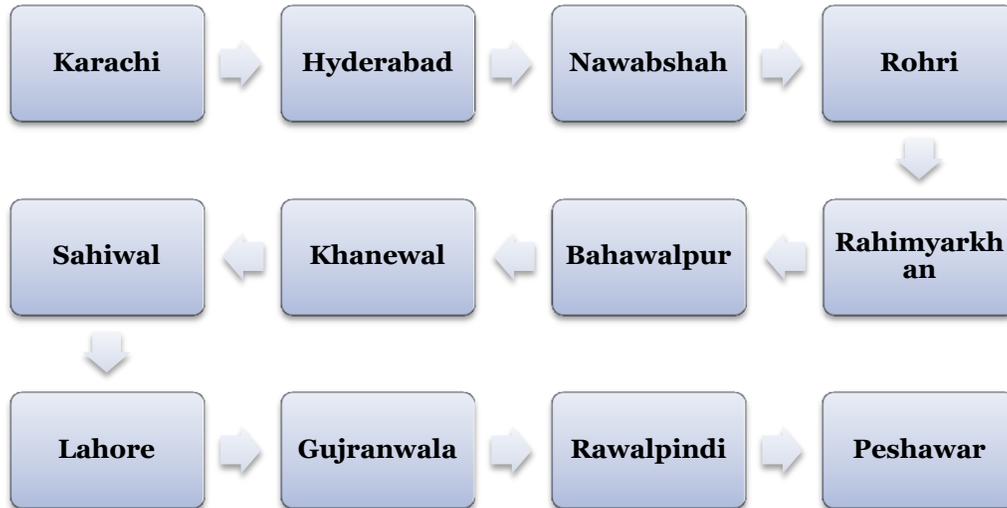
<sup>3</sup> <https://cpec.gov.pk/progress-update>.





cost is USD 6806 million and is expected to generate 24000 job opportunities during the construction period. The following diagram depicts the location of ML-1.<sup>4</sup>

### ML-1 Location



#### 1.1.1 Progress update

As per the information provided by the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiative, the feasibility of the project has been completed and a bilateral Financing Committee to finalize the concessional financing agreement has been constituted. The Framework Agreement and commercial contract for preliminary design for this strategic project was signed on 15 May 2017 during the PM visit to China. Moreover, ECNEC approved PC-1 for this project on 5 August 2020.<sup>5</sup> The revised plan envisages a break-up of the project into four phases, as follows:

- One. Karachi to Multan
- Two. Multan to Lahore
- Three. Lahore to Lalamusa
- Four. Lalamusa to Peshawar

As per the media reports, the revised plan which names the project as “Rationalized up-gradation of ML-1” has reduced the estimated cost of the project from USD9.85 billion to USD6.678 billion. It envisages construction of 2,096 bridges/culverts, track fencing

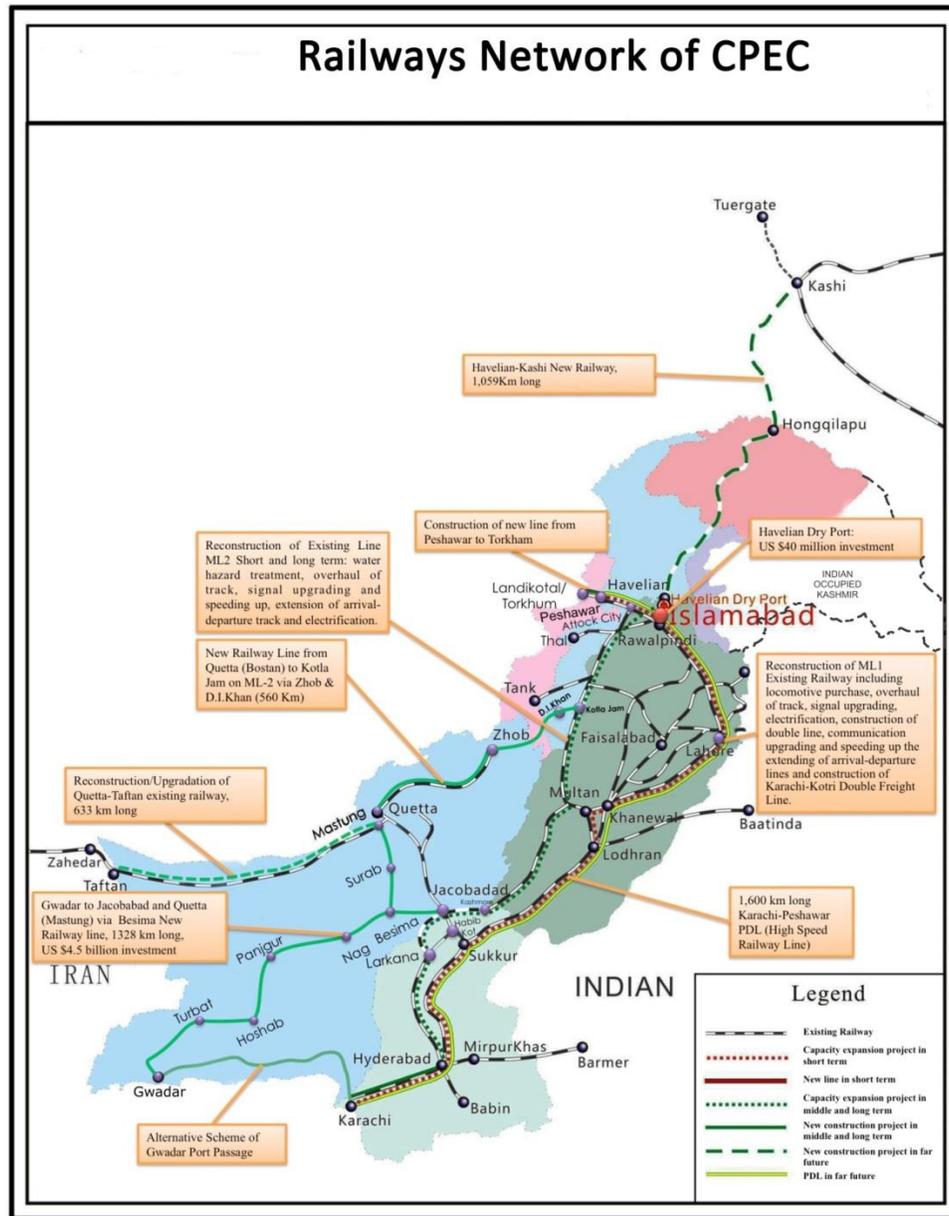
<sup>4</sup> <https://cpec.gov.pk/project-details/30>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://cpec.gov.pk/project-details/30>.





of 1,300 km, and 165/631-grade separation. The project, which is expected to be completed in nine years with a lifespan of 30 years, will shorten travel time between Karachi and Peshawar to 17 hours and 15 minutes.<sup>6</sup>



<sup>6</sup> Khalid Hasnain, "New government to ink loan accord with China for ML-1," Dawn, 11 February 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1813194>; Khalid Hasnain, "ML-1 project cost reduced to \$6.67 billion," Dawn, 13 October 2023, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1780800>.



## 2. Pakistan's connectivity with Central Asia

Connectivity retains the potential to bring closer countries through enhanced trade and economic opportunities. Experts highlight the role of infrastructure development and connectivity in market and supply chain efficiency which in turn contributes to economic growth and wellbeing. The opportunity geographical contiguity offers for greater trade between Pakistan and Central Asian Republics is curtailed due to less developed infrastructure in these countries. The traditionally isolated landlocked Central Asian Republics which are endowed with excessive natural resources are keen to connect with countries like Pakistan which offer direct access to deep-water ports. However, instability and volatility in Afghanistan has presented daunting challenges for regional connectivity through transport corridors. The Iranian side is often constrained due to international sanctions which come into the way of realizing the geographical potential of Iran.<sup>7</sup>

On the other side, China is playing increasingly instrumental role in facilitating regional connectivity through its flagship Belt and Road Initiative and other frameworks. Through multibillion dollar investment in CPEC, China is enabling Pakistan to build its economy on solid footings thereby opening vistas of seamless opportunities for linking Pakistan with Central Asian Republics. Moreover, the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) program has invested almost 47.27 billion dollars from 2001 to 2023 on 257 regional projects including road and rail among others. CAREC was established in 1997 under the patronage of the Asian Development Bank for economic cooperation among member states which currently include: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, People's Republic of China (PRC), Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The World Bank, ADB, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) stand out as the top three funders for CAREC. Among the six CAREC Corridors, 5 and 6 involve road and rail networks of Pakistan.<sup>8</sup> Besides multilateral frameworks like the CAREC some regional countries have established connectivity projects on trilateral basis as well.

<sup>7</sup> Sarwat Rauf, "Regional connectivity in Pakistan and Central Asian Republics: prospects and challenges," *China Quarterly of International Studies* 7, no. 3 (2021): 327-347.

<sup>8</sup> Nausheen Wasi, "Pakistan's economy and connectivity: looking towards Iran and the Central Asian States," *Pakistan Horizon* 76, no.4 (2023): 47-63.



## CAREC Corridor Alignments including Pakistan

### CAREC Corridor 5: East Asia-Middle East-South Asia

CAREC 5a	CAREC 5b	CAREC 5c
Country/Route	Country/Route	Country/Route
Hami	Hami	Hami
PRC Turpan	PRC Turpan	PRC Turpan
Kashi	Kashi	Kashi
Yierkeshitan (road) - BCP	Mansehra	Yierkeshitan (road) - BCP
Irkeshtam (road) - BCP	Havelian	Irkeshtam (road) - BCP
KGZ Sary-Tash	Hasanabdal	KGZ Sary-Tash
Karamyk (road) - BCP	Islamabad	Karamyk (road) - BCP
Karamyk (road) - BCP	Lahore	Karamyk (road) - BCP
TAJ Dushanbe	Pindi Bathian	TAJ Dushanbe
Bokhtar	Faisalabad	Bokhtar
Panji Poyon - LC/BCP	PAK Gojra	Panji Poyon - LC/BCP
Shirkhan Bandar (road) - BCP	Shorkot	Shirkhan Bandar (road) - BCP
Kunduz	Khanewal	Kunduz
AFG Kabul	Multan	AFG Kabul
Jalalabad	Muzaffargarh	Ghazni
Tokham (road) - BCP	Dera Ghazi Khan	Qalat
Landi Kotal (road) - BCP	Ratodero	Kandahar
Peshawar	Sehwan	Chaman
Islamabad	Karachi	Quetta
Lahore		Kalat
Pindi Bathian		PAK Surab
Faisalabad		Basima
PAK Gojra		Hoshab
Shorkot		Gwadar
Khanewal		
Multan		
Muzaffargarh		
Dera Ghazi Khan		
Ratodero		
Sehwan		
Karachi		

AFG = Afghanistan, BCP = border crossing point, CAREC = Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation, KGZ = Kyrgyz Republic, LC = Logistics Center, PAK = Pakistan, PRC = People's Republic of China, TAJ = Tajikistan.

Source: CAREC Secretariat.



### CAREC Corridor 6: Europe-Middle East-South Asia

CAREC 6a	CAREC 6b	CAREC 6c	CAREC 6d
Country/Route	Country/Route	Country/Route	Country/Route
RUS Krasnyi Yar (road)/ Aksaraskaya (rail) - BCP	RUS Orenburg	RUS Orenburg	RUS Krasnyi Yar (road)/ Aksaraskaya (rail) - BCP
Kurmangazy (road)/ Ganyushkino(rail) - BCP	Novomarkovka (road)/ Kos Aral (rail) - BCP	Novomarkovka (road)/ Kos Aral (rail) - BCP	Kurmangazy (road)/ Ganyushking (rail) - BCP
KAZ Makat	Zhaisan (road/rail) - BCP	Zhaisan (road/rail) - BCP	KAZ Makat
Beyneu (rail)/ Tazhen (road) - BCP	Aktobe	Aktobe	Beyneu
Karapalkastan (road/rail) - BCP	Shalkar	Shalkar	Aktau
Nukus	KAZ Aral	KAZ Aral	Bereket
Urgench (split)	Kyzyl - Orda	Kyzyl - Orda	TKM Ashgabat
Turtkul	Shymkent	Shymkent	Mary
Gazli	Saryagash/Yallama (rail) and Zhibek Zholy (road) - BCP	Saryagash/Yallama (rail) and Zhibek Zholy (road) - BCP	AFG Herat
UZB Bukhara (converge)	Keles (rail) and Gisht Kuprik (road) - BCP	Keles (rail) and Gisht Kuprik (road) - BCP	Islam Qala - BCP
Uchkuduk	Tashkent (split)	UZB Tashkent (split)	IRN Dogharoun - BCP
Navoi	Djizzak	Khavast - BCP	AFG Kandahar
Bukhara (converge)	UZB Ayni	Istaravshan - BCP	Chaman - BCP
Karshi	Samarkand (converge)	Ayni	Quetta
Boysun	Karshi	TAJ Dushanbe	Kalat
Termez/Airatom (rail/road) - BCP	Boysun	Bokhtar	PAK Surab
Hairatan	Termez/Airatom (rail/road) - BCP	Panji Poyon (road) - LC/BCP	Basima
AFG Mazar-i-Sharif	Hairatan (rail/road) - BCP	Shirkan Bandar - BCP	Hoshab
Andkhoy	Mazar-e-Sharif	Kunduz	Gwadar
Herat	AFG Andkhoy	Pul-e-Khumri	
Kandahar	Herat	AFG Salang	
Chaman - BCP	Islam Qala - BCP	Kabul	
Quetta	IRN Dogharoun - BCP	Jalalabad	
Kalat	AFG Kandahar	Torkham (road) - BCP	
PAK Surab	Chaman - BCP	Landi Kotal (road) - BCP	
Basima	Quetta	Peshawar	
Hoshab	Kalat	Islamabad	
Gwadar	PAK Surab	Pindi Bhattian	
	Basima	Lahore	
	Hoshab	Faisalabad	
	Gwadar	PAK Gojra	
		Shorkot	
		Khanewal	
		Multan	
		Muzaffargarh	
		Dera Ghazi Khan	
		Ratodero	
		Sehwan	
		Karachi	

AFG = Afghanistan, BCP = border crossing point, CAREC = Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation, IRN = Iran, KAZ = Kazakhstan, LC = Logistics Center, PAK = Pakistan, RUS = Russian Federation, TAJ = Tajikistan, TKM = Turkmenistan, UZB = Uzbekistan.

Source: CAREC Secretariat.



## 2.1 Road connectivity between Pakistan and CARs

Pakistan's network of 48 national highways, motorways and strategic roads extending the length of 14,480 km<sup>9</sup> contributes to national development by providing transport facility and provides transport infrastructure for connecting with regional countries for enhanced trade and economic growth. Despite all challenges such as high transportation cost and safety concerns, road continue to dominate transport sector in Pakistan as the major chunk of freight passes through road channels. Realizing the potential of Pakistan's road infrastructure regional countries like Central Asian Republics have connected through corridors and other frameworks meant to increase trade and connectivity.

### 2.1.1 CAREC road corridors

Road sector dominates the CAREC investment projects. The sector accounted for more than sixty 60% of the total investment projects highlighted in the Transport and Trade Facilitation Strategy 2020. Pakistan's accession to the CAREC program in 2010 opened new vistas of opportunities for member states to find way towards the Arabian Sea. Consequently, the Transport and Trade Facilitation Strategy 2020 included significant changes in the Corridor 5 (East Asia-Middle East-South Asia) which envisaged three extensions totaling 4,526km as follows:

- i. *“An extension of the road corridor in Pakistan from Torkham to Peshawar and then south to the ports of Karachi and Qasim via the M1-M4 (meaning 1,M2,M3, and M4), N-55, and other components of the north-south national corridor on the west side of the Indus River.*
- ii. *An extension south from Kashi (Peoples Republic of China) to Hasanabdal (near Islamabad) via the Karakoram Highway. Construction of a new section of this road is under way with PRC funding.*
- iii. *An extension southwest from Kabul on the ring road through Kandahar to the BCP at Chaman (Afghanistan), on to Quetta (Pakistan), through reconstructed sections of road in Balochistan province of Pakistan, and then to the port of Gwadar in Pakistan.”<sup>10</sup>*

Similarly, investments in Corridor 6 (Europe-Middle East-South Asia) envisaged linking Afghanistan's Kandahar with Chaman and Quetta and eventually with Gwadar on the

<sup>9</sup> Economic Survey of Pakistan 2022-2023.

<sup>10</sup> CAREC Transport and Trade Facilitation Strategy 2020.



Arabian Sea. Building on the Transport and Trade Facilitation Strategy 2020, the CAREC Transport Strategy 2030 highlighted the role Pakistan can play in regional connectivity. The document identified following road projects in Pakistan: Construction of 4-lane highway Rajanpur-Dera Ghazi Khan (cost - \$300 million, implementation period - 2028-2031); Construction of additional tunnel at Kohat (cost - \$80 million, implementation period - 2021-2024); and Rehabilitation of missing section of Dera Ismail Khan-Yarak, N-55 (cost-\$20 million, implementation period - 2022-2023).

The road sector faces various challenges in terms of cross border transport and logistics facilitation, road asset management, and road safety. With regards to cross border transport logistics and facilitation key issues include lack of meaningful coordination among respective national transport agencies and border management agencies as well as among relevant agencies of neighboring countries. Resultantly, the average time for border clearance remains high and average travel speed across CAREC remains low. Situation becomes further difficult at the intersection of maritime transport with land transport. Road maintenance is yet another challenging area for the fact that budget allocation focuses primarily upon construction of new roads, the funding allocated for rehabilitation often ends at the roads in highly poor condition. Ensuring safe travel across the road infrastructure requires urgent attention for the fact that the annual road traffic deaths and injuries are significantly higher in the CAREC region (8.7 to 18.1 per 100,000 population) as compare to European countries such as Sweden (2.8) and UK (3.1).<sup>11</sup>

### **2.1.2 Quadrilateral Transit Trade Agreement (QTTA)**

The Quadrilateral Transit Trade Agreement (QTTA) provides Pakistan and Central Asian countries connectivity route through China avoiding Afghanistan. Though Afghanistan provides shortest route between Pakistan and Central Asia, the instability and dwindling political will of Afghanistan to provide transit route for trade between Pakistan and CARs necessitated circumventing Afghanistan for trade between Pakistan and Central Asia. QTTA was agreed among Pakistan, China, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan on 09 March 1995 and enforced in May 2004. Tajikistan expressed the desire to join the agreement in 2017 and Uzbekistan demonstrated interest to enter the agreement in May 2020. It connects Karakorum highway to Xinxiang province of China which is linked with Central Asian Republics. The route is Karachi-Rawalpindi-Hassanabdal-Gilgit-Khunjrab(Pakistan/China Border)-Kashgar-Torugart (China/Kyrgyzstan Border)-

<sup>11</sup> CAREC Transport Strategy 2030.





Bishkek-Ajol-Kordai (Kyrgyzstan/Kazakhstan Border)-Almaty (Kazakhstan). However, the route is challenged by bureaucratic hurdles culminating into unnecessary delays at borders and other issues. Therefore, the route has remained unable to enhance trade to significant levels among participating nations over the years.<sup>12</sup>

## **2.2 Rail connectivity between Pakistan and CARs**

Pakistan's railway network consists of 7,479 km of broad gauge lines and a 312 km section of meter gauge. However, much of the Pakistan railways' rolling stock is in poor condition and track and bridge infrastructure needs immediate overhaul. Pakistan's trade through rail is comparatively low. Various factors such as lack of capacity and absence of private sector investments in this area contribute to low levels of freight traffic through railways which caters mostly of passenger traffic. Most of the freight traffic comprises of coal and bulk commodities. Moreover, Pakistan's cross-border trade through rail is negligible. Pakistan's progress in rail sector depends much on the renewal and up-gradation of ML-1 which can link Pakistan's rail with neighboring as well as Central Asian countries. Pakistan's geographical location which offers direct access to the Arabian Sea carries great potential for intraregional trade. By up-grading the existing infrastructure and removing the missing links in the rail connectivity corridors Pakistan can substantially enhance freight traffic across the region through rail network. For instance, due to absence of rail network between Havelian and Kashgar as well as Peshawar and Afghanistan traffic has to shift towards the road sector for transportation. Under the CPEC, Pakistan and China are seeking to up-grade ML-1 and remove the missing links. If this materializes intraregional trade can be enhanced through rail networks.<sup>13</sup>

### **2.2.1 CAREC rail corridors**

CAREC Corridor 5 (East Asia-Middle East-South Asia) and Corridor 6 (Europe-Middle East-South Asia) retain relevance for railway development in Pakistan. Corridor links China and Pakistan through Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Sub-corridor 501 connects Kashgar in China to Pakistan. In Pakistan it follows ML1 from Karakorum mountain range to Havelian, Islamabad, Lahore, and ultimately Karachi. While rail network is missing currently between Kashgar and Havelian, the up-gradation of ML1

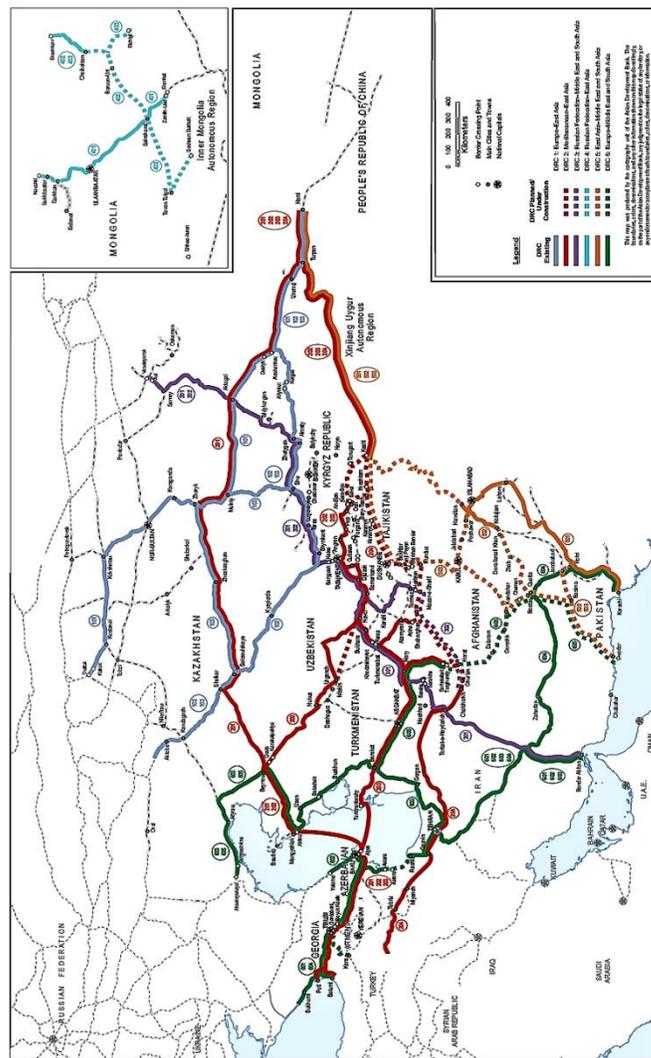
<sup>12</sup> Umar Khan, "Pakistan's road to Central Asia: a perspective through prism of transit trade treaties," *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs* 6, no. 2 (2023): 388-401.

<sup>13</sup> CAREC, "Railway sector assessment for Pakistan," March 2021; CAREC, "The situation of railways in CAREC countries and opportunities for investment, commercialization and reform," June 2022.



under CPEC may remove this shortcoming in the near future. Sub-corridor 502 links Peshawar to Gwadar port, this sub-corridor has still in pipeline. Sub-corridor 503 links Gwadar port via Quetta to Kandahar, Kabul, and Kunduz. It further extends to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. However, sections of this sub-corridor beyond Kashgar have yet to be built. While the progress on Corridor 5 is in early stages, high construction cost and difficult terrain in the mountainous region may hamper progress stretching it to many years.<sup>14</sup>

### CAREC Designated Rail Corridors



DRC = designated rail corridors.  
Source: CAREC Secretariat.

<sup>14</sup> CAREC, "Railway sector assessment for Pakistan," March 2021.





Corridor 6 links Pakistan with Europe through Caspian Sea (Azerbaijan, Iran, Russian Federation, and Turkmenistan) and Black Sea countries (Georgia and Turkey) providing landlocked countries access to deep-water ports such as Gwadar, Bandar Abbas and Karachi. Sub-corridors 601-604 seek to capitalize on the existing railway corridors linking Pakistan, Iran, Europe, and Russian Federation. These connect Karachi port to Iranian cities of Zahedan and Tehran reaching westwards to Europe through the Caucasus Transit Corridor and Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, and northwards to Russia via sub-corridor 603 east of the Caspian Sea. It requires gauge change at the Pakistan-Iran border from broad gauge to standard gauge. Moreover, sub-corridor 605 connects Gwadar port to Quetta heading further north through Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan and ultimately the eastern side of the Caspian Sea. At this point the sub-corridor comes into contact with shipping services to Baku from Turkmenbashi (Turkmenista) or Aktau (Kazakhstan). It can extend further to Russia utilizing the existing rail network. However, the progress on the sub-corridor is hampered due to missing links in Pakistan and Afghanistan.<sup>15</sup>

### **2.2.2 Trans-Afghan Railway Project**

A trilateral project between Pakistan Afghanistan and Uzbekistan, the trans-Afghan railway envisions accelerating Uzbekistan's trade through Pakistani seaports as well as Pakistan's trade linkage with Central Asian Republics and beyond. The idea is to construct 760 km long railway line which will link Uzbek city Termez with Pakistani seaports through Afghanistan. The project seeks to decrease travel time by approximately 30% in comparison with road transportation. The 13<sup>th</sup> Trilateral Meeting of railways authorities of three countries gave nod to Termez-Mazar e Sharif-Shashpul-logar-Karlachi route ignoring the other option that was of Termez-Mazar e Sharif-Shashpul-logar-Torkham route.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> CAREC, "Railway sector assessment for Pakistan," March 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, <https://www.mofa.gov.pk/central-asia>.





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