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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Vision Central Asia; Pakistan; Afghanistan; transit trade; regional connectivity; economic diplomacy	Pakistan's Vision for Central Asia aims at promoting regional cooperation via political engagement, trade and investment, energy and transport connectivity, security cooperation and people-to-people contacts. The article looks at the role of Afghan transit routes in this policy, and explores why geographical proximity has not always meant reliable regional connectivity. The research relies on qualitative documentary review of published scholarship, institutional studies and official communications to reflect on road transit through Torkham and Chaman, Pakistani seaports, the proposed Uzbekistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan railway and regional energy initiatives. As a dated illustration of operational uncertainty, documented evidence of border interruptions in 2025 and 2026 is included, not as a measure of corridor performance. The thematic focus is on transit governance, security and common interests, and commercial viability. The results differentiate between diplomatic agreements and progress in infrastructure and always available services. The article suggests improving existing routes, creating cross-border responsibilities, appraising significant projects based on credible demand and reporting on verifiable implementation milestones. Pakistan's connectivity ambitions should be judged on the basis of reliable transport and energy services, and not on the basis of policy announcements or anticipated benefits alone.
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Introduction

Pakistan's location on the Arabian Sea also provides potential maritime access to landlocked economies in Central Asia. Afghanistan is a key geographic link, but transport and energy links across the border also depend on political cooperation, security and functioning transit arrangements. Thus, Pakistan's connectivity agenda includes infrastructure development, but also

agreements that govern the movement of goods and energy. Raza (2024) refers to possibilities of regional connectivity along with political and security limitations. Pakistan's vision for Central Asia is based on five pillars: political engagement; trade and investment; energy and connectivity; security and defence; and people-to-people exchanges (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan, 2024). This article considers these policy priorities in the specific context of Afghan transit routes. It looks at the interaction of diplomacy, infrastructure and border institutions, and argues that geographical advantages can only support commercial connectivity when coupled with reliable services and workable cross-border rules. The policy problem is thus to translate a regional vision into a dependable set of services. Goods must move from the point of production into a domestic transport network, cross several administrative jurisdictions and reach a port or a final buyer. Any defect at any point could diminish the value of investments elsewhere. But in this article the corridor is treated as that connected sequence, rather than a single road, border terminal or railway proposal. This approach also maintains focus on implementation: political endorsement is required for cooperation, but traders experience policy through the procedures applied to individual consignments. Afghanistan is a central focus of this analysis, not just a transit zone for cargo through which other states move. Cooperation on transit also relates to Afghan commercial interests, domestic transport services and the sharing of responsibilities. Pakistan's objectives, the interests of the transit economy and the requirements of the Central Asian exporters need to be taken into account. Raza (2024) situates Afghanistan and Pakistan within a wider agenda of regional connectivity. The current article develops the practical implication of that perspective: a corridor is more likely to attract sustained participation when its arrangements are workable for all of the economies on which it depends. The debate still centers on Afghan routes. Alternative routes are only considered when they illustrate commercial choice or the limits of Pakistan's geographical advantage. The article does not rank all Eurasian transport networks, nor does it estimate their relative profitability. Its purpose is to articulate the institutional and commercial context within which Pakistan's current policy aspirations could translate into more reliable regional linkages.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

Pakistan aims to establish trade and transit routes to Central Asia. The authors argue that the combination of domestic and regional factors tend to complicate these efforts. Not all agreements are implemented as functioning transport services. The main objective of this study is to analyze the gaps in the aspirations of Pakistan to improve regional connectivity and the institutional, infrastructural and commercial requirements for their realization. This study will primarily cover land and road-based connections.

Research aim

To assess the potential transit routes from Afghanistan to Pakistan's Central Asia policy to establish reliable and financially viable regional connectivity.

Research objectives

1. To assess the role of Afghan transit routes within Pakistan's vision for Central Asia from a strategic viewpoint.
2. To identify elements of diplomacy, infrastructure, and institutions that influence transportation, trade, and energy from a broad connectivity perspective, and define trade and energy corridor concepts.
3. To determine techniques and means to improve the reliability of transit routes and to discern actual results from expected outcomes in the course of project implementation.

Research questions

1. What roles do Afghan transit routes play within Pakistan's Vision for Central Asia?
2. How do diplomatic, infrastructural and institutional factors shape transport and transit connectivity?
3. Which practical measures could improve corridor reliability and performance while distinguishing expected project benefits from verified results?

Significance of the Study

The research investigates the role of diplomacy and investment in promoting regional connectivity. From a policy perspective, the focus is on the most important legal and infrastructural constraints that warrant attention. For business, the goal is an efficient and reliable transport logistics system. The landlocked economies of Central Asia focus on widening transport and transit options. An integrative approach that takes into account the aforementioned issues and concerns is essential for evaluating and analyzing Pakistan's policies and programs on connectivity as well as the policies of its transit and transit trade partners. The study focuses on the integration of foreign policies with the transport and communication policies of various countries. The study also identifies various levels of policy success. A political agreement may set the framework for future cooperation. The completion of an investment project may enhance a country's transport and communication capacity. Taken individually, the outcomes listed above do not show that a service of a commercial value is operating on a recurring basis. Distinguishing recurring from non-recurring events allows one to identify genuine institutional advances without overstating advances in economic terms. It also allows a clearer view of the evidence that is still missing. The qualitative approach supports integration of various domains of policy. International transport, customs and security cooperation policies, as well as integration and energy policies, are often analyzed in isolation. Considering them in conjunction supports identification of gaps between the right to take decisions and the means of implementation. The main contribution of the study is to be of this nature. The study does not seek to estimate the size of trade, to assess the economic viability of an undertaking, or to replace an assessment of the technical feasibility of an undertaking.

Literature Review

Research focuses on the strategic position of regions and the barriers that persist. Raza (2024) examines potential connections between Central and South Asia that Afghanistan might provide. The relevance of Afghanistan's regional placement, and political and security issues, are covered by Mughal and Suleman (2021). Shahbaz et al. (2025) review Pakistani-centered connection projects and some issues concerning Central Asia. Hussain (2024) studies prospects and risks for Pakistan in extending the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Central Asia. The study by Javaid et al. (2024) focuses on constraints posed by Pakistan's regional and international trade. Several studies are used to evaluate Pakistan's extension of the economic corridor to Central Asia; however, planned projects have not been shown to fulfill anticipated advantages. De Soyres et al. (2019) address the prospective reduction in international trade friction due to the construction of the Silk Road projects, and De Soyres et al. (2020) review the use of integrated transportation networks. The World Bank (2019) provides an assessment of opportunities and threats in the international trade and transport sector. The studies provide input to help assess potential projects; however, they do not describe actual implementation of the Trans-Afghan Railway project. Research focusing on international and regional trade mainly examines the combined role of border trade and infrastructure. The OECD (2023d) studies trade facilitation in Central Asia. Other studies examine infrastructure, international trade and trade facilitation (Karymshakov and Sulaimanova, 2023). Some studies analyze the geographical and economic proximity of countries in the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) area (Samad et al. 2023). These studies help assess possible trade and transportation-related situations along with the assessment of physical links. The OECD (2023c) identifies options and priorities for the infrastructure and the logistics and regulation coordination of the Middle Corridor. The case offers evidence on the governance of corridor administration, and should not be interpreted as evidence for the administrative corridors of the case of Afghanistan. In this research, the above-mentioned aspects are synthesized (qualitatively), to analyze the policy goals and obstacles of Pakistan for the establishment of reliable transit. The research presents new evidence and should not be interpreted as a claim that the existing evidence is lacking. This report notes improvement in some Central Asian states, but suggests that shortcomings in the use of information and communication technology and coordination among border services continue (OECD 2023d). Some of the suggestions include simplifying and standardizing trade and transport procedures. This document should be integrated with the report on Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Considering the fact that the report focuses on the Central Asian economies, recommendations of the report should be utilized to integrate transport and border services of Central Asia. ADB (2025) further elaborates on the assessment of corridor performance. It uses the Cross-Border Trade and Transport Facilitation Index, which measures, among others, the operational and regulatory aspects of border services. This study, however, places more emphasis on extending conceptual links, rather than on assessment. The findings presented here build on published works. This study does not replicate the surveys, and thus a new index computation is not presented. Rather, this study explores the range and scope of services offered at border facilities, in addition to evaluating the physical constraints of border facilities.

The OECD (2025a) discussion on the Trans-Caspian corridor describes the predominant constraints as the presence of informal charges, and insufficient investment and storage, despite improved digital and transportation infrastructure. It should be noted that these observations do not address the limitations on road infrastructure in Afghanistan. These examples show why corridor competitiveness should evaluate total service offered to clients. The focus of a competitiveness analysis shouldn't be whether it is legitimate to assume that the service performance of another corridor may be applicable to a local context. The focus should be on whether the potential corridors in Pakistan may offer similar operational conditions. The reviewed literature identifies two interrelated shortcomings. Writings in the field of strategy and security refer to the government's interest and planning in the field, while studies on corridor and international trade create an understanding of the constraints on the actual use of the access thus created. This study attempts to bridge the explain these links. This study assesses the degree to which the political declarations and the prevailing economic context in the country affect the improvement of the corridor. The study relies on previously-published literature in order to establish the degree of correlation among promises made by politicians and other influential figures, the real capacity of the state, and the expectations of the society.

Analytical Framework

The analysis relies on three interrelated perspectives: geo-economics, regional integration, and institution building. Geo-economics is concerned with the role of corridors of international trade and transportation as well as international energy corridors. The integration of national economies is achieved by removing barriers to the free movement of goods, services, capital, and nationals. The institution building concentrates on rules and regulation and the capacity of the institutions. The CAREC Integrated Trade Agenda encourages coordination across various sectors and policies. Based on this approach, the ADB supported countries are invited to incorporate the strategies into their transport and other related sectors, based on the priority.

In this regard, reliability describes the predictability of accessing and using a transport and energy infrastructure, as well as the charges. Feasibility examines the accessibility of the market for the proposed services. In the case of institutional performance, the concern is the willingness and ability of involved institutions to implement the decided policies and procedures. These descriptions of the concepts constitute the core of the discussion in the various chapters of the document and do not represent a statistically validated model.

The five pillars are political engagement, trade and investment, energy and connectivity, and security and defense. Political engagement offers routes for governmental engagement to settle disputes and/or grant access. Trade and investment focus on the commercial side of the preceding links. Energy and connectivity are salient elements of cooperation. Security and defense impose conditions on the unrestrained movement of people. Fostering contacts, building up skills and setting up businesses along the Corridors may be equally important for people to people cooperation. Hence, the five pillars give broad policy directions and do not stipulate specific end

results. Their worth is in the kind of assistance they provide in the functioning of Corridor networks.

The significance of mutual dependence has also to be addressed. Pakistan can build/renovate roads and/or ports, but the worth of an Afghan transit route is tied to conditions beyond its control. Likewise, the Afghan transit route is useful only if there is (additional) transit/trade beyond it. This shows that many improvements, especially if taken in isolation, will have little effect. The aim of the analysis is to establish where integration is necessary, and to determine what limits may be set on various partnerships. It identifies the areas where integration is required and where partnerships are likely to be most useful. These conclusions, however, are hypothetical.

Methodology and Limitations

This research employed a qualitative documentary-review approach to analyze Pakistan's Vision for Central Asia, through published academic and institutional works and public documents on policy and projects. The source pool comprised of 29 works of academic and institutional nature published from 2019 to 2026 and seven policy-related, trade and project documents. Altogether, these formed the 36 works cited in this study. The works were carefully picked based on their relevance to the different facets of the relations of Pakistan and Central Asia including the transit trade, regional transport and energy linkages, corridor governance and corridor's economic potential. The review was mainly interpretive and not exhaustive. Works were found through targeted searches on various academic and institutional publishers, journals and records. The searches were primarily focused on cover pages and bibliographical references. If policy documents did not explicitly say that the policy or project in question was implemented, these documents along other administrative reports were used to establish the position of a government. Based on the information available, other records were used to substantiate the position or to interpret what is known about a given situation. These records, however, did not comprise the main body of the information used in the review. No primary data was collected. Most of the abstracts or institutionally embedded reviews were used to establish what is known. The qualitative thematic discussion was structured under three categories namely, (1) reliability and governance of transit, (2) security and mutual interests, and (3) commercial and practical implementation. Relevant extracts from the documentation were compared and integrated into the categories, distinguishing project appraisal and assessment from policy formulation and agreements. The organization of evidence into the above categories, does not emanate from interview or field work findings. No beneficiary or cost/benefit analysis or estimate was conducted. The study was restricted by purposive approach, inadequate and unbalanced access to basic documentation, and bias in government or project reports on accomplishments. A notice from a border official is essentially the same as the report of an authority, describing the reason for restriction and/or obstruction in international traffic, crossings. The statement does not validate the cause of restriction, nor supports the duration of the disruption. The account of the World Bank for various trade related activities in Afghanistan, does not assess or project the situation or conditions for the transport of goods or services in the Afghanistan / Pakistan or Afghanistan / Central Asia trade routes. Evidence and findings of the study do not support, or enable, the

assessment of the size of trade, welfare or any other impact. Evidence, and findings from other places are used to pose or support questions on various institutional issues. The evidence or findings do not show or support similar situations or conditions in other places.

Pakistan's Connectivity Efforts through Afghanistan

Diplomacy and transit institutions

Pakistan employs diplomacy and trade agreements to establish regional transit corridors. As reported by the Ministry of Commerce, Pakistan, signed the Pakistan-Uzbekistan transit trade agreement on 15 July 2021 and it became operational in March 2022. Establishing these agreements is important, but reliability and profitability of the routes still remain to be tested. The Pakistan-Afghanistan Transit Trade Agreement 2010 is also important to regional transit cooperation (Ministry of Commerce, Pakistan, 2020). The successful execution of transit trade requires a number of policies and agreements among the countries involved. Customs and border policies and rules, sanctioned transportation routes, and vehicle movement within the territory of each country must be aligned. The policies and rules of different countries must be integrated to achieve efficient transit.

The usefulness and the level of diplomatic importance of an agreement are assessed separately. The absence of an agreement may hinder the actual implementation. The goal is to identify the authorization, assurances and obligations that allow transit across the entire route. A Pakistan-Central Asia agreement does not resolve transit issues across all the other member states of the organization. It is more productive to consider the adjustment of the corridor's transit and infrastructure arrangements, and to evaluate the diplomatic and legal agreements that pertain to the corridor, than to pursue a simple numeric target.

Concerning the adjustment, it is imperative that transport authorities at all levels collaborate. A policy endorsed by a ministry is meaningless if frontline staff and field operatives do not understand it or are unable to implement it. When there is a failure to implement a policy, it is often due to a lack of governance. If a responsibility is assigned to more than one agency, an agreed policy to resolve the situation is likely to address the issue. Policies to assure that Diplomatic commitments are transformed to administrative responsibility at every crossing may clarify the intent of cooperation.

Road corridors and maritime access

As border crossing points, both Torkham and Chaman are important transport interchanges between the two countries. The rapid clearance of border formalities and subsequent land transport in Afghanistan to final markets can strengthen regional trade and economic links. Besides, Pakistan's sea ports and land-linked logistics can be integrated in such trade and transport links. While various studies evaluate Pakistan's gateway potential, it is important to scrutinize if such gateways are financially and economically rational for given shipments. The truth is that the ADB (2021) evaluates a panoply of factors in determining landlocked CAREC

countries' maritime access. Related to this, in appraising shipping routes and options, transport planners and corridor engineers have to assess various competing factors including transport costs, transport time, transport volume, transport frequency, and mode, among other competing and exogenous factors. Improving domestic transport and logistics in Pakistan may be accomplished with the CPEC. However, ensuring the welfare of Central Asian markets requires implementation of integrated regional and international projects and programs. The CAREC region's Transport Strategy 2030 provides regional policy instruments for regional integration and economic cooperation. Its mid-term evaluation retains the same priorities. This work is not to prove that improvements on CAREC and Af-Pak routes have been achieved. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) records show that improvements at Torkham, Chaman, and Wagha border posts would include not only physical facility upgrades, but also be accompanied by improvements in border management and staff capacity (Asian Development Bank, n.d.). There are implementation notes that state Wagha was removed from the scope of the project due to lack of funds (Asian Development Bank, n.d.). Of note for this article, are the border crossings of Torkham and Chaman. Thus, records show planned improvements at the border crossings mentioned. However, these records don't necessarily reflect the current state of the border, or the improvement of border services. On 24 October 2025, the Press Information Department (PID) of Pakistan issued a press release describing that all Pakistan-Afghanistan border Customs had halted two-way transit trade. According to the PID, over 495 trucks loaded with transit goods, were stuck across both the Torkham and Chaman border crossings, and clearing processes at Chaman had been halted from the 15th of the month (Press Information Department, 2025). As stated, these are administrative figures and do not represent an independent assessment of corridor performance. The communication, however, shows that even the best border infrastructure would be of no use in ensuring smooth and continuous trade across the border. The argument regarding road transit suggests that funding should go to the most constraining part of the system. There are several sources of inefficiency along the transport chain. Focusing on one might have a limited impact on efficiency if other sources of inefficiency remain. For example, simplifying documentation might be of little value if the road is blocked. Likewise, improving a road might also be of little value if the transport terminus lacks the means to safely and efficiently handle the transported cargo. Constraints can be of an administrative nature or of a physical nature. While addressing administrative constraints might require facilitation, physical constraints might require a larger, more integrated set of interventions. The most appropriate solution to a given problem should be defined, and building more infrastructure should not be the default answer to every problem. Similar considerations should be made regarding maritime access. While Pakistan has a coastline, this in itself does not create a transport chain that integrates the Pakistani hinterland, and does not provide shipping services to handle the transport of various goods. Different goods might require different transport and logistics chains. Therefore, the focus should be on integrating existing Pakistani ports with a transport and logistics chain that provides seamless connectivity to the Pakistani hinterland, rather than focusing on the competing, single-port maritime policy. It is not a given that in the process of making Pakistani ports more competitive that one would identify Pakistani ports as being the least competitive.

The proposed Trans-Afghan railway

Construction of the Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan railway will have the potential to enhance regional transport and trade. Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a report on 24 July 2025 that gave an update on a 17 July 2025 trilateral meeting in Kabul and mention of an arrangement on the preparation of a joint feasibility study (2025). It is premature to describe the outcome of the meeting as evidence of the establishment of an international railway. There are a number of aspects relating to a potential railway that should be evaluated in a feasibility assessment. These include an analysis of alternative routes, expected demand, construction and operating costs, financial and funding resources, and connection to other railway systems. Evaluation of the rail corridor should be conducted to determine the potential demand that can be supported, and what demand will be realized. Other aspects of the evaluation should include the effect of varying levels of trade, what competition does exist, and what impact will a new rail route have on trade. The focus of the assessment should be placed on what the trade will be that will be supported by the rail route, where the trade will be, and whether the trade will be new trade. The assessment should examine where the trade will come from, where it will go to, and what other transport options are available. The transport options being considered in this article are new options; they may also be used to carry trade that is diverted from other options. This article provides an analysis of what the benefits of the options are and why they will probably not be what is being perceived by the various stakeholders. How a proposed international rail route connects to existing international and domestic land, sea and air transport routes is one of the appraisal issues. There are border issues, terminal and connecting transport and transit issues that also need to be assessed. The rail route may be technically constructed, but that does not answer all the issues such as how the rail service will be integrated with the other services, and what happens if the service is disrupted. The issues require further research that defines the objectives and decides how the service will be operated. The physical construction of the rail route answers few if any of the business issues that will be faced during the operation of the rail service.

The goal of integrating land and sea transport along a North-South Corridor is longstanding. It implies that some planning may be justified. Appraising authorities might adopt a similar approach and make planning and pre-investment decisions before commitments become irreversible. Reports to the public may track decisions related to planning, funding and carrying out work. They may warn of a change in the reasons underpinning a decision. Such a decision need not always require work to be undertaken in a sequential fashion. The aim should be to be in a position to provide evidence that justifies a major decision. In the light of such justification, a railway may be recognized as strategically important, without implying that the rail line is a trade-expanding measure.

Energy connectivity

Energy projects like the CASA-1000 show the role that Afghan transit plays in larger energy projects, as well as the challenges of regional energy trade without adequate cross-border infrastructure. The World Bank's report of January 2026 states that the construction of the

CASA-1000 project in Afghanistan began in December 2024. As of that time, the other countries involved in the project had completed their infrastructure, and the project was awaiting completion of the Afghanistan transit line to begin system tests and operations. The World Bank report stated that the complete project was expected to be operational by December 2027. However, the report was published prior to the completion of the project, and thus could not have confirmed operation of the project. The potential for Afghanistan to engage in energy trade has been further demonstrated by the planned TAPI pipeline and related electricity projects. Afghanistan's role has been analyzed by Sabory et al. (2023). Electricity and gas trading projects and infrastructure must be integrated in a different fashion in the pipelines and transmission projects. It is important that the projects be aligned with the regional energy policies to ensure that energy is being traded. The CAREC Energy Strategy 2030, for example, also considers regional energy and infrastructure trade and projects as being implemented through policy, legal and other reforms (ADB, 2019a). CASA-1000 demonstrates the significance of a regional system's connecting segment. The World Bank (2026b) specifically notes that other regional infrastructure and CASA-1000's Afghan connection work in tandem, and that facilities elsewhere are of no use for regional service. We can, therefore, conclude that assessment of performance should be done at the regional service level as well as at the individual national level. This does not negate the significance of the work already completed. Rather, it highlights the fact that physical work and service completion do not necessarily answer the same questions. Differences in commercial aspects of international electricity transmission and international transport of gas, as compared to international transport of goods, should be taken into account. There are ongoing relationships between gas and electricity suppliers, transporters and/or pipeline operators as well as purchasers. In the case of transport, these relationships are further extended to the contracting authority and/or the transit State. Constraints and Opportunities of Regional Energy Trades in Eurasia and Beyond: The Case of Afghanistan, outlines opportunities and constraints of regional energy trade. In the context of this analysis, it provides insight into possible financing, construction, and/or operation of energy transmission projects. The authors do not suggest that assessment of electricity transmission projects be done using the criteria of road corridors. Similarly, assessment of gas pipelines should not be done using the same criteria as an electricity transmission project.

Thematic Discussion

All documentary evidence has been considered under the original three themes. Each theme contains strategic or policy arguments (sometimes project-related) and relevant literature of various institutional documents. Qualitative judgments (not quantitative assessments) are included in the discussion as to the possible effect on the international trade and/or transportation.

Reliability and transit governance

The first theme is the need for certainty in service. Traders need clarification on documentation, published rates, and an effective mechanism for addressing service delays. The OECD (2023d)

addresses these aspects of trade. From a policy perspective, we can infer that border agency coordination should be coupled with investment in facility and transportation infrastructure, because resolving administrative uncertainty is vital for achieving the benefits of improved border and transport facilitation.

Transit routes through Afghanistan offer the possibility for Pakistan to connect its road and sea routes with the landlocked Central Asian countries and transport energy and other goods. However, transit routes and geographical access do not ensure reliable and predictable transport and service. A number of logistical and legal barriers need to be aligned for the geographically available transit routes to be of commercial use. The World Bank's March 2026 Afghanistan Economic Monitor noted the ongoing disruption at the Pakistan border increased trade costs and encouraged trade diversion (World Bank, 2026a). The report noted certain concerns related to continuity of trade. However, the report did not assess the transport service from Pakistan to Central Asia. Thus, it is not possible to assess the impact of the report, or make a case, for trade through alternative routes. As such, the first research question takes into account the role of Afghanistan, and the transport corridor, separately. The existing roads from Pakistan to Central Asia serve little purpose, if any, to Vision Central Asia without predictable and reliable border services.

Security and reciprocal interests

The second theme is the intersection of security and cooperation. As identified by Mughal and Suleman (2021), stability is a pre-requisite for integrating other regional connectivity paths, and particularly for corridor policy, means must be found to allay concerns regarding security while ensuring that the transportation of legal traffic is as planned and as predictable as possible. Among other things, stable and secure transit conditions should enable Afghanistan to gain commercially reasonable, and legally permissible, transit and, where appropriate, service transit opportunities. As noted earlier, the CAREC climate scoping study (ADB, 2023) mentions various potential drivers for regional cooperation on climate change, including capacity-building, and identifies disruption due to politics as one of the possible impediments to transport in the region, along with unreliable and vulnerable transport infrastructure. It provides an engineering planning approach for addressing transit disruptions. According to the 2025 World Bank report (2026b), the Pakistan Customs office issued a notice on October 24, describing disruptions to trade and the transit of vehicles at border crossings, due to the imposition of security-related restrictions, along with an appeal for the issuing of clearances for stranded vehicles. Security-related disruptions to the flow of transit trade and transport along corridors call for corridor planning to address security and related threats, as well as information sharing. Consideration should also be given to the interests of Afghanistan and Central Asia. Unless the transit terms, local trade, transit charges and modalities for addressing disputes are agreed, Pakistan's strategic goals may not be implemented. Therefore, the provision of reciprocal transit and trade facilities by the member countries reflects both political and practical considerations. Documentary evidence has not been found to indicate a specific framework for sharing benefits. This, however, does not

mean that no such framework exists. This study's second research question considers the integration of the three pillars of diplomacy, infrastructure and institutions. The first of these, i.e. diplomacy, enables the formation of the rules for transit and helps resolve disputes, while the other two offer the necessary physical and management skills, respectively. Continuity and reliability of the service offered may be impacted by external factors. The resources and efforts committed by the partner states point to the understanding that a collaborative framework remains the best way to enable and improve regional transit and trade (Mughal & Suleman, 2021; ADB, 2023).

Commercial feasibility and implementation

The third theme concerns strategies and transport projects that have political or diplomatic advantages but have no prospects for becoming operational. The reason for this is that various transport and transit projects rely on adequate demand to cover their costs and to amortize the investments made in them. When appraising projects, it is important to evaluate possible demand and the conditions of the financing and investment. For transport projects, all of the available transport routes and corridors play an equivalent role. Therefore, the competitiveness of the transport corridors offered by Pakistan has to do with costs and reliability of the transport services offered. The development of international transport and transit requires the same work focused on export promoting firms. The OECD notes that export diversification in Kazakhstan is linked to the improvement of the business environment and regulations, as well as to trade and transit logistics and transport. The OECD studies on Uzbekistan and Pakistan explore similar dynamics. International competitiveness of firms and economic development is conditioned by many factors, including market access. Therefore, policies aiming to create and diversify international economic exchanges should promote conditions and remove obstacles for trade. Among the factors related to the will and capacity of a country to implement policies, the OECD noted some improvements in border-related cooperation among countries in the Central Asia region. Improving cooperation at borders raises many issues of institutional capacity and will of countries to implement policy agreements. With regard to these cases, the OECD has provided several examples of how to implement policies to improve border and international connectivity. The distinction between strategy and implementation is best illustrated by the Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan railway. While work on the railway was reported in 2025 by the Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2025), it failed to note the completion of the trans-border section of the railway. Similarly, the World Bank (2026b) reported on the status of the CASA-1000 project, noting work in progress and project milestones, without announcing the completion of the project. The focus of this research is on realism; therefore, the expected benefits of a project, program, or activity should be considered as achieved only after the costs, demand, financing, and operation and maintenance have been addressed. Regarding possible choices, road transit and border procedures call for improvement to ensure the reliability of transport services; larger rail and energy projects call for improvement to ensure the viability of the projects and the commencement of regular, verified operation; and progress in the completion of projects must be distinguished from routine operation of projects. Documenting procedures and costs may be feasible once reliable records and

procedures become available. The focus of this research is on the project completion and the usability of projects rather than projects that have been announced.

Conclusion

Pakistan is currently reliant on Vision Central Asia to develop corridors for regional trade and transit. With the review of the available evidence, it shows there has been recent diplomatic activity and the existence of a number of key transit infrastructure projects. There have also been documented disruptions to regional trade and the World Bank has reported that Afghan trade routes have been changed. The evidence cited is from some time ago and describes conditions at a particular point in time. They illustrate the potential for improving transit infrastructure to enhance regional trade. Experience has shown that one of the limiting factors to the further development of regional trade is not the potential, but the will and capacity to invest in and develop necessary regional infrastructure. Improving infrastructure to improve existing trade corridors and providing similar trade infrastructure to support regional trade integration to enhance trade and energy connectivity should be prioritized. Transit infrastructure and regional trade integration have to be based on functions, reliability and services rather than the size and scale of the infrastructure and trade projects, commitment and engagement of governments in the region. Based on the evidence cited, commitment to Central Asia and the stabilization of Afghanistan are related to furthering trade and regional connectivity and sustainable development. The relation and interaction of diplomacy, trade and infrastructure help realize opportunities rather than focusing on trade and transit projects in the region. The relationship, cooperation and engagement of regional countries, especially Central Asia, in support of these integrational and transregional activities help guide and prioritize policies rather than committing to large, scale and unmanageable projects. This is the main finding of the study and it should inform further policy and research. Independent and objective evidence rather than self-cited evidence should be used to validate and guide further policy discussions.

Recommendations

1. To ease the movement of transit cargo through Torkham and Chaman, Pakistan and Afghanistan should improve Customs coordination to optimize and standardize the transit procedures.
2. Mechanisms to protect trade and transit shipments affected by border closures should be developed by both countries.
3. Customs documentation should be regional harmonized. Digital information should be exchanged by Customs authorities to enhance regional trade.
4. The first step to improve regional trade should be the modernization of land and transport infrastructure.
5. The feasibility of the Trans-Afghan Railway should be assessed.

6. Strengthening diplomatic relations of Pakistan with Central Asia should be combined with modernization of transport and transit infrastructure to attain secure trade and regional transport corridors.
7. To improve institutional accountability and responsiveness, a series of institutional and operational gaps in regional corridors should be continually monitored.

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