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Middle East Railway Sector Market & Investment Opportunity Analysis

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Abstracts

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“Middle East Railway Sector & Investment Opportunity Analysis” report gives comprehensive insight on the current scenario of rail transport in Middle East region at country level. Report also discusses the policy and regulatory framework adopted by each country along with the initiatives undertaken by the various stakeholders to promote the growth of rail network in the region. Currently Iran, Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia are the dominant players in the regional rail network expansion efforts. The total rail network length in region is close to 35,000 km and is further expected to surpass 45,000 km by 2030 years with total investment of more than US$ 200 Billion.

Beginning of rail transport in Middle East dates back to late nineteenth century when national railway lines were constructed in Egypt, Turkey, Iraq and Iran. After that during the Ottoman Empire, railway network in Middle East grew substantially in the countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria. Like most of the other parts in Asia and Africa, railway construction in various Middle East countries is also a history of the colonial powers’ strategic and economic priorities. During the first part of the 1900s, railways were built for military purposes, as well as to provide distribution routes for products from the industries of the colonizing nations and raw materials for the same industries. Consequently, the lines have different technical specifications, depending on which country constructed them.

During the last century, railway construction was proceeding at a considerable speed – mainly in Turkey, Syria, Iran, Iraq and Israel. However, the rail density was – and still is – low, compared with more advanced countries. Likewise, the diversity of standards and axle load did make through traffic difficult. Still, a few border crossing were established

within the region and towards Europe and Asia. Vast desert areas, extremely hot climate, difficult topography, disperse population centers and heavy dependence on road due to abundant domestic petroleum resources have always acted as the roadblocks in the growth of rail network in the region. Though now most of the countries have built railway network, at least to some extent, its role in passenger transport is almost negligible in the region as a whole.

As in 2016, the total railway network length in the entire Middle East region is close to 35000 km with more than 90% being in Iran, Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Iran with about 13000 km of railway network length, leads the rail transport in the region followed by Turkey and Egypt with railway network of 12000 km and 9500 km respectively. Besides, railway networks with moderate length also exist in the countries like Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Israel, Jordan and Syria etc. But excepting Saudi Arabia, in a large part of the Arabian Peninsula in countries like Qatar, Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain Oman rail transport has no presence. Barring tiny proportion of freight movement by rail, these hydrocarbon resource-rich countries are almost entirely dependent on road transport, primarily due to the cheap fossil-fuels and the policies of respective governments. But some of the countries outside the Arabia region but falling within the Middle East region, such as Iran, Egypt and Turkey have built extensive rail network and railways account for major part of the transportation network in the country. Rail networks of shorter lengths are also present in the countries like Israel, Jordan, Syria, Iraq etc. though the role of rail transport in the entire transportation systems is quite insignificant in most of the countries.

Rail transport is integral part of sustainable growth strategy in the region that will drive the market. There are several cross-border railway links including the Gulf Railway in the list of proposed railway projects. These will naturally enhance the scope of trade among the countries along with providing invest opportunities in other sectors. The railway network can transform the region in the way so that it will have the one of the best transportation infrastructure in the world. In addition to direct economic benefits, it will enable the countries to utilize the sizeable potential in other sectors like finance, tourism, retail which have already indicated enormous potential.

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