

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.

Contents

1. MIDDLE EAST OUTLOOK

- 1.1 Countries Overview
- 1.2 Middle East Economy
- 1.3 Transportation in Middle East

2. MIDDLE EAST RAIL TRANSPORT OUTLOOK

- 2.1 Overall Status of Rail Transport in Middle East
- 2.2 Trends in Railway Infrastructure Development in Middle East

3. SAUDI ARABIA

- 3.1 Existing Railway Infrastructure
- 3.2 Proposed/Planned Railway Infrastructure
- 3.3 Regulatory Framework
- 3.4 Policy for Railway Infrastructure Development

4. BAHRAIN

- 4.1 Planned Railway Infrastructure
- 4.2 Regulatory Framework
- 4.3 Policy for Railway Infrastructure Development

5. UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE)

- 5.1 Existing Railway Infrastructure
- 5.2 Proposed/Planned Railway Infrastructure
- 5.3 Regulatory Framework
- 5.4 Policy for Railway Infrastructure Development

6. KUWAIT

- 6.1 Existing Railway Infrastructure
- 6.2 Proposed/Planned Railway Infrastructure
- 6.3 Regulatory Framework
- 6.4 Policy for Railway Infrastructure Development

7. OMAN

- 7.1 Existing Railway Infrastructure
- 7.2 Planned Railway Infrastructure
- 7.3 Regulatory Framework
- 7.4 Policy for Railway Infrastructure Development

8. QATAR

- 8.1 Existing Railway Infrastructure
- 8.2 Proposed/Planned Railway Infrastructure
- 8.3 Regulatory Framework
- 8.4 Policy for Railway Infrastructure Development

9. IRAN

- 9.1 Existing Railway Infrastructure
- 9.2 Proposed/Planned Railway Infrastructure

10. JORDAN

- 10.1 Existing Railway Network
- 10.2 Planned Railway Network
- 10.3 Railway Development Policy

11. TURKEY

- 11.1 Existing Railway Network
- 11.2 Planned Railway Network
- 11.3 Regulatory Framework
- 11.4 Policy for Rail Network Expansion

12. ISRAEL

- 12.1 Existing Railway Network
- 12.2 Planned Railway Infrastructure
- 12.3 Regulatory Framework
- 12.4 Railway Infrastructure Development Policy

13. GCC RAILWAY NETWORK

14. INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITY IN MIDDLE EAST RAILWAY SECTOR

15. MIDDLE EAST RAILWAY SECTOR DRIVERS

- 15.1 Policies to Diversify Economy
- 15.2 Urbanization & Rapid Population Growth
- 15.3 Environmental Reasons

16. MIDDLE EAST RAILWAY SECTOR COMMERCIAL CHALLENGES

- 16.1 Geographic Size & Population Base
- 16.2 Unfavorable Geographic Conditions
- 16.3 Availability of Cheap Fuel for Road Transport

17. MIDDLE EAST RAILWAY SECTOR FUTURE OUTLOOK

List Of Figures

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2-1: Middle East - Railway Network Length by Countries (km), 2016

Figure 2-2: Middle East - Proportion of Total Railway Network by Country (%), 2016

Figure 2-3: Middle East & Other Countries Railway Network Density of Population (km Railway Lines per 1 Million Population), 2016

Figure 2-4: Middle East – Top Five Countries with Railway Network Density of Population (km Rail line per 1 Million population), 2016

Figure 2-5: Middle East & Other Major Countries Rail Network Length Density of Area (km of Railway lines per 1000 km² area), 2016

Figure 2-6: Middle East - Top Five Countries in terms of Railway Network Length Density of Land Area (km Railway Lines per 1000km² Area), 2016

Figure 2-7: Middle East - Railway Track Gauge (mm) by Country

Figure 2-8: Middle East - Electrified Railway Network Length (km), 2016

Figure 2-9: Middle East - Share of Electrified & Un-electrified Railway Network (%), 2016

Figure 2-10: Share of Electrified Railway in Middle East & Other major Regions (%), 2016

Figure 3-1: Saudi Arabia - Current & Projected Length of Railway Network (km), 2016 & 2040

Figure 3-2: Saudi Arabia - Proposed Railway Network Development Plan in Three Levels (km), 2010-2040

Figure 3-3: Saudi Arabia - Investment Plan in Railways (US\$ Billion), 2010 - 2040

Figure 4-1: Bahrain - Planned Public Transport Network Length by Various Modes of Transportation (km), 2016 - 2030

Figure 4-2: Bahrain - Phase-wise Plans for Public Transport Network Length (km), 2016 - 2030

Figure 4-3: Bahrain – Phase wise Investment in Public Transport Network (US\$ Billion), 2016 - 2030

Figure 6-1: Kuwait - Urban Rapid Rail Transit Network Implementation Plan Phase-wise (km)

Figure 6-2: Kuwait - Planned Implementation Schedule of National Railroad Project by Phase (km)

Figure 7-1: Oman - Railway Network

Figure 7-2: Oman - Rail Network Development by Phase (km), 2018-28

Figure 8-1: Qatar - Projected Railway Ridership (passenger trips per day), 2021 & 2031

Figure 8-2: Qatar - Projected Designed Maximum Speeds of the Trains (kmph)

Figure 10-1: Jordan - Current & Projected railway Network Length (km), 2016 & 2020

Figure 11-1: Turkey- Rail Investment (US\$ Million), 2003 & 2013

Figure 11-2: Turkey - Cumulative Railway Network Length (km), 2011, 2014 & 2016

Figure 11-3: Turkey - Cumulative Length of High Speed Railway Network (km), 2011 & 2016

Figure 11-4: Turkey - Railway Passenger Ridership (Million), 2011 & 2016

Figure 11-5: Turkey - Passenger Ridership in High speed Rail (Million), 2011 & 2016

Figure 11-6: Turkey - Planned Railway Network Length by Type (km), 2015 – 2023

Figure 12-1: Israel - Rail passenger Volume (Million), 2009, 2013 & 2016

Figure 12-2: Israel - Railway Investment Plan by Sectors (Us\$ Million), 2016 – 2020

Figure 12-3: Israel - Current & Projected Passenger Volume in Railways (Million), 2016 & 2020

Figure 13-1: GCC – Rail Network Outline

Figure 13-2: GCC - Railway Network Length in Each Member States (km)

Figure 14-1: Proposed Investment in Rail Projects in CC Countries (US\$ Billion), 2015 - 2030

Figure 15-1: GCC Region - Projected Population (Million), 2020 & 2025

Figure 15-2: Average per passenger fuel economy in various transport modes (passenger mile per gasoline-Gallon equivalent), 2016

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