Bhutan

Country Presentation
Subregional Capacity Building Workshop
Session 2: Multimodal Transport System

Shillong, Meghalaya
22-23 November 2023
Outline

❖ Freight Transport Connectivity
❖ Railway Connectivity (2005 to 2009)
❖ Railway Connectivity (2019-2021)
❖ Challenges and Issues
❖ Inland Water Transport
❖ Issues and Challenges
# Freight Transport Connectivity

Table 1: Share of different modes of freight transport in the BBIN sub-region (CUTS, 2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Roadways</th>
<th>Railways</th>
<th>Waterways</th>
<th>Air/Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Does not exist</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Railway Connectivity (2005 to 2009)

- Railway links between Bhutan and India have been explored since 2005 with five possible links initially proposed:
  1. Hasimara (West Bengal) - Phuentsholing (approx. 18 kms) and bifurcation to Pasakha;
  2. Kokrajhar (Assam) – Gelephu (approx 70 kms);
  3. Rangia (Assam) – Nanglam (Approx 40 kms);
  4. Rangia (Assam) – Samdrup Jongkhar via Darranga (approx. 60 kms);
  5. Banarhat (West Bengal) – Samtse (approx. 16 km) were identified.
Feasibility Study
A Highway Connecting Gelephu and Taraythang

Design and Geotechnical Division

Source: CUTS, 2022
Challenges and Issues

- Slow progress due to land acquisition issues and minimal RoI
- Resistance from tea garden owners in the area
- Alternate option of using elevated railway lines suggested but it increases the cost multiple times.
RGoB proposed Mujnai, West Bengal (India) and Neyopaling, Samtse (Bhutan) as a strategic infrastructure for the mining industry in 2020.

Site visits in mid-March 2020. Difficulties in land acquisition and RoI stalled the proposal.

MFA requested the former MoIC & MoEA to revise the proposal to focus on Assam railway links

New proposals submitted in order of preference:

1. Bongaigaon/Kokrajhar, Assam, India to Gelephu
2. Pathsala, Assam, India - Pelzomthang (Rinchenthang/Nganglam),
3. Rangiya, Assam, India - Motaga, Samdrup Jongkhar
Current Status: RGoB’s proposal for Kokrajhar – Gelephu Railway Link
Inland Water Transport

❖ To substantially increase its mineral exports, including coal, dolomite, gypsum, limestone, marble, quartzite, slate, talc, boulders, sand and gravel mined in the south and southwest of Bhutan.

❖ Inland water transport for passengers as well as good transport has not been exploited in Bhutan.

❖ Only water transport systems used in some stretches of selected rivers for wooden logs transport and rafting for recreational purposes are carried out.
Bhutan and Bangladesh signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on April 18, 2017, regarding the use of inland waterways (IWW) for bilateral trade and transit cargoes.

The MoU allows the export-import cargo of Bhutan to be handled at maritime ports of Chittagong and Mongla in Bangladesh, with transit to identified destinations in Bhutan through waterways in Bangladesh.

The first consignment of boulders was dispatched from Bhutan to Bangladesh via Dhubri river-port in Assam, India, and terminating in Narayanganj port in July 2019 (Suberi, 2020).

The services could not continue primarily because of inadequate infrastructure and poor road section leading to the port that passes through the town and is hugely congested.
Studies on Inland Water Transport

- The Surface Transport Master Plan for Bhutan 2007:
  - Recommends that Pho-Chhu (Wangdue-Punakha) and Drangme Chhu (Panbang-India Section) as feasible and potential sites for carrying out a techno-economic feasibility.
  - The study found out that most of the rivers in Bhutan are either having very high current or low water levels.
  - Manas River: Protected area thus not permitted.
Brahmaputra/Jamuna Tributaries for Inland Water Transport (WB, 2014)

- Alternative transport links to Bhutan’s regional neighbours and the gateway ports at the head of the Bay of Bengal (principally Kolkata, Mongla and Chittagong).

- The study identified eight rivers that merit investigation for inland water transport purposes, either in part (on the southern portion of the Duar Plains) or along their total length as follows:
1. The Singimari River
2. The Torsa River (also known in Bhutan as the Amo Chu)
3. The Raidak/Sankosh Rivers
4. The Gourang River.
5. The Champabati River
6. The Aie River (known in Bhutan as the Gala Chu)
7. The Beki River (known in Bhutan as the Manas)
8. The Lokhartou River
Issues and Challenges

- However, the concept note recommended undertaking detailed feasibility study on the following:
  a. The navigability of the proposed rivers; and
  b. The economic and financial feasibility of their development into navigation channels for transport.
- Nothing much has happened after the concept note by the World Bank.
Thank you!