



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

Middle Corridor – balancing ambition with actual performance



The Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, known as the Middle Corridor (TITR), has become a real, measurable cargo **route** between China and Europe over the past three years. It is no longer a pending project, but it is not yet a stable system.

Its development demonstrates that trade in the Eurasian area can be redirected and maintained outside established routes, but at a high cost and with constant technical limitations.

The Middle Corridor is therefore not a story of rapid ascent but of a prolonged effort to create a reliable land route where previously there were only temporary connections.

In 2024, approximately 4.5 million tonnes of goods passed through the corridor, an **increase** of about 62 per cent compared to 2023. During the first seven months of 2025, more than 24,000 containers were **transported**, almost twice as many as in the same period of the previous year.

Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Georgia now have a common operating framework through the TITR association, which coordinates tariffs and schedules.

Limits of the Middle Corridor

The corridor connects China's rail network to European markets via Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. The total length exceeds four thousand kilometres of railway and about five hundred kilometres of sea crossing.

The flow of goods on the Middle Corridor depends on the coordination of rail and sea transport. Goods are transported by train through Kazakhstan, then loaded onto ships that cross the Caspian Sea, and continue by rail through Azerbaijan and Turkey.

The total capacity of the corridor is now about 5.8 million tonnes per year - The World Bank

Each transfer requires transshipment, customs control, and additional documentation. At these points, congestion, costs, and delays occur, which determine the real efficiency of the corridor.

Under the most favourable conditions, transit takes between 18 and 22 days, which is still far from the stable industrial precision required by global supply chains. According to World Bank estimates, the total **capacity** of the corridor is now about 5.8 million tonnes per year. This is significantly below the capacity of the northern route.

Connecting systems to accelerate transit

The main progress in recent years is visible in infrastructure. Kazakhstan has **expanded** the Dostyk–Moiynty railway, modernised the terminals in Aktau and Kuryk, and planned additional capacity by 2027.

Azerbaijan is **completing** a new container terminal at the port of Alat, and the modernisation of the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway reduces transit times through the Caucasus. However, the main problem remains crossing the Caspian Sea—a limited number of ferries, unreliable timetables, and a lack of synchronisation with rail schedules.

The goal is to automate documentation and customs checks, eliminating the need for repetitive procedures at each border

At the institutional level, TITR introduced a shared coordination platform and began digitising customs procedures. TITR **launched** a joint digital system between Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Georgia to accelerate the movement of goods along the corridor.

The goal is to automate documentation and customs checks, eliminating the need for repetitive procedures at each border. This

system is already operational in Kazakhstan, allowing shipments to pass in less than an hour, a process that previously took an entire day. Once all three countries connect their systems, transit time through the corridor could be reduced by several days.

Ambitious but not unrealistic projections

The Middle Corridor is developing because other routes have become unstable. The war in Ukraine and sanctions against Russia have disrupted regular freight traffic via the northern route.

Simultaneously, attacks in the Red Sea and rising insurance costs have slowed traffic through the Suez Canal. In these circumstances, the countries of Central Asia are seeking to establish a new route through which goods can move without delays or political obstacles.

Kazakhstan plans to increase traffic by 220 per cent by 2027, with investments in new railways and additional shipping lines across the Caspian Sea

In this context, the countries in Central Asia are attempting to become mediators rather than centres of power. Their advantage is their geographical location, but their limiting factors are cost, institutional weakness, and dependence on external funding.

The World Bank estimates that by 2030, traffic through the corridor could **reach** 11 million tonnes if ports are modernised and multiple customs processing is abolished. Kazakhstan plans to increase traffic by 220 per cent by 2027, with investments in new railways and additional shipping lines across the Caspian Sea. These are ambitious but not unrealistic projections, provided the region stabilises politically.

Not a world-changing project, but a test of stability

The Middle Corridor is no longer merely a plan, but it is not yet a stable system. Its progress depends on the technical alignment of railway networks, long-term investment, and the trust of carriers.



For Europe, and especially for the UK, the Middle Corridor has significance that extends beyond regional logistics - President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev with Ursula Von der Leyen

The corridor is currently used by Chinese, Kazakh, and Azerbaijani state-owned railway companies, as well as several smaller European operators testing regular lines.

In August 2025, the Chinese operator CRCT (China Railway Container Transport) **joined** the TITR association, making China's participation in transport permanent.

European companies currently **use** the corridor to a limited extent, mainly for test deliveries and medium-value goods. The main goal of the development programmes is not to increase speed but to improve the reliability and predictability of traffic.

For Europe, and especially for the United Kingdom, the Middle Corridor has significance that extends beyond regional logistics. It demonstrates how dependent the global economy is on reliable land connections and how risks have shifted from the oceans to the continents.

If growth projections are confirmed, British

and European companies will need to incorporate this route into their supply strategies, even if only as a supplementary channel to reduce dependence on Russian and maritime routes.

Fundamentally, the Middle Corridor is not a project that will transform the world. It is a test of the ability to maintain predictable transport under unstable conditions. Its value lies not in the volume of traffic but in the way it demonstrates how the global system adapts to constraints.

The coming years will reveal whether the Middle Corridor can function without interruptions and losses. If countries along the route provide stable transportation and shared rules, the corridor will become part of a regular trade network between Asia and Europe. If it fails, it will remain a temporary path that exists only when other routes are unavailable.