The Interests of Russia in the Eurasian Transport Space

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Abstract—The paper analyzes the development of the transport infrastructure by the example of railway transport depending on the strategic goals of the government and indicates the processes of stagnation and new reference points tied to the openness of the economy and its resource orientation. The place and role of Russian railways in external ties as well as the transit potential for increasing their competitiveness under conditions of stronger competition and realization of alternative projects on the part of the neighboring states are shown.

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Evolution of the railway transport infrastructure, its influence on social processes in Russia. The development of transport infrastructure preceded the realization of different projects of strategic character. The influence of railway transport on the geopolitical and economic position of the country has been noted at all the stages of formation of the railway network for the more than 170-year period of existence of this type of transport. Trunk railways, particularly in newly developed regions, were the axes along which the system of settlement was formed.

Three mainlines in the western part of the Russian Empire that had great commercial and strategic value were the basis of the network in the initial period (since 1837). The middle of the 19th century was characterized by explosive growth of the network with an annual increase of more than 1500 km in the directions to the ports of the Baltic, Black, and Azov seas and the borders of Germany and Austria-Hungary.

By the early 20th century, railroads were introduced to the Urals, Central Asia, and Transcaucasia owing to the intense industrial development there; the greater part of the Trans-Siberian Mainline was built. The rate of growth in the network in this period exceeded 2500 km per year; its total extension reached more than 53000 km. The development of the mainline network resulted in a significant increase in the population in the eastern part of Russia; the flow of migrants increased particularly rapidly in the zones of attraction of the mainline in Western Siberia and Northern Caucasus.

The subsequent growth of the network followed the path of its complication, liquidation of “island” sections, creation of parallel relief lines in the European part, and completion of construction of the strategic mainlines in all directions. As a result, reliable communication between the Northwestern part of Russia and the Urals was established, and an outlet to the ports of the Pacific Ocean was provided.

By the end of the period falling within the years of the First World War and Civil War, when more 60% of the network was destroyed, the devastated sections were successfully restored, and new sections were built, which permitted the links between the center and eastern regions of the country to be optimized. Analogous changes in the railway network took place in the years of the Great Patriotic War, by the end of which, despite serious destruction, the operational length of railway lines increased by 6800 km compared to the pre-war 1940 level, having reached 113000 km. The basic network of the European North was formed; lateral and frontal roads were built in the south of the country.

Subsequently, the network developed most intensely in Western and Eastern Siberia owing to the rapid development of the resource base and creation of the FIC (fuel-industrial complex). The South Siberian and Central Siberian Mainlines were built, the construction of railway lines to the port of Vanino was completed, and a network was built on the territory of Kazakhstan and Central Asia. The development of the network was accompanied by its modernization.

In the last 15 years of existence of the Soviet Union, the rate of putting railway lines into operation slowed down (approximately 600 km per year); as a result, a deficit of the transportation and carrying capacity of the network began to be sensed. Nevertheless, the largest projects that had important economic and strategic value were realized in this period (the Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM)), and the mainlines opening access to the hydrocarbon deposits of Western Siberia and the bypass lines around the largest transport loops (Moscow (the third ring), Kuibyshev, Rostov, Sverdlovsk loops) were created. According to the data of Academician A.G. Aganbegyan, before the BAM was built, approximately 300000 people lived in its zone of attraction extending 3000 km (in a number of regions the population density reached 1 man per 100 square kilometers); by the completion of construction, the population of this territory exceeded 2 million people.
By 1990, the extension of the railway network was 147,500 km; the configuration had been formed according to the orthogonal type in both the European part of Russia and the southern part of the Urals, Siberia, and Far East, i.e., almost within the entire system of settlement in the country.

The systemic crisis of the 1990s resulted in negative trends in development of the network: the decline in the volume of traffic for not only objective reasons—as a result of the decline in output, disintegration of the Soviet Union and appearance of new independent states in its place, and insignificant introduction of new lines into service. The unbalanced tariff policy along with shutdowns entailed the outflow of the population from the regions of the Far North and Far East and depopulation of vast territories remote from the center of the country, which also resulted in a sharp decrease in passenger and cargo traffic.

Owing to the decline in traffic, many network sections were dismantled or transferred into the category of access lines. Moreover, despite the increase in output that started in 2000, the trend toward closing railway sections continues. Such changes in the configuration of the network are observed even in unharmed regions with an export orientation of the economy, where the development of the network is oriented to outbound freight—the Northwestern and Urals Federal Districts. Thus, in the Northwestern FD, along with putting into operation the lines for export of timber and products from the Kostromskaya Mining Plant and building new connecting lines at the St. Petersburg transport hub for connections to Finland, a number of sections were closed predominately in the Kaliningrad and Murmansk oblasts, and separate sections were handed over to branch departments.

The most significant changes in the spatial structure of the network toward its reduction and simplification took place in the Central, Volga, and Southern Federal Districts. On the territory of the latter, along with putting two lines into operation (the lateral line in Dagestan that reduced the path from the Volga region to Transcaucasia and the access railroad to the port of Olya in Astrakhan oblast), many sections of the network and border-crossing points at the frontier with Ukraine were dismantled, and a number of sections in Rostov oblast were also removed owing to several mines having been closed.

The formation of the BAM was completed in the Siberian Federal District upon putting the North Musk tunnel into operation; however, many sections at the border with Kazakhstan concurrently underwent dismantling and transfer into the category of access lines. The cargo-generating lines connecting the mainlines with the access lines to inactive mines were hastily closed in the Kuzbass in the mid-1990s, the completion construction of the Meret–Central Siberian line was halted with an 80% degree of readiness, given the fact that the growth in coal production with a 9% average annual increase was subsequently observed in the region.

One of the significant infrastructure projects in recent years was the building of the Amur–Yakutsk Mainline in the Far Eastern FD (movement of labor began in 1997; it was put into operation in 2006) and creation of a number of lines up to the border with China; however, the extension of railway lines in the district has on the whole decreased. This is due to liquidation of the Kholmsk–Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk Mainline in Sakhalin owing to its low competitiveness compared to the general network level: the prime cost of transportation by this mainline exceeds the average network level by an order of magnitude owing to the peculiar properties of operation.

Changes in the configuration of the network took place to an even greater extent than in its extension (Table 1 [1]—the data were calculated by the author on the basis of the statistical reports of OJSC Russian Railways with the assistance of topographic maps). The closure of duplicate sections with low traffic as well as a number of sections at the borders with the former Soviet republics is noted at mainlines. The closure of many cargo-generating and industrial branches has resulted from the liquidation of separate enterprises (particularly in the branches of the mining, food, and logging industries) and the closure of a number of defense installations as well as from changes in the schemes for delivery of raw materials and products. The liquidation of narrow-gauge lines that began as far back as the Soviet period (they were reduced from 2900 to 1300 km from 1970 to 1990) was carried out in parallel. This process is due to development of the road-transport network and changeover of the cargo and passenger flows from railroads to this network.

Consequently, as the railway transport developed, it fulfilled the function of an integrating factor all over the country and was an instrument for exerting political and economic influence on solving tasks at the national level. Over the period of reforms, the spatial structure of the railroad network was reduced and simplified toward the predominance of mainlines with the orientation to external links, first of all, to the far-abroad countries. The rupture of the Trans-Siberian Mainline took place on the Russian territory: separate sections pass through the territory of Kazakhstan. A number of mainline tracks transferred into the outlying category. The mass closure of weakly operating sections was also promoted by the fact that the legal mechanism assigning the order of their closure was absent until 2005. The stabilization of the operational length of railroads has begun to show only in recent years.

**Transport projects and geopolitics.** The change in the country’s boundaries, growth in the predominance of northern territories, and destruction of the integrated transportation network have significantly narrowed the potential for the geopolitical influence of Russia. The global geopolitical and socioeconomic changes in the post-Soviet space have resulted in reorientation of raw materials sources and market outlets and, most importantly, in the change in the subjects of support to newly formed states. The new refer-