

# **A History of Pakistan Railways From Pre-Partition Times till Now: A Historical Review with Key Evolutionary Milestones**



**Pakistan Institute of  
Development Economics**



PAKISTAN INSTITUTE  
OF DEVELOPMENT  
ECONOMICS

Webinar Series on  
**Pakistan Railways**  
**PART 2/6**



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# A History of Pakistan Railways From Pre-Partition Times till Now: A Historical Review with Key Evolutionary Milestones

**Monday 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2021**

**Start at 11:00 AM (PST).**

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**Meeting ID: 986 3023 1695**

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## Preamble

Pakistan's railway sector is not "on rails" and the sector seems to be wrapped around a single institution, Pakistan Railways (PR)—managed collectively by the Ministry of Railways (MoR) and PR. The crisis in PR started in the 1970s and continues to this date. The passenger traffic has reduced, freight traffic has truncated, revenues have scaled-down while working expenses have soared. Most of the locomotives are found in warehouses in need of spare parts. Interference from politicians and bureaucracy, and the inability to modernize the 19th century inherited railway asset has led to mere mismanagement and rot. Pakistan Railways is the national, state-owned railway company of Pakistan. Founded in 1861 and headquartered in Lahore, it owns 7,791 kilometers of track across Pakistan from Torkham to Karachi, offering both freight and passenger services.

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## Key Messages

### Dr. Muhammad Imran

- History is vital for understanding today's problem.
- Railways have played an active role in industrial development, especially the engineering industry, mining industry caught on, and spinning and weaving mills, and the food industries. It has played an active role in increasing agricultural productivity, improving external and internal trade, and providing employment.
- According to Professor Wu Han Boucek from the University of Pennsylvania, there are four levels to understand and analyze any transport policy.
  - 1. Strategic environment
    2. Transport policy and investment
    3. Transport mode network
    4. Individual case portfolio jack
- If we apply this framework to Colonial India, we can understand the context of railway development. Whereas, in Pakistan only the level four individual project applied on Pakistan Railway. So, without fixing the first three levels, I do not think that Pakistan can move sustainably in the 21st century.
- Unfortunately, we do not have a forum. In New Zealand, these kinds of issues have been dealt with first with establishing a royal commission, and doing such thorough research on some of these sorts of things is missing. So, without fixing the first three levels, I don't think that Pakistan can move sustainably in the 21st century to better PR.

### Mr. Muhammad Ishfaq Khattak

- Pakistan had some railways, what we see today was a small part of a much bigger railway network, which was the Indian railway at that time. It is one part of the Indian railway network of the subcontinent.
- Later, we had the Pakistan Western Railway and the Eastern Railway, and the entire Indian railway at that time after partition was broken up into three parts, the Pakistan railways that we have today, Eastern railways, Bangladesh railways now, and of course, Indian railways. And then after 1971, we had the Pakistan railways which we still have till today.
- Previously the purpose of partition was that basically, this part of the world was adjacent to the borders of Iran and Afghanistan on one side and of course closer to Russia. At that time there was a fear of Russia getting into this part of the world. So, the purpose was a defense-oriented railway and a strategic railway. From that point of view, it meant carrying troops in a better way.
- In 1989, railways had the railway board, later on, it was merged into the ministry. The secretary railways became the chairman railway. So whoever was posted as Secretary Railways was de facto Chairman Railways.
- Now, what is happening, the minister gives you the policy. The secretary does not know all about the railways. So there is a communication gap between the railways and the ministry. Political interference in train operations and other areas is very rampant. This is one of the major factors that brought us to the bad condition.
- From the 1980s to today, the present deficit has gone up to 45 billion rupees which is a burden on the nation. It is in the national interest and the public interest that this deficit needs to be removed.
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- The number of employees per train is very high as compared to other realms. Then in the 90s and early 90s, we had the concept of open access policy, which came in the form of recourse.
- When you know that the infrastructure of a Railway is not good, what is the gain you get from introducing passenger trains which are already making losses? So, that has resulted in deficits and for frequent accidents, we are now the story of deferred maintenance and investment in all three assets, namely.

1. Infrastructure
2. Rolling stock
3. Human resource

#### **Mr. Zia-ul-Haque**

- 1955 Afghan Pakistan Transit trade worked smoothly for 45 years, and we loaded 72 bogies three times in a week. But in 2010, a new contract was signed, in which 70% of our trade shifted to Bandar Abbas and Chabahar and the Railway Ministry made some policies.
- If you want Railway to be successful as Afghani says that Karachi port is cheap and short. Although they have multiple options now. And look from the past ten years 70 percent of our trade is from Chabahar and Bandar Abbas. They have other options, but they are giving us importance because this route is short. When we talk about loose cargo, officers say that we face loss in this. To remove SRO is the job of FBR. In the past, after the shipment was reached, the container was given to shipping companies. The container stays on Karachi port for many days, then reaches Peshawar, then crosses Toorkham, then Jalalabad, and then to Afghanistan
- Concluding Remarks by Dr. Amer Z. Durrani
- We have learned from the history of the railway that unless we have a vision of policy for our overall transport sector, we will not have a vision for railways and the railway will stay where it is.

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