

Third Party Evaluator's Opinion on Paksey Bridge Construction Project (I) (II)

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Relevance

Bangladesh is a riverine country with an area of 147570 sq. km and population of 143.9 million (2007) and is geographically divided by three of the world's largest rivers (Ganges/Padma, Jamuna, Meghna). Ferries used to cross these large rivers bottlenecked road traffic and preventing balanced development of the country. Despite Jamuna and Meghna bridges coming into being, there were no concrete bridge plans for the Ganges River that divides the northwest and southwest regions or the downstream Padma River, which divides the east and southwest regions. Thus, road traffic to the southwest region was forced to use these inefficient ferries. Under the policy coordination of roads, railways and inland water transport with multiple transport corridors, the construction of Paksey Bridge over the Ganges River, the second longest bridge (1786 meter) after Jamuna Bridge, has not only increased the efficiency of road transport between the northwest and southwest regions, but has also created a bypass to connect Dhaka, Khulna (third largest city), and Mongla Port (second largest international seaport) using the Jamuna Bridge. In addition, the national road that passes over Paksey Bridge (PB) is a part of the international highway. Paksey Bridge Construction Project (PBCP) highly bears upon *inter alia* the pressing need for road transport of the economy of this region saving waiting time for vehicles. Furthermore, it was necessary to move the wharf when water levels in the river changed causing frequent disruption of ferry service. PBCP is in line with the current national development strategies and priorities. The demand for transport using PB continues to grow *albeit* slowly primarily due to depressed demand for road transport in the PBCP catchment area owing partly to stagnation of Khulna and Mongla. The second PRSP (FY 2009-11) of the country places strategic emphasis on the development of transportation infrastructure. Navigability of the Ganges/Padma River is on the wane due to regular siltation giving new relevance to PBCP. Besides, it functions readily as an alternative bridge for the railway Hardinge Bridge whenever needed.

Effectiveness and Impact

The direct and indirect impact of PBCP is moderate. Increase in passenger and cargo transport is fairly good *albeit* the achieved impact falls short of the targeted impact in terms of revenue earnings (tolls collected in FY2006 totaled approximately 100 million Taka). The traffic volume between the southwest and northwest regions using PB has remained at 2.8-fold increase as against 5.7 times using Jamuna Bridge, while the volume between the eastern region and southwest region using ferry service has increased by 4.2 times.

The increase rate of traffic crossing the Ganges is lower than that of Jamuna or Padma. PB is used as an import route to the northwest region, but most of the importation areas are in the east region for which ferries are used as import routes. However, PB is most likely to attain full life once Khulna and Mongla operate in full swing.

For PBCP, approximately 143 hectares of land were acquired, and number of households who were affected by losing their land or buildings was 1362. Social effects of PBCP on relocated residents are mostly positive. Compensations have already been paid, no land dispute is in evidence and jobs and social services including schooling of the children and health services of the displaced people have been well protected. No environmental problems including pollution and noise are seen. On the contrary, while there were accidents with the ferries, there is no evidence of accidents on the bridge contributing to the improvement of safety of river crossing.