

The Transit War: Trucks and Tractors, Iran's Unassuming Weapon in the Battle for Routes

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Introduction: A War Fought Over Routes

In today's world, an important part of a country's national power lies in its ability to move goods, energy, capital, and people. A country that can control global trade routes does not merely collect transit fees; it places itself at the heart of a chain of economic, industrial, financial, insurance, warehousing, repair, and value-added activities. This is precisely what is referred to as **logistics warfare**.

Iran stands at a unique geographical crossroads. On one side, it connects Central Asia and China to the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, and the Indian Ocean. On another axis, it connects the Caucasus and Russia to the warm waters of the south. On a third axis, it links Turkey and Europe with Central Asia, Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan.

The key question is not whether Iran has a transit position or not. The real question is how much of this position it has actually turned into an operational advantage.

Under the doctrine of logistics warfare, transit is no longer a marginal economic activity; it is a strategic weapon and an instrument of national survival against economic blockades and crippling sanctions. A country capable of controlling the routes through which goods, energy, and capital move effectively holds the economic breathing points of its rivals in its hands. At the heart of this battle stand trucks and tractor units—unassuming weapons that receive little attention, but without which no transit chain can be completed.

Trucks and Tractor Units: The Irreplaceable Link

The biggest mistake in analyzing transit is reducing it to the movement of a truck from one border to another. A transit shipment moved by truck alone can generate demand for dozens of economic activities: from the truck, tractor unit, and trailer itself to repair shops, gas stations, insurance services, banking, and financing. From customs offices, transport companies, freight forwarders, and logistics firms to information technology, satellite tracking, and security. From restaurants, hotels, and driver services to spare-parts manufacturing, truck production, and maintenance and repair services.

The result is that every ton of transit cargo moved by truck can create value within the domestic economy several times over. This is what turns the truck from a simple means of transportation into a multilayered industry.

The truck is the most flexible means of transportation. It can pick up cargo directly from a factory, cross a border with no rail infrastructure, travel to an industrial town without a dry port, and ultimately deliver the goods to their destination. This flexibility has made the truck the final link in the transit chain and, on many routes, its principal link. Even when goods are transported by ship, train, or aircraft, it is the truck that moves them from the port to the warehouse, from the station to the factory, and from the airport to the final destination. The truck is the connecting link between all modes of transportation.

Tractor Units: The Beating Heart of the Transit Fleet

Among different types of trucks, tractor units occupy a special position. The tractor unit is the most expensive, technically advanced, and strategic component of a transit fleet. A modern international tractor unit costs between **\$150,000 and \$300,000**, while a standard trailer is worth around **\$30,000 to \$50,000**. This means that more than 70 percent of the value of a transit fleet is concentrated in tractor units.

The tractor unit is the driving force of the transportation economy. Fuel consumption, depreciation, maintenance, and driver income all depend on the performance of the tractor unit. Its characteristics in terms of emissions,

permissible weight, and safety equipment determine whether Iran can access European markets and countries with high standards. Outdated tractor units can increase fuel costs by up to 40 percent, reducing the competitiveness of Iranian transit compared with Turkey and the UAE.

Transit tractor units are generally equipped with sleeper cabins so drivers can rest during long journeys. Their engine power is usually between **400 and 600 horsepower**, and they are equipped with ABS, EBS, and stability-control systems. Euro emissions standards determine restrictions on entry into different countries.

In Iran, the active fleet includes a combination of Volvo, Scania, Mercedes-Benz, Renault, MAN, DAF, and Iveco tractor units, but a large portion of them are outdated, and the average age of the country's transit fleet is more than **25 years**.

Some tractor units are designed for specific applications: refrigerated tractor units for perishable goods, container tractor units for transporting containers, heavy-duty tractor units for oversized loads, and dual-fuel tractor units to reduce fuel costs. Choosing the right fleet combination according to the type of cargo and route is one of the key factors for success in transit.

Market Size: A World Moving Billions of Tons of Goods

To understand the depth of the transit market, we must look at global figures. In 2024, the value of global trade in goods and services reached approximately **\$33 trillion**, of which around **\$25 trillion** was merchandise trade. In terms of volume, international maritime transport alone moved approximately **12.1 billion tons** of goods in 2024.

These figures show that the transit market is a global market involving the movement of billions of tons of goods, rather than a small and marginal sector. By comparison, total foreign transit passing through Iran in **1403** was reported at approximately **21.9 million tons**, representing a **22.5 percent** increase compared with the previous year. This means that Iran currently captures only a small share of this enormous global trade flow.

If we look at regional markets, the picture becomes clearer. Iran's trade with neighboring countries in 1403 exceeded **\$60 billion**. Regional trade—including the Middle East, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and South Asia—amounts to approximately **\$1.5 trillion annually**. With the completion of transit corridors, Iran could potentially channel 10 percent of this enormous volume through its territory each year, equivalent to **\$150 billion in transit-related turnover**.

A major portion of this transit is carried out overland by trucks and tractor units. International road transportation, which accounts for a significant share of transit, generates more than **\$3.5 trillion in annual turnover**. Even on routes where railways exist, trucks remain the principal players in the last mile and regional distribution.

Forty Million Tons: The Starting Point, Not the End of the Road

The Seventh Development Plan has set a target of at least **40 million tons of annual transit through Iran** over its five-year horizon. In 1403, the reported figure was approximately **21.9 million tons**. Reaching 40 million tons therefore means almost doubling the current volume.

But the logistics-war perspective must go beyond these figures. Forty million tons is only a medium-term target. Beyond that, scenarios of **60, 80, and 100 million tons** should be examined as long-term horizons, provided that actual infrastructure capacity and agreements among transit-route countries allow it. A major part of this increase should be achieved through the truck and tractor-trailer fleet.

Where Is the Transit Money?

An important point often overlooked in economic analyses is the difference between the value of goods in transit and Iran's transit revenues. If 40 million tons of foreign goods pass through Iran, the value of the goods belongs to their owners. However, Iran can generate revenue from the range of services associated with their movement. These include truck transportation, roads, fuel, repairs, insurance, customs services, financial services, terminals, logistics, restaurants and hotels, driver services, and industrial value-added activities.

For this reason, there is no single official statistic for the total turnover of Iran's transit industry that can encompass all these links. Estimates of the logistics market vary depending on the definition, ranging from several trillion dollars to more than ten trillion dollars.

Therefore, a specific proposal is to establish a **national transit account for Iran**. The government should publish annually:

- The volume of transit cargo in tons

- The number of truck and tractor-trailer journeys
- Direct transportation revenues
- Fuel revenues
- Repair and maintenance revenues
- Insurance revenues
- Financial-services revenues
- Direct employment
- Indirect employment
- Attracted investment

Until such an account is established, it will not be possible to accurately determine how much truck transit contributes to Iran's gross domestic product.

Truck Transit as a Shield Against Sanctions and Blockade

Transit alone does not eliminate sanctions, and such a claim should not be made. However, diversification of trade routes can reduce a country's vulnerability to disruption along a single route.

This was clearly demonstrated during the war in Ukraine. With disruptions to Black Sea ports, Ukraine was forced to rely on a combination of road transport and alternative routes. The World Bank has described Ukrainian Railways as the backbone of the economy and flow of goods during the war, but trucks also played a vital role in moving goods toward the western borders.

The lesson for Iran is clear:

A country that has only one route for imports and exports is vulnerable during a crisis. A country with multiple routes, ports, borders, and modes of transportation is more resilient. In this context, the truck, because of its exceptional flexibility, can open routes during a crisis that no other mode of transportation can.

The Logistics Spider Web, Not a Single Corridor

Iran should not tie its future to a single corridor. The proposed network should include several axes:

- **North–South axis:** Connecting India through Chabahar and Bandar Abbas to Iran and from there to the Caucasus and Russia.
- **East–West axis:** Bringing China through Central Asia to Iran and from there to Turkey and Europe.

- **Persian Gulf corridor:** Connecting the Persian Gulf through Iran to Iraq, Turkey, and the Mediterranean.
- **Pakistan axis:** Connecting from Zahedan to Iran's transportation network.
- **Afghanistan axis:** Connecting Iran's eastern borders to southern ports.
- **Caucasus axis:** Linking Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia to Iran.

In all these corridors, trucks and tractor units are the main players in moving goods. Even on routes where railways exist, trucks serve as the feeder and final-distribution system. This diversity means that the failure or disruption of one route will not bring the entire system to a halt.

Iran's Exceptional Opportunity: Fifteen Neighbors, 600 Million People

Iran is connected to a group of countries surrounding it to the north, east, west, and south. Russia and the Central Asian states, the Caucasus, Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the countries of the Persian Gulf are all located around Iran.

The combined population of these surrounding countries exceeds **600 million people**. In addition to trade, this large market creates enormous potential for truck transit, tourism, medical services, religious tourism, exports, imports, and logistics services.

Within this large market, Iran can play the role of a land bridge between north and south and between east and west.

Corridors That Are Threats Today Can Become Opportunities Tomorrow

Competition among corridors is both a threat and an opportunity for Iran. Competing corridors can attract some of the cargo that could potentially have passed through Iran.

The response should not be limited to protest or political competition. The economic response is: **lower costs, shorter transit times, greater security, better services, and faster customs procedures.**

If the Iranian route is better than a competing route in terms of time and cost, cargo owners will choose the more economical route. And because of its flexibility and speed over short and medium distances, the truck can be Iran's trump card in this competition.

Ports: Gateways for Truck Transit

No transit strategy can be complete without strong ports. Bandar Abbas is the main southern gateway and a link to the North–South Corridor. Chabahar is considered a potential gateway to the east and a connection to India, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. The Persian Gulf ports are vital for regional trade and exports, while the Caspian Sea ports provide routes connecting Iran to Russia and the Caucasus.

But a port should not merely be a place for loading and unloading. Trucks are what carry goods from ports into the interior and bring cargo from factories to ports. Without an efficient truck fleet, a port is merely an unused quay.

Airports: A Link in the Transit Chain for High-Value Goods

Airports should also become part of the transit chain, particularly for perishable goods, medicines, industrial components, electronic goods, e-commerce, express shipments, and high-value cargo.

Even in air transit, however, the truck remains the final link—the vehicle that delivers the cargo from the airport to its ultimate destination.

Dry Ports: The Forgotten Link

A dry port can transfer part of port operations inland. In the desired model, a ship is unloaded at the seaport, and trains and trucks pick up the cargo and transport it to a dry port, from where it is delivered to its final destination.

In this way, trucks do not have to wait for hours at the port, while part of the operations can be carried out at inland logistics centers.

Therefore, **Aperin** and logistics centers in Tehran, Isfahan, Mashhad, Tabriz, Shiraz, Kerman, Zahedan, and suitable border centers should be integrated into a multimodal network, with their number increased in line with greater capacity-building, while trucks serve as the connecting link among them.

Small Cargo: The Link That Needs Reform

Truck transit is not only for massive shipments. The transportation of small cargo must also be made possible and simple. A small producer should be able to introduce 200 kilograms, one ton, five tons, or a single pallet into the logistics network.

The solution is for freight companies to establish cargo consolidation centers, develop an online booking system, and ultimately make door-to-door transportation possible. This will transform the trade of small and medium-sized companies, while trucks, because of their flexibility, are the best option for this type of transportation.

Roads: The Main Platform for Truck Transit

Trucks cannot operate without standard roads. Iran has access to a network of freeways and highways, but there are gaps. Border bottlenecks, insufficient capacity on some routes, varying road quality, the lack of standard terminals, inadequate parking, limited roadside services, a shortage of repair centers, border delays, and weight and axle restrictions on some routes are among these gaps.

Investment in these links directly reduces truck transportation time and increases the competitiveness of Iranian transit.

Customs: Where Hours and Days of Truck Transit Are Lost

A fast road is no longer fast if it keeps a truck stuck at the border for several days. The speed of truck transit is determined by the weakest link in the chain.

Customs must move from traditional controls toward smart customs. In 2025, Iran reported that some components of paperless trade, including an automated customs system, an electronic single window, and electronic submission of declarations, had been fully implemented. However, alignment of operating hours and procedures with neighboring countries was reported as only partial. This means that digital infrastructure has begun, but cross-border connectivity and coordination remain highly important.

Integration of Border Customs: One File, One Data Set, One Window

The specific proposal is to establish **integrated border customs**. Instead of truck drivers and cargo owners having to deal with several separate agencies, customs, standards, quarantine, veterinary services, health authorities, border guards, police, and other necessary controls should operate through one coordinated process.

This does not necessarily mean organizational integration, but rather **one file, one data set, one window, and one process**.

The benefits of this integration for the government are clear. Instead of several fragmented systems, the government would have a real-time picture of the cargo, truck, driver, route, declaration, risk, destination, and entry and exit times. This means greater control, not less control. Smart control can replace part of repetitive physical controls.

The benefit for truck drivers is also significant. Drivers should know when to arrive at the border, how many hours they will have to wait, which documents are required, when they are expected to exit, the status of the queue, and which alternative route is open.

A smart border appointment system can minimize waiting times. For example, a specific truck could have an entry time of 8:20, queue number 127, an estimated inspection time of 10:10, and an estimated exit time of 11:30. This both preserves the driver's time and reduces the physical queue of trucks.

Clearance Time Measurement: Actual Time Must Be Measured

One of the standard global tools is the **World Customs Organization's Time Release Study**, which measures the actual time required to release goods from entry to exit.

For every Iranian border crossing, an indicator should be published: the average time from truck entry to truck exit—not merely the number of trucks passing through.

Bazargan, Astara, Sarakhs, Bashmaq, Parvizkhan, and Shalamchek should each have their own time indicator. Until truck waiting time is measured, managing it will also be difficult.

Long Delays: The Hidden Tax on Truck Transit

Every day a truck is delayed means tied-up capital, fuel consumption, driver costs, parking costs, depreciation, delivery delays, increased risk of cargo spoilage, and higher insurance costs.

As a result, Iran's route may be shorter in terms of kilometers but more expensive than a competing route because of border delays.

The solution is that Iran cannot resolve all bottlenecks alone. It must engage with neighboring countries on customs working hours, working days, documents and standards, permissible weights, insurance and fees, permits and quarantine, border controls, acceptance of electronic documents, and the movement of trucks.

Reports by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank also emphasize cross-border coordination, digitalization, and modernization of border crossings as key tools for developing truck transit.

Deployment of Law Enforcement: Security That Is Itself an Economic Advantage

The organized deployment of law-enforcement personnel at vehicle terminals and truck parking centers can have benefits: driver security, cargo security, prevention of theft, reduction of violations, management of truck traffic, control of entry and exit, and increased confidence among foreign companies.

However, this presence must be designed to be smart and non-disruptive to the flow of goods. In other words: **more security plus less waiting, not more security plus longer queues.**

International Road Transport Associations: From Trade Associations to Operational Think Tanks

International road transport associations should not merely perform an industry-representative role. They can become **operational think tanks for truck transit.**

Their proposed responsibilities include identifying border bottlenecks, providing real data on truck waiting times, reporting drivers' problems, proposing regulatory reforms, following up negotiations with foreign counterparts, training drivers, standardizing services, combating opaque brokerage, establishing price and capacity systems, and participating in the formulation of transit policy.

Aging Fleet: The Major Brake on Truck Transit

One of the most important obstacles is the aging of part of Iran's truck and tractor-unit fleet. An old fleet consumes more fuel, incurs higher maintenance costs, generates more emissions, has lower reliability, and may not meet the standards of some foreign markets.

The average age of Iran's transit fleet is more than twenty-five years. In some cases, trucks that are thirty to forty years old are still operating. Meanwhile, the average fleet age in Europe is less than eight years and in Turkey less than ten years. The result is that renewing the truck and tractor-unit fleet must be regarded as a national project.

Annual Need for Tractor Units and Trucks: A Realistic Calculation

The actual annual requirement should be calculated based on the age of the fleet, the retirement of obsolete vehicles, transit growth, and domestic production capacity. Therefore, instead of announcing a fixed figure without a solid basis, a multi-year fleet renewal program involving tens of thousands of vehicles should be established, with an official annual calculation.

But under conditions of foreign-exchange constraints, an important question arises: Should the country continuously import trucks and tractor units, or should it import technology, production lines, technical know-how, and the service chain? The second approach, if technology transfer and quality assurance are possible, can create greater added value domestically.

Brands such as Volvo, Scania, Renault, and Mercedes-Benz are well known in Iran's heavy-truck market, and examples of these brands are already present in the country's fleet. Particularly in the case of Volvo, if the legal, financial, and commercial conditions are provided, establishing standardized production or assembly capacity, together with a parts supply chain and after-sales services, could have a greater industrial impact than simply importing vehicles. Volvo's advantage is its strong after-sales service network in Iran, which could make it a first priority for importing a production line.

Domestic production capacity must also be taken into account. Companies such as Saipa Diesel, Iran Khodro Diesel, Mammut, and Rakhsh Khodro supply part of the country's needs, but they face limitations in the supply of engines, gearboxes, and electronic systems. Therefore, combining domestic production with the import of production lines and technology transfer could be the optimal solution.

An Alternative to Import Restrictions and the Foreign-Exchange Repatriation Issue

One of the obstacles to investment in renewing the truck and tractor-unit fleet is import restrictions and foreign-exchange requirements. Possible solutions include imports against exports, direct foreign investment with a commitment to domestic production, joint ventures with foreign companies, importing production lines instead of complete vehicles, financing and long-term leasing, and a fleet-renewal fund repaid from transport revenues.

These models have been used in different forms in various countries. The key point is that the law must make the entry of capital and equipment predictable.

Why Is the Investor Still Cautious?

Investors look at questions such as:

What is the rate of return on investment?

How many days per month does a truck operate?

How long is the border waiting time?

How stable are tariffs?

Is money transfer possible?

How is insurance handled?

How likely are regulations to change in a few months?

How are spare parts supplied?

How secure is the route?

Is it possible to repatriate capital?

Therefore, attracting investors cannot be achieved simply by saying that Iran has a strategic transit position. Investment risks must be reduced.

A National Package for Attracting Transit Investment

A specific proposal is to establish a national package for attracting transit investment.

For each project, the following should be clearly defined: land, permits, taxation, tariffs, road access, water, electricity and gas, customs, purchase guarantees for services, export opportunities, the possibility of transferring profits, and the project timetable.

An investor should be able to enter the process with a single file, rather than having to deal with dozens of government agencies.

Logistics Towns: The Beating Heart of the Truck Transit Network

If truck and tractor-unit transit is to be transformed from a fragmented and traditional activity into an organized and competitive industry, we must turn to one of the world's most effective tools: the logistics town.

A logistics town is not merely a large parking lot or a simple warehouse. It is a complete ecosystem that concentrates all the services required by a transit chain in one location.

Imagine a truck entering Iran through the Bazargan border. Instead of the driver searching the city streets for customs, a warehouse, a repair shop, or a place to rest, the truck goes

directly into a logistics town. There, smart customs clears the cargo; covered warehouses and cold-storage facilities store the goods; a repair shop services the tractor unit if necessary; banks and insurance companies provide financial services; a hotel and restaurant accommodate the driver; and finally, the cargo is sent to its final destination by truck or rail.

This means that trucks no longer wander around cities; instead, they have a defined route from the border to the final destination...

Advantages of a Logistics Township for Truck Transit

Reducing Waiting Time

The greatest advantage of a logistics township is the significant reduction in truck waiting time. When all services are concentrated in one location, the driver no longer needs to move from one facility to another. Customs clearance time can be reduced from several days to a few hours.

Reducing Operating Costs

The concentration of services reduces urban transportation costs, parking costs, temporary warehousing costs, and additional handling and movement. The truck loads and unloads at the same location.

Increasing Security

A logistics township is a controlled environment. CCTV cameras, security guards, enclosed parking, and integrated management significantly increase the security of cargo and drivers. Cargo theft, which is one of the main concerns in transit operations, can be minimized in such an environment.

Cargo Consolidation and Reduction of Empty Trips

One of the problems in truck transit is empty or partially empty trips. In a logistics township, small consignments from different producers can be consolidated and transported to the destination by a single truck. This means lower cost per ton-kilometer and higher fleet productivity.

Development of Value-Added Services

A logistics township is not merely a place for the passage of goods. It can also be a location for packaging, labeling, final processing, and preparing goods for export. This means that value added remains inside the country, and instead of exporting raw goods, products ready for regional markets can be supplied.

Creating Sustainable Employment

A logistics township creates hundreds of direct and indirect jobs, ranging from customs staff, warehouse workers, and forklift operators to logistics specialists, mechanics, security personnel, restaurant and hotel employees, and information technology specialists.

Facilitating Digitalization

When all participants in the supply chain are physically gathered in one location, implementing digital systems becomes much easier. Truck tracking systems, a customs single window, warehouse management, and online capacity reservation can all be implemented on a single platform.

Reducing Pollution and Urban Traffic

By directing transit trucks toward logistics townships on the outskirts of cities, heavy urban traffic can be reduced and air pollution can also be lowered. Heavy trucks would no longer need to pass through city centers.

Logistics Cooperation Foundation, Operator of the National Logistics Township Network

If the Logistics Cooperation Foundation is properly established, it can act as the main operator for developing a network of logistics townships throughout the country. This network should not be designed in a scattered and case-by-case manner, but according to a strategic roadmap that takes into account geographical locations, transit corridors, and regional needs.

Key Locations for Establishing Logistics Townships

In the western borders, logistics townships in Bazargan, Razi, Sarv, and Tamarchin can organize transit goods coming from Turkey and Europe. These townships would be connected to road and rail networks and would move goods into the country and from there toward the southern ports.

In the eastern borders, logistics townships in Sarakhs, Dogharoun, Mirjaveh, and Shamtigh can serve as gateways for goods entering from Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. These townships are particularly vital for the transit of goods from China toward the Persian Gulf and Europe.

In the northern borders, logistics townships in Astara, Jolfa, and Incheh Borun can manage transit goods from Russia and the Caucasus and connect them to the rail and road networks.

In the southern borders, logistics townships in Mehran, Shalamcheh, Chazabeh, and Khorramshahr can serve as gateways connecting Iran with Iraq and the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf. These townships will become even more important with the completion of the Shalamcheh–Basra railway connection and the connection to Kuwait.

Around the southern ports, logistics townships in Bandar Abbas, Chabahar, Imam Khomeini, and Bushehr can process imported and exported goods and connect them to the rail and road networks.

Around the northern ports, logistics townships in Anzali, Amirabad, and Nowshahr can manage transit goods from Russia and Central Asia.

At dry ports, industrial and mining centers, logistics townships in Aprin, Isfahan, Tabriz, Mashhad, Shiraz, Kerman, Yazd, and Arak can serve as domestic distribution hubs and deliver transit goods to producers and final consumers.

Around international airports, logistics townships in Tehran, Mashhad, Shiraz, and Isfahan can combine air cargo with trucking and create a complete multimodal network.

Why Is the Logistics Cooperation Foundation the Best Option for Implementation?

First: Being Community-Based

The Foundation of Cooperation is inherently a community-based and cooperative institution. Therefore, developing logistics townships with the participation of the stakeholders themselves—namely drivers, transportation companies, and repair shops—is not only possible but also more economically viable. People participate in ownership, profits, and decision-making, which in turn increases their motivation and commitment.

Second: Institutional Capacity

The Logistics Cooperation Foundation can work with specialized universities, trade associations, financial institutions, and government bodies to establish an organized structure for managing the townships. This structure can include project companies, investment funds, and local cooperatives.

Third: Networking

The Logistics Cooperation Foundation can design logistics townships not as separate islands, but as an interconnected network. A truck entering through Bazargan could deliver cargo in Sarakhs, unload goods in Bandar Abbas, and pick up a new load in Isfahan. This networking increases the efficiency of the entire system.

Fourth: Specialized Capacity Building

The Logistics Cooperation Foundation can cooperate with universities to organize specialized training courses for logistics township management. Township managers, logistics specialists, warehouse operators, and technicians must become familiar with modern technologies, digital systems, and international standards and apply them in practice.

Financial and Operational Model of Logistics Townships

The Logistics Cooperation Foundation can establish an independent project company for each logistics township. The shares of this company would be divided among the Foundation, the private sector, local investors, drivers' cooperatives, and financial institutions. The land for the township can be provided by the government or from national/public lands, while its construction and equipment can be carried out with the participation of the private sector and cooperatives.

The township's revenues would come from several sources:

- Warehouse rental
- Customs service fees
- Parking charges
- A share of loading and unloading operations
- Rental of offices to logistics companies
- Value-added services such as packaging and labeling

This diversity of revenue sources transforms the township from merely a construction project into a sustainable and profitable business.

The Role of Logistics Townships in the War for Transit

Under conditions of crisis and sanctions, logistics townships can serve as secure and resilient distribution centers. If one border is closed or one route is damaged, other townships can manage the flow of goods. If a central customs facility experiences disruption, the customs office located within a logistics township can continue providing services. This intelligent decentralization represents the redundancy and resilience that we discussed in the context of logistics warfare.

Logistics townships can also become centers for consolidating small consignments, allowing small and medium-sized producers to send their goods to regional markets through the transit network without the need for a dedicated fleet. This means truly making trade and the transportation economy accessible to the people.

Truck Transit and Employment, from the Driver to the Artificial Intelligence Engineer

Truck transit creates direct employment:

Driver, mechanic, terminal employee, customs officer, crane operator, transport specialist, insurance specialist, logistics specialist, and warehouse worker.

But indirect employment is much broader:

Parts manufacturing, tires, repairs, hotels, restaurants, information technology, banking, insurance, construction, truck manufacturing, steel industries, and energy.

The International Labour Organization has also estimated that land transport alone accounts for more than sixty million direct jobs worldwide and emphasizes that this sector also generates extensive indirect employment. At the level of supply chains, approximately four hundred and sixty-five million jobs worldwide are linked to foreign demand, while in Asia approximately seventy-five million jobs are connected to global supply chains.

However, for Iran, there is currently no official and integrated statistic indicating exactly how many direct and indirect jobs truck transit has created. Therefore, fabricated figures should be avoided.

To calculate the increase in employment, a scientific method can be used. If transit volume increases from twenty-two million to forty million tons, an economic model should be developed to calculate its impact on the number of truck trips, terminals, warehouses, repair services, drivers, and border services. Then, using Iran's input-output table, the direct and indirect employment multipliers can be calculated. This method is far more credible than announcing a promotional figure.

Truck Transit and Gross Domestic Product, an Impact Beyond Customs Fees

The impact of truck transit on gross domestic product enters through several channels: transportation, logistics services, repair and maintenance, truck manufacturing, fuel and energy, insurance and financial services, warehousing, export industries, tourism, employment, and ultimately gross domestic product. Therefore, the development of transit can have a multiplier effect far greater than the direct revenue from transit fees.

According to international studies, every one billion dollars invested in transit infrastructure adds, on average, five-tenths to eight-tenths of one percent to gross domestic product. For Iran, current transit revenue, which is approximately one and a half billion dollars, represents less than three-tenths of one percent of gross domestic product. If revenue reaches fifteen billion dollars, this share will increase to three to four percent, equivalent to fifteen to twenty billion dollars in added value.

Truck Transit, a Driver of Trade Development

When a transit route becomes active, local trade also grows along it. The port, logistics township, industrial city, and border form a chain of economic activities. Along this route, warehouses are built, factories are established, services develop, transportation companies are founded, hotels and restaurants are created, and investors enter the market. As a result, truck transit can evolve from the movement of goods into regional economic development.

The impact of transit on trade development is also significant. Through the use of road routes, the cost of transporting exported goods can be reduced by up to thirty percent.

Iranian products become more competitive in regional and global markets as transportation costs decline, creating the infrastructure necessary for the growth of non-oil exports.

Road connections with Turkey, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russia, and the countries of Central Asia, and through Iraq and Kuwait with the countries of the Persian Gulf, make the surrounding markets more easily accessible from Iran. In fact, truck transit can become the infrastructure for Iran's regional trade.

Truck Transit and Cultural Exchange

Truck transit does not only move goods. Along with it, drivers, tourists, traders, students, patients, pilgrims, and investors also move. Therefore, the road transit network can contribute to the growth of tourism, pilgrimage, medical tourism, trade, and cultural exchange.

The Persian Gulf, Connecting Iran to a Large Regional Network

According to official information from the Gulf Cooperation Council, the GCC railway project covers a route of approximately two thousand one hundred and seventeen kilometers, connecting Kuwait through Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman to Muscat. In 2025 and 2026, this project remained on the agenda and continued to be coordinated among the GCC countries.

This issue is highly important for Iran. Connecting Khorramshahr to Shalamcheh, Basra, Iraq, and Kuwait could, if the necessary infrastructure and intergovernmental agreements are completed, bring Iran closer to the Gulf transportation network. However, even along this route, trucks remain the main link for the movement of goods over short and medium distances. The potential outcome of this connection is trade, tourism, pilgrimage, health tourism, and transit.

Even the Hajj: A Potential Application

If, in the future, Iran's transportation network is connected through Iraq to Kuwait and then to the network of the Gulf countries, and this network extends to Saudi Arabia, an infrastructure-based potential route could emerge to support the travel of Iranian pilgrims to Saudi Arabia. Under this scenario, some of the pressure resulting from limited flight capacity could be reduced, and land travel could become possible for certain travel programs. Passenger trucks and buses could play a key role along this route.

However, this issue requires the connection of the railway lines, agreements between Iran and Iraq, an agreement with Kuwait, an agreement with Saudi Arabia, as well as border and customs regulations, security arrangements, and Hajj management. Therefore, this issue should be regarded as a long-term strategic scenario, rather than an existing operational route.

Truck Transit and Tourism

Every transit corridor can also become a tourism corridor. For example, the Tehran–Isfahan–Shiraz–Bandar Abbas route, the Tabriz–Zanjan–Qazvin–Tehran route, or the Mashhad–Sarakhs route. Alongside the transportation of goods by truck, road tourism tours, pilgrimage tours, and health tourism tours can also be developed...

Successful Foreign Models, from Turkey to the UAE

Turkey, through the development of a modern road fleet, earns more than twenty billion dollars in transit revenues annually. The key to Turkey's success is the integration of customs with clearance in less than two hours, a young fleet with an average age of less than eight years, and the facilitation of visas for transit drivers. This is exactly the model that Iran should pursue.

The UAE, through the development of Jebel Ali Port and Dubai Airport, generates more than thirty billion dollars in transit revenues annually. The key to its success is logistics free zones with tax exemptions, integration of transportation, and full digitalization of processes. In the UAE, trucks are the link connecting ports and airports to the entire region.

China has also done more than simply create routes for the passage of goods. Around its transportation network, it has built factories, ports, warehouses, and industrial cities. The result is that goods do not merely pass through; they generate added value along the route.

Russia uses its extensive road network to connect ports, industrial areas, and major markets. The lesson for Iran is that if the road network consists of only a few limited routes, it is vulnerable; if the network is multi-route, resilience increases.

Within the country, there are also successful examples. Shahid Rajaei Port, as Iran's largest container port, handles more than two million containers annually (highlighting the need to increase port capacity in terms of cargo volume and the berthing of large ships), and trucks play the main role in distributing these goods throughout the country. Aprin Dry Port is the largest dry port in the Middle East, and trucks are the link connecting it to the cities. The Sarakhs Special Economic Zone is considered the gateway to Central Asia, and the North–South Corridor is a national project with the potential to generate ten billion dollars in transit revenues.

Truck Transit in Wartime Conditions: An Alternative Route Is Itself a National Asset

During a crisis, a port may be damaged, a road may be blocked, a border may be closed, flights may be suspended, or communication lines may be disrupted. Under such conditions, trucks, because of their remarkable flexibility, can open routes that no other mode of transportation is capable of using. A truck can travel on secondary roads, use less-known border crossings, and deliver goods to their destination.

Therefore, the network must have redundancy, meaning alternative routes.

For example, Bandar Abbas alongside Chabahar, one road alongside another, and the western border alongside the northwestern border. This alternative network can reduce the impact of economic and commercial disruptions.

Digitalization: The Brain of Truck Transit

All components of the network must be connected to a single platform. Trucks, drivers, containers, customs, borders, warehouses, and ports must all be traceable. The required technologies include GPS, the Internet of Things, RFID, artificial intelligence, cameras, digital twins, blockchain where appropriate, and predictive analytics.

Artificial intelligence can be used to predict truck queues at borders. An intelligent system can predict that if another five hundred trucks enter the border, how long the queue will become over the next four hours. The system can then regulate truck entry, suggest an alternative route, increase customs capacity, reallocate personnel, and notify cargo owners. This means transforming customs from a reactive system into a predictive one.

Domestic and Foreign Investment: How Prepared Is Iran?

Iran has significant potential in terms of its geographical position, human resources, automotive industry, steel, cement, road construction, and ports. However, investors pay equal attention to sanctions, money transfers, regulatory stability, political risk, insurance, ownership, return on investment, and access to equipment. Therefore, economic potential is high, but investment readiness is not the same as geographical readiness.

The five main barriers to investment are:

Regulatory instability, whose solution is stable and long-term contracts;

Financing, whose solutions include project funds, public-private partnership methods, and leasing;

Money transfers, whose solutions include legal multilateral mechanisms, barter, and direct investment;

Bureaucracy, whose solution is a single investment window;

And demand risk, whose solution is long-term operating contracts and minimum-capacity guarantees.

Truck Transit: An Opportunity for the Private Sector

The government should not build everything itself. The government should provide legislation, land, basic infrastructure, security, and regulation. The private sector should bring in trucks and tractor units, warehouses, terminals, services, technology, and capital.

The proposed financial model is to establish a project company for each corridor. Its shareholders would include the government, Iranian private-sector companies, foreign

investors, banks, transportation companies, and ports. Its revenues would be generated from access rights, transportation, warehousing, logistics services, terminal services, and value-added services.

Logistics Cooperation Foundation: The Link Between the People, the Industry, and the Government

If truck transit is to truly become people-centered and all stakeholders are to participate in it, an intermediary institution is needed to build a bridge between the people, the industry, and the government. This institution could be called the Logistics Cooperation Foundation: a structure that is neither purely governmental nor purely private, but rather an inclusive cooperative that brings together all players in the transit chain.

The stakeholders and members of the Foundation would include the following groups:

Drivers and owners of trucks and tractor units, international transportation companies, freight forwarders and logistics companies, repair shops and spare-parts sellers, insurance and leasing companies, transportation trade associations, drivers' unions, universities and specialized transportation training centers, and government bodies such as customs and road transportation authorities.

The Foundation's key missions would include:

Attracting small and large-scale capital from the stakeholders themselves to modernize the fleet and develop infrastructure;

Removing administrative and customs obstacles through collective negotiations with the government;

Creating a transparent pricing and capacity-allocation system to prevent non-transparent intermediation;

Providing specialized training for drivers and technicians in cooperation with relevant universities;

And providing shared services such as insurance, leasing, spare-parts procurement, and fuel at competitive prices.

Specialized professional capacity building centered on relevant universities is one of the pillars of this Foundation. Universities specializing in transportation engineering, logistics, automotive engineering, and supply-chain management can play a fundamental role in managing the Foundation while cooperating with it to organize practical training courses for drivers, technicians, and managers of transportation companies. These courses can include international certifications such as ADR for the transportation of dangerous goods, safe and economical driving training, and familiarity with digital tracking and fleet-management systems.

The role of the intermediary institution with the government is also very important. The Logistics Cooperation Foundation can act as the collective representative of the industry, systematically convey and pursue the demands of drivers and companies before government institutions, and participate in drafting regulations, determining tariffs, and removing bottlenecks at border crossings. This model both strengthens the voice of the industry and enables government decision-making to be based on real field data.

Making the economy of transit truck transportation people-centered means that the driver and truck owner should not be merely a worker or contractor, but should participate in ownership, profits, and decision-making. The Logistics Cooperation Foundation can institutionalize this participation through shareholding and cooperative models. For example, drivers can purchase small shares and become members of a fleet cooperative company and benefit from the profits of its operations. This model both provides the capital needed to modernize the fleet from within the industry itself and significantly increases drivers' motivation and commitment.

The experience of countries such as Turkey and Germany shows that transportation cooperatives have played a key role in organizing the industry, increasing bargaining power, and improving service quality. In Turkey, international transportation associations have been able, through collective negotiations, to secure better conditions for drivers and companies. In Germany, logistics cooperatives have helped reduce costs and increase productivity. Iran can also draw on these experiences and turn the Logistics Cooperation Foundation into a powerful and efficient institution.

Ultimately, the Logistics Cooperation Foundation can act as the executive and people-centered arm of the transit strategy: an institution that not only operates at the policy-making level, but also at the level of daily operations, organizing and empowering the truck and tractor-unit chain from production to transit, from driver to driver, and from border to border. This is the missing link that can transform the people-centered development of the transit economy from a slogan into reality...

A Bigger Goal: From a Transit Country to a Logistics Hub

The goal should not merely be for goods to pass through Iran. The goal should be for goods to enter Iran, be processed, packaged, stored, and receive added value in Iran, and then be exported. This is the difference between a transit country and a logistics hub. And trucks, along this path, are the link connecting all these processes.

Ten-Year Roadmap

The first stage, within two years, focuses on reducing truck border waiting times, digitalization, measuring clearance times, modernizing terminals, reforming regulations, and activating existing capacity.

The second stage, during the two years following that, pursues the modernization of the truck and tractor-trailer fleet, the development of logistics parks, and the connection of border crossings.

The third stage, over the subsequent three-year period, puts increasing truck capacity, developing modern terminals, and expanding road transit on the agenda.

And the fourth stage is to move toward sixty to eighty million tons of annual transit, provided that capacity and market demand are achieved.

Success Indicators

The government should not simply say that transit has increased. It must publish specific indicators. The volume of truck transit should show sustained growth. Border-crossing time should decrease. The cost per ton-kilometer should decline. The average age of the truck and tractor-trailer fleet should decrease. The number of modernized trucks should increase. The capacity of dry ports and warehouses should expand. Private investment should grow. Employment should increase. Revenue from logistics services should rise, and the number of active corridors should increase.

Gap Analysis: Where Are We and Where Should We Go?

The volume of truck transit is currently twenty-one million nine hundred thousand tons. The target is forty million tons. This means that we have a gap of eighteen million one hundred thousand tons, which can be closed by removing border bottlenecks and developing corridors.

The average age of the truck and tractor-trailer fleet is currently more than twenty-five years. The target is less than ten years. This means that there is a fifteen-year gap, which can be closed through fleet renewal and the introduction of vehicle production lines.

Final Conclusion: The War of Truck Transit

The logistics war in this chapter leads to an important conclusion: Iran is not merely a country located along the route of transportation corridors; it can become a provider of transit and logistics services. At the heart of this transformation stand trucks and tractor-trailers.

The current twenty-two million tons of transit, compared with twelve billion one hundred million tons of global maritime trade and approximately thirty-three trillion dollars in global trade in goods and services, shows that a much larger market exists beyond the country's borders. The forty-million-ton target of the Seventh Development Plan can be a turning point, but achieving it requires reforming the entire truck-transit ecosystem.

A smart border, integrated customs, standard roads, modern terminals, logistics parks, a new fleet, investment, insurance, banking, technology, artificial intelligence, transport diplomacy,

and agreements with neighboring countries—all of these are components of a single system at the center of which trucks and tractor-trailers are positioned.

And perhaps the most important sentence of this chapter is this: in an economic war, a country that can create more routes for the entry, exit, and transit of goods is more resilient to disruptions. Sanctions can make one route expensive or restrict it, but a network of diverse routes, roads, borders, and corridors creates greater adaptability.

Truck transit, therefore, is not merely a source of government revenue. It can become an engine for industrial development, employment, regional trade, investment, tourism, economic diplomacy, and increased supply-chain resilience.

Ultimately, the mission of the logistics war should not be for Iran merely to be a route through which goods pass. The goal should be to transform Iran into a point of connection, storage, processing, value creation, and distribution of goods across Eurasia. This is the difference between being a country located along a route and being a transit power.

In the war of transit, trucks and tractor-trailers are not merely vehicles; they are economic ambassadors, connecting links, and engines of employment. If the aging fleet and border bottlenecks are reformed, Iran's truck transit can become one of the main pillars of Eurasia's transit power.

Sources and References

Based on reports from UNCTAD, the World Bank, the Secretariat of the North–South Corridor, the Islamic Parliament Research Center, the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the World Customs Organization, the International Labour Organization, and reports on the international road freight transportation market....