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TRANSPORT AS A FACTOR ENSURING REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

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Abstract
This article analyzes the role of the transport system in the modern economy, its key functions, and its significance in regional development. Particular attention is given to the economic integration, social connectivity, standardization, environmental sustainability, and innovative functions of transport, while substantiating their influence on the national economy and the quality of transport services. Furthermore, the study examines the priority directions for the development of Uzbekistan's transport system, including the insufficient level of transport infrastructure development, the low quality of transport services, regional disparities in transport accessibility, the slow pace of digitalization processes, and the challenges associated with the implementation of transport projects. The article also highlights the importance of comprehensive approaches to addressing these issues, emphasizing the introduction of innovative technologies and the role of strategic planning in enhancing the efficiency and competitiveness of the transport sector.

Keywords: Transport system, transport infrastructure, quality of transport services, transport and logistics system, economic integration, digitalization, transport potential, logistics, innovative technologies, transport services market, regional development, transport strategy.

Introduction

The primary function of modern transport is not only to meet consumer demand in a timely manner, but also to provide high-quality and efficient transport services to production sectors. In this context, it is important to emphasize the substantial conceptual difference between the notions of "transporting goods and passengers" and "providing consumers with high-quality and timely transport services." The transportation of goods and passengers is characteristic of the initial two stages of transport development, whereas at the third stage—where production and transport are integrated into a unified system—the principal function of transport becomes the provision of high-quality and timely transport services to consumers.

Under the current conditions of Uzbekistan's steadily developing economy, the transport system is required to achieve a level at which it can provide high-quality transport services in close integration with production processes.

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The transport system occupies a unique and strategic position in ensuring the rapid growth of the national economy. In this regard, it is necessary to integrate production and transport into a unified production-and-transport system. Achieving this objective requires harmonizing the interests of various modes of transport within the transport complex with the broader interests of the national economy.

Considering the necessity of mobilizing the activities of the transport complex of the Republic of Uzbekistan toward increasing national wealth and improving the living standards of the population, it is natural that the sector is assigned economic, political, socio-cultural, and defense-related responsibilities.

The role of transport in societal development is directly associated with its core functions. The advancement of the economy, the expansion of international relations, and the emergence of new technologies have contributed to the formation of several new transport functions. These functions provide a broader characterization of the essence and content of transport activities (Figure 1).

The first function characterizing the essence of transport activity is economic integration. Transport not only ensures connectivity between regions and countries, but also contributes significantly to trade development and economic growth within territories. A well-developed transport infrastructure enables the timely delivery of goods and services, thereby increasing overall economic efficiency.

One of the key objectives of transport-based economic integration is the simplification of logistics processes. The integration of different modes of transport—such as road, rail, air, and maritime transport—makes it possible to minimize delivery time and transportation costs, while creating efficient and sustainable supply chains.

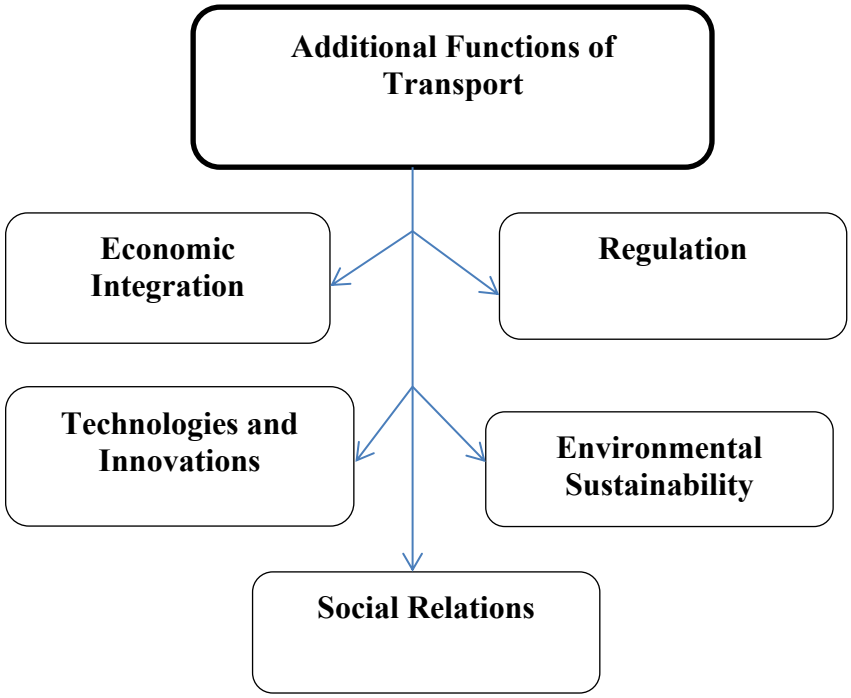

Figure 1. The Content of Transport Activity

Furthermore, economic integration often stimulates additional investment in transport infrastructure, which contributes to improving the quality of roads, as well as enhancing the efficiency of transport hubs and terminal operations.

In addition, the economic integration function of transport reduces tariffs, taxes, and other barriers to the movement of goods and services between countries. This includes the simplification of customs procedures and the harmonization of regulatory standards.

As a result of integration, the number of service providers increases, leading to stronger competition, which ultimately contributes to lower prices and improved quality of transport services. Enhanced transport connectivity also expands access to employment opportunities, education, and various social services for the population.

The function of transport in the development of social relations facilitates people's mobility across countries and promotes cultural exchange, thereby supporting the development of local communities and reducing social isolation. This is particularly important for rural and remote areas, where socio-economic development largely depends on the accessibility of transport services.

At present, this function of transport demonstrates its increasing relevance in the development of tourism, which has become one of the priority areas receiving significant attention in the republic. In order to promote domestic tourism and improve the transportation of foreign visitors across the country, Uzbekistan has acquired new types of buses, specialized rickshaws and similar vehicles designed for tourist zones with historical monuments, as well as modern electric locomotives and new-generation aircraft over the past five years.

The standardization function of transport involves the development and implementation of unified standards for transport services, packaging, documentation, and inspection procedures, thereby facilitating and simplifying international trade processes.

In order to improve national, regional, interstate, and international standardization activities in the republic, the Technical Committee for Standardization in the field of STQ 7 "Transport" was established under the "O'zavtotranstexnika" Scientific and Production Center by the decision of the Uzstandard Agency. The committee's primary responsibilities include reviewing proposals from stakeholders related to sectoral standards, developing standards, introducing amendments, and preparing standards in accordance with the approved work program. In addition, one of the key objectives of this technical committee is to carry out national, regional, interstate, and international standardization activities in the interests of the state, producers, and consumers.

The environmental sustainability function of transport addresses the increasingly urgent issue of environmental protection. Modern transport solutions must take environmental considerations into account. The development of public transport systems and the application of environmentally friendly technologies contribute to reducing environmental pollution and improving the overall quality of life.

The function of technologies and innovations provides new opportunities for enhancing the efficiency and safety of transport activities through the introduction of advanced technologies in the transport sector, such as autonomous vehicles and electric transport systems.

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Considering the significance of the content of transport activities and its role in the national economy, the Action Strategy for the Development of the Transport System of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030, developed by the Ministry of Transport of the Republic of Uzbekistan, defines several priority objectives. These include improving the quality, accessibility, and efficiency of transport services for the population and business entities; deepening the integration of the national transport system into the global transport network and realizing the country's transit potential; increasing the level of digitalization; and introducing innovations into the transport system.

The implementation of these objectives largely depends on the transport potential of the region. The transport system, depending on the spatial characteristics and geographical location of a territory, requires solutions to a number of complex challenges.

One of the major challenges is the insufficient development of regional transport infrastructure. The key problems associated with transport infrastructure vary by region; however, several common issues can generally be identified. The deterioration of roads, bridges, vehicles, and related infrastructure contributes to an increase in traffic accidents, longer transportation times, and traffic congestion, all of which reduce the overall efficiency of the transport system.

In addition, inadequate coordination among different modes of transport, insufficient funding for infrastructure development and maintenance, technological backwardness, the non-compliance of vehicles with environmental standards, the poor condition of logistics enterprises and service facilities, as well as the lack of financial resources for implementing infrastructure modernization projects, significantly hinder the development of transport infrastructure.

The second major problem is the relatively low quality and slow growth rate of transport services provided to the population. Studies and analyses of demand for transport services indicate that consumers' primary requirement regarding service quality is the timely dispatch and delivery of goods. This demand is primarily driven by consumers' intention to reduce inventory levels and minimize storage-related costs.

The long-term dynamics of transport services demonstrate that demand within the transport services market is continuously changing. Under such conditions, the primary objective of transport enterprises is to generate profit through the formation of sustainable demand and the expansion of service volumes.

Existing shortcomings within the transport system include the absence of guaranteed timely shipment and delivery of cargo, as well as cases of postponement or refusal to fulfill transportation orders. Such problems inevitably lead to a decline in the quality of transport services. Therefore, it can be concluded that particular attention should be paid to both the volume and quality of transport services, as these indicators are closely interconnected.

Another significant issue is the uneven level of transport accessibility among the population across different regions. In many cases, large cities possess better transport opportunities, while rural areas remain limited in terms of accessibility, resulting in insufficient transport routes between sparsely populated territories. In certain districts, although the total length of roads may be adequate, their poor condition significantly restricts accessibility and mobility.

In addition, cases of uneven allocation of resources for capital repairs and infrastructure maintenance are frequently observed. In many instances, the lack of strategic planning results

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in the inefficient distribution of resources. Furthermore, the limited participation of the public in the decision-making process creates imbalances in meeting transport needs.

The fourth major issue is the low level of digitalization within transport activities.

The development of regional transport activities based on advanced technologies and the introduction of digital technologies require substantial financial support. While the implementation of digital technologies in transport activities is relatively well established in urban centers, many districts located farther from central areas continue to face unresolved challenges in this regard.

Moreover, the digitalization process in the transport sector is slowed down by several additional factors, including the shortage of specialists possessing the necessary expertise in information technology and digitalization for developing new information systems; the insufficient number of regulatory and legal documents supporting the implementation of digital technologies in the transport sector; the lack of integration among various systems, which complicates data collection and analysis; inadequate awareness of new technological opportunities; as well as problems related to internet connectivity and the absence of infrastructure required to support digital solutions.

Another existing challenge is the low level of implementation efficiency of transport sector development projects. In some cases, the execution of activities outlined in roadmaps and development programs for transport infrastructure is hindered by insufficient financial resources or organizational inefficiencies and delays.

In addition, when developing such programs, it is essential to rely on comprehensive research that takes into account the condition of all regional roads, the problems and expectations of carriers, as well as the requirements of cargo owners.

In order to address the above-mentioned challenges, it is necessary to adopt a comprehensive approach that includes financing mechanisms, the introduction of new technologies, marketing strategies, and strategic planning. It is also important to develop integrated development programs and strategies that consider the needs of all segments of the population, involve local residents and entrepreneurs in planning and decision-making processes, and implement advanced technologies in transport and logistics management to optimize services. These measures will contribute to improving transport accessibility and enhancing the provision of transport services for the population across regions.

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