
GCC railway could start 2010 and be operational by 2017

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Railway Gazette reported that the Gulf Cooperation Council remains optimistic that a 1940 route kilometres regional network could be operational by 2017. Despite concerns that the ambitious railway network linking the 6 states in the Gulf Cooperation Council could be delayed by the global economic downturn, officials are insistent that work will begin 2010 and that the bulk of the 1940 route kilometres core route could be operational by 2017.

Painting a vision of 200 kilometres per hour diesel trains cruising seamlessly across the borders within the planned common market and currency union, Mr Mohammed Obaid Al Mazroui assistant secretary general of GCC confirmed that the initial study by Systra, Canarail and Khatab & Alami had now been approved by the region's leaders.

According to the Mr David Lupton study's project manager, a final decision to proceed is expected in 2011, followed by 2 years of engineering design and 4 years for construction.

Mr Al Mazroui said that the 6 countries have agreed to share the anticipated USD 25 billion cost in proportion to the length of main line in each country. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates will shoulder the largest proportion with Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman the other partners. Each country will build its own branches, stations and freight terminals to feed the core network.

UAE has already taken its first steps with the establishment of Etihad Railways Company also known as Union Railways, following a decree by Mr Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan president of UAE in July. With an equity capital of UAE 1 billion, ER will be responsible for building around 1100 route kilometres at an estimated cost of UAE 30 billion. A second decree issued on October 1st 2009 appointed the ER board members, who will serve for an initial period of 3 years.

New chairman Mr Hassem Jasem Al Nowais has already started looking for potential traffic, opening negotiations with the Abu Dhabi National Oil Corporation to serve oil and gas fields in the west of the country.

(Sourced from Railway Gazette)

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