



PRESS RELEASE nr.33 /2012

The high-level conference, “Rail Vision, Projects and Perspectives for the Middle-East”, jointly organised by UIC and Jordan Railways ARC and JHR, under the auspices of Minister Alaa A. Batayneh, opens in Amman.

(Amman, 5 November 2012) UIC and UIC Region “Middle-East”, in close cooperation with both of Jordan’s Railway Companies, Aqaba Railway Corporation (ARC) and Jordan Hejaz Railway (JHR), are organising a high-level conference entitled “Rail Vision, Projects and Perspectives for the Middle-East – Towards an Integrated, Competitive, Rail Transport System.”

This conference, coordinated by the UIC Middle-East Region (UIC RAME), chaired by Turkish Railways President Mr Süleyman Karaman, and held under the aegis of the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources and Minister of Transport of Jordan, Eng. Alaa. A Batayneh, opened today in Amman, Jordan, in the presence of 80 participants representing 10 countries.

This high-level conference provides a unique opportunity to gain a general overview of all railway projects being planned or implemented in the Middle-East, to underline the overall coherence of these national projects with a view to developing a “regional” railway system and gaining strong support from authorities, international institutions, stakeholders and potential investors.

The high-level conference includes:

- presentations on the future role of railways in the respective countries;
- presentations by railway presidents/director-generals of railway master plans and national projects (including intermodal projects);
- presentations by international institutions of their respective contributions to supporting the development of railways in the Middle-East;
- the challenges of interoperability and railway standards (by UIC);
- presentations by partners from the rail and private sectors.

The Minister, Mr Alaa A. Batayneh, stated in his opening address, “Transport’s main objective is to accommodate future domestic demand as a direct result of growth of population, economy, and trends in goods flow or changes in policies, both locally and regionally, that affect overall demand. It is, however, expected to stimulate such growth, and attract business and trade to the country concerned”.

And he went on to say, “Our goal is to pave the way to making the country an even more appealing business center by ensuring the safety and security of investors and their investments, to foster a multitude of business opportunities and a higher quality of living”.

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Mr Jean-Pierre Loubinoux, UIC Director-General, underlined that “this first high-level conference should mark a milestone, a new starting point for the UIC Middle-East Assembly, aiming to coordinate, support and encourage the development of a new future-oriented railway system, able to serve the entire Middle-Eastern Region”.

And he went on, “It is one of our ambitions that railways in the Middle-East already prepare themselves to contribute as a very effective tool in the development of easier mobility between all countries, once governments have decided to reinforce cooperation and to remove barriers. And it is starting to happen”.

He added “With all these projects becoming a reality, rail is the key to uniting countries and regions and cementing economic mobility and political stability”.

In his capacity as Chairman of UIC Middle-East, Mr Süleyman Karaman, President of Turkish Railways (TCDD), presented an overview of the main projects decided on or being implemented in the region, placing the region at the crossroads of north-south and east-west international corridors. The railway dynamic in the region includes main projects in Saudi Arabia, the GCC, Qatar, Iran, and projects in Turkey as well as the first intercontinental link between Europe and Asia under the sea, the Marmaray project.

He said, “Connecting Europe, Asia and the Middle East with railways will contribute a lot to our region in a socio-economic way. Aiming to make the railway organizations and financial institutions that wish to make investments in this sector come together and to attract attention in order to ensure financing for the railway projects in the region, I truly believe that this conference will provide encouragement for all the projects of the region in the eyes of governments, international organizations, banks, investors, customers, commercial and business partners”.

Mr Hussein Krishan, Director-General of Aqaba Railway Corporation (ARC), UIC RAME Vice-Chairman, highlighted railway projects within Jordan and, more importantly, other projects in neighbouring countries. These could only be achieved with the appropriate level of scientific and engineering input, in addition to increased cooperation and dialogue with other railway operators and railway partners, and the support of financial and political institutions. In his capacity as Vice-Chairman of UIC RAME and Director-General of Aqaba Railway Corporation, he is focusing his efforts on this objective of further regional cooperation.

The number of actions already taken at national level, and the projects to develop them at international level, obviously necessitate an integrated and harmonised approach on both technical and operational issues. This is the basis for a Common Declaration in favour of the development of an integrated regional rail system.

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UIC RAME HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE

*Rail Vision, Projects and Perspectives for the Middle-East –
Towards an integrated, competitive, Rail Transport System*

**5 November 2012
Amman, Kingdom of Jordan**

Amman Declaration

The 1st high-level conference entitled “Rail Vision, Projects and Perspectives for the Middle-East – Towards an integrated, competitive Rail Transport System” was held on 4-5 November 2012 in Amman, Kingdom of Jordan, under the high patronage of the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources and Minister of Transport HE Mr Alaa A. Batayneh and was jointly organised by UIC, the UIC Middle East Region, the Aqaba Railway Corporation, ARC, and Jordan Hejaz Railway, JHR.

The Middle East is one of the regions with the most promising futures in rail transport. Examples of this include the ambitious plans for developing high speed in Turkey and Saudi Arabia, numerous projects in Iran, Syria and Iraq, and the projects of the Emirates and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), not to mention the reopening of lines and border connections between all these countries and international work to create long-distance freight corridors linking the Middle East to Asia and Europe (East-West corridor along the Silk Route, North-South corridor).

The main challenges for the region consist in presenting a **coherent vision for railway development in the region**, gaining support from governments and international organisations, attracting investors and business partners and contributing towards developing a competitive, safe, interoperable and cost-effective rail transport system within the Middle East and connecting it to the neighbouring regions, Asia and Europe.

The UIC Middle East Regional Assembly aims to play a pivotal role in uniting the efforts of all the railways in the Middle East for the modernisation and expansion of their networks and gradual integration of the rail system.

At the 1st high-level conference entitled “Rail Vision, Projects and Perspectives for the Middle-East – Towards an integrated, competitive Rail Transport System”, member railways of the UIC Middle East Region (RAME) agreed on following objectives for the development of a seamless and competitive rail transport system for the region.

Objectives and actions

- Promote the development of rail transport in the Middle East as an effective and sustainable transport system, coping with future economic and societal needs in the region;

- Contribute to the definition of a strategic vision for the development of an integrated and coherent transport system for the Middle East, in close cooperation with all stakeholders, financial institutions and international organisations, based on an analysis of the evolution of market needs and social evolutions;

- Encourage interconnections between national rail transport systems as well as with other transport modes in the region; help create new synergies through the international dimension of the future transport system;

- Cooperate with governments, international organisations and financial institutions to support the strategic vision for developing rail transport in the Middle East through international conventions and agreements and investment policies. Define the framework and content of agreements (e.g. with ECO, UNESCAP, UNECE, UNESCWA, regional banks, etc).

- Create new business opportunities and encourage partnerships with investors, intermodal partners and business partners;

-Strengthen regional cooperation between UIC Middle East member railways, particularly in the fields of technology, operations, business and training, with the objective of improving interoperability in the rail system. Refer whenever possible to UIC specifications and standards to ensure interoperability.

-Increase efforts on training programmes in order to foster a new generation of railway managers, experts and staff.

-Promote the launch of regional or multi-regional cooperation projects serving all UIC Middle East member railways, with the support of UIC.

Amman, Kingdom of Jordan, 5 November 2012