

Rebuilding Afghanistan



Road to Success



Rebuilding Afghanistan Road to Success



Working together, Afghans, Americans, and our international partners have made great progress in ridding Afghanistan of Al Qaida and Taliban elements. We averted famine for some 7 million Afghans last year and have begun the essential and challenging work of rebuilding after decades of dictatorship, war, and extremism. As a sign of confidence in the future, some 2 million refugees have returned to Afghanistan over the past year.

But much remains to be done. This year will mark a shift toward long-term reconstruction projects and the rebuilding of Afghan institutions. The United States will be a full partner in this transition, helping to secure stability and supporting reconstruction throughout the country, including roads, schools, clinics, and agriculture. We will continue our work together, with other partners, to gather the resources that will hasten the day when all Afghans lead prosperous and secure lives.

Joint statement between the United States of America and Afghanistan
The White House, February 27, 2003



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A Lifeline for Afghanistan

In the 1960s, the United States helped build a highway connecting Afghanistan's two largest cities. It began in Kabul and wound its way through five of the country's core provinces—skirting scores of isolated and otherwise inaccessible villages; passing through the ancient market city of Ghazni; descending through Qalat; and eventually reaching Kandahar, founded by Alexander the Great. More than 35 percent of the country's population lives within 50 kilometers of this highway, called, appropriately, modern Afghanistan's lifeline.

In 1978, the Soviet Union invaded. By the time its forces withdrew more than a decade later, more than 1 million Afghans had been killed and 5 million had fled. Civil war followed. The Taliban emerged, controlling all but the remote, northern regions. Afghanistan was terrorized by this group, which was dogmatically opposed to progress and democracy.

More than two decades of war had left the Kabul-Kandahar highway devastated, like much of the coun-

try's infrastructure. Little could move along the lifeline that had provided so many Afghans with their means of livelihood and their access to healthcare, education, markets, and places of worship.



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Reviving the Road

Restoration of the highway has been an overriding priority of President Hamid Karzai. It is crucial to extending the influence of the new government. Without the highway link, Afghanistan's civil society and economy would remain moribund and prey to divisive forces. The economic development that the highway makes possible will help guarantee the unity and long-term security of the Afghan people.

The restored road is a visually impressive achievement whose symbolic importance should not be underestimated.

The restored highway is a visually impressive achievement whose symbolic importance should not be underestimated. It marks a palpable transition from the recent past and represents an important building block for the future. Recently, an official in Herat likened the ring road to veins and arteries that nourish and bring life to the "heart" of Kabul and the body of the country.

The highway will not end in Kandahar: there are plans to complete the circuit, extending it to Herat and then arcing it back through Mazar-e Sharif to Kabul. The route is sometimes referred to as the Ring Road.



Highway reconstruction projects provide jobs for over 2,000 Afghans.



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The Challenge

The Louis Berger Group was notified by USAID in September 2002 of its selection as prime contractor for the restoration of the Kabul-Kandahar highway. Prodded by President Karzai, the company signed on to an extraordinarily ambitious timeframe: completion of the Kabul-Kandahar phase by the end of 2003.

The new highway was to be built to U.S. construction standards and specifications, and designed to withstand traffic for 15 years. The Louis Berger group subcontracted the work to five firms: one from India, three from Turkey, and one joint Afghan-U.S. enterprise. The 389-kilometer stretch of highway was divided into five segments, with the last 50-kilometer link into Kandahar to be completed by the Japanese.

The Kabul-Kandahar phase included the first layer of asphalt to accommodate all-weather commerce and vehicle speeds of 60 mph—considerably faster than was possible over the few good stretches of existing highway. The phasing of the project allowed

Afghans to profit as quickly as possible from improved highway conditions.

Since the deadline for the Kabul-Kandahar phase has been met, startup for the next phase can begin as soon as winter ends. By fall 2004, additional layers of asphalt will be laid, highway shoulders improved, and signage completed.

This reconstruction project had a distinct advantage: two decades earlier, the Kabul-Kandahar highway had been very good. Because its line and track could be used, the Louis Berger Group was not beginning at square one.

Still, the old highway showed the scars of 25 years of war and neglect, including bomb craters that could swallow an automobile and areas that had turned to dust and rubble.

The highway had to be demined before it could be scarified, backfilled, and graded. State-of-the-art, remote-controlled armored vehicles were brought in to speed demining. Less technologically advanced methods—including metal detectors, mine-sniffing dogs, prodding sticks, and bare hands—were employed by Canadian troops assigned by the U.N. to minesweeping operations funded by USAID.

The highway reconstruction was a vast multinational effort, operating under dangerous and trying circumstances and a compressed timeframe.



Demining operations removed over 1,000 explosive devices from the highway and adjoining areas.



Areas extending 20 meters on either side of the highway were also demined to ensure the safety of workers—and future pedestrians—as were large areas for work camps and plants. Afghanistan is honeycombed with deadly material: more than 1,000 mines and pieces of unexploded ordinance were uncovered, approximately three per kilometer.

Security problems should not be underestimated. The international team assembled for the construction work was continually menaced by terrorists. Though the Afghanistan Ministry of the Interior engaged almost 1,000 guards to provide security, fifteen workers were seriously injured and several were killed or kidnapped.

Security dangers could have derailed the project, but contractors adeptly transferred crews to safer work zones where their skills were also needed. This avoided shutdowns and kept the project on schedule—a considerable achievement, given the intervention of washouts, landslides, avalanches, and sandstorms.

Because it proved impossible to transport needed material through land routes, an unprecedented nonmilitary airlift was organized. Loaders, dump trucks, and bulldozers were flown in. The reconstruction also



Louis Berger Group subcontracted work to five firms: one from India, three from Turkey, and one joint Afghan-U.S. enterprise.

brought in over 100,000 metric tons of bitumen from Egypt, India, and Pakistan. A concrete batch plant came from Italy. The project even imported over 200,000 barrels of asphalt, which was then processed in a plant built from scratch.

Afghanistan was a barely functioning country when the project began. The highway reconstruction was a vast multinational effort, operating under dangerous and trying circumstances and a compressed timeframe. Its success was due to firm commitment, careful planning, close supervision, programming flexibility, and unprecedented coordination among multilingual and multinational organizations.

Rebuilding Afghanistan Road to Success



The Impact

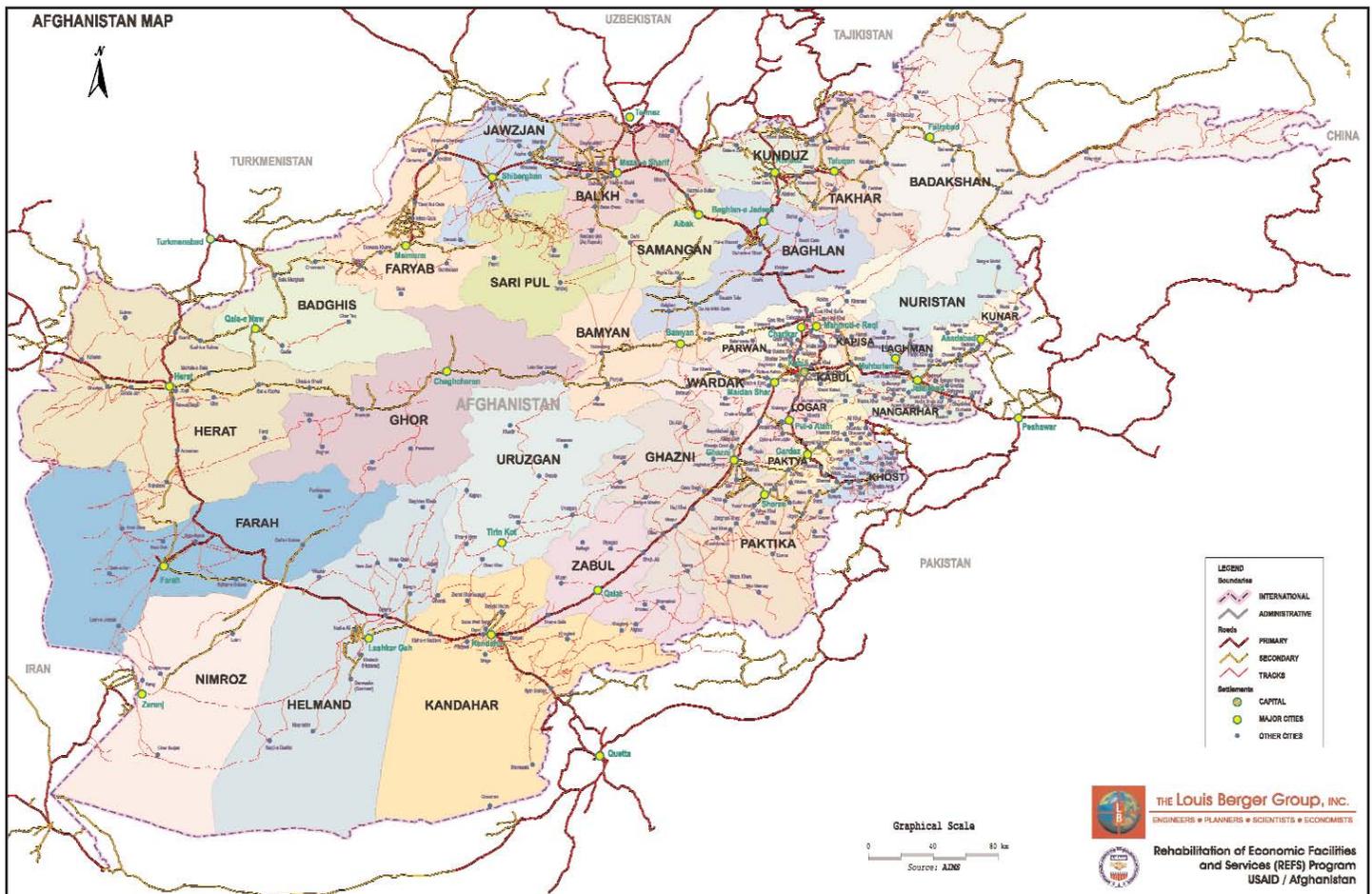
The new highway also means that rural populations—especially women—will have better access to healthcare clinics.

Approximately 35 percent of Afghanistan's population lives within 50 kilometers of the Kabul-Kandahar highway. They are the major beneficiaries of the new highway and the improvements that follow in its wake.

The journey by car from Kabul to Kandahar now takes about six hours—less than half the

time it took on the old highway. A taxi ride used to cost 1,000 afghanis; it now costs 300.

Reduced travel times and attendant costs for commercial vehicles and the efficient movement of people and goods will stimulate and benefit the local and national economy. Drivers operating minivans, buses, and taxis



will be immediate beneficiaries, as will shipping or forwarding companies.

Regionally, the highway will bring Afghanistan out of its isolation by reestablishing effective links on south-central Asia trade routes. In fact, the collection of international customs tariffs could provide a much needed revenue stream for the Kabul government.



The new highway will improve access for Afghan citizens to education, business, and healthcare.

Short term, the highway has already generated benefits for locally employed workers: some 1,500 laborers were recruited from villages along the route. These benefits and employment opportunities will expand into new geographical areas during upcoming phases of highway reconstruction.

Afghanistan's overwhelmingly rural and agricultural population will share the benefits of the new highway. Shopkeepers and merchants will be better able to provision their businesses at lower costs. Goods flowing more easily into and out of villages will stimulate local agricultural production. Better returns will likely accrue to shippers and cultivators.

Even villagers who travel by donkey cart or on foot can do so more quickly and safely on the demined shoulders of the highway.

Because paving has reduced dust, some villagers say they now breathe more easily.

The new highway also means that rural populations—especially women—will have better access to healthcare, and, for more complicated procedures, to the hospital in the capital. Educational benefits will also derive from improved access to Kabul University, regional teacher-training schools, and secondary schools.

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Who Benefits

Farmers

A rehabilitated road helps farmers bring their produce to market on time and in good condition. One reported that 50 percent of his loads of melons had been lost due to rough treatment in transit along the Kabul-Kandahar highway. With the new road, such losses will be significantly reduced.

Women

One woman hopes she will be able to obtain healthcare not available in her community and attend important social events when the highway is completed. Right now the highway offers no appropriate public facilities where women can rest, bathe, or attend to children's needs. Another woman described having to sleep in a vehicle with her sick child during winter, nearly causing the child to freeze to death. Travel times are now reduced: trips between Kabul and Kandahar can now be easily completed in a day.

Businesspeople

Showali Al-Sadat, a freight forwarder based in Kandahar, has already seen an increase in freight loads due to highway improvements completed as of August 2003. Al-Sadat believes his maintenance costs, currently \$2,500 per vehicle per month, will drop to under \$700 per month when the project is finished.





We like the road because now it's easy for cars...and easy for us to get to school. Not only my parents, but all the villagers are very happy with the new road because we can get sick people to the clinic faster. And now, because the road is paved, there is no longer so much dust.

*—Asif Haseebkhan, age 10,
Durani Village, near Km 43*



Thank you to everybody who helped build our road. It is very good. What used to take one hour to drive now takes only 10 minutes. Before, it was so bumpy and dusty. And we used to travel at 30 km per hour at most. Now we can go up to 110 km per hour. This is very good for my business.

*—Noor Rahman, taxi driver,
Wardak Province*



Now my children can walk safely and easily to school. The cars move faster and the drive is smoother. Now it's much easier for me to take my fruit and vegetables to the market. This paved road is very good.

*—Sultan Mohammad and his six children, walking along
the road from their village of Andar to attend a
wedding in Shahkabal, Wardak Province*