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## **TRANSPORT PROJECTS IN AFGHANISTAN: IRAN'S AMBITIONS AND A BALANCING CENTRAL ASIA**

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The article by Nargiza Umarova, published by the CACI Analyst, examines the growing competition over trans-Afghan transport corridors, with Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Iran advancing rival railway projects to connect Central Asia with Pakistan and China. The Taliban government has actively supported these initiatives, recognizing Afghanistan's strategic position as a transit hub. While Uzbekistan promotes the Kabul Corridor (Termez-Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar), Turkmenistan backs an alternative Torghundi-Herat-Kandahar-Spin Boldak route. Meanwhile, Iran is expanding its Chabahar-Zahedan railway toward Afghanistan, aiming to establish direct links with China via Herat through the China-Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran railway corridor (the Five Nation Road).

As the author states, Iran's growing influence in Afghan transport infrastructure poses a challenge to Uzbekistan's dominance in regional transit. While Tashkent initially planned to integrate with the Iran-backed Khaf-Herat railway, it shifted focus to the Kabul Corridor to protect its own transit interests. Tajikistan, historically skeptical of the Taliban, has become more engaged in trans-Afghan projects, collaborating with China and Korea to develop a railway link through Sherkhan Bandar. Meanwhile, Turkmenistan's TAT corridor and the Lapis Lazuli trade route offer alternative links to Turkey and Europe, increasing regional competition for control over Afghan trade routes.

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