

More than \$150bn of rail projects under way and planned in MENA



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More than \$150bn worth of major railway, metro and tram projects are under way or planned in the Middle East & North Africa region, according to a report published this month by MEED, the business intelligence and events company.

The figure reflects the momentum gathering in the region's railway projects market due to rapid urbanisation and the increases in cross-border movements in people and goods.

"More than \$25bn-worth of rail contracts are expected to be awarded in 2014, with a similar amount likely in 2015," according to the author of the report MEED Insight Head Ed James.

"These include packages on the Doha, Jeddah and Abu Dhabi metros, the second phase of the Etihad Rail project, the third phase of Line 3 of the Cairo metro and various tram projects in Algeria."

Ed James will be delivering a keynote address at the 10th annual MENA Rail & Metro Summit 2014 which opens at the Conrad Hotel in Dubai on 21-22 June.

"The main driver for rail and metro development in the region is the increasing congestion in urban areas and the growing realisation that building more roads is not the

solution," James writes. "At the same time, governments are recognising the economic benefits rail networks can bring, especially to more remote areas. Moreover, for the oil exporters high oil prices have meant they have the funds to finance their rail ambitions."

Figures compiled by MEED show that plans call for the total length of MENA region railway track to be increased by 40,000 kilometres from under 29,000 kilometres at present. The largest railway programme is in Saudi Arabia where the aim is to build 10,000 kilometres of track compared with 2,415km at present in the form of the Riyadh-Dammam lines and the North-South Mineral Railway to Ras al-Khair.

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More than one quarter of the new railway track is to be laid in the GCC, including the GCC railway from Kuwait City to Muscat in Oman which is due to start operating in 2018. Plans for the regulation and operation of the railway are now being finalised.

EXISTING AND PLANNED TRACKS (KILOMETRES)

	EXISTING	PLANNED
Bahrain	0	245
Iraq	2,405	2,343
Kuwait	1	405
Oman	0	2,244
Qatar	0	750
Saudi Arabia	2,415	10,000
UAE	80	1,400
Yemen	0	2,155
Jordan	508	897
Lebanon	0	0
Syria	2,833	1,402
Gaza/West Bank	14	473
Algeria	3,854	7,105
Egypt	9,633	111
Libya	0	3,104
Mauritania	700	430
Morocco	2,159	1,526
Sudan	1,566	3,143
South Sudan	248	492
Tunisia	2,197	894
Western Sahara	5	0
Total	28,618	39,119

Source: MEED Insight

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The largest existing mainline networks are Egypt, with more than 9,600km and Algeria with 3,500km. Much of the existing MENA network was built when both countries were controlled by the Ottoman Turks, France and the UK. The most famous line was the Hejaz Railway, which the Ottomans built to link Syria with Muslim Holy Cities in what is now Saudi Arabia.

Libya is the only North African state to have no mainline or metro services, although historically it did have a

mainline network. Libya had been in the process of building a coastal rail line and a minerals rail line into the interior, but the civil war and the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi's regime in 2011 put all infrastructure plans on hold as contractors pulled their workers out of the country.

It is a similar situation in Syria where the conflict has destroyed rail infrastructure and where plans to upgrade the network and build a metro have been indefinitely delayed.