

MAY 2004



**INTERNATIONAL  
ROAD FEDERATION**

2 Chemin De Blandonnet,  
1214 Vernier (Genève), Switzerland  
Tel: +41 22 306 0260,  
Fax: +41 22 306 0270  
e-mail: [apearce@irfnet.org](mailto:apearce@irfnet.org)  
Website: <http://www.irfnet.org>



1010 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.,  
Suite 410, Washington, DC, 20001,  
USA  
Tel: +1 202 371 5544,  
Fax: +1 202 371 5565  
e-mail: [info@irfnet.org](mailto:info@irfnet.org)

IRF was founded in 1948 to encourage better road and transportation systems worldwide. IRF is a non-profit, non-political service organisation which helps in the application of technology and management practices to produce the maximum economical and social return from national road investments. Some 500 governments, companies and associations around the world are members of IRF and provide financial support to the dual offices in Washington, DC and Geneva, Switzerland. National and regional road associations around the world make up the Federation. IRF is an accredited transportation consultant to the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the Organisation of American States, and works closely with other international institutions in the transportation field.

# TSH seminar looks at road development-related issues

**The Trans Sahara Highway (TSH), the 4,500km route through the Sahara desert linking Algiers (Algeria) to Lagos (Nigeria), via Niger, with 3,600km of feeder routes in Chad, Mali and Tunisia. It is one of the nine Trans African Highways whose development is currently under review by the International Financial Institutions and aid agencies**

A March international seminar focused primarily on the socio-economic issues related to the ongoing development of the Trans Sahara Highway. The road itself, of which some 85% is now in serviceable condition, was codenamed the African Unity Highway back in 1973, an indication of its importance for the entire African continent and its anticipated positive impact on trade.

Does today's reality on the Tans Saharan Highway live up to the original expectations? The international seminar, *The Trans Sahara Highway: a Motor for Development*, held in Algiers (Algeria) on 10 and 11 of March, took a close look at current commercial exchanges between the six countries members of the Trans Sahara Road Liaison Committee (TRLIC): Algeria, Chad, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Tunisia

The international seminar, organized by the Trans Sahara Road Liaison Committee (TRLIC), takes place once every five years and this was the second in an ongoing series. It brought together road officials and representatives from the Ministries of Commerce, Chambers of commerce, Ministries of Transport and Public Works and Ministries of Health of the TRLIC member countries

Also present were delegates from the African Development Bank, the Islamic Development Bank, and the United Nations Development Programme. IRF was the only non-governmental organization present at the event.

The aim of the seminar was to focus on the social and economic implications of road development, and place under review other issues that contribute to the efficient functioning of the transport system

## Trade

A significant part of the seminar was devoted to country reports detailing the current economic environment, trade with other countries of the region, status of their transport infrastructure in general and the trans Saharan Highway on their national territory.

Reports indicated unanimity among delegates that the road would have a positive impact on commercial exchanges. Nevertheless, with the exception of intense ongoing trade between Algeria and Tunisia in the northern section of the road, and between Niger and Nigeria on the southern section, it was generally recognized that exchanges are, to date, extremely limited.

Close examination of the case

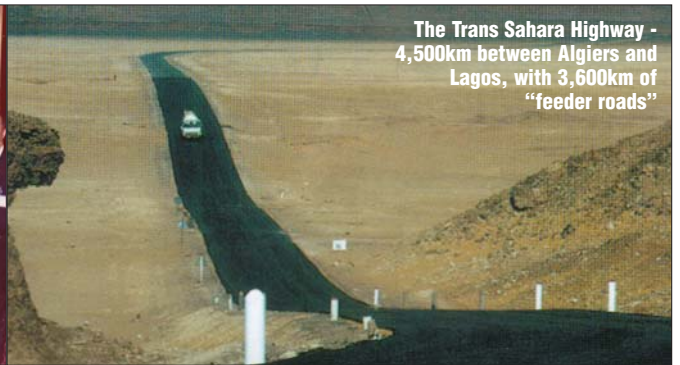
"The IDB is fully convinced of the importance of [the Trans Sahara Highway], which serves Algeria, Mali, Niger, Chad, Nigeria and Tunisia, as well as many other countries along the Atlantic coast. It also believes that it will serve as a solid foundation for development in the countries concerned and facilitate the import and export of basic commodities to and from them.

...the IDB supports NEPAD\* as a general framework for full and integrated development that

addresses Africa's major economic, social and political priorities. Such a new partnership is inevitable when it comes to roads as a way to achieve its prime objective, i.e. reduce by half the number of Africans living in abject poverty by 2015..."

**Dr. Ahmed Mohamed Ali, President, Islamic Development Bank**

*\*New partnership for Africa's Development*



The Trans Sahara Highway - 4,500km between Algiers and Lagos, with 3,600km of "feeder roads"

revealed that this was not due to a lack of protocols and agreements between the TRLC region, but lack of implementation. More coordination was needed. Also lacking was a regional authority whose role would be to follow up decisions and boost commercial exchanges.

Some issues raised were practical, for example, the age of the transport fleet in some of the countries involved. Further, regular exchanges

between the transport business interests in the TRLC would, delegates believe, improve the trade situation.

Part 2 focused more particularly on issues of migration and public health associated with the development of transport networks, and more specifically to the risk of the transport system becoming a vector for transmissible diseases. See following articles ■

## Members of the Trans Saharan Road Liaison Committee

**Mohamed Ayadi**, *TRLC Secretary General*

**Hocine Necib**, *Director of Roads, Algeria*

**Ahmat Abakar**, *Director of Roads, Chad*

**Gabouné Keita**, *Director of Public Works, Mali*

**Garbo Bako**, *Director General of Public Works, Niger*

**Ganty Blaji Giwa**, *Deputy Director General of Motorways, Nigeria*

**Achour Mouncef**, *Director General of Bridges and Roads, Tunisia*

# Mobility and issues of concern

The Trans Saharan seminar was chiefly exceptional for its focus on the socio-economic rather than technical aspects of a route which is, today, 85% complete. Although mobility procures numerous social economic benefits, it has always been recognised that there are what are known as "negative externalities" related to the transport system, in particular roads.

In most industrialised countries, environmental impact studies routinely form part of the feasibility study, which then factors the negative costs of the particular infrastructure project into the total cost. Leila Tadj, advisor to the United Nations Development Programme Coordinator in Algiers, believes that other costs, in particular social costs, should also be factored into the total cost of the Trans Sahara project.

The basis of her argument is that, just as protection of vulnerable species forms part of the environmental impact assessment, so protection of vulnerable populations should be considered a priority in the socio-economic impact assessment. But protection from what?

One of the known but rarely evoked downsides to population mobility has been the spread of disease from regions where they are endemic to regions where they are not. Even the common cold introduced into an area where it was previously unknown can have

**Leila Tadj**, UNDP programme coordinator in Algeria



**Leila Tadj, advisor to the United Nations Development Programme Coordinator in Algiers, believes that other costs, in particular social costs, should also be factored into the total cost of the Trans Sahara project**

devastating consequences.

For the Africa in general, undoubtedly the major problem related to improved mobility and transport infrastructure, regional integration, enhanced trade and so on is the spread of HIV-AIDS.

"In the past we'd largely believed that serious as the HIV-AIDS problem was on the African continent, populations living in of the Sahara were unlikely to be seriously affected because they were so

remote from the major centres of population. This turned out to be a complete illusion."

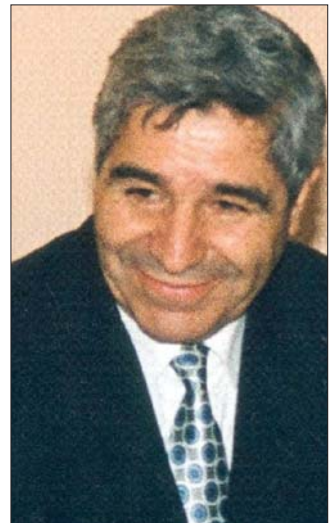
"Even if current infection rates are relatively low, what is alarming is the rate of increase of infection especially among women and young children," pursues Ms. Tadj. "Information and data is not easy to come by, especially among the most vulnerable sections of the population. What we do know is the ratio of men to women, previously at 1 to 4, is now down to 1 to 1 in some parts of the Sahara. These show a pretty dramatic increase in the infection rate among women."

According to Ms. Tadj, some of the major initiatives and strategies developed up to now by the development agencies and recommendations for action at a national, regional and international level deal with issues such as prevention, population migration studies, cooperation between various countries in the Sahara region, allocation of human and financial resources, and development of strategies and tools. In addition, there is the question of developing capacity for health care and controls in the region.

"All these elements come at a price, and these costs should necessarily be factored into the total cost of the Trans Sahara Highway," stresses Ms. Tadj. But these costs will be considerable and risk being even higher if they are not factored in from the outset, she concludes ■



# IRF asks the questions



**CLRT Secretary General Mohamed Ayadi: "Clearly, the economic argument is the most important... There is a strong desire to attenuate the isolation, destitution, and improve the living conditions, sometimes appalling, of populations in the desert."**

**IRF interviews TRLC Secretary General Mohamed Ayadi**

**on his insights into the Trans Saharan Highway**

**Q** *uestion: Each time the CLRT meets, do you get the impression of real progress, or do you find that the same issues, dealt with during previous meetings, are tabled again?*

**Answer:** Let me first make the distinction between the 2nd International Seminar, this event, and a regular CLRT Committee meeting. The Seminar takes place once every five years, with a different theme as basis for discussion.

The Committee meets once every six months, once per year in Algiers, and once in each of the CLRT member countries in turn, with the aim of evaluating the situation along the Trans Saharan Highway according to country and project.

Technical issues are always high on the meeting agenda, with successes and setbacks constituting an exchange of experience between countries and object lessons for all. The Committee also discusses and prepares training programmes and debates issues of finance in the preparation of applications for loans of grants for carrying our studies and project works. We also discuss feasibility studies before and after financing has been secured.

The Trans Saharan Highway project itself is moving forward slowly. It is not surprising that the question

of its progress comes up frequently at Committee meetings considering the lack of resources in the member countries themselves, some of them among the poorest in the world.

**Q: For IRF road investment must have economic rather than political justifications. Do you think the Trans Saharan Highway is an economic rather than political concept?**

**A:** Clearly, the economic argument is the most important. Yet, having made the point, my introduction to the Trans Sahara Highway seminar deliberately included history and background to the development of trade in the Sahara. I included this in order to place in context the will among heads of government to move towards political integration, itself a by-product of economic integration, and which explains the priority assigned to transport and, in particular, to the development of the road network.

The Trans Sahara project has the merit of being a direct route through the desert, which serves, at the same time, a vast region covering six countries. There is a strong desire to attenuate the isolation, destitution, and improve the living conditions, sometimes appalling, of populations in the desert.

That is certainly the principal reason behind the

Trans Sahara Highway project. To this should be added a combination of strategic and economic reasons, to which each country assigns varying levels importance.

At a project level, the economic viability of loan-financed sections is verified, and we engineers try to remain within the limits of economic viability by recommending specifications and levels of equipment commensurate with present and future traffic.

This is not always an easy task, for example when we suggest a rigorous stage-by-stage approach necessitating access to sufficient maintenance loans available in a timely manner.

**Q: Given the limited funds available, is it possible that assigning funds to the Trans Sahara Highway may divert funds from road projects of national importance, i.e. roads between economic centres not situated on the Trans Sahara route.**

**A:** Member countries of the CLRT are perfectly well appraised of how to lay down a hierarchy of road development priorities.

**Q: According to some seminar participants, one of the main advantages of the Trans Sahara Highway will be improved access to the port of Algiers. This is especially so in the light of recent hostilities in many West African countries, which have drastically reduced port access options.**

**A:** Access to the sea and the availability of numerous options for ports are issues of concern for the large majority of landlocked countries. Even Nigeria, itself not landlocked, recalls the blockade of Lagos in 1976, with convoy traffic rerouted via Algiers.

In Mali, the region of Gao suffered a severe dry spell

some ten years ago. The deaths of huge numbers of cattle could have been avoided if the section of road towards Algiers had been in better condition. Those are specific issues at specific times, but the long-term interest of the Trans Sahara Highway, demonstrated by a feasibility study, is reduction of product delivery times: it takes 20 days fewer to deliver products to the departments of Arlit and Agades in Mali than by importing them through Algiers and along the TSH than via the Gulf of Guinea. The same applies to the region of GAO.

**Q: In the absence of harmonisation, such as exists within the EU, will the transit of certain goods, for example, through Algerian territory, require costly control mechanisms, with a negative impact on the economic viability of the TSH, notably in Algeria itself?**

**A:** This is a question that will naturally arise once a consistent level of demand for transport along the TSH has been established. We are not there yet, but we take note of the issue ■

## IRF ROADWAY SAFETY EXECUTIVE SEMINAR TRAINING



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# Dates set for 4th SEE Road Congress

The 4th IRF International Road Congress for South East Europe will be held in Dubrovnik, on 15 and 16 of November 2004, under the high patronage of the government of Croatia.

"It's great to see that this flagship IRF initiative is back on track," Says IRF Geneva Director General Wim Westerhuis, who negotiated final agreement for organising the conference. "The IRF series of conferences had built up momentum since the 2000 beginnings in Sofia. It's good to see that no event in 2003 was just a blip rather than a long term state of affairs.

Just a blip indeed because the 2004 event promises to be the biggest ever. Interest in the event is clearly demonstrated by the incremental increase in participation. The first conference, held in Sofia in 2000 attracted some 250 delegates; Bucharest 2001 assembled 400 delegates; and the third conference in Belgrade in 2002 brought together some 500 participants.

## Interests and needs

IRF took the initiative to organise a series of annual road congresses in 1999. Each congress, it was decided, should focus specifically on the road infrastructure interests and needs in South East Europe, a region just emerging from several years of civil war. Two factors governed IRF thinking in launching the congress initiative.

First, although IRF was aware of European Union (EU) plans for "road corridors" through the SE Europe region, it felt that the plans put forward were, in themselves, insufficient to significantly improve economic development. Second, evidence available to



IRF Geneva  
Director General  
Wim Westerhuis

IRF suggested that road development in South East Europe was evolving as a patchwork of unrelated projects funded separately by number of International Financial Institutions (IFI), and other international donors and lenders. A coherent plan for road development within wider context of regional economic development appeared to be lacking.

For the IRF, it was high time in 1999 to organise a forum where all the major stakeholders could be represented, issues of common concern could be debated, possible joint action contemplated, and resolutions formulated.

The forum envisaged by IRF evolved into a series of congresses entitled "IRF International Road Congress for South East Europe."

## Shared responsibility

Like all IRF conferences, congresses and meetings, the principle behind the series of International Road Congresses for South East Europe is one of shared responsibility. The host

country organisation team deals with event logistics: congress venue, identification of hotels, registration, translation services and equipment, technical support, social activities and so on. The congress host has full liberty to contact sponsors of its choice and organise an accompanying event such as a road exhibition.

For its part, IRF develops and manages the congress program, selects and contacts speakers, and drums up support for the congress and possible participation from among IFIs, EU, UN Economic Commission for Europe, and other International governmental as well as non-governmental organisations. IRF also gives media coverage to the event - for example, here in the pages of World Highways - and deals with the international promotion of the event, and collects and collates the congress presentations, later published on CD-ROM.

Crucial to the success of the event, in IRF's experience, is active support from the Government of the host country, in particular from the Ministry responsible for road infrastructure.

## A winning formula

The 2004 IRF International Road Congress for south East Europe will be the fourth in the series. The proposed preliminary congress structure is therefore based on the winning formula, tried and tested over the past few years.

The first session, immediately following the Congress opening ceremony, will bring together ministers of transport from all the countries of the region to report on national road infrastructure developments, and debate the ways and means of ensuring compatibility with other countries of the region.

IRF has long argued that it makes little sense to invest enormous sums in national road development if fluid traffic then comes to a grinding halt at national frontiers where it stands in line for hours. Thus, the ministerial sessions frequently cover issues beyond



road infrastructure such as customs agreements and border crossings.

The next programmed session provides the opportunity for national road authorities, road and other associations to focus on specific aspects of national road development in their "country reports". The ensuing session looks at general economic issues and indicators provided by national governments, IFIs, European Union representatives and development agencies.

Next item on the congress agenda is needs assessment - an inventory of current road networks and their state of repair, together with details of missing links. This is followed by a special session on road financing and project implementation, which looks at a variety of models ranging from entirely public to entirely private. A final session will cover the crucial issues of road maintenance and - in a year when both World Health Organization and UNECE are making every effort to bring the issue to the forefront of policy - road safety.

The final part of the two-day IRF event will focus on opportunities in South East Europe for developing mechanisms and reporting structure for cross border and region-wide cooperation in road infrastructure development, with the final session devoted to conclusions, recommendations and reading of the congress resolution ■

## 4th IRF INTERNATIONAL ROAD CONGRESS FOR SOUTH EAST EUROPE



### International Road Federation

15 and 16 November 04, Dubrovnik, Croatia

For more information about the 4th IRF International Road Congress for South East Europe, contact IRF at Tel: +41 22 306 0260, Fax: +41 22 306 0270 or email [info@irfnet.org](mailto:info@irfnet.org). Latest information posted online regularly at [www.irfnet.org](http://www.irfnet.org)