

Russia Briefs Leaders On Railway Projects

Nov. 22—Russian Railways President Vladimir Yakunin gave U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood a presentation on the Russian high-speed rail program on Nov. 21 in Moscow, in the context of a three-day annual conference on “Russia’s Transport: Establishment, Development, Prospects.”

Yakunin showed the U.S. officials the Sapsan (Peregrine Falcon) high-speed train, and briefed them on the development program of high-speed rail transport in Russia planned up to 2030.

According to a Russian Railways report, LaHood said that he was impressed by the first Russian high-speed train, built jointly by German and Russian engineers. He pointed out that the railway systems of Russia and the United States have much in common, and that the Russian program to develop high-speed rail transport is of great interest to Washington, in the light of what he called the U.S. Administration’s plans to create a high-speed national rail network.

This year’s conference was keyed to the 200th anniversary of the 1809 founding of Tsarist Russia’s Sea and Land Transport Directorate and the Institute of the Corps of Transport Engineers. Held as an exhibition in the Manege Hall next to the Kremlin, the conference was attended by Minister of Transportation Igor Levitin, Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov, and Kremlin Chief of Staff Sergei Naryshkin. On Nov. 20, the visiting transportation ministers of 24 nations were received by President Dmitri Medvedev.

Medvedev on Transport Corridors

According to *Kommersant* daily, Medvedev told the foreign guests that “development of a strategy for transport is largely the basis of our future cooperation,” citing the potential for foreign investment in Russian road-building, as well as the exploitation of existing capabilities such as transpolar air routes from Asia to the Americas across Siberia. *Kommersant* commented that “both West and East are interested in creating transport corridors across Russia, equipped with the latest technology.” Medvedev confirmed this, noting that “be-

cause of Russia’s unique capabilities, we would like to expand work on the North-South and West-East transport corridors. This means creating modern, multimodal logistics centers and improving our technologies in use at border crossings.”

Many Russian regional leaders attended the event, pushing for funding of projects in their areas. Media in Siberia and the Far East, in particular, played up the conference. Interviewed by Vesti state television, deputy chairman Anatoli Ballo of the government-owned VEB Bank—the major conduit of state crisis-mitigation funds into the Russian economy—stressed that “in the recent period, we have been devoting more and more attention to the Far East.” Citing the construction of a new rail terminal at Vladivostok on the Pacific (a project involved in the recent Russia-China economic cooperation package), Ballo said that Russia wants to attract more international freight shipments to its railways, which means there is a need for “transportation corridors, logistics centers, and the whole range of transport infrastructure.”

Sergei Ivanov, in his address to the conference, highlighted the scheduled 2010 completion of the 2,000-km Chita-to-Khabarovsk highway, which will mean that “for the first time in the history of the Russian Empire, the U.S.S.R., and modern Russia, our country will have a highway connection all the way from the West to the East.”

A report in *Marchmont News*, earlier this month, said that the Moscow conference would be an occasion for renewed discussion of the Sakhalin-to-Mainland Russia bridge or tunnel connection, with upgrading of the rail system on Sakhalin Island and a further connection to Hokkaido in Japan. Russian Railways head Yakunin announced, after a Nov. 10 meeting with Sakhalin Region Governor Alexander Khoroshavin, that his company will back the Sakhalin government’s efforts to launch the project. Giving Japan a direct outlet to the Trans-Siberian Railway will be a major enhancement of Eurasian Land-Bridge connections.

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