

Actually, it has better soil conditions than the English Channel, where they have already built a rail tunnel. With the English Channel Tunnel being completed, that indicates that the project to build a tunnel under the Bering Strait is certainly a feasible one. It could be readily built.

**EIR:** Turning to some problems in the current rail system: Besides not completing many routes, what about the fact that the lack of maintenance and underdeveloped infrastructure, such as continuation of grade-level crossings — where the rail and highway are on same level — causes problems? Higher rates of accidents, and so on?

**Cooper:** Certainly the fact that we have not properly invested in our rail system, and in the highway systems that interface with the railroads — specifically the grade crossings, and grade separations — has helped create the safety problems we've had. Some people have said that deregulation may have put too many cost pressures on railroads, and they haven't made the investments. I know there was a concern over CSX and the Northeast Corridor runs several years ago on that issue.

What we're going to need to do, is build a large number of grade separations, which is going to require lots of steel and concrete, and keep lots of people employed; along with the fact, we need to double-track and triple-track the railroads, and electrify them.

I think the conference in Alaska next week is going to be very important, in terms of what has to happen in the redevelopment of our North American rail system. The fact that there is now a bill in Congress for \$71 billion to upgrade freight and passenger railroads, is certainly a good start. But there has to be a real push from the Federal government to do that.

I also think that we need to have some organization, other than the present management of Amtrak, running things. We need to take a completely growth-oriented national focus, rather than a strictly Northeast Corridor status-quo focus. I think that there's going to be lots and lots of additional investment.

I also think, that we are probably seeing a period now, where we are not ever going to see airline travel as dominant as it has been in the past. And we also are going to need to find some way of getting trucks put on trains.

Ultimately, we are going to need a magnetic levitation system network across this country, in conjunction with the railroads, as a replacement for at least some of the airlines service that we have in this country today. Because it doesn't have to use oil, and we can use energy resources, including nuclear and coal, that we already have in this country.

**EIR:** If you are phasing in these routes, what is the principle governing this?

**Cooper:** I think the smartest thing that can be done with magnetic levitation, is to build on these projects that were already proposed in the recent solicitation by the Federal Rail-

road Administration, where they were proposing projects that would go from downtowns to airports. There's one in the Washington, D.C. area — Washington to Baltimore — one in Pittsburgh, that I understand were recommended for funding; but those need to go ahead, as well as other ones, in Southern California, and in Atlanta, and so forth — that would be very good.

In some respects, these are going to replace the need for expanding airports; that's becoming increasingly difficult to do. Of course, here in Seattle, they're going ahead with expanding their airport, with the very likely possibility that there's not going to be the traffic there in the future. We need to be thinking in different ways than we have in the past.

**EIR:** So you say, just get along with the job. Get some experience, and then build the other lines.

**Cooper:** Exactly. Because then it will just build on itself. I see it, for long-distance travel across the country, as complementing, as a replacement for at least some of the airlines service we have today.

**EIR:** So it would be an inter-mix, at the beginning, of upgraded, pre-existing rail, and then, the introduction of maglev.

**Cooper:** Exactly. I don't see maglev replacing the present rail. I see it complementing it.

## Russia Will Build Rail Link To Sakhalin Island

by Rachel Douglas

The Russian government's weekly meeting of Oct. 4 was devoted to key economic projects in the far western and eastern reaches of the Russian Federation: the development of Kaliningrad (formerly Königsberg) on the Baltic Sea; and the construction of the rail bridge from the Eurasian continent to Sakhalin Island in the Pacific Ocean. At a press conference after the cabinet session, Minister of Economic Development and Trade German Gref, and Railways Minister Nikolai Aksyonenko announced Russia's commitment to push ahead with the connection to Sakhalin, which is an eastwards extension of Eurasia's first land-bridge, the Trans-Siberian Railroad (TSR).

Gref called these projects "geostrategic and geopolitical in their implications." He reported that a feasibility study, undertaken earlier this year, had determined that a Mainland-Sakhalin rail bridge is preferable to a tunnel. Gref placed much emphasis on negotiating the participation of Japan in further development of Sakhalin infrastructure, asserting that the \$3-4 billion, 5.8 kilometer-long Mainland-Sakhalin bridge project will break even, only if Sakhalin is subse-

quently linked by tunnel to Hokkaido Island in Japan. As illustrated in *EIR's 1997 Special Report*, "The Eurasian Land-Bridge: The "New Silk Road"—Locomotive For Worldwide Economic Development (see **Figure 1**, p. 8), the Mainland-Sakhalin link and another proposed tunnel, from the southern tip of Sakhalin Island to Hokkaido, would mean a revolution in trade and development in the entire Pacific Region.

With rail lines running from Hokkaido through Sakhalin to the Trans-Siberian Railroad, freight from Japan could be sent to Europe along that route. A similar case exists for cargoes from the Korean port of Pusan, if a modernized Trans-Korean Railroad is also hooked up to the TSR, as is under negotiation. This option was also discussed at the Gref-Aksyonenko press conference, but it is being handled as a separate project.

Looking only at the aspect of freight haulage, Gref said that the bridge would have to carry 10-12 million tons of freight each year, in order to be profitable. Sakhalin-to-Mainland haulage peaked at 7.8 million tons in 1990, and is currently about 2 million tons per annum. Tying in Japan would enhance "the possibilities of using the Trans-Siberian Railroad in the Eurasian transportation corridor."

Pressed on whether the Mainland-Sakhalin link would go ahead, with or without Japanese participation, Gref said, "This is a geostrategic project for Russia and it is important, in any case, for the social and economic development of Sakhalin and the region as a whole. It will certainly have a very positive impact on economic development in the entire region." But, he claimed that there would be a "return on investment in the near future, only if Japan joins the project." Aksyonenko, arriving later at the press conference, said that the go-ahead could not depend on Japan; that he had "no doubts" about the project, but "if Japan is going to make decisions for us, then I do have doubts."

### **'A Strategic Project'**

Aksyonenko said that private investment in the bridge was not excluded, but that the project "was not specifically considered for financing by private investors. This is an infrastructure project. By its recoupment modalities, it cannot look attractive for private investors." At the same time, on the extension of the railroad to Hokkaido, he said that "preliminary talks took place and heightened interest was expressed by Japanese transnationals like Mitsui, Sumitomo, and others." As for Russia, "We are talking about starting a project involving the continent and Sakhalin Island, and then we [shall] look and see. If we look ahead longer than five years, this is a very important strategic project in conditions of a globalized economy. It is a transport corridor that will link up with Europe. So, it would simply be unforgivable not to take advantage of Russia's geographical position, and to deprive industry of utilizing its potential and taking advantage of the services of Russian, not foreign, transportation."

Otherwise, as China goes ahead with the Silk Road, the more southerly, new Eurasian Land-Bridge, Aksyonenko said

that Russia might "be late, as usual" and miss out on the benefits of building the Eurasian transport corridors.

Aksyonenko was asked, "Who first got the idea" of the Sakhalin bridge link—"perhaps you, personally?" He replied, "I cannot claim credit for what doesn't belong to me. I think it occurred to some smart people. . . . A decision on Sakhalin was made once before, in the early 1950s. It was prompted by the geopolitical interests of Russia. And today, in addition to geopolitics, we also see economics. We see the burgeoning Asia-Pacific region, we see the 6 million containers that travel from Europe to Asia and we see that Russia is left out of it, in terms of transportation."

### **No Hobbesian Choice**

The potential rail links from Korea and Japan to the TSR are hotly debated in Russia. Some political leaders in the Russian Far East protest that to court such cargo flows means to condemn Russia's own deteriorating Pacific ports, like Vladivostok, to oblivion. Others, however, including some smart people at the Academy of Sciences, are pushing a concept of development for the entire region in tandem with the transport corridors.

Interviewed on Sept. 11 by the Internet news service Strana.ru, the deputy director of the Academy's Institute of the Far East, Vasily Mikheyev, spoke in favor of the creation of a development bank for Northeast Asia, with participation from Japan, South Korea, China, Russia, and the United States, which "by issuing long-term bonds, would accumulate financial resources and funnel them toward developing infrastructure projects"—bilateral ones such as Russia-China pipelines, but also for a more general upgrading of the whole region's economy.

Asked what has happened with the projects for a Berlin-to-Moscow highway, and a high-speed rail line from Moscow to St. Petersburg, Gref replied that "these projects cannot be scrapped. These projects are relevant and they will be implemented. The question is when."

It was also striking that Gref, who usually has espoused neo-liberal notions, stated that the economic decay and budget crisis in Kaliningrad was due to "a lack of investment in infrastructure," resulting chiefly from application of the Free Economic Zone Law! In the 1990s, the liberal reformers supposed that Kaliningrad would become a Hong Kong of the Baltic, as a free trade zone.

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