SAFE PASSAGE ALTERNATIVES

Historical Highlights

1995: Oslo’s Interim Agreement
The safe passage is defined in Annex I of the Interim Agreement of 1995 (Oslo II Accord): "In order to maintain the territorial integrity of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as a single territorial unit, and to promote their economic growth and the demographic and geographical links between them, both sides shall (provide for) normal and smooth movement of people, vehicles, and goods ... between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip." 1
A related protocol, defining the operations of the safe passage, was signed in 1999.

1999: Palestinian Convoys on Israel Roads
The protocol was implemented during 4 months in October 1999 but terminated 4 months later, when the second Intifada broke out. During this period, 115,000 people in 6,500 taxis, 1,700 buses and 2,100 autos, all Palestinian, traveled on Israel’s roads between Gaza and the West Bank. The Palestinian traffic was confined to certain roads and to convoys of 25 vehicles, with Israeli security details at the beginning and end. Nevertheless, 765 Palestinian people and 52 Palestinian autos have “disappeared” during the trip... 3 There was strong resistance from Israeli cities en-route against these convoys because of both security and congestion concerns.

2003: Geneva Initiative
A key component of the Disengagement Plan, based on Clinton Parameters (2000), was a “designated road”, interpreted as a land corridor across Israel, between the West Bank and Gaza, consisting of roads, railroads, pipes, cables and other utilities. The related Geneva Accord indicated that while the corridor remains an Israeli territory: “The State of Palestine shall have full sovereignty over the designated roads, and the Palestinian law shall apply to them”. 4

2019: Deal of the Century
Trump administration’s peace plan indicates in its economic section: “The most ambitious undertaking would be a 5$ billion transportation corridor from the West Bank to Gaza that could link the two Palestinian territories with a major road and possibly a modern rail line.” 5 The corridor will be provided via a sub-terrain tunnel which, according to the sketchy map provided with the plan, extends about 50 km. Our very rough cost estimate, based on the experience in constructing Tel-Aviv subway, is somewhat lower at $4 billion for the tunnel, rolling stock and rail/bus stations.

Previous Studies
Numerous studies of the safe passage have been undertaken by Israeli and international entities. The four, most notable studies were:

1. Research-Professor (emeritus), University of New Orleans, USA, see: www.asafashar.com. Members of the Group of Experts assisted in preparations of this paper.
3. https://www.israelhayom.co.il/article/669267
• Ministry of Regional Cooperation (2003) – defining 8 alternative corridors, assessing them according to security, political (sovereignty), transportation, environmental, engineering and economic criteria, and recommending a sunken road/rail corridor. The possibility of a tunnel was rejected as way too expensive.

• AIX-Group Position Paper (2010, 2016) – identifying the construction of a dedicated Palestinian-controlled surface roads inside Israel, following Route 33, between Gaza’s Karni Crossing and West Bank’s Al-Majid crossing as the only economical solution. Sub-surface (sunken) or elevated roads are rejected as too expensive and too long to construct. A rail option is rejected due to the expensive rail-to-road transfer at each end.

• Jerusalem Center for Public Policy (2007) – focusing on political and security concerns, identifying convoys on existing Israeli roads as the only reasonable plan. A dedicated Palestinian-controlled road is rejected since servitude rights may lead to Palestinian sovereignty.

• Shaul Arieli (2013) – reviewing the broader territorial and security issues and recommending the sunken road/rail corridor.

Different Approach to the Safe Passage Plan

The analytical approach in each of the above studies, as well as all other studies, was to consider a single plan for handling all the components of the Palestinian traffic: cargoes, passengers and cars. In contrast, our analytical approach considers each traffic component according to its specific functional requirements and devising a separate plan for each.

Evaluation of Safe Passage Plans

The following is a short description and evaluation of the main alternative plans to provide safe passage. The main evaluation criteria are assuring Israel’s security while providing “free” movement for the Intra-Palestinian traffic. The other criteria include economic viability and environmental impact. A political pre-requisite to all plans is keeping intact Israel’s territorial sovereignty.

Existing Israeli Road System (Convoys)

Description: Allow Palestinian cars, trucks and busses to travel on existing (but NOT dedicated) Israeli roads between West Bank and Gaza border crossings. The traveling is conducted in convoys, escorted by Israeli security vehicles.

Advantages: No need for investment in infrastructure. Immediate implementation.


Existing Israeli Rail System (Dedicated Trains)

Description: Extend Israel’s existing rail network to border crossings in Gaza and the West Bank and provide dedicated Israeli trains moving between crossings for Palestinian traffic.

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6 https://rafibenheb.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/d793d795d797-d794d795d7a2d793d794-d794d796d7a2-d794d7a7d791d795d7a2.pdf The study was initiated by Shimon Peres, the architect of Oslo Accord, then serving as Ministry of Regional Cooperation.
7 http://aix-group.org/index.php/category/publications/
8 http://www.jcpa.org/text/TheSafePassage.pdf
Advantages: A relatively-low investments in new trackage, since the Israeli rail system already reaches close to border crossings; Erez crossing is about 5 km away from Sderot and Tarqumiya crossing is about 20 km from Kiryat Gat.
Disadvantages: Requires Israeli inspection and Israeli guards on-board (in case of passengers). The West Bank and Gaza do not have rail network, mandating rail-to-truck transfer at border crossings and requires the construction of intermodal yards for handling cargoes and train stations for handling passengers. A significant security concern (passengers).

Dedicated Surface Corridor
Description: Construct a new, dedicated surface road for Palestinian vehicles between the West Bank and Gaza, with security fences and patrol roads, and overpasses and/or underpasses for Israeli roads, rail lines and utilities. The corridor is under exclusive Palestinian control.
Advantages: No Israeli inspection. High capacity of 3,000+ vehicles/hour per direction.
Disadvantages: Major political (sovereignty) and security concerns. High investment cost of about $1 billion (per AIX 2010, Route 33). High operating costs mainly due to Israeli security.

Dedicated Sunken Road/Rail Corridor
Description: Construct a 10-m deep and 100-m wide trench, including 4-lane highway, 2-line railway, pipelines, electric and communication cables, with security fences and patrol roads on the surface along the trench, and with bridges for Israeli roads, rail lines and utilities across the trench. The corridor is under exclusive Palestinian control.
Advantages: No Israeli inspection. High capacity of 3,000+ vehicles/hour per direction for the road and additional capacity provided by rail.
Disadvantages: Major political (sovereignty), security and environmental concerns. High investment cost, of $2 + billion. High operating costs mainly due to Israeli security. Regarding rail, see also section on existing Israeli rail.

Dedicated Elevated or Tunneled Road/Rail Corridor
Similar to the sunken corridor but on a bridge, 20-m above ground or inside an under-ground tunnel. Involves higher investment cost of $4-5 billion. The above-ground option carries high security concern and higher environmental impact (“eyesore”). The under-ground tunnel option is much safer, although not risk free.

Dedicated Monorail
See section on Palestinian Passengers below.

Different Solutions for Cargoes, Passengers, and Cars

Palestinian Cargoes – Existing Israeli Road/Rail System
The Israeli road system already handles a large volume of Palestinian cargoes, moving on Israeli trucks between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza border crossings. Notably, this movement includes Palestinian imports, traveling on Israeli trucks directly from the Israeli ports of Haifa and Ashdod to Palestinian border crossings. The cargo transfer at the West Bank crossing is “back-to-back”: Palestinian cargoes are unloaded from the back of an Israeli truck, go through Israeli inspection and loaded onto the back of a Palestinian truck and vice versa. At Kerem Shalom, which transfers up 1,000 trucks daily, the process involves grounding (laying down) cargoes in walled cells, inspection and using “neutral” Palestinian trucks for the transfer between the Israeli and the Palestinian side. The current system could also be applied to the Intra-Palestinian movement of cargoes. Since

10 http://asafashar.com/GAZA%20PORT%20ALTERNATIVES.pdf
the volume of the Intra-Palestinian traffic of cargo is relatively small and distributed over several border crossings, it is not expected to generate congestion on Israel’s roads. Likewise, since all Palestinian cargoes will continue be inspected, there is no additional security concern. In the long term, as is currently the case with Palestinian cars, a limited number of “neutral” Palestinian trucks and drivers could be allowed to move cargo on Israeli roads.

Most of the future growth in Palestinian traffic will be generated by export/import cargoes. If the South Gaza Palestinian autonomous port is constructed, most of these cargoes will go through Kerem Shalom, which may justify the construction of a dedicated rail line for (inspected) cargo across Israel, between Kerem Shalom and Tarqumiya.

**Palestinian Passengers – Dedicated Monorail**

The obvious option to transport Palestinian passengers is by Israeli busses on existing Israeli roads between the West Bank and Gaza. But, the cross-Israel trip mandates Israeli inspection of Palestinian passengers at border crossings, having Israeli security on-board busses, and taking a circuitous route to avoid crossing through Israeli cities -- resulting in an overall trip time of 4-5 hours. The high cost of hiring Israeli busses with on-board guards and the cost of inspections at border crossings also mandate high fare. And, despite the inspections and guards, some security concern remains.

An elevated monorail system for passengers provides a much faster and more secured service. The 40-km route between existing passenger terminals in Erez and Tarqumiya (see figure below) 90 km/hour speed of trains result in a travel time of only 30 min. The security concern is minimal: trains travel at high speed, high above ground, without stopping over Israeli land, with all railcars are sealed and under constant surveillance. Accordingly, there is no need for Israeli inspection and on-board guards.

The advantages of a single-rail, or monorail system over a two-rail system are lighter-weight railcars and smaller guideway structure, especially for small-capacity system such as those based on short, 3-car trains, with 140 -- 320 seats. A very rough cost estimate for the investment in the entire system is $500 million, assuming a single-line guideway and ground-level train stations. Accordingly, with a daily traffic of 1,000 passengers per direction, the economic, one-way fare should be at around $20, which can be reduced by subsidies. The monorail project can be undertaken by a private concessionaire (BOT), as common with most monorail systems worldwide.

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12 The present inspection time at Erez and Tarqumiya is 1 – 2 hours.

Palestinian Cars – Prohibited (with Exceptions)
Allowing Palestinian cars on Israel’s roads mandates burdensome car inspections, since weapons and explosives can be concealed in double bottoms, side walls, tires, fuel tanks, etc. Additional inspection is required to assure cars meet Israeli safety and environmental standards, have Israeli-approved insurance, and drivers are properly licensed. Even with inspections, Palestinian vehicles with Palestinian drivers and passengers continue to pose a security concern.

The convenience of the monorail system renders unnecessary for passengers to use their own private cars for the Intra-Palestinian trip. Moreover, roads in both Gaza and the West Bank are highly congested, meaning that the long-term solution there (and in Israel) is public transport. Therefore, considering the availability of a convenient monorail service, there is no need to modify the present policy of banning Palestinian vehicles from Israeli roads, except for special cases (see footnote 10).

Summary
Based on the functional analysis of the three components of the Intra-Territorial movement of Palestinian traffic, our plan for the safe passage includes:

- **Cargoes** – continue using **Israeli trucks on Israel roads**, with a long-term option for “neutral trucks”;
- **Passengers** – construct a **monorail** across Israel between Tarqumiya and Erez border crossings; and
- **Cars** – continue with the **banning** policy, except for special cases.