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To Find an Answer to a “Simple Question”

Among the numerous aspects and variants of solutions to the well-known problem “How do we equip Russia?”, transport connectivity has occupied, perhaps, one of the leading places throughout Russian history. The process of transport connectivity tends to involve two large groups of questions:

1) what should be the transport system capable of overcoming the “oppression of space” and reliably connecting the various territories of a vast country;

2) how to ensure its effective operation (this implies the organization of interaction not only between different types of transport, but also complementary activities, primarily the freight forwarding and logistics segment).

And both these groups are united by the answer to two key questions – what is the priority and how it can be achieved over a certain period of time. Thus, in the second half of the nineteenth century, when discussing the directions of Russia’s trade development in Asia, it was fairly noted that: “...The straightforward, the only reasonable measure is the immediate care of our own factories, manifested not by subsidies or control of production, which we have the same technical means to reach perfection as foreign industry has, – but by improving the means of communication from markets for raw materials to factories and from factories to the place of sale of manufactures. So, the question, in simple terms, is not to hinder foreign trade, foreign marketing, but to facilitate our own trade by eliminating everything that impedes its development”¹.

At the same time, promotion of domestic trade and economy is connected both with measures of strategic character, i.e. long-term measures, going beyond conventional notions of project payback time, and with measures of current and medium-term plans, fully taking into account these circumstances.

It is quite probable that if during preparation and decision-making on construction of the Great Siberian Way (Transsib) there had been

¹ *Shavrov N.* On the ways for trade between Russia and Asia. Report presented to the Society for the Promotion of Russian Industry and Trade. – St. Petersburg, 1873. 86 p. [P. 50]

orientation only on "standard return on investment", this project would never have been carried out. Its evaluation was based on an understanding of possibilities, which could be given by construction. The point is that such assessment stemmed from an understanding of the opportunities from the construction of a railroad from Europe to Asia, on the one hand, and the potential of the space, which could be realized for the benefit of domestic economy, on the other hand. If the state undertook the main risks on the first point, on the second point it formed a system of involving both industrial and commercial capital and huge masses of migrant peasants in the process of developing the space. The combination of these two circumstances ensured a huge synergetic effect of the Great Siberian Way project².

It is noteworthy that the Trans-Siberian Railway was built at the expense of state funds and external borrowings, which were taken under state guarantees and obligations. Unfortunately, the opposite approach has prevailed in modern Russia – gold and foreign currency reserves were invested in securities and financial assets abroad. The government of modern Russia in previous years did not dare create real transport (including) assets of a long-term (perpetual) nature.

One example of this indecision is the "Belkomur" project. The process of its promotion clearly demonstrates a lack of vision of the strategic priorities of the country's spatial development, and also serves as an example of the inapplicability of the classic project

² "Siberia, thanks to the greatest railroad in the world granted to it – is called to a new and better life. Our gold fund has reached the enormous sum of one billion three hundred and fifteen million rubles, besides 317 million gold and silver coins in circulation. At the same time the construction of our Siberian road, which is worth almost one third of this cash gold fund, will soon be brought to completion. The state is not able to ensure the strength of this benign parity by any artificial measures. And one cannot demand this, just as one cannot, for example, continue to stubbornly exploit the road, depriving it of the transportation of goods and passengers. Here we need a living activity of the whole organism as an entrepreneur, and moreover an independent activity. Only then will our golden circulation be lasting when it is based on the mighty development of the productive forces of the people. Everyone knows how great is the cost of the state treasury to our remote outlying regions to the detriment of the interests of our central provinces. That is why the entire East of Russia, all of Siberia itself should go to the aid of the state and keep a close watch to ensure that not a single human hand is lost, that we all as one person would be worthy citizens and defenders of our state interests and real workers for our common good, bearing faithful, ardent service to the Tsar and the Fatherland. Siberia, as an organism, now already matured, is called to a new independent life" (Kraevsky P. S.-G. World-Transit Siberian Railway. Communication, made in the Assembly of engineers of the ways of communication, March 8, 1897. Irkutsk, 1898. 84 p. [P. 50]).

approach with an emphasis on “acceptable” return on investment in the current period (see the paper by Arild Mu). Measures related to the development and promotion of economic activity in the zone of influence of the road were either not considered at all or were not properly elaborated. Quite expectedly, such indecision and uncertainty were not a mystery to potential Chinese partners, who eventually “let the project go down the drain.

Note that this project (in its various modifications) is already more than 140 years old³. But if in the initial period the indecisiveness of the State is understandable – there was a discussion about the Great Siberian Way, in our time during the intensive Belkomur discussion there were no (and, perhaps, still are not) any significant nationwide transport infrastructure projects of a strategic nature (despite the considerable package of “national projects” in the most different directions).

The “Belkomur” project made very clear the roles of different parties involved therein. If on the federal level the project was supported rather passively, based primarily on its potential geostrategic importance, the active role of regions – the Arkhangelsk region and Nenets Autonomous Okrug – was determined by the vital need to give a new impetus to the development of economy and social sphere. However, the most important participant – business – remains silent. The reason is more than banal – neither a clear request for its participation from the state (at the federal level), nor any certainty about the forms of support for projects in the zone of influence of the projected road has been expressed.

A similar situation is currently observed in the eastern “wing” of Russia’s transport system – in Siberia and the Far East (the paper by P.A. Lavrinenko and K.V. Yankov). An obstacle to the implementation of new strategically important transportation projects is both the uncertainty of the conditions of their implementation and the lack of a vision of the role of transport in solving the problems of socio-economic development of territories. The latter especially

³ “To eliminate accidents and make the trade relations of the rich Western Siberia with Europe constant is possible only by running a railroad from one of the points lying in the lower reaches of the Ob River to the point of the Northern Ocean, which is beyond the limits of ice navigation. The most convenient endpoints of such a road from the side of the Ob river – the mouth of the Voykara river, and from the side of the Ocean side – Haipudyrskaya bay”. Golokhvastov A. D. The Ob’ railroad. Siberian Society of Trade and Obskaya Zheleznaya Doroga. St. Petersburg, 1881. 44 p. [P. 4].

concerns high-speed railways in the east of the country – without them it is impossible to develop active and effective cooperation of scientific and industrial centers in the south of the macro-region.

The free movement of freight flows and the development of business in the sphere of freight forwarding services are impeded in no small measure by the prescriptive (prescriptive) nature of regulatory norms and rules. Attempts to compensate for the shortcomings of the institutional system of regulation of freight transport activities through the development of digital monitoring systems only for cargo transportation processes (within, for example, the "Platon" system) cannot claim to be comprehensive solutions (the paper by I.I. Batischev, M.A. Nizov, I.A. Mozhayskaya). As a consequence, the presence of a significant "shadow" market in road transportation, the prevailing monopoly pricing for services at airports (the paper by D.M. Grinev).

The answer to the simple question lies in the development and implementation in practice of a comprehensive approach to solving the problems of moving goods and services in space – from ensuring the interconnection of transport infrastructure development projects with the development of domestic producers, suppliers and recipients of goods to the formation of a modern flexible freight forwarding and logistics segment (the interview of D.N. Nikitin). Thus, the experience of Eurosib JSC shows that a clear and consistent system of interaction between freight forwarders and logisticians is not only the basis for sustainable functioning of the transport industry in the present time, but also a factor of its progressive development for years to come.

The key areas to help form a modern transport and logistics sector in Russia are "comprehensiveness" and "interaction" of all the parties involved in the movement of goods. Connectivity and socio-economically acceptable transport accessibility of the territory are the most important conditions for economic sovereignty and sustainability of the country's development as a whole.

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