UPGRADING PORT FACILITIES IN AQABA

I. BACKGROUND

End of 2003, a revised study of the infrastructure and port facilities on the Jordanian section of the Red Sea coast was made. All three port areas were reviewed from both land and sea. A report on the development of the section of coast was prepared by the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA). A proposal to improve the safety of crude oil import handling has also been prepared by the Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company (JPFC). Particular attention has been paid to the container terminal where substantial traffic growth has occurred within the last few months, caused by the increase in traffic from and to Iraq, as well as the crude oil import system.

II. EXISTING SITUATION

A. ROADS

There are three existing roads running in a north-south direction: (1) the original Coast Road (which in the area is now acting as an internal road carrying only port traffic and not open for public use); (2) the newly constructed bypass road around the Container Port (it has 4 lanes, footpath, and road lighting facilities and links the Coast Road to the North and the South of the container port); (3) and the Back Road with an east-west link road into the Container Port area, which acts as a bypass for Aqaba town center and serves as the main access into the Industrial Port (Back Road is essentially a single carriageway south of the link to the Container Port road with an extra third lane at uphill gradient sections. The Back Road carries large volume of trucks of over 1500 trucks per day as well as other vehicles.

There is a lack of truck staging facilities and parking areas. There are a large number of trucks parked haphazardly along the old coast road. There are existing plans to provide proper parking areas for the trucks (350 truck parking spaces for phase one). There is also an existing plan to construct a north-south Truck Road linking the three Aqaba ports. This road is for trucks only and not for tourist traffic.

B. RAILWAY

There is no existing passenger carrying railway line in the Aqaba area. Currently, a single line mineral railway line bringing phosphate from the north terminates at the Main Port.

C. MAIN PORT

This consists of 10 berths with a total length of about 2 km that are used for general cargo, grain, phosphate, and light traffic. There are two fundamental issues –one short terms and one long term. The short term issue is the discharge of dust to the atmosphere during Phosphate handling into the bulk carriers. The long term issue involves the complete closure of the Main port to allow the urban area of Aqaba to expand to the south up to the foot of the rocky hills that run down to the coast just to the south of the Main Port.

Most of the cargo traffic will need to cater for by either transfer to container or by the development of alternative berths at the Industrial Port. However, berth space at the industrial Port is quite limited. Extensive research and study should be made, and then the appropriate new facilities can be built at the industrial Port to allow the closure of the main port to eventually take palce. This is likely to be a lengthy process.

D. CONTAINER PORT

The current throughput of containers is about 150,000 TEU per annum. This seems to be very low considering that the container port of Aqaba has many strategic advantages. For example, the port is very close to the most important container route in the world – that from Europe and the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean and the Far East. The Gulf of Aqaba has very deep water close inshore and so costly maintenance dredging is not required. The very deep water of the Gulf of Aqaba provides a very safe navigational environment, and the inland transport links are excellent with a modern dual high specification highway most of the way to Amman and its links with Iraq.

However the container port itself has several drawbacks, including the lack of investment has resulted in lengthy ship loading and unloading, and there are old straddle carriers to move the containers that can be very dangerous; the road access and entrance to the terminal is very inadequate; the ship to shore cranes are of light construction and are not big enough for most of the larger modern container ships that ply between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean; the containers are moved around the yard by old straddle carriers (these are dangerous to operate, wasteful of space, very unreliable, and costly to maintain); and the container park space utilization is poor due to the straddle carrier operational space requirements.

There has been a continuous increase in full container traffic over the past year –due to the increase in container transhipment to Iraq.

E. INDUSTRIAL PORT

The Industrial Port houses industry and plants that are of strategic importance to Jordan including a large gas fired power station; potash and phosphate plants; timber based industry; crude oil import and storage facilities; as well as other fuel import and storage facilities. The crude is stored in a large parked super tanker and is then pumped to the Zarqa refinery. There are also crude storage tanks and a further truck loading station near them. The road tanker loading facility is inadequate in size and is located at a very inappropriate point adjacent t the coastal road that carries tourist traffic. It is apparent that the industrial area needs substantial investment in order to improve security, services, infrastructure, to provide the berths required due to the closure of the Main port, rehabilitate the coastal road corridor, and make the crude oil tanker loader operation a lot safer.

III. DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS FOR UPGRADING PORT FACILITIES IN AQABA

Components	Duration of Implementation	Estimated Cost (*US$ million*)
1) The preparation of infrastructure plans to cover the relocation of the Main Port, road and rail routes between Aqaba and the Industrial Port, Industrial Port layout and infrastructure	6 months	1.5
2) A self contained container terminal	30 months	160
3) Truck road access 1 km long to proposed container terminal –phase 1 of re-routed Truck Road	24 months	5.0
4) Upgrading 3 km of link to Back Road to dual standard	24 months	3.0
5) The relocation of the oil tanker loading terminal	15 months	15.0
6) The Phosphate dust reduction project	24 months	2.5
7) Upgrading Back Road and improving safety measures including the provision of lighting	24 months	14.1
8) Road rescue equipment	6 months	0.42
9) Passenger terminal rehabilitation including berth relocation	12 months	1.12
10) The Construction of truck staging facility on Spur Road Project	9 months	2.12
Total Cost		**204.7**

IV. BENEFITS

An investment of over US$200 million would also provide the framework for a very profitable container port to take early advantage of the growth of transhipment to Iraq, and inevitably assist the rebuilding of Iraq.