FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ABOUT THE KABUL-KANDAHAR HIGHWAY RECONSTRUCTION FINANCED BY USAID

Kabul, Afghanistan, October 2003

USAID Contract 306-C-00-02-00500-00

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Q. What is the Kabul to Kandahar Highway?

A. The Kabul-Kandahar (K-K) highway is 482 kilometers long and was originally constructed with U.S. government financing in the early 1960s. In the eastern part of Afghanistan it handles major north-south Afghan highway traffic. Kandahar in the south is connected to Herat in western Afghanistan, 566 kilometers away, by another major highway. Other important roads link Herat, via cities in the north of the country, to Kabul. Together these arteries constitute the Afghan Ring Road.

Like the entire Ring Road, the Kabul-Kandahar highway and its bridges and other structures have suffered considerable deterioration and damage over the years, especially during the hostilities of the past two and a half decades. Under the previous administration, the first 43 km of highway south of Kabul were repaved, as were the last 50 km into Kandahar. While the 43 km near Kabul are still in serviceable condition, the 50 km of highway north of Kandahar need considerable improvement, which the government of Japan is providing funds for.

Q: How is the U.S. government involved with the K-K highway, and what is the role of The Louis Berger Group?

A. Through USAID's REFS (The Rehabilitation of Economic Facilities) contract, The Louis Berger Group (LBG) is responsible for the reconstruction of the remaining 389 km of the K-K highway. USAID is providing approximately $250 million in financing, or a bit more than $640,000 per kilometer. The current construction schedule calls for completion of the first phase of the highway by the end of December 2003. At that time, much of the highway will have at least one layer of asphalt or asphalt-treated-base paving, while the rest will receive a single bituminous surface treatment. Seriously damaged bridges will be replaced. This will enable the highway to be open for traffic throughout the winter, when weather conditions preclude working on it.

In spring 2004, the second phase will begin. Additional asphalt courses will be laid, the shoulders will be widened and paved, drainage structures will be repaired or replaced, and signage and highway markings will be provided. Upon completion in late 2004, the Kabul-Kandahar Highway will have: 1) a paved surface 7 meters across, 2) shoulders 2.5 meters wide, and 3) a total asphalt concrete depth of 20 to 30 centimeters. Approximately 2.3 million metric tons of aggregate and some

108,000 mt of bitumen will have gone into its construction. Travel between Kabul and Kandahar will be reduced to four to five hours from the two days it took before LBG began work on the highway.

Q. Who are the subcontractors working on the Kabul-Kandahar Highway?

Contractor	Nationality	Section, Kilometers
ARC	Afghan-American	B, Km 43 – Km 92 49
Mensel JV	Turkish	C, Km 92 – Km 177 85
Kolin Nafter JV	Turkish	D, Km 177 – Km 262 85
BSC/C&C JV	Indian	E, Km 262 – Km 347 85
Gulsan/Cukurova JV	Turkish	F, Km 347 – Km 431 84

Q. Where does the project stand today, in October 2003?

A. All K-K highway roadbed rough grading has been completed, as well as much of the fine grading, and all five subcontractors are actively paving their highway sections. Over half of the 389 kilometers of roadway has new asphalt paving or has been effectively repaired. Over 1,000 Afghan truckers and construction personnel are currently working on the highway. Travel time between Kabul and Kandahar has been dramatically reduced.

Q. Where are all the materials for the highway construction coming from?

A: Only aggregate is being provided locally, from dry riverbeds. LBG has contracted with two companies to provide aggregate. The contractor for Section B, ARC, is producing its own aggregate, while the Section F contractor, Gulsan-Cukurova, is responsible for providing screened aggregate for the remaining contractors.

Asphalt pavement production is the responsibility of each contractor. Bitumen for asphalt is being supplied from various sources in Egypt, India, and Pakistan. More than 2.3 million metric tons of aggregate and some 180,000 mt of bitumen will be needed to produce asphalt pavement for the road.

Q. How about highway bridges, causeways, and culverts?

A. The LBG portion of the highway has 46 bridges, 25 causeways, and more than 2,500 culverts. Many of these structures are in need of repair. Six of the bridges, varying in length from 33 meters to 50 meters, need to be replaced. KolNat Venture, a Turkish firm, is working on five of the bridges, and ARC, the Section B contractor, is rebuilding the sixth. The repair of minor damage to bridges and causeways is being handled by other subcontractors.

Q. How extensive are demining operations and what is the role of the United Nations?

A. Demining operations are very extensive. Afghanistan has more land mines and UXO than any other country in the world. In addition, the Kabul-Kandahar highway was the scene of much fighting over the past 24 years. To make the highway safe for construction crews and equipment, mines and UXO are being cleared from a strip 20 meters wide along each side of the highway.

Demining is directed by the United Nations Mine Action Center Afghanistan (UNMACA) and is funded by USAID. LBG provides liaison between the demining teams and the highway construction subcontractors. To date, demining crews have discovered over 100 mines and more than 900 pieces of unexploded ordnance (UXO) along the highway.

As manual demining is a very slow and dangerous process, the UN has import heavily armored mechanized vehicles, capable of analyzing at least five kilometers of highway a day. These tank-like vehicles collect and GPS air samples within 200 meter-wide strips along the highway. The GPS labeled samples are then sent to a lab outside Kabul, where mine dogs sniff them. If the dogs detect the presence of mines or UXO, demining personnel return to the area where the sample was obtained and clear it using manual detection methods. This approach has resulted in a 400% increase in productivity.

Q. What is the security situation along the highway?

A. There is still instability along the highway, especially in the southern sections, and we have experienced a few incidents with suspected Taliban and Al Qaeda elements, including one that resulted in the deaths of four of our highway security personnel. To deal with this situation, the government's Ministry of Interior (MOI) is fielding a large security force. This operation is supported by USAID through a Berger subcontract. Some security personnel are assigned to fixed locations, while others patrol the road in vehicles. Nearly 1,000 MOI troopers are currently providing security for the road-building project.

Q. What are the benefits of a paved highway between Kabul and Kandahar?

A. The highway will be a source of tremendous pride to the people of Afghanistan at many levels. A significant short-term benefit of the highway project is the generation of employment opportunities, both nationally and locally, during the construction period. Afghan truckers and construction personnel are making important contributions to the project.

The most obvious benefit is the reduced travel time between the country's two largest cities and a reduction in transport costs. The ability of goods and people to move quickly between these hubs will have a significant impact on both local and national economies. Up and down its length, the highway will enable farmers to reach markets faster and increase people's access to employment, schools, and

health care. At a regional level, the highway will improve linkages between south-central Asia trade routes. And, as an important part of the country's ring highway system, the highway will show the commitment of the government to national unity, security, and development.