

The 19th Century Origins of The Bering Strait Project

by Richard Freeman

It was the great railway-building thrust led by President Abraham Lincoln and his economic advisor, Henry C. Carey, that laid the basis for creating a rail network crossing the Bering Strait. In 1869, at Promontory Point, Utah, the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads were joined, creating the Transcontinental Railroad, which linked the United States from coast to coast—Lincoln's great vision. At the U.S. Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876, exhibits and discussions were held on building rail networks, including by international figures such as the Russian scientist and railway builder Dmitri Mendeleev. In the 1890s, American nationalist networks joined their Russian counterparts in building the Trans-Siberian Railroad.

- William Gilpin (1813-1894), an American System ally of President Lincoln, proposed a railroad line going over the Bering Strait, as part of his idea that all great cities would be linked by railroads. In 1861, Lincoln appointed Gilpin the first Governor of the Colorado Territories.

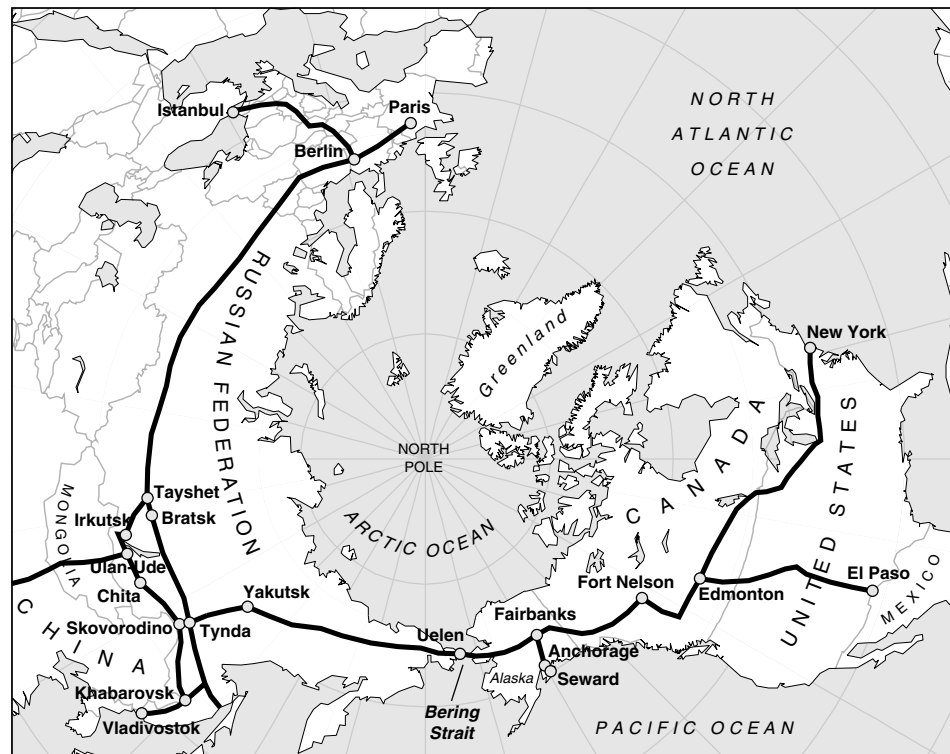
- Toward the end of the 19th Century, the first proposals were made in Russia, for building a railroad between Yakutsk, Russia, and the Bering Strait. Several options were considered for the railroad, which was to head southeast, and connect Yakutsk with the Sea of Okhotsk, and continue along the coast via Magadan to the Strait.

- At the start of the 20th Century, capital was raised to form the Trans-Alaska Siberia Company, which would build a railroad line extending from North Dakota (which was already connected to U.S. rail lines) through Canada to Nome, Alaska, which is within 100 miles of the Bering Strait. There would also be a railroad built from the Chukotka region of Russia (now the Chukotka Autonomous Region), which borders on the Strait, heading southwest, which would connect to Russia's Trans-Siberian Railroad.

Funds were raised to pay for

the initial feasibility studies for the 5,650-mile rail system. The idea was that New York, Moscow, and Paris could all be joined together for world peace. The company was advancing toward raising the \$300 million required in 1907 to complete both the Russian and American railway land components, when British-allied interests halted the railway. The alliances of World War I put a permanent halt to this effort.

In 1902, Loicq de Lobel, the French explorer, approached the Russian Imperial Technical Society with a proposal to explore the length of the future track from Yakutsk to the Bering Strait, and farther to Alaska, up to the point where it would connect with an existing track. Upon receiving the approval of the Russian and French governments, Lobel set up the first committee for promotion of this project, and a second such committee, affiliated with the American Railroad Administration, was created in New York. The explorer delivered several reports on his work at the Paris Geographical Society at the Sorbonne.



FUTURE GLOBAL RAIL CONNECTIONS, AS SEEN FROM NORTH POLE

In the 19th Century, the Bering Strait was part of a plan to link all the great cities by railroads.

Source: Adapted from H.A. Cooper

In **1905**, Tsar Nicholas II proposed building a Bering Strait rail link.

In **October 1906**, a Russian Government Commission on the creation of the Great Northern Route held discussions attended by four American, one French, and one Canadian representative. It was decided to expedite work on the project, putting Lobel and the American engineer James Waddell in charge. Preliminary technical parameters for the track were set. Construction was supposed to be carried out by the New Jersey Construction Company, under a 90-year contract which entitled it to a strip of land 24 kilometers wide. Plots of land on both sides of the track were to be divided in chessboard pattern between Russia and the contractor.

In **March 1907**, the Russian government terminated the contract, having decided that its terms were not favorable.

In **April 1918**, Russian leader Vladimir Lenin addressed the All-Russian Executive Committee on the need to intensify the construction of railroads, first of all in the North, including those reaching the Bering Strait, to expedite exploration of natural resources. Projects for building a track from Yakutsk to the ports Ayan and Eikan, and to Nikolayevsk-on-Amur, reaching the Bering Strait, were again on the agenda.

During the **1930s-1950s**, Josef Stalin put himself in charge of the Polar Track project for building a Northern Siberian railroad from Vorkuta to Anadyr.

In **1942**, During World War II, the Seattle District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers conducted a feasibility study to build a proposed railroad line, from Prince George, in British Columbia, Canada, to Fairbanks, Alaska, and thence to Teller, a city in Alaska's Northwest. The Army Corps projected for this project, a capital construction cost of \$87 million for the 1,417-mile route, and a purchase cost for rolling stock of \$24 million.

The initial idea was to ferry wartime supplies needed by Russia, from the Alaskan port of Teller, to the Chukotkan port of Uelen, *until a railway tunnel across the Bering Strait would be built*. Another railroad would then be built, heading westward, from Uelen to Egvekinot, and to a junction, where it could then proceed to one or both of two Russian rail corridors. One rail corridor would go along the south shore of the Arctic Ocean to Vorkuta, to join the newly completed 1,100-mile rail line to Moscow.

President Franklin Roosevelt's personal emissary to Russia, Harry Hopkins, had raised this rail proposal, following a trip to Moscow, and briefed Roosevelt, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, and Roosevelt's uncle, Frederic Delano. Roosevelt's uncle, among others, urged him to fund the Army Corps feasibility study. After the June 1942 U.S. defeat of a Japanese carrier force at Midway Island, the project was deferred.

After the end of World War II, Stalin contacted President Harry S Truman to restart discussions about connecting the Russian and U.S. rail networks, through a tunnel under the Bering Strait. Truman rebuffed Stalin.

In **1991**, the nonprofit corporation Interhemispheric Bering Strait Tunnel and Railroad Group (IBSTRG), known as "Transcontinental," was officially registered in Washington, D.C. The founding members on the American side were the State of Alaska, the American Railroad Association, and several large railroad, construction, consulting, and extraction com-

panies. In Russia, a division of the corporation was set up under director V.N. Razbegin, a vice president of IBSTRG, as well as a Coordination Research and Development Committee, whose first chairman was Academician P.A. Melnikov. Participants on the Russian side included the Railroad Ministry, the Energy and Fuel Ministry, the Committee on the North, the Economics and Finance Ministry, the Construction Ministry, Unified Energy Systems, Transstroj Corporation and the Russian Academy of Sciences. Overall, 40 organizations were involved.

In **1992**, Lyndon LaRouche and Helga Zepp-LaRouche began presenting proposals, later known as the Eurasian Land-Bridge, which would connect Europe, Asia, and ultimately the whole world, through efficient, high-speed rail networks and accompanying development corridors to reconstruct the shattered world economy. The proposals called for either a tunnel or a bridge to connect rail systems across the Bering Strait.

In **1994**, the American Engineering Association held a conference in Fairbanks, Alaska, entitled, "The Bering Strait Tunnel." Participants included V.N. Razbegin, vice president of IBSTRG, and Hal Cooper, a consulting engineer of Cooper Engineering.

In its **April 16, 1994** issue, *Executive Intelligence Review* published an article by engineer Hal Cooper, "Bering Strait Tunnel and Railway Project Will Boost Pacific Development."

From **May 7-9, 1996**, in Beijing, at a conference entitled "International Symposium on Economic Development of the Regions Along the Euro-Asia Continental Bridge," Helga Zepp-LaRouche gave a speech, "Building the Silk-Road Land-Bridge." In the wake of this conference, *EIR* published a Special Report entitled *The Eurasian Land-Bridge, The 'New Silk Road'—Locomotive for Worldwide Economic Development*, which included discussion of worldwide plans for development through infrastructure corridors, and also the physical economic principles upon which such plans are based.

In **March 1998**, a draft resolution was introduced to the Russian government on the necessity to conduct complex research on the possibility of building a polytrack, which was coordinated with the Railroad Ministry, the Construction Ministry, the Committee on the North, the head of the administration of the Chukotka Autonomous Region, and the presidents of Unified Energy Systems and the Transstroj Corporation.

At the end of **2000**, Viktor Razbegin, of the Moscow Regional Transportation Institute, announced a feasibility study of building the connecting rail to the Bering Strait, indicating that it would be very economically feasible, and would benefit freight transport between the interior of Asia and the interior of the United States.

On **Nov. 20-28, 2002**, the 70th Anniversary Conference on the Railroad Transportation Developments in Siberia was convened at the Siberian State Transport University in Novosibirsk, at which the Bering Strait tunnel proposal was raised.

In **July 2006**, IBSTRG president George Koumal addressed U.S. President George W. Bush on this subject.

On **Sept. 28, 2006**, at a meeting at the Federal Agency for Railroad Transport (Roszheldor), the decision was taken to build the Yakutsk-Magadan track with its further extension to the Bering Strait.