

## URBAN TRENDS: URBAN CORRIDORS - SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME?

As cities push beyond their original boundaries some are merging into new massive conurbations known as mega-regions, urban corridors and city-regions.

According to UN-HABITAT's *State of the World Cities 2010/2011: Bridging the Urban Divide*, these urban configurations are becoming the new engines of global and regional economies, even as they create further paths of regional divisions.

Mega-regions are being formed by the spatial spread of geographically linked metropolitan areas and other urban configurations; by the merging of regions of high demographic concentrations by large markets; by significant economic capacities; and by substantial innovative activities and large number of skilled workers that come with them.

Today, mega-regions are absorbing even larger populations than mega- or meta-cities, (which UN-HABITAT defines as hosting upward of 20 million residents), and their economic output is enormous. Examples cited in the report include:

- China's **Hong Kong-Shenzen-Guangzhou** mega-region, home to 120 million people
- Japan's **Nagoya-Osaka-Kyoto-Kobe**, likely to hold 60 million by 2015
- Brazil's **São Paulo to Rio de Janeiro** mega-region where 43 million people now live
- Recent research showing that the world's 40 largest mega-regions cover only a tiny fraction of Earth's habitable surface and are home to fewer than 18% of the world's population. Yet, they account for 66% of global economic activity and about 85% of technological and scientific innovation

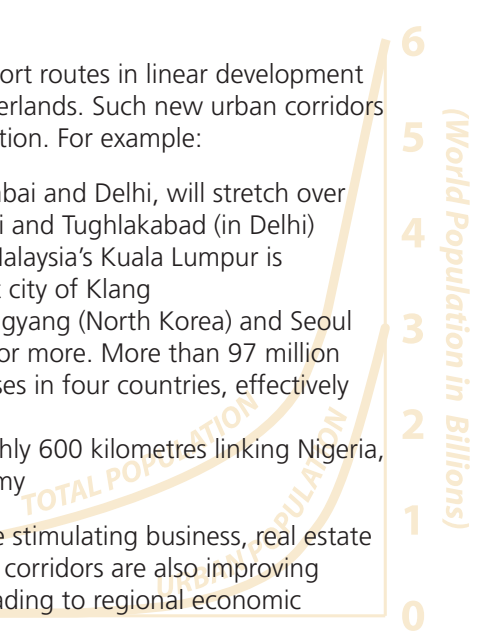
### URBAN CORRIDORS

A number of city centres of various sizes are becoming connected along transport routes in linear development axes that are often linked to a number of mega-cities, encompassing their hinterlands. Such new urban corridors are experiencing the fastest growth rates and the most rapid urban transformation. For example:

- **Central Asia:** the industrial corridor developing in India between Mumbai and Delhi, will stretch over 1,500 kilometres from Jawaharlal Nehru Port (in Navi Mumbai) to Dadri and Tughlakabad (in Delhi)
- **South-East Asia:** the manufacturing and service industry corridor in Malaysia's Kuala Lumpur is clustered within the Klang Valley conurbation that stretches to the port city of Klang
- The 1,500-kilometre belt from Beijing (China) to Tokyo (Japan) via Pyongyang (North Korea) and Seoul (South Korea), connects at least 77 cities with populations of 200,000 or more. More than 97 million people live in this urban corridor, which links four separate megalopolises in four countries, effectively merging them into one
- **Africa:** the greater Ibadan-Lagos-Accra urban corridor - spanning roughly 600 kilometres linking Nigeria, Benin, Togo and Ghana - is the engine of West Africa's regional economy

According to the report, the advantage of these urban corridors is that they are stimulating business, real estate development and land values along their ribbon-like development areas. These corridors are also improving inter-connectivity and creating new forms of interdependence among cities, leading to regional economic development growth.

However, the disadvantage is that, in some cases, urban corridors can result in a country's capital being the only city of importance (known as urban primacy). This can result in unbalanced regional development as these capital cities strengthen their ties to existing economic centres (i.e. each other) rather than allowing for more diffused spatial development.



## CITY-REGIONS

Other dynamic and strategic cities are extending beyond their administrative boundaries absorbing semi-urban and rural hinterlands that merge eventually to become full-blown city-regions. These are emerging in various parts of the world, turning into areas that are territorially and functionally bound by economic, political, socio-cultural, and ecological systems. Many such regions have grown enormously over the last 20 to 30 years, owing to the effects of agglomeration economies and comparative advantages. For example:

- **Thailand:** By 2020, the extended Bangkok Region is expected to expand another 200 kilometres from its current centre, growing far beyond its current population of over 17 million
- **Brazil:** Metropolitan São Paulo already spreads over 8,000 square kilometres with a population of 16.4 million
- **Africa:** The full extent of South Africa's Cape Town city-region, when including the distances from which commuters travel to and from every day, reaches up to 100 kilometres

Some of these city-regions are actually larger in surface area and in population than some countries like Belgium, the Czech Republic or the Netherlands.

In conclusion, the reports points out that while these mega-regions, urban corridors and city-regions reflect the emerging links between city growth and new patterns of economic activity, they are in danger of creating a new urban hierarchy and further patterns of economic and social exclusion.

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## SELECTED GLOBAL CITY-REGIONS, URBAN CORRIDORS AND MEGA-REGIONS

