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Transportation – Tunisia

New rapid transit system for the capital Tunis

Traffic in Tunisia's capital, as in so many major cities around the globe, has increased drastically in recent years. It is now so dense in Tunis' metropolitan area of two million people that commuters can easily spend a good half an hour in traffic jams every day. This costs time, unproductive time, is frustrating for everyone involved and harms the environment. That is why the metropolitan authorities are now further expanding the public transport network – one train at a time.

In addition to a sufficient supply of energy and a stable banking sector, one basic prerequisite is a functioning transport infrastructure. Although the road network in the North African country as a whole is well developed, public transport has not kept pace with the population growth of recent years or with its economic momentum. This is particularly true in the capital Tunis. While buses in Tunis run frequently and in many districts, the urban railway network so far only covers part of the capital and is also pushing the limits of its capacity.

The Tunisian government would therefore like to add a rapid transit system to the bus and tram network already in place. A rapid transit system with its own line would be able to transport hundreds of thousands of

Context

Tunis is the largest city in the country and at the same time its political and economic centre. While the 2010–2011 Jasmine Revolution did not start there, but in the countryside, the actual upheaval and political turmoil manifested itself again in the capital. While some progress has already been made on the road to greater democracy, such as the adoption of a new constitution at the beginning of 2014, the transformation process is also proving arduous. Although the change of government in 2016 was largely marked by political continuity, a government that remains politically heterogeneous and the highly fragmented party system in Tunisia make it difficult to reach consensus, which is becoming an ever greater problem for the economic recovery of the country in view of the urgently needed reforms. Unemployment remains at a high level, for young people, unemployment exceeds 40%. In addition, terrorist attacks resulting in many deaths, as in 2015, highlight the vulnerability of the still young democracy. Structural reforms, economic growth and support for disadvantaged regions are therefore necessary and form a major priority for the government, as is reflected by the five-year plan adopted in early 2017.

Project name	Rapid transit system in Tunis
Commissioned by	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Country/Region	Tunisia
Lead executing agency	Société du Réseau Ferroviaire Rapide de Tunis (RFR)





Overcrowded railway station in Tunis. Source: KfW photo archive, photographer: photothek.net

people every day from A to B, quickly and without harming the environment, regardless of the dense road traffic. KfW is supporting Tunisia with this project on behalf of the German Federal Government with the aim of improving the congested urban infrastructure and at the same time making a contribution to environmental protection.

Project approach

The Tunisian government's plan for local public transport includes the construction of five rapid transit lines over a total length of 85 kilometres in the greater Tunis metropolitan area. The first phase is currently underway, with two lines being built over 18 kilometres through the centre of Tunis in the direction of the city's suburbs. Lines D and E start at the main station and pass through a new tunnel to the west. From there, one line runs largely parallel to an existing long-distance railway line to the northwest, the other on a new route to the southwest.

The project will be implemented by a specially created public company, Société du Réseau Ferroviaire Rapide de Tunis (RFR). Local and European companies are involved in the construction project. A German-French consortium, in which Siemens is also involved, is responsible for the overhead line, telecommunications and signal technology, for example. The SNCFT (Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Tunisiens) will be responsible for operation of the rapid transit railway.

The Tunisian government is financing the cost of route construction together with a consortium of European donors with participation from KfW, the EU's Neighbourhood Investment Facility, Agence Française de

Développement and the European Investment Bank. KfW is providing EUR 47 million for the construction of the first two rapid transit railway lines. KfW has made an additional EUR 65 million available for the procurement of the new rapid transit trains.

With this project, KfW is building on past cooperation in which it funded the construction of a tram in Tunis, called the Métro léger. The first lines were opened in 1985 and were the first of their kind on the African continent at that time. Today the tram constitutes the heart of the capital's local, eco-friendly public transport system. Starting in 2020, the two rapid transit railway lines will successively supplement and noticeably expand the range of public transport services on offer.

Impact

The rapid transit railway is designed to transport 350,000 people a day in the Tunis metropolitan area quickly, safely and in a way that is environmentally, thereby connecting people and markets. The trains are also intended to slow further growth in individual traffic. By reducing carbon emissions by around 50,000 tonnes per year, the project also makes a valuable contribution to global climate change mitigation.

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