

Tripoli–Syria Railway... 5 Obstacles to Lebanon's Return to the Region's Maps



From the Port of Tripoli, Lebanon is testing an old route in search of a new role: linking the port to the Abboudiyeh crossing on the Syrian border through a tender to select a consulting firm to update the design, estimate the cost, and examine feasibility and implementation requirements.

The issue is broader than a short rail line in northern Lebanon. Tripoli is not seeking an isolated railway, but rather a land hinterland that would take the port beyond its local boundaries into a wider transit network.

This hinterland does not begin in Beirut, but in Syria. If the line stops at Abboudiyeh, it will remain a project with limited impact. But if it connects to Syrian routes toward Turkey, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, the Port of Tripoli could become a potential maritime branch on the map of new corridors.

Between ambition and reality, the question remains: Will Lebanon find a place on this map, or will the tender remain just another document in a file of projects that never moved from paper to implementation?

What is the proposed project?

In mid-May 2026, signed Minister of Public Works and Transport Fayez Rasamny,

from the Port of Tripoli, the tender documents for updating and designing the railway line between Tripoli and Abboudiyeh.

The minister explained that the idea originated from the Railway Authority in cooperation with the port administration, with the aim of updating the terms of reference and reassessing economic feasibility.

This means the current phase is limited to updating the design, estimating the cost, assessing economic, social, and environmental feasibility, and selecting a financing model—not laying tracks on the ground.

The route begins at the Port of Tripoli, passes through Abdeh and Tall Abbas in Akkar, then reaches the Abboudiyeh crossing on the Syrian border. The line is about 35 kilometers long inside Lebanon, with an additional six-kilometer section inside Syria.

The main objective lies in linking the port to a land corridor capable of transporting containers and goods efficiently, with the possibility of studying passenger service later.

Choosing the port as the starting point of the route makes clear that containers and freight are at the heart of the project, as the idea is to connect the maritime dock to a land “backbone” toward regional markets in Syria, Iraq, and the Gulf.

It is expected that the study will take six months, after which the consulting firm will submit the terms of reference for the second phase, which concerns implementation, while financing and the partnership model will remain contingent on the feasibility results.

Historically, the Tripoli–Homs line opened in 1911, while the Tripoli–Abboudiyeh/northern network line stopped operating with the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975. It was later considered for revival within several regional plans, but that never materialized.

Why does the railway matter?

The importance of the project does not stem from the length of the line, but from the function it seeks to give Tripoli: a port that does not stop at its docks, but seeks a land depth that restores it to a broader logistical role.

A railway line starting from the port could create an integrated freight route: transporting containers directly to Syria, storing them, then redistributing them to Iraq and the Gulf, which the project presents as a competitive logistical alternative to overland trucking.

The importance of the project increases with the presence of the Port of Tripoli and the special economic zone, in addition to proposals to reactivate

Qlayaat/Rene Mouawad Airport in Akkar, reinforcing the idea of building a multimodal transport network in the north.

But the line's value is not limited to Lebanon's interior, as Syria is the decisive link that gives the project its meaning.

Without a Syrian network capable of receiving the Lebanese line and connecting it to broader routes toward Turkey in the north and Jordan in the south, the project remains short and limited in impact. For that reason, those concerned tie its value to the broader redrawing of regional transport corridors around Syria.

Riyadh, Ankara, and Amman are studying a rail link between Saudi Arabia and Turkey via Jordan and Syria. Saudi Transport Minister Saleh Al-Jasser said the feasibility study will be completed before the end of 2026.

Turkey, Syria, and Jordan also signed a trilateral transport cooperation memorandum to develop land, maritime, and rail connectivity and establish joint technical frameworks, while Turkish Minister of Transport and Infrastructure Abdulkadir Uraloğlu said building the network/corridor could take four to five years.

On these maps, Lebanon does not appear as the center of the corridor, but rather seeks to become a potential maritime branch on the Mediterranean if it is formally included in regional networks and the Syrian connection is realized, which could give Tripoli a role in overland transport options amid disruptions to maritime corridors.

Talk of Syria's reconstruction also adds to the appeal of the idea, because the line could serve the movement of goods and supplies linked to economic recovery, if feasibility and sufficient trade volume are available.

What are the obstacles to implementation?

Between announcing the tender and operating an actual line stands a series of conditions that will determine the project's fate. The study may prove that the route can be rehabilitated, but that alone is not enough to turn it into a functioning railway.

The success of the Tripoli–Abboudiyeh line will not be decided by engineering alone, but also by finance, politics, borders, and trade. The chances of implementation appear tied to five main obstacles, beginning with financing and ending with commercial feasibility.

1- The first obstacle is financing: What is certain so far is that the Port of Tripoli will fund the feasibility study, but financing for implementation has not yet been announced. The Lebanese state is betting on possible partnerships with the private sector at a time when public finances are suffering from chronic distress.

The Railway Authority owns about 10 million square meters of land, and work is underway to remove encroachments on it, but how these assets will be turned into an actual source of financing has not yet been decided.

2- The second obstacle is Syria: the line's success does not depend only on rehabilitating the Lebanese section, but on the ability of the Syrian network to receive this connection and turn it into a broader transit route.

It is true that Syrian railways have begun to recover part of their freight movement, but they still need financing, maintenance, locomotives, spare parts, and rehabilitation of damaged lines. There are signs of Lebanese-Syrian coordination, but so far there has been no detailed Syrian announcement on funding or an implementation timetable for the section connected to the Tripoli line.

3- The third obstacle is borders and customs: transporting containers by train requires detailed agreements on customs, inspection, transit mechanisms, and operating responsibility between the two sides. So far, no detailed operational and customs agreements specific to freight train crossings between Tripoli and Syria have emerged.

4- The fourth obstacle is security and stability: the project is cross-border and long-term, and any investor will need political and security guarantees before entering into financing costly infrastructure. Therefore, engineering feasibility alone is not enough; what is required is an environment that allows regular operation that does not stop at the first disruption.

5- The fifth obstacle is commercial feasibility: it is not enough to build the line; the study must prove that there is enough freight volume to operate it regularly.

The Port of Tripoli will also be operating within a crowded logistical environment: the Port of Beirut domestically, Syrian and Turkish ports on the Mediterranean, and the Port of Aqaba on the Red Sea within regional visions of land-sea connectivity. Therefore, the line's success requires steady trade with Syria and beyond, not merely the completion of the tracks.