From oil to data: How Iraq could become an internet corridor between the Gulf and Türkiye

In February 2026, Iraq found itself at the center of an unfamiliar map of data cables after WorldLink was put forward as a project for a sea-land cable worth nearly $700 million, designed to link the UAE to Türkiye through Iraqi territory.

The significance of the project lies not only in its financial scale, nor simply in the fact that it is a new cable being added to the global internet network, but in what it reveals about a broader shift: the region is entering an intensifying race over data routes and hubs amid rising demand for cloud computing and artificial intelligence.

For Iraq, the idea appears to be bigger than a single project. A country the world has long viewed as a corridor for oil and goods is now trying to recast its geographic position as a potential digital passageway, offering internet traffic between the Gulf, Türkiye, and Europe an alternative route that is shorter and more diversified than traditional paths.

This report explains the details of the route and the significance of this shift, placing it in the context of a broader regional race over data centers and artificial intelligence. Can Iraq turn the geography that made it a country of oil and transit routes into a new digital asset in the data economy?

WorldLink: The road map from the Gulf to Türkiye

Behind the WorldLink project is a private Iraqi-Emirati consortium that includes Iraq's Tech 964, DIL Technologies, which is linked to the Kurdistan Region, and the UAE's Breeze Investments.

The project is a hybrid system: a subsea section beginning in the UAE and reaching the Al-Faw Peninsula at Iraq's far south, and a land section heading north through Iraqi territory toward the Turkish border.

The idea behind this sea-land route is to provide an alternative path to traditional routes that pass through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. The subsea segment carries the signal to Al-Faw, after which terrestrial fiber transports it north toward Türkiye and from there to potential European networks.

The proposed route could also be connected to other Gulf interconnection points, with the possibility of later expansion toward Europe via Türkiye, but the most important landing point is Al-Faw.

This small area in Iraq's far south has, in recent years, become a hub for major plans thanks to its maritime location and its place in infrastructure planning: the Grand Faw Port, the Development Road project aimed at linking southern Iraq to the north, and now data cable projects that make it a transfer point from sea to land.

In terms of implementation, the partners say financing will be private and that the project will be carried out in phases over five years. Project materials also indicate that the targeted capacity could exceed 900 terabits per second — that is, the route's ability to carry massive volumes of data every second once completed.

The project also promises latency of less than 100 milliseconds, meaning reduced delay in data transmission between the Gulf, Türkiye, and Europe — a key factor in attracting cloud companies and data centers that need fast, reliable routes.

But for now, these figures remain target specifications, as the route has not yet entered service and its implementation and operating contracts have not been finalized.

The route's importance: What does Iraq gain from data transit?

It is one thing for oil to pass through a country, and another for data to pass through it. The business of data transit means a state hosts international fiber on its territory and allows telecom and technology companies to use its routes to move data between different regions.

Here, the goal is not merely to improve local internet service, but to turn Iraq into part of the internet traffic flowing between the Gulf, Türkiye, and Europe. The

importance of this role rests on two main factors : latency and capacity.

Latency is the time it takes for a packet of data to move from one point to another. The shorter and less congested the route, the lower the latency.

According to estimates by Iraqi telecom company iQ Networks, data transit time from the Gulf to Europe could fall from about 150 milliseconds via some traditional subsea routes to around 70 milliseconds via the Iraqi land route. Capacity, meanwhile, is the volume of data the route can carry.

This is where the value of route diversity becomes clear: the more paths available to data, the lower the risk of disruption when a subsea cable fails or a crisis erupts in a transit zone.

Iraq is trying to seize this opportunity through more than one project. The Silk Route Transit network developed by iQ Networks extends across Iraq and benefits from relatively protected land routes, including paths close to oil infrastructure.

But this ambition requires more than geography alone. It needs stable electricity, security along the entire route, transparent governance, regulation that guarantees network neutrality for operators, and coordination between federal and regional authorities.

Without that, digital transit projects may remain more attractive headlines than reliable infrastructure on which global technology companies can depend.

The test of success, alternative projects, and competition

Interest in these routes cannot be separated from the boom in data centers and artificial intelligence, as Gulf states — especially the UAE and Saudi Arabia — are pouring major investments into advanced computing infrastructure.

In the UAE, Stargate UAE stands out as an AI cluster with a targeted capacity of up to 1 gigawatt, with the first 200 megawatts expected to come online in 2026.

In Saudi Arabia, HUMAIN and Nvidia announced a partnership to build “AI factories” with a targeted capacity of up to 500 megawatts over five years.

These infrastructures require reliable fiber routes capable of carrying enormous volumes of data with low latency. That is why several projects are competing for the role of the “alternative corridor.”

iQ Networks’ Silk Route Transit, provides an existing overland route from Iraq to Türkiye, but it remains tied to political and security stability.

Qatari operator Ooredoo’s Fibre in Gulf project aims to connect the Gulf and Iraq with large capacities, with operations expected to begin in 2027.

The Zain Omantel International corridor with Horizon Scope Telecom and Iraq's Ministry of Communications is intended to connect Iraq to Türkiye and then Europe.

There is also the SilkLink project in Syria, where STC announced an investment of nearly $800 million to build a fiber network spanning more than 4,500 kilometers, in addition to data centers and international cable stations, with the aim of returning Syria to the regional connectivity map.

For WorldLink, the key question is one of success: Can Iraq provide a reliable environment to protect the cables and landing stations?

The lack of sufficient implementation details , the unclear nature of Turkish operating partnerships, and intensifying competition from projects backed by governments and substantial financing all mean the project needs more than an announcement.

The competition is not only about who has the shortest route, but about who can guarantee capacity, security, stability, and long-term commercial trust.

Success will require more from Iraq than geographic location alone. It needs security stability to protect the route, investment in electricity to power data centers and related services, transparent legislation that guarantees competition and access to capacity, and balanced coordination with Türkiye and Gulf states to win the confidence of global companies.

Without these conditions, digital transit projects may remain attractive headlines on paper rather than corridors on which the data economy can rely.