



Proposal for a Bering Strait Peace Tunnel



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A Bridge for a New Era of International Cooperation

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In a time of renewed calls for stability and constructive engagement, few projects match the symbolic and practical potential of the proposed Bering Strait Peace Tunnel. This rail and infrastructure link connecting Alaska and Russia's Chukotka region would unite the American and Eurasian continents. According to proponents, it has the potential to mark the beginning of a new era of dialogue and collaboration between the United States, Russia, and other nations, offering a channel for improved communication and cooperation.

The idea of linking Eurasia and North America across the Bering Strait dates back to the late 19th century. In 1890, William Gilpin, the first territorial governor of Colorado, proposed an intercontinental railway with a tunnel under the Bering Strait as part of a global transportation network. Canada also explored northern rail expansion concepts in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, such as routes toward Dawson City, which could have been integrated into a wider transcontinental system.

The Russian Czar Nicholas II gave provisional approval in 1905 for exploration of a rail tunnel, but by 1907, amid political instability after the 1905 revolution and fears of American encroachment, his government withdrew support. In 1906, a consortium of Russian, American, and French interests announced an ambitious project, reported in The New York Times, but archival evidence suggests it remained a preliminary concept.

At the 1945 Potsdam Conference, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin proposed to U.S. President Harry Truman that they link their rail networks through a tunnel or bridge, but Truman declined amid Cold War tensions. In the mid-20th century, engineer Tung-Yen Lin promoted the idea of an "Intercontinental Peace Bridge." Joseph Strauss, chief engineer of the Golden Gate Bridge, also publicly discussed the potential of a Bering link.

In 1981, Dr. Sun Myung Moon announced his vision for a Peace Tunnel – an 85-kilometer link under the Bering Strait estimated at US\$200 billion at the time – as part of a global peace highway. He reiterated this vision during the 2005 inauguration of the Universal Peace Federation and the inaugural tour through 100 nations. His advocacy was one of several factors that revived interest in the idea. The International Bering Strait Regional

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Group (IBSRG) and its successor IBSTRG have since provided a multilateral platform for engineers, economists, policymakers, and peace advocates to explore feasibility.

The Council for the Study of Productive Forces (SOPS), a joint body of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Ministry of Economic Development, has been a key driver of the modern Russian rationale for the Bering Strait project. Under academician Alexander Granberg in the 1990s, SOPS coordinated multidisciplinary studies, including aerial route surveys, geotechnical mapping, and energy concepts. The council projected additional benefits such as energy efficiency gains from grid integration and major resource development in the Russian Far East, making SOPS a central knowledge hub in advancing the project in Russia.

In 2014, China's state-run Beijing Times reported a proposal by Chinese engineers for a high-speed rail line from Beijing to Alaska via a 200-kilometer Bering Strait tunnel, informally dubbed the "China-Russia-Canada-America" route. While not an official government plan, it aligned with China's Belt and Road vision.

Russia's Amur-Yakutsk Mainline reaches Nizhny Bestyakh, opposite Yakutsk in the Russian Far East. The rail bridge over the Lena River is under construction (2024–2028), but there are no rail lines east toward Magadan or Chukotka. Extending to the Bering Strait remains a long-held concept, though facing challenges such as permafrost thaw, seismic activity, remoteness, and lack of supporting infrastructure.

From Frontier of Division to Corridor of Peace

Historically a line of separation, the Bering Strait could become a symbol of partnership. The two Diomed Islands – one in U.S. territory and one in Russia – are only about 4 kilometers apart, offering a powerful image of potential reconnection for indigenous communities divided by the Cold War "Ice Curtain." A tunnel could contribute to dialogue and cooperation, while requiring clear agreements on management, security, and governance involving all stakeholders, including indigenous communities.

During World War II, the Bering Strait region already played a role as a symbolic bridge between the United States and the Soviet Union. Through the Lend-Lease program, American aircraft were flown from Alaska to Siberia via the Alaska-Siberia (ALSIB) route, crossing near the Diomed Islands. These deliveries strengthened the Soviet war effort against Nazi Germany and turned the strait into a gateway of wartime cooperation. For many veterans and historians, it remains a reminder that even in the most difficult times, the two nations found ways to work together toward a common goal.

The proposed 6,000-kilometer intercontinental corridor might integrate electrified rail, power transmission, fiber-optic communications, and possibly pipelines. According to preliminary estimates cited by proponents, the project could cost between US\$50 and \$100 billion, and potentially generate significant transit revenues. It might shorten travel times between Asia and North America compared to all-water routes via the Suez or Panama Canals. Benefits for remote regions would depend on parallel investment in local infrastructure, and all forecasts remain preliminary. It could also serve as an alternative or complement to the Northern Sea Route during certain seasons.

Skeptics and Challenges

The tunnel's feasibility faces numerous obstacles. Funding of US\$50–100+ billion would require unprecedented international cooperation. While the Bering Strait itself is relatively shallow and stable, the main challenge lies in building thousands of kilometers of access rail through the Arctic tundra with extreme cold (down to -50°C), permafrost, and short construction seasons. Corrosion from saline exposure adds further complexity. Freight volume estimates, such as Russian Railways' claim that the tunnel could carry 3% of global cargo, are considered overly optimistic by analysts due to cheaper maritime alternatives.

Finally, while Russia has long-term plans to develop transport corridors toward Chukotka, Alaska and Canada currently lack equivalent federal initiatives or funding for connecting infrastructure, creating a significant imbalance in preparedness.

Feasibility and Impact

A functioning link could encourage tourism, cultural exchange, and research collaboration. Electrified rail could reduce emissions compared to shipping, but must incorporate permafrost-stabilization technologies and strict protections for migratory bird routes and marine ecosystems, particularly in the Bering Land Bridge preserve. Proceeding with the project would require shared funding commitments, rigorous technical studies, and phased implementation. As of 2024, there are no official agreements or dedicated financing, and the political climate presents serious obstacles.

A Call to Visionary Leadership

The Bering Strait Peace Tunnel is not a cure-all, but it could become a practical symbol of what the Universal Peace Federation calls "the hope of reconciling long-separated nations and ideologies" through shared infrastructure. It would require coordinated participation from Canada, Asian partners such as China, Japan, and Korea, potential European or Nordic stakeholders in Arctic development, as well as the United States and Russia.

Governments, international institutions, investors, and civil society are encouraged to consider the Bering Strait

Peace Tunnel with clear eyes – recognizing its challenges while exploring its potential. We urge establishing an international technical commission to conduct feasibility studies and foster dialogue beyond current political constraints, determining whether this vision can be transformed into a viable project that benefits all of humanity, with careful verification of historical precedents, technical feasibility studies, and comprehensive assessment of economic and environmental impacts.

By Tageldin Hamad, President, Universal Peace Federation
August 11, 2025

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