

## **Afghan Road Project Given Extra Boost by IWPR Report**

**Author:** [IWPR Afghanistan](#)

Local residents say they have long felt their needs were being ignored, but now the government has woken up to their concerns.

Business leaders and officials in Afghanistan's Khost province say their campaign to get a key trade route upgraded was given fresh impetus by an IWPR story about the challenges still to be met.

The Ghulam Khan crossing point with Pakistan is a key route for Afghan traders, who have complained that their government is dragging its feet on upgrading the 32-kilometre road that leads from Khost city to the border checkpoint. The road upgrade project was officially launched in December, and local officials insist that construction is already under way.

The report was entitled **Afghan Traders Call for Fast-Tracked Transit Route**.

Local business leaders said that after giving interviews to IWPR, they met to warn the government in Kabul that unless work speeded up, they would organise a boycott of the April presidential and provincial council elections and block the main highway to the capital with demonstrations.

"From the moment I was interviewed by the IWPR reporter, I stepped up my encouragement of young people and businessmen to lobby for Ghulam Khan to be upgraded into [an officially-recognised] transit route," said Keramat Khan Khepalwak, head of a shopkeepers' association in Khost. "When this comprehensive report was published, it added to our determination, and gratifyingly, this prompted officials to think about the Ghulam Khan route."

Khepalwak said he understood that the article had led Kabul to rethink its approach.

"We have had a couple of [previous] meetings with Kabul officials as well, but they weren't that serious about it. It seems that now they're paying attention," he said, adding, "Many media outlets have reported on the Ghulam Khan route, but IWPR's article took a more rounded approach by interviewing both officials and traders from Khost and Kabul provinces. That's why it had good impact."

The provincial governor's spokesman, Mubarez Mohammad Zadran, wrote to thank the author of the story, Ahmad Shah, for adding fresh urgency to the issue.

"I'm grateful to IWPR for preparing such a report," Zadran wrote. "Any official would be convinced after reading it."

Haji Din Wali, the head of the retail union for Khost province, said, "We never believed the Ghulam Khan issue would become such a hot topic... the news reached as far as the finance ministry and raised an issue that's of great importance to the country's economy".

Faizullah Ghamkhor, a writer and civil activist in Khost province, met Afghan finance minister Hazrat Omar Zakhilwal after the story appeared.

"I gave him a copy of the published IWPR report, along with some other documents about the Ghulam Khan transit route, in order to convince him," he said.

"He showed more interest than before," Ghamkhor noted, adding that the minister promised to come to Khost province in the near future to open the new customs house at the border.

Ghamkhor said the report encouraged business and civil society groups to gather and make their feelings known to Kabul.

Other Khost reporters added their own praise for what Deutsche Welle correspondent Faridullah Zahir said was a "well-crafted, balanced and comprehensive" piece that "leaves no question unanswered".

Elyas Wahdat, a journalist for BBC and Reuters, said the point of professional reporting was to have a positive impact on the community. "The IWPR report provided this outcome, so if journalism follows this path, the public will value it," he said.

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