

## The Trans-Oceanic Highway of Peru - Benefits and Concerns

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Connecting Acre, Brazil, a state in the Amazon, with the cities of Matarani, Ilo, and San Juan de Marcona which are located along Peru's southern coast is the Trans-Oceanic Highway. The highway is 3,400 miles long and basically entails the renovation of existing roads as well as the construction of new ones. The main purpose of the highway is to make it easier to get Brazilian goods to the Pacific coast and thereby the Asian market as well as facilitate the transfer of Asian products to the Atlantic coast, and consequently to the United States, Europe and Brazilian markets. It is anticipated that it will attract more tourists to the area. On the other hand, it has been a concern of environmentalists that the road will cause an increase in the destruction of the Amazon rainforest.

### **A Vast Construction Project**

When the project began, there was a more complex network of roads in Brazil so construction efforts centered on building a bridge across the Acre River and making the border crossing more efficient. In Peru, the road between the border of Brazil and Inambari River needed to be paved and three roads that were already paved that went across the Andes and connected with the cities of San Juan de Marcona, Matarani and Ilo needed to be renovated and improved. In addition, the work required 1,606 miles of highway to be constructed and renovated as well as 11 miles of city roads. There were a total of 22 bridges that were to be built, in particular the President Guillermo Billinghurst Bridge. This bridge was designed to cross the Madre de Dios River, a few miles from the main city of the department of Madre de Dios, Puerto Maldonado. The bridge, at a cost of \$22 million US, has a length of 450 miles and displays a large hanging structure. The cost of building the Trans-Oceanic highway was over \$1.51 billion US. Funding sources were the Andean Development Corporation and the Brazilian National Development Bank. These bank loans enabled the financing of a Public-Private Partnership between the companies contracted to do the work and the Peruvian government.

### **Environmental Concerns**

Although the commercial gains from building the highway were supported by the governments of Peru, Bolivia and Brazil, environmentalists were concerned that the highway was approved without an environmental impact study and it would affect the region negatively from an environmental standpoint. They reported that climate changes would result as the new roads broke up the natural expanse of the Amazon forest and make it hotter and drier. The atmosphere would be filled with more carbon gases from the forest causing the rise in temperatures.

### Fears Are Confirmed

An environmental impact study conducted during the construction of the highway concluded that within ten years the highway will degrade the natural forests as well as urban areas, cause problems for water resources and biodiversity and have great impact on the local societies by invading the native land in general.

In land of contradictions and extremes, the Trans-Oceanic Highway is another Peruvian example of conflicting interests in a complex situation.

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