THE PHYSICAL INTEGRATION ROUTES BETWEEN BRAZIL AND PERU: FROM IIRSA TO THE PRESENT DAY

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Abstract

The article investigates the evolution of physical integration initiatives between Brazil and Peru within the framework of the Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South American (IIRSA), established in 2000. It argues that the bilateral logistics integration agenda has demonstrated structural resilience and continuity. The analysis delineates the three principal corridors of binational integration (Northern, Central, and Southern) and assesses how economic and political transformations over the past twenty-five years have reconfigured strategic priorities and opportunities along these routes. The study concludes by advancing a series of policy-oriented recommendations designed to safeguard institutional continuity and to foster the effective implementation of cross-border infrastructure projects in the short and medium term.

Keywords: Brazil–Peru infrastructure connectivity. IIRSA. South American integration routes.

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AS ROTAS DE INTEGRAÇÃO FÍSICA BRASIL-PERU: DA IIRSA ATÉ OS DIAS DE HOJE

Resumo

O artigo analisa a evolução dos projetos de integração física entre Brasil e Peru desde o lançamento da Iniciativa para a Integração da Infraestrutura Regional Sul-Americana (IIRSA) no ano 2000. A revisão histórica demonstra que a agenda de integração logística bilateral tem mostrado resiliência e continuidade. São descritos os principais eixos da integração logística binacional (Norte, Centro e Sul) e avalia-se como algumas mudanças econômicas e políticas ao longo de 25 anos reconfiguraram certas prioridades e oportunidades dessas rotas. Conclui-se com algumas sugestões de linha de ação para assegurar a continuidade da execução dos projetos de integração no curto e médio prazos.

Palavras-chave: Integração logística Brasil-Peru. IIRSA. Rotas de Integração Sul-Americana.

LAS RUTAS DE INTEGRACIÓN FÍSICA BRASIL-PERU: DESDE LA IIRSA HASTA LOS DÍAS DE HOY

Resumen

El artículo analiza la evolución de los proyectos de integración física entre Brasil y Perú desde el lanzamiento de la Iniciativa para la Integración de la Infraestructura Regional Suramericana (IIRSA) en el año 2000. El repaso histórico demuestra que la agenda de integración logística bilateral ha mostrado resiliencia y continuidad. Son descritos los ejes principales de la integración logística binacional (Norte, Centro y Sur) y se evalúa cómo algunos cambios económicos y políticos a lo largo de 25 años han reconfigurado algunas prioridades y oportunidades de estas rutas. Se concluye con algunas sugerencias de medidas para asegurar la continuidad de la ejecución de los proyectos de integración en el corto y medio plazo.

Palabras clave: Integración logística Brasil-Perú. IIRSA. Rutas de Integración Sudamericana.

Brazil and Peru share a three-thousand-kilometer border, the longest for Peru among its neighboring countries and the second longest for Brazil. Although most of this binational boundary is characterized by dense forest cover and a limited presence of urban centers, both states and their societies have, for decades, expressed interest in developing logistical infrastructure capable of strengthening economic ties between two countries historically oriented toward opposite oceans.

One of the earliest private attempts to overcome the connectivity challenges imposed by the Amazon rainforest and to harness the economic potential of binational integration dates back to the mid-nineteenth century. In the 1850s, Irineu Evangelista de Souza (Baron of Mauá) founded the Amazon Navigation and Trade Company to operate steam vessels between Atlantic ports in the Brazilian state of Pará and the town of Nauta in Peru (Brito 2018). This marked the first private economic venture, supported by the Brazilian state, to explore a natural river corridor in the Amazon Basin with the aim of linking two societies that remained only tenuously connected.

In the decades that followed, the development model promoted by the Brazilian government focused mainly on integrating the country's interior with productive hubs along the coast (Silva 2017). Peru, for its part, implemented targeted policies to link the Amazon and Andean regions with its Pacific coast (Rendón Cusi 2022). This long-standing absence of binational physical-integration projects began to shift in the 2000s, particularly with the launch of the Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America (IIRSA). Today, both Brazil and Peru seek to revive much of IIRSA's project portfolio, though adapting it to the geoeconomic changes of the past quarter century.

This article aims to present the main proposals for binational physical integration since the launch of IIRSA in 2000 and to highlight that, at least since then, a structural and resilient logistics-integration agenda has taken shape between Brazil and Peru. The terms *resilient* and *structural* are central to characterizing the dynamics of this integration agenda. Drawing on a historical analysis and a review of primary and secondary sources, the article argues that although the relevance of specific Brazil–Peru integration projects has varied across different administrations, these initiatives have consistently been recognized by both States as priorities.

The article is organized into four sections. The first outlines the general foundations of IIRSA. The following three sections assess the progress of physical connectivity (road, rail, and waterway) between the two countries, structured around three geographic axes: the Northern Route, the Central

Route, and the Southern Route. Finally, the conclusions reinforce the idea that a historical dynamic of convergence continues to shape the regional physical-integration agenda between Brazil and Peru, and they propose short- and medium-term actions to ensure effective project implementation and to strengthen institutional dialogue around these initiatives.

IIRSA—The Precedent

The year 2000 was not chosen arbitrarily for the historical analysis presented in this article. In August of that year, for the first time, the leaders of all South American countries gathered in an exclusively regional meeting, bringing together the Heads of State and Government of the twelve South American nations in Brasília. According to Ricupero (2016), the most concrete decision to emerge from that Summit, one whose practical effects endure to this day, was the establishment of IIRSA.

This initiative was conceived as an intergovernmental coordination mechanism, primarily technical in nature, aimed at evaluating physical-integration projects for South America in the areas of transportation, energy, and communications. In the years immediately following its creation, numerous technical and political meetings were held to shape IIRSA's project portfolio. More than 560 proposals designed to strengthen regional physical, energy, and communications integration were incorporated into IIRSA's institutional framework.

In 2011, IIRSA was officially incorporated as the UNASUR technical forum of the South American Infrastructure and Planning Council (COSIPLAN), the organization's political forum for South American infrastructure. With the political fragmentation of UNASUR toward the end of the 2010s, COSIPLAN's activities—and those of IIRSA itself—were significantly weakened[2]. Nevertheless, IIRSA's core function of consolidating the region's principal integration projects within a single forum was not entirely lost. Its Project Information System (SIP) remains accessible and contains hundreds of project profiles that continue to serve as a reference for policymakers and researchers, even though systematic technical updates to these profiles were largely discontinued around 2018.

2 Although it constitutes a central element for understanding the evolution of Peruvian–Brazilian negotiations on bilateral physical integration, the crisis of UNASUR and its repercussions on the paralysis of COSIPLAN/IIRSA involve details that merit a dedicated study and therefore will not be addressed in this work.

Peru and Brazil were among IIRSA's most committed supporters and participated actively in several of its structuring axes into which the more than 560 projects were organized. Officially, Peru is included in four IIRSA axes (the Amazon Axis, the Peru–Bolivia–Brazil Axis, the Central Interoceanic Axis, and the Andean Axis). Brazil, for its part, participates in seven axes (the Amazon Axis, the Peru–Bolivia–Brazil Axis, the Central Interoceanic Axis, the Capricorn Axis, the Guiana Shield Axis, the Mercosur–Chile Axis, and the Paraguay–Paraná Waterway Axis).

Peru and Brazil thus share projects in three common axes (Amazon, Peru–Bolivia–Brazil, and Central Interoceanic). More than eighty transport-related projects involving the two countries were included in IIRSA's portfolio within these three axes—some strictly bilateral in nature, others involving neighboring countries as well. Given the space constraints of this article, the analysis focuses on those projects that have gained the greatest political relevance in recent decades, organized, solely for the purposes of this study, into projects of the Northern Route, the Central Route, and the Southern Route.

Northern Route

The Brazil–Peru integration initiatives discussed in this section refer to those connected to the Peruvian border with the Brazilian state of Amazonas. Based on IIRSA's project portfolio, the only physical connection planned between the state of Amazonas and northern Peru is a riverine one—through the Amazonas/Solimões River,[3] which links both countries in the Peru–Brazil–Colombia tri-border region.

Currently, according to information from a private consultancy (Gestión 2025a), the volume of cargo transported between Brazil and Peru via the river route is limited, consisting mainly of small quantities of sugar, soybeans, and fish products flowing toward Peru. From the Brazilian perspective, two immediate actions within national territory could rapidly transform the existing river link into a proper waterway capable of supporting greater commercial flows up to the border.

The first is the completion of the ongoing dredging works on the Amazon River along the stretch between Manaus, the region's industrial hub, and the Peruvian-Brazilian border at the city of Tabatinga. The second action

3 "Solimões" is the name used in Brazil for the stretch of the Amazon River that runs from the border with Peru (near Tabatinga/Leticia/Santa Rosa, in the Brazil–Peru–Colombia tri-border area) to the city of Manaus, in the state of Amazonas.

is the installation of a Brazilian customs post in Tabatinga to facilitate the monitoring of goods entering and leaving the tri-border area. Both actions have been included in Brazil's "South American Integration Routes" initiative and are currently in the implementation phase.[4]

Launched in 2023, following a regional meeting of South American leaders in Brasília similar to the 2000 summit, Brazil's "South American Integration Routes" proposal revives and adapts many of the hundreds of IIRSA projects crossing Brazilian territory. Under this new public policy, led by the Ministry of Planning and Budget, the Brazilian government mapped out priority initiatives from a domestic perspective to enhance logistical connectivity within Brazil up to strategic border points with all neighboring countries, including several IIRSA projects that link Brazil to Peru. Through meetings with authorities from each neighboring country, the Brazilian government presented major national infrastructure projects that form part of the Routes Program and that could positively impact binational connectivity, provided there is interest on the part of the neighboring state.

On the Peruvian side, there are two possible waterway routes to connect the border at Tabatinga with Pacific ports, which would allow Brazilian producers to import parts and equipment from Asia needed for Manaus's industrial hub. The first of these river routes passes through Iquitos and continues on to Yurimaguas. The second also passes through Iquitos but heads south toward the city of Pucallpa, located in Peru's central Amazon region.

Although the rivers are currently navigable, particularly up to Iquitos, navigation during certain times of the year is hindered by the region's rainy seasons, making vessel transit unsafe. Moreover, river depths must be improved in certain stretches to allow the passage of larger vessels. For this reason, both the Tabatinga–Yurimaguas and the Tabatinga–Pucallpa connections were included in IIRSA's portfolio in the early 2000s.

The Peruvian government referred to the combined initiative as the "Amazon Waterway." After several rounds of public consultations between 2015 and 2017, the waterway's implementation was awarded in 2017 to a Chinese–Peruvian concessionaire. However, according to OSITRAN (2024), the project did not move forward due to environmental and human-rights controversies, which led the concessionaire and the Peruvian government to agree to terminate the concession.

4 The official Brazilian website providing detailed information on the initiative's projects is available at https://www.gov.br/planejamento/pt-br/assuntos/articulacao-institucional/rotas-de-integracao-sul-americana. Accessed August 4, 2025.

A key factor in favor of developing the connection with Brazil via the Amazonian rivers is that roads already exist from both Yurimaguas and Pucallpa, linking the river ports of these two cities bordering the Peruvian rainforest with the Pacific coast. The 1,007-km highway between Yurimaguas and the Port of Paita, on Peru's northern coast—known as "IIRSA Norte"—has been under concession since 2005, and paving and improvement works were completed in 2011. Likewise, Pucallpa has a road connection to the country's coast—though not to northern ports, but rather to the Lima region. However, this highway has not been fully upgraded. The project, known as "IIRSA Centro" by the Peruvian government, has only been partially implemented so far.

Although both road routes connecting Peru's coast to the Amazon Waterway project present advantages, a recent development, absent when IIRSA's original portfolio was created, has strengthened political and economic arguments for linking Brazil to the Peruvian coast through Pucallpa: the Port of Chancay.

Several analyses have examined the new "megaport," located roughly 75 km north of Lima, which evolved from a small private initiative into what the press describes as the largest port development on South America's Pacific coast (Olmo 2025), following major investments by the Chinese state-owned shipping company Cosco. While the present study does not focus on Chancay, the port's potential is essential for understanding why certain IIRSA initiatives have been adapted and why some have gained greater political prominence than others over the past three years.

The new port infrastructure has enabled the establishment of a direct maritime route between South America and China, with an estimated reduction of nearly ten days in transit time, using deep-draft vessels that previously could not enter Peruvian ports. The shorter navigation time and the elimination of the need to transship Peruvian cargo through other Pacific ports before reaching China are expected to reduce transportation costs for goods shipped from Chancay. Consequently, this may improve the economic viability of exporting agricultural production from Brazil's Center-West region to Asian markets—something that was difficult to justify in concrete terms before Chancay's inauguration.[5]

However, achieving this outcome requires completing an adequate physical connection between Brazil and the new port. While such a connection could be

5 Studies conducted by COSIPLAN/IIRSA in 2017, prior to the expansion of the Port of Chancay, showed that estimated maritime travel times between Peru and major Asian ports were very similar (around 30 days) to those observed from Santos to the same destinations, despite the geographical proximity offered by the Pacific route.

realized through the Amazon Waterway, the considerable geographic distance between Brazil's main agribusiness hubs and this river route has shifted attention toward projects that would traverse the Center-West region directly.

Central Route

Unlike the Northern and Southern Routes (as will be discussed in the next section), no established river or road connection currently exists in the central region of the binational border. Moreover, the boundary area between Peru's central Amazon and Brazil—specifically the northern portion of the Brazilian state of Acre—is characterized by extremely low population density (inhabited mainly by Indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation), the presence of environmental and Indigenous reserves both in Peru[6] and in Brazil,[7] and particularly challenging geographic conditions. A mountain range—the Serra do Divisor—serves both as a border marker and as a natural divide separating two river basins: the middle valley of the Ucayali River, in Peru, and the upper valley of the Juruá River, in Brazil.

These geographical and socio-environmental obstacles pose significant barriers to the development of a road link between the two closest urban centers in the region: Pucallpa, on the Peruvian side, and Cruzeiro do Sul, on the Brazilian side, which are approximately 260 km apart. Within IIRSA's original project portfolio (COSIPLAN 2015), a project sheet proposed creating either a "railway or highway" between the two cities. The description of the project—updated in the IIRSA database only until 2015—already indicated the considerable environmental and social challenges involved, as well as the lack of clarity regarding whether the connection should be road-based or rail-based.

Although at first glance the highway option may appear less costly (according to preliminary Peruvian studies cited in the IIRSA technical file), it would likely cause greater medium- and long-term social and environmental impacts in the region due to population influxes that typically occur both during and after road construction. Furthermore, the area's complex geography could require carving out a highly winding route, thereby making the circulation of large trucks, essential for transporting significant cargo volumes, difficult or even unfeasible.

6 Sierra del Divisor National Park and Sierra del Divisor Occidental Indigenous Reserve.

7 Serra do Divisor National Park.

These constraints led Peruvian and Brazilian authorities to consider the railway alternative. Evidence of this was the inclusion, in Brazil's National Transport Plan (established by Law 11.772 in 2008), of a planned rail segment between Cruzeiro do Sul and Boqueirão da Esperança, a town located on the binational border. In the Brazilian plan, this stretch would connect the Peru–Brazil border to the broader railway project linking the capitals of Acre (Rio Branco) and Rondônia (Porto Velho) with the coast of Bahia, traversing Brazil's major agribusiness region.

On the Peruvian side, the idea of a Brazil–Peru railway crossing the central Amazon appeared in the 2016 National Railway Development Plan. According to the Ministry of Transport and Communications, the plan is currently being updated to include a more detailed proposal for a rail link stretching from the Port of Chancay (whose construction was completed in 2024) to the Acre border, passing through Pucallpa.

At the regional level, COSIPLAN conducted a comprehensive study (COSIPLAN 2017) on South American railway integration, which included potential Peru–Brazil bioceanic connection routes. Referred to in that study as the "Brazil–Peru Bioceanic Railway Corridor" (CFBBP), the bioceanic route would still have had the Bayóvar region, 800 km north of Chancay Bay, as its final destination on the Pacific coast.

The COSIPLAN study noted that the CFBBP would be the longest railway in South America, spanning nearly 5,000 km, and one of those with the least preexisting infrastructure (only about 3% of the corridor's rail network was already operational). The report also highlighted a technical issue later reiterated by Peru's foreign minister in an interview with a Peruvian television channel available on YouTube (2025): Brazil's railway network primarily uses track gauges of 1,000 mm or 1,600 mm, while Peru's uses the 1,435-mm standard gauge.

It should be noted that the CFBBP concept included in the COSIPLAN study served as a reference for the bioceanic corridor proposal eventually incorporated into Brazil's South American Integration Routes program. Within that program, the "Quadrante Rondon Route" includes, among other projects, the very railway alignment connecting Brazil's coast to the Peruvian coast through the agribusiness region and Acre.

Due to the prominence gained by the Port of Chancay beginning in 2023, precisely when the Brazilian proposal was being drafted, the integration route proposed by Brazil does not include Bayóvar as the Pacific terminus, as envisioned in the COSIPLAN study. Instead, it ends at the megaport of Chancay, given its significant potential for facilitating trade flows to and from Asia.

Beyond its inclusion in government and regional development plans, the idea of a Brazil–Peru railway crossing Peru's central Amazon and northern Acre is frequently revived by high-level political leaders. One of the earliest presidential statements on the matter came from then-Peruvian president Alan García during Brazil's national day in 2009, when he expressed that "the realization of the transoceanic railway is closer than one might imagine" (Brazil 2009).

In subsequent years, Brazilian and Peruvian technical officials held occasional meetings to determine how feasibility studies for the project could be carried out. One such example was the signing of a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to create a Working Group on Railway Integration between the transport ministries of both countries, signed during the Fourth Meeting of the Vice-Ministerial Border Integration Commission (CVIF) in Lima on August 21, 2013 (Brazil 2013).

Bilateral discussions progressed, and in 2014 both countries agreed to coordinate with Chinese representatives—who, according to *O Globo* (2015), had already been preparing feasibility studies for other sections of the transoceanic railway within Brazil—to conduct a dedicated study for the border region.

Thus, on 12 November 2014, a Trilateral Memorandum of Understanding for a Brazil–Peru Bioceanic Railway Connection was signed in Beijing by the Brazilian Ministry of Transport, Peru's Ministry of Transport and Communications, and China's National Development and Reform Commission. The document was signed by ministerial authorities in the presence of Presidents Xi Jinping and Ollanta Humala, who was in Beijing to participate in the APEC summit (Brazil 2014).

As in the recent 2025 bilateral Brazil–China MoU on the same subject, the document signed eleven years earlier did not create binding legal obligations. Its main aim, just like the 2025 MoU, was to structure cooperation among technical authorities to conduct basic feasibility studies toward the implementation of the bioceanic railway. The 2015 MoU had an initial duration of five years, renewable for an additional period, and mandated that trilateral technical meetings be held at least once per year, rotating among the three countries. No official records were found indicating when such meetings took place, nor is there evidence that the MoU was renewed.

It is worth noting the contrast in public reaction following the signing of the two documents, particularly in Peru, where media coverage differed sharply. While in 2015 Peruvian newspapers focused on the technical assessment of

the project's financial viability and its implications for the development of remote regions, eleven years later the reaction was overtly political.

Despite repeated clarifications by Peruvian and Brazilian authorities that the Brazil–China document is nonbinding and that, even though bilateral, it does not exclude Peru from the initiative, local political commentators concentrated their criticism on the absence of the Peruvian government from discussions regarding a project whose Pacific access point lies on Peruvian territory. The press also sought to highlight inconsistencies among statements made by different government authorities, transforming what could have been a positive foreign-policy agenda into a topic of short-term domestic political debate.

The effective consequences of the Brazil–China memorandum for the actual implementation of a railway linking Brazil's coast to the state of Acre on the Peruvian border remain uncertain. It also remains unclear how the current Peruvian government, or the next one, to be elected in 2026, will coordinate efforts with Brazil and China to ensure that ongoing studies in Brazil also benefit Peru. As the next section will show, evolving political and economic conditions may once again shift momentum away from the railway project across the Serra do Divisor and toward alternative routes.

Southern Route

Unlike the other two border points (central and northern) discussed in the previous sections, which require either transferring between river and road transport or the construction of entirely new infrastructure, the Brazil–Peru connection through the southern part of the state of Acre and southern Peru (the Madre de Dios region) already exists and is exclusively road-based. In 2005, the Peruvian government granted a concession for the Southern Interoceanic Highway, known as IIRSA Sur, whose construction was completed in the early 2010s.

This is a functioning and consolidated link between the two countries, enabling direct road circulation between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. According to OSITRAN (2025b), traffic volumes of both light and heavy vehicles along this route increased by approximately 100% over the course of the 2010s, with figures stabilizing in recent years (OSITRAN 2024).

This rise in traffic generated positive effects for the economic growth of municipalities in the region, improved predictability and frequency in the supply of food and basic goods in Peru's interior, and expanded access

to health services available on the Brazilian side of the border. The growth spurred by the consolidation of the highway also brought new challenges, particularly in the areas of public security and environmental crime—issues that are frequently addressed in bilateral discussions during the periodic meetings of the CVIF (Vargas 2023).

Regarding cargo transport, although it too has increased since the completion of IIRSA Sur, there is still perceived room for improvement. According to data from Brazil's Ministry of Development, Industry and Commerce (MDIC), Brazilian exports to Peru through Assis Brasil rose from US$ 4.5 million to US$ 83.5 million between 2011 and 2024. However, the proportional increase in imports into Brazil over the same period was considerably smaller, rising from US$ 500,000 to US$ 3 million. Moreover, an analysis of the basket and volume of the main goods crossing into Peru—such as refined soybean oil and Amazonian Brazil nuts—shows that they do not originate from Brazil's agricultural hinterland and are primarily destined for domestic markets rather than for export to Asia.

Several relatively quick-to-implement measures could facilitate cargo transport to Peruvian ports. The first would be to improve the physical infrastructure of the control agencies' facilities on both sides of the border. The second would be to extend operating hours, especially on the Brazilian side. Although Peruvian control agencies operate almost continuously, Brazil's Federal Police and Federal Revenue Service do not conduct inspections at night, and the Agriculture Ministry's inspection agency does not maintain permanent staff in Assis Brasil: personnel travel there on specific days, often on demand. It is important to note that vehicle circulation is possible regardless of the control agencies' operating hours, which creates oversight vulnerabilities and leads to the underreporting of official data on cargo and passenger flows.

A medium-term measure relates to the condition of the highway, particularly on the Brazilian side. Although the Peruvian portion of the highway is in good shape, the roads linking Acre to central Brazil are deteriorated. The BR-317, which connects Assis Brasil to Rio Branco, is in critical condition and currently has no scheduled improvement works. In contrast, the BR-364, which links Rio Branco with the rest of Brazil, is expected to receive public investment for renovation over the coming months (Brazil 2025).

These government actions could stimulate trade along the IIRSA Sur highway, especially given the ongoing shift in subregional economic dynamics resulting from the opening of the Port of Chancay. However, a key structural

(and natural) challenge facing any substantial increase in Brazilian export volumes via IIRSA Sur to Peruvian ports is the Andes mountain range.

The topographic profile of the current highway—combined with the loss of engine power combustion vehicles experience at higher altitudes, higher fuel consumption during ascents, and the limited average cargo capacity of trucks capable of navigating steep and winding sections—will always be weighed by exporters when deciding whether to ship goods through the Atlantic or Pacific (Barros et al. 2021). The "Chancay factor" may help offset these natural challenges, although it remains unclear whether it will ultimately become a decisive element in favor of the Pacific route. A regional commercial dynamic that increases "backhaul" opportunities—i.e., greater inflows of Peruvian goods into Brazil—could significantly influence the decision of Brazilian agribusiness producers to use Peruvian ports as export outlets.

Another alternative that would mitigate, but not fully resolve, the natural challenges posed by the Andes, and that likewise faces the challenge of expanding backhaul capacity, would be the construction of a railway parallel to the highway. It is uncertain whether such a project would be economically viable, precisely because a functional road route already exists. The volume of cargo that a railway would need to move in both directions would have to be even greater, given that part of the flow is already naturally routed through the highway.

An alternative to a solely binational Brazil–Peru railway at the Iñapari–Assis Brasil border crossing would involve constructing targeted rail segments in Brazil, Peru, and Bolivia to complement the existing networks in central-southern Brazil and southern Peru (Puno and Arequipa regions). Unlike the binational rail proposal, the railway network of this more northern corridor is already almost fully completed on the Brazilian side, with only a few segments remaining in Bolivia and Peru. According to the original project in the IIRSA portfolio, known as the Central Bioceanic Railway Corridor (CFBC), the line would begin at the Port of Santos on Brazil's coast, pass through industrial and agricultural hubs in central-southern Brazil, enter Bolivia at the Corumbá–Puerto Suárez border, and end at southern Peruvian ports as well as at the Chilean port of Arica.

The COSIPLAN/IIRSA (2017) report on South American railway projects noted, among the advantages of the CFBC, the fact that nearly the entire existing network already uses the same 1,000-mm track gauge, except for the Peruvian segment. Another factor favoring this alternative is that the corridor crosses economically diverse regions (industrial, agricultural, and mining hubs), thus reducing risks associated with projects that depend on

a single type of cargo and are therefore more vulnerable to external market fluctuations.

On the other hand, major challenges for the project's implementation include discrepancies in track gauge and certain excessively steep segments in the Andes. Regarding track gauge, the IIRSA report emphasizes that Peru would need to adopt, on an exceptional basis, the 1,000-mm gauge for this project, as adapting only the Peruvian section would be far less costly than modifying the rest of the line.

As for the cost, estimates vary considerably depending on the source consulted (Brazilian press,[8] Peruvian press,[9] or oficial reports).[10] However, there is one constant: investment requirements for the CFBC via Bolivia would be lower than those needed for the railway connection either through Cruzeiro do Sul and Peru's central Amazon (the CFBBP) or through Assis Brasil–Iñapari near IIRSA Sur.

This lower estimated cost was one of the main arguments that gave the CFBC political traction in Peru immediately after President Humala's administration, which, as noted earlier, had favored the proposal for a railway through Peru's central Amazon. After Humala left office, his successor, former president Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, quickly signaled his government's prioritization of the CFBC (Semana Económica 2016).

Martín Vizcarra, who served as Minister of Transport under Kuczynski and was originally from southern Peru, assumed the presidency in March 2018 and maintained the CFBC as one of his administration's priority logistics-integration projects. So much so that Lima hosted a ministerial meeting in 2018 dedicated to the CFBC, from which significant announcements emerged, including Peru's commitment to adopt the metric gauge for the railway segment on its territory (Brazil 2018), between Desaguadero and Ilo.

From a geopolitical perspective, it is noteworthy that while the railway project crossing Peru's central Amazon has attracted Chinese interest, the CFBC appears to have drawn attention from European actors, with countries such as Germany and Spain expressing willingness to invest in the initiative (El Comercio 2018). Furthermore, the CFBC was originally designed under

8 Available at https://ac24agro.com/2025/07/21/projeto-da-ferrovia-bioceanica-pode-mudar-tracado-e-passar-por-cruzeiro-do-sul/?utm_source=chatgpt.com. Accessed August 15, 2025.

9 Available at https://larepublica.pe/sociedad/2024/06/25/tren-bioceanico-conectaria-chancay-pucallpa-y-brasil-conoce-su-ruta-y-otras-ciudades-que-cruzara-1344800?utm_source=chatgpt.com. Accessed August 15, 2025.

10 Available at https://www.iirsa.org/News/Detail?Id=139&utm_source=chatgpt.com. Accessed August 15, 2025.

IIRSA to terminate at Peruvian ports such as Ilo or Matarani, which would require expansión, funded either by Peruvian or international resources, to accommodate increased cargo volumes from the new railway.

In this context, and perhaps as a way of balancing China's significant investment in Chancay, there are indications that U.S. investors may be interested in participating in the "Megapuerto de Curió" project in Punta de Bombón, also in southern Peru, with the objective of developing a maritime outlet even larger than Chancay, and with greater depth (Logística 360 2025).

Although still speculative, the construction of a major new port financed by U.S. or other Western investors would represent a significant geoeconomic shift with natural implications for the prioritization of regional integration projects. A large-scale port in southern Peru would further incentivize economically influential groups in the region—particularly agribusiness exporters from central-west and central-south Brazil—to push for expanded logistical infrastructure along the Southern Route, whether by road or rail.

Conclusions

Since the 2000 meeting of South American presidents that gave rise to IIRSA, the distribution of power in international relations has undergone transformations that have reshaped how countries in the region relate to external actors. China has become the principal trading partner of both Brazil and Peru, as well as the largest foreign investor in the Andean country (Sanborn-Pareja and Quispe 2025). At the same time, the United States, traditionally a key partner for South American countries, remains an unavoidable political actor for any government in the region. This combination of economic change and political continuity creates a more complex environment for the external action of South American states. The weakening of regional cooperation institutions adds yet another layer of difficulty.

Even amid a less stable international landscape and the crisis of regional coordination mechanisms, as evidenced by the absence of high-level meetings under COSIPLAN/IIRSA since 2017, it is possible to affirm that Peru and Brazil have consistently sought, over the past quarter-century, to coordinate efforts in support of binational physical integration. In recent decades, the projects originally included within IIRSA have remained central to the bilateral agenda, receiving attention from presidents and ministerial authorities of diverse political orientations. Some of these projects have gained greater prominence at particular moments, depending on the priorities of the government in

office. Such variation is part of the democratic process and of foreign-policy formulation that seeks to reflect the electorate's preferences.

Regardless of the political circumstances surrounding these projects under different administrations, what is absolutely essential is ensuring their effective implementation, whether through unilateral or bilateral actions, coordinated or not with extra-regional actors.

Among the short-term unilateral measures, initiatives such as improving border-inspection procedures at Tabatinga and Assis Brasil, already planned by the Brazilian government, can quickly and easily facilitate trade in the border region and potentially increase the flow of cargo from Brazil's agribusiness interior toward the new Port of Chancay. The CVIF, which has met regularly since the late 2000s, is the natural forum to discuss how these and other relatively simple implementation measures can generate synergies in favor of development in the binational border region.

From a medium-term perspective, the 2025 Brazil–China Memorandum—despite the politically charged reactions in the Peruvian press—remains a positive step toward advancing the construction of a railway within Brazil that has been envisioned for at least two decades. Completing the feasibility studies and effectively building the tracks on Brazilian territory up to Acre would generate an additional positive externality that Peru could leverage according to its own sovereign interests.

The maturation period for these railway projects extends beyond the mandate of any democratically elected government, and the existence of institutional coordination mechanisms that transcend administrations is essential to ensure continuity in technical negotiations. In the current context, marked by the inactivity of major regional structures due to political reasons, one alternative could be the establishment of National Coordinator Working Groups for the integration routes discussed throughout this article.

These more technical groups could draw inspiration from the working group created by Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Paraguay, which has met regularly for several years to address logistical infrastructure matters related to the Capricorn Corridor—another initiative originally envisioned under IIRSA and later incorporated into Brazil's South American Integration Routes program.

Although South America's capacity for unified action in the face of global challenges is currently weakened, the space for intra-regional coordination on infrastructure has not disappeared. Just as IIRSA served in 2000 as a catalyst for broader regional cooperation, the reactivation of its agenda may well become the seed for a new, more structured regional approach in the years ahead.

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