The World Bank has supported transport corridors, in Africa and elsewhere, through two types of activities: (i) investment projects and analytical studies of corridors in individual countries, and (ii) research on trade and transport corridors.

World Bank support for transport corridors in Africa dates back to the 1970s. However, support during the early years was almost exclusively focused on improving infrastructure. A review of the African corridor projects by the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group\(^1\) found that most projects were limited in coverage to a single transport mode or agency and centered upon the development or rehabilitation of physical facilities. The projects were meant primarily to meet the infrastructure needs of the countries of project location. Project achievements with respect to corridor transit traffic proved to be minimal, mainly because of the projects' narrow focus on a single transport mode (therefore ignoring connectivity and operations; for example, between ports and roads), and because of the lack of emphasis on institutional reforms. This is not surprising and was actually necessary at the early stage of Africa development back in the 1970s–90s, when focus had to be at the national level of stability and accessibility. However, once the national level accesses and connections are basically established, the investment strategy should be
expanded to include a subregional and regional dimension. A key conclusion of the report was that the World Bank needs to step up its support for corridor projects and studies and that prerequisites for future operations should be intercountry agreements on corridor operations, including access, maintenance, and streamlining and harmonization of regulation.

One of the most comprehensive World Bank operations in recent years has focused on trade and facilitation in East Africa. Currently the Bank has two investment projects of this type in the East and Central Africa corridor: one in the Western Africa corridor that recently was approved, and another project in the corridor between Abidjan and Lagos that is currently under preparation. Since 1995, the World Bank has supported several rail concessions in Africa, including two binational concessions (Senegal–Mali and Burkina–Côte d’Ivoire). An important lesson from these projects is that the impact of rail concession is more on the reliability of service and stronger competition with road operators than on an actual decrease of transport costs.

Note

1. World Bank (1994). This report covered 42 completed projects in 14 countries, including eight landlocked countries (Rwanda, Burundi, Malawi, Zambia, Central African Republic, Burkina Faso, and Mali) and six littoral countries (Kenya, Tanzania, Cameroon, Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, and Senegal).