

# State Policy on Railway Transport of Late 2019 – Early 2022: Challenges for Sustainability and Stability

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**Abstract:** The article deals with the problems of state policy in the field of railway transport. Are analyzed two approaches to the state policy in the field of railway transport, the forms of ownership in the situation of sanctions on railway transport and competitors close to it – first of all, this is the aviation transport. The question is about the effectiveness of public policy to achieve the stability and sustainability of transport. The article analyzes the goals, implementation, and effectiveness of the state policy in the field of railway transport from the end of 2019 to the beginning of 2022 under the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and sanctions. The question of the role of ideology in the formation of the concept of public policy and the ways of its implementation is raised. The role of the driver, conductor and police for security on the territory of transport, including in the conditions of a pandemic, is being studied. A comparative analysis of the goals of state programs is carried out.

**Keywords:** state policy, stability, sustainability, railways, aviation, sanctions, biopolitics

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## Introduction

Russian state policy in the field of railway transport undergoes a deed crisis. The crisis was caused by a host of factors, first of all, by extensive sanctions of varying degrees of intensity. So, in 2018, JSC “Russian Railways” and “Uralvagonzavod” already faced serious problems<sup>1</sup>, and in the period under investigation they found themselves

<sup>1</sup> Rodionov D. Trump launched a "rail war" against Russian Railways. Free Press. 26.02.2022. Available from: <https://svpressa.ru/economy/article/258252>; Nikolsky A., Mukhametshina E., Churakova O., Bocharova S. How “Uralvagonzavod” was on the verge of bankruptcy and what saved it. *Vedomosti*, 06.03.2018. Available from: <https://www.vedomosti.ru/business/articles/06.03.2018/752833-uralvagonzavod> (in Russian).

even in a more difficult situation as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even greater complications were brought with a new wave of sanctions related to the military events in Ukraine in 2022.

Current political situation shows that regardless of the affiliation and form of ownership sanctions can be imposed on state authorities, and both state-owned and private companies. Thus, a lot of Russian ministries and institutions, state and private companies, the biggest banks of Russia as well as government officers and individuals, including those from business circles have come under large-scale sanctions from the USA, Great Britain and the European Union<sup>2</sup>. The sanctions affected, for example, P.O.Aven and M.M.Fridman ("Alfa-Bank"), O.Y.Tinkov ("Tinkoff Bank"), A.A.Mordashev ("Severstal"), G.N.Timchenko<sup>3</sup> ("Volga Group"; Council Decision 2022). The transport industry got under a great pressure as well: JSC "Russian Railways", "Aeroflot", aircraft factories, a number of transport engineering enterprises and even personally the Minister of Transport of the Russian Federation V.G.Savelyev.

The period of time we investigate is important because the historical events happening now are unique and without any known precedent. A lot of mechanisms and methods of regulation which are the results of the implemented state policy are currently being subjected to a test for strength by both external and internal political, economic and demographic circumstances.

We need to recall that "state policy is an internally oriented system of actions, and guiding norms and values have a basic, system-forming character" (8:35). In the period under research Russia experienced a serious political event, that is the change of the Prime Minister and the government.

Let us also note the problem of goal-setting as the foundation of state policies. With this, there arises the problem of not only the effectiveness of the state policy itself, but of the methods by which the government seeks to give stability to the economic processes. In our case these processes are connected with the public sectors such as railways, aviation and oil and gas sector.

All mentioned above can be treated both within the political context and beyond. Liberal discourse develops the issue of nationalisation of such industries as railways, and rises the question if railways can function better and not be unprofitable, demanding budget funds for their maintenance, but be profitable and in demand from legal consumers and individual passengers. Conservative discourse polemizes that unprofitability is an objective phenomenon, and the task for state policy is to build the stable system to support the industry. If we turn to the current Russian communists, we will see that they stand for the earlier models of railway management based on the Soviet

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2 Abdullina, A. Russian aviation will get its wings broken, Kommersant, 26.02.2022. Available from: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5236969> (in Russian).

3 Keffer L The UK has imposed new sanctions against Russian companies and bankers. Kommersant, 24.03.2022. Available from: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5271930>. (in Russian).

Union practices and also turn to the pro-social rhetoric concerning the issues of labour and wages<sup>4</sup>.

There is a problem of not only effectiveness of the state policy but of the methods with which the government seeks to give more stability to the processes related to the nationalised economic sector (clearly, it is railways in our case).

The purpose of the research. At present the Russian Federation has got under unprecedented hard political and economic conditions. In this regard, it seems necessary to conceptualise the recent challenges to the stability and sustainability of the political system, in particular, in the sphere of railway transport which, like many other industries, has fallen under sanctions. Thus, after such conceptualisation, it will become possible to proceed to the development of the response to these challenges both in political and economic aspects.

## Materials and methods

The materials for the research are, first of all, the latest historical facts, professional literature, and relevant documents of the Government of the Russian Federation.

The research methods we have applied are the following ones: general scientific method, qualitative event-analysis (based on mass media materials), content analysis (applied to the documents of the Government of the Russian Federation).

## Results

Stability in the context of railways can be understood in different ways.

First of all, we should mention the definition which is classical for the railways – engineering stability and stabilization measures. Obviously, we include in this the very design of the railway track, resistive action against landslides and landfalls (4), snow control (1), etc., and also engineering safety measures. This stability may concern traffic (2), i.e. the continuity of transportation and the accuracy of schedule.

In this aspect, in our opinion, stability should be understood as the regularity of pace of railway networks, low accident rate, good pace of new railway tracks construction and low frequency of postponements for various projects of governmental programmes.

Sustainability connected with the concept of stability will reveal itself in economic dimension – low inflation of tariffs of various types. Here an important role for us will play the decisions of the Central Bank of Russia – one of the main macroeconomic regulators the

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<sup>4</sup> Gavrilov S.A. Russian railways are a strategic object, they are not subject to privatization. The official website of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation – KPRF.RU, 30.05.2016. Available from: <https://kprf.ru/dep/gosduma/activities/155646.html>; The history of Russian railways: starting with a lag, and ending with a collapse. The official website of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation – KPRF.RU, 10.01.2011. Available from: <https://kprf.ru/crisis/edros/97283.html> (in Russian).

goal of which is fighting inflation and keeping it low by any means, and of the bodies on other levels of government: Federal Anti-Monopoly Service (FAS) in the context of checking natural monopoly entities and Federal Tariff Service (FTS – until 2015, abolished).

Further on, stability will be treated as related to the security issues both on the rail roads themselves and in relation to the adjacent infrastructure – security at railway stations (as one of the most crime-prone environments). Transport facilities are quite vulnerable to terrorist attacks and to other criminal encroachments. We might come across this both abroad and in our home country, for example, in the case of “Nevsky Express” in 2009.<sup>5</sup> Here we, of course, talk about security as the security of a police type and character – about direct disciplinary control of railway stations, railway roads and adjacent infrastructure.

In the literature devoted to technical safety of railways, a thorough attention is paid to the issue of human factor. Railway transport is defined as “a complex technical control system in which a man is not only the user of the result of the process, but also is a part of the system (and not always reliable enough) that performs the functions of the operator of a particular subsystem”. At the same time, a big importance is attributed to the problems of health, psychological stability and compatibility, physical fatigue of the railway personnel (5:427, 429; 6:9, 21). Statistical data indicate that in most cases the reason for accidents on the railways is precisely the human factor.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, in this sense the political as the regulatory function of the state policy becomes a particular foundation for the types of regulation and “normalisation” of human behaviour (7:89).

Here we came across the issues investigated by Michel Foucault and his work “Security, territory, population”. Is the political governance exercised to its full extent in the formation and implementation of national policy? How exactly does the national policy act at the railways in the final reckoning? To what extent do disciplinary authorities show themselves in the behaviour of railway personnel and end-user passengers? Can the government successfully solve the problem of discipline through the state policy? To what extent does the train conductor inherit the role and functions of pastoral care and guidance? And to what extent does the train driver do it? Let’s remember what Foucault writes about similar issues:

Behaviour – is the action of the verb “lead”, the action of the guide, leading, guidance if you will, but also the manner how people behave, how they allow somebody to behave, how they are led, and, finally, how they react to the guidance, which is the action of the guide. (7, p. 259)

During the pandemic in the air transport sphere – which is quite close to railways – we could witness different manifestations of discontent up to violent clashes:

<sup>5</sup> Kosorukov, A. Four years have passed since the explosion of the Nevsky Express train in the Tver region. *Komsomolskaya Pravda – Tver*, 27.11.2013. Available from: <https://www.tver.kp.ru/online/news/1596491>. (in Russian).

<sup>6</sup> UIR: statistics of accidents on railways. Materials of the International Union of Railways UIC Safety Report 2020. Railways of the world, 19.06.2021. Available from: <https://zdmira.com/articles/mszhd-statistika-proisshestvij-na-zheleznykh-dorogakh>. (in Russian).

For about 800 passengers of 3 flights arrived from Asian countries there were only 3 Rospotrebnadzor (Federal Service for the Oversight of Consumer Protection and Welfare) specialists, that is why people had to wait for the issuance of certificates for several hours. As result, the Russians who fell under the isolation regime lost their temper. It was decided to take the exit from the airport by assault. Surprisingly, three police officers couldn't stop the vengeful crowd", – said one of the witnesses of the incident, and added that many tourists left without receiving their documents. Another passenger noted that she managed to wait for her turn, but the forms for the resolutions were over<sup>7</sup>.

What, if not the problem of revolt and epidemics, can bring us closer to one more important topic raised by Michel Foucault which comes from the issue of guidance – political management and state interest (in our case it is its derivative – the state policy) which is implemented through the institute of the police in the broad sense of this concept?

With regard to political issues, in our way of thinking, there are two possible approaches to understanding the subject and object of possible research.

The first presupposes an additional identification of the political aspect in a number of areas listed above. In this sense, the political stability will become a concept with a narrow meaning, and will primarily include geopolitical issues, such as the issue of geopolitical bridges (Russia as a transit territory or the New Silk Road alternative to it). Also this approach allows to include into it a dispute between the conservatives and the liberals about the best form of ownership for railways: which of them – private or public – will be best suited to such a country as Russia which is unique in every sense?

The second approach will treat the areas listed above as some sub-areas. In this approach such type of policy as state policy will find its expression in setting a particular model of political management of the strategic economic sphere – railways – through specialised forms of power/governance. In the context of Russian management model for the current system of public power we will single out the problematic issues and forms of their manifestation which concern directly the railway system in the three branches of power. In the judicial branch we will pay attention to court decisions and their dynamics between parties to trials: between transport prosecutor's office and railways as legal entities, between contractors and public clients, etc.

In the legislative branch, the work of parliamentary committees will be important for us, as well as their work on improving, first of all, federal laws on railway transport in the context of the country's Basic Law.

In the executive branch, the regulatory function of the state, the work of inspectors in relation of implementation of the guide-lines prescribing a particular procedure for actions on railway roads, compliance of the construction and operation with the requirements of the adopted legislation will be of primary importance. Here we should mention the coming out disciplinary power exercised by the state.

<sup>7</sup> The quarantined Russians took the exit from the airport by storm. Lenta.ru, 20.03.2020. Available from: <https://lenta.ru/news/2020/03/20/shturm/> (in Russian).

Thus, with the second approach we can see a bright manifestation of the political problematic issues: freedom and/or security, the problem of their correlation, the model of state power in this branch of industry and interaction of the concepts “man” and “state” with the account for the form of ownership for JSC “Russian Railways”. In the long run, the choice of the optimal model of interaction between the entities and objects mentioned above brings to stability and sustainability of railways as the result of public policy.

When choosing optimal models, let us get back to the issue of goal-setting in state policy on the example of comparative analysis of two programmes of the Government of the Russian Federation in the field of transport. They are interesting to us because they both were approved under different Presidents and Prime Ministers, both are arranged in the linear sequence and quite relevant in this sense.

From 2008 to 2019, Strategy for the development of railway transport in the Russian Federation till 2030 was in effect in Russia based on the the Edict of the Government of the Russian Federation No.877-r, dated 17.06.2008. It set the following goals:

The goal of the Strategy is to create conditions for

- sustainable social and economic growth of Russia,
- increasing mobility of the population and optimisation of the movement of goods,
- reinforcement of economic sovereignty, national security and defensive capacity of the country,
- reduction of the cumulative transport costs of the economy,
- improvement of the competitiveness of national economy
- ensuring Russia’s leading positions on the basis of advanced and innovative development of railway transport harmoniously linked with the development of other economic sectors, types of transport and regions of the country<sup>8</sup> (Development Strategy 2008)

In 2021, this Edict ceased to be in force and effect and a new Edict of the Government of the Russian Federation No.3363-r dated 27.11.2021 was adopted. It is the Edict “On approval of Transport Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2030 with a forecast for the period up to 2035”.

In it we can see a slightly different approach to goal-setting, particularly:

The strategic goal in implementation of the Strategy measures is to meet the demand of economy and society for competitive and high-quality transport services:

- Goal 1 “Improving spacial connectedness and transport accessibility of territories”;
- Goal 2 “Increasing mobility of the population and development of domestic tourism”;
- Goal 3 “Increasing volume and speed of cargo delivery, including transit, and development of multimodal logistics technologies”;

<sup>8</sup> Strategy for the development of railway transport in the Russian Federation till 2030 (Edict of the Government of the Russian Federation No.877-r, dated 17.06.2008), Ministry of Transport of the Russian Federation. Available from: <https://mintrans.gov.ru/documents/1/1010>. (in Russian).

● Goal 4 “Digital and low-carbon transformation of the industry and accelerated introduction of new technologies”<sup>9</sup>.

We should note the key (Development Strategy 2021) difference between Strategy-877 from Strategy-3363: in dynamics we might observe that fewer goals have been set – 4 instead of 6, the main goal has become more utilitarian – we can see the supply of economic demand as the biggest priority.

The matter is not only the textual attributing of subjectivity to the concept of economy, though it is important to note this fact as well. But what is more important is the disappearance of the statements connected with leadership, outperformance and innovation, which were quite often mentioned during the presidency and premiership of D.A.Medvedev. Strategy-3363 was adopted under M.V.Mishustin at the post of the Prime Minister, and we can see the absence of these notions and their replacement with more measurable categories – volume, speed, mobility, and the presence of conceptually important words like “territory” and “population”.

## Conclusion

Thus, we can conclude the following.

Firstly, during the period under investigation the state policy in the area of railway transport in its conceptual expressions has become closer to the concept of “bio-power” through different disciplinary and guide practices.

Secondly, in our opinion, this process has a strongly pronounced determinant of external threat bringing the state to an increasingly active stand.

Thirdly, the result of such practices will lead to stability and sustainability.

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<sup>9</sup> Transport Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2030 with a forecast for the period up to 2035 (Edict of the Government of the Russian Federation No.3363-r, dated 27.11.2021), Ministry of Transport of the Russian Federation. Available from: <https://mintrans.gov.ru/documents/8/11577?type> (in Russian).

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