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ADB Experts Evaluate Funding for Karachi-Rohri Rail Upgrade

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On July 19, 2025, a team from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), led by Chief Transport Planner Sangyoon Kim, inspected the 480-kilometer Karachi-Rohri section of Pakistan's Main Line-1 (ML-1) railway to assess funding prospects for this critical infrastructure project. Part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the \$6.7 billion ML-1 upgrade promises to transform the 1,687-kilometer Karachi-Peshawar rail line,

boosting economic growth and connectivity. The visit signals cautious optimism about securing financing, though challenges remain.

The ML-1 project, approved in 2020, is a cornerstone of Pakistan's ambition to modernize its aging railway network. The Karachi-Rohri segment, a vital artery, is set to receive track doubling, advanced signaling systems, and infrastructure for higher-speed trains. These upgrades will slash travel times and increase capacity for cargo and passengers, directly supporting economic hubs like Reko Diq and enabling faster transport of Thar coal. "This project is a game-changer for Pakistan's economy," a Pakistan Railways official noted during the visit, emphasizing its role in strengthening trade and industrial output.

Despite its potential, the ML-1 project has faced setbacks, primarily due to funding delays. While China remains the primary financier under the CPEC framework, the ADB's involvement could diversify investment and reduce reliance on a single partner. Sangyoon Kim's team, joined by Pakistan Railways officials, meticulously reviewed the section's infrastructure needs. Their forthcoming report will be pivotal in determining whether the ADB will commit funds, a decision that could accelerate the project's timeline and signal confidence in Pakistan's economic reforms.

For a nation hungry for progress, the ML-1 upgrade represents more than just a railway. It's a lifeline for industries, a boost for jobs, and a step toward self-reliance in a region where infrastructure often lags ambition. Yet, the project's success hinges on navigating fiscal constraints and geopolitical complexities. As the ADB team finalizes its assessment, Pakistan awaits a verdict that could reshape its economic landscape,

proving that strategic investments can deliver prosperity even in challenging times.