

Work Starts in Peru at Highway that Will Open the Pacific to Brazil

Contributed by Mylena Fiori
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The Interoceanic Highway (Rodovia Interoceânica), which will run through the state of Acre and across Peru, linking Brazil to the Peruvian ports of Ilo, Matarani and San Juan, on the Pacific coast of South America, gets underway officially today at Puerto Maldonado (Peru), with a cornerstone placement ceremony.

The presidents of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva; Peru, Alejandro Toledo; and Bolivia, Eduardo Rodríguez, will participate.

The highway will stretch for a total of over 2,600 kilometers, of which 1,100 are to be in Peru. The stretch that work begins on today extends for slightly more than 1,000 and will cost US\$ 700 million. Contractors from Brazil, Bolivia and Peru will build the highway.

With the Pacific coast connection Brazil should experience a surge in business with Asia, not to mention closer commercial ties with its continental neighbors to the west.

President Lula will spend most of the day in Peru. He will have talks with Toledo and Rodriguez on Amazon area development and regional integration. The presidents will also hold a joint news conference. Lula returns to Brasília this evening.

The Rodovia Interoceânica is one of the priorities in the South American Regional Infrastructure Integration Initiative (IIRSA) which was created in 2000.

Also part of the IIRSA is the Consensus Implementation Agenda (Agenda de Implementação Consensuada), which was drawn up last December at the III South American Presidential Summit. It contains no less than 335 projects, with an estimated total cost of US\$ 48 billion.

"This is strategic planning for integration. We identified bottlenecks in communications, energy and transportation. And after four years of discussion, we have a sharply focused and selective list of projects," explains Ariel Peres, of the Ministry of Planning, who is also the Brazilian coordinator for IIRSA.

Further discussions on South American integration will take place at the South American Community of Nations summit scheduled for September 29 and 30 in Brasilia.

The organization was also formed last December at the III South American Presidential Summit. "Physical integration of infrastructure is one of the three pillars of the Community, along with economic integration and strengthening democratic values," explained Peres.

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