

6.5 Strategy 5: Urban Centers And Infrastructure Development

6.5.1 Rationale

The NBR has relatively small urban agglomeration with lack of core urban centers. It results in limiting job opportunities and the availability of supporting services to industrial development. In order to accelerate regional economic development, urban economies should be sufficiently large to avoid leaking local resources to the other regions. Therefore, it is necessary to encourage the urban economy to drive positive influences on the regional economy.

To strengthen the urban functions in NBR as a whole, in consideration of economic linkages

with the Lao side, a basic concept can be addressed in such a manner that since all the existing urban centers in NBR cannot be the primary regional urban center alone, functional networking of these centers needs to be structured. Based on this concept, three (3) strategies are proposed to strengthen urban functions in NBR:

- Establishment of urban linkages between Mukdahan and Savannakhet to form a “**Pair City**”;
- Establishment of urban linkages among Nakhon Phanom, Mukdahan and Sakon Nakhon to form an “**NBR Urban Alliance**”; and
- Reinforcement of Urban linkages by “**Local Area Network by IT**”.

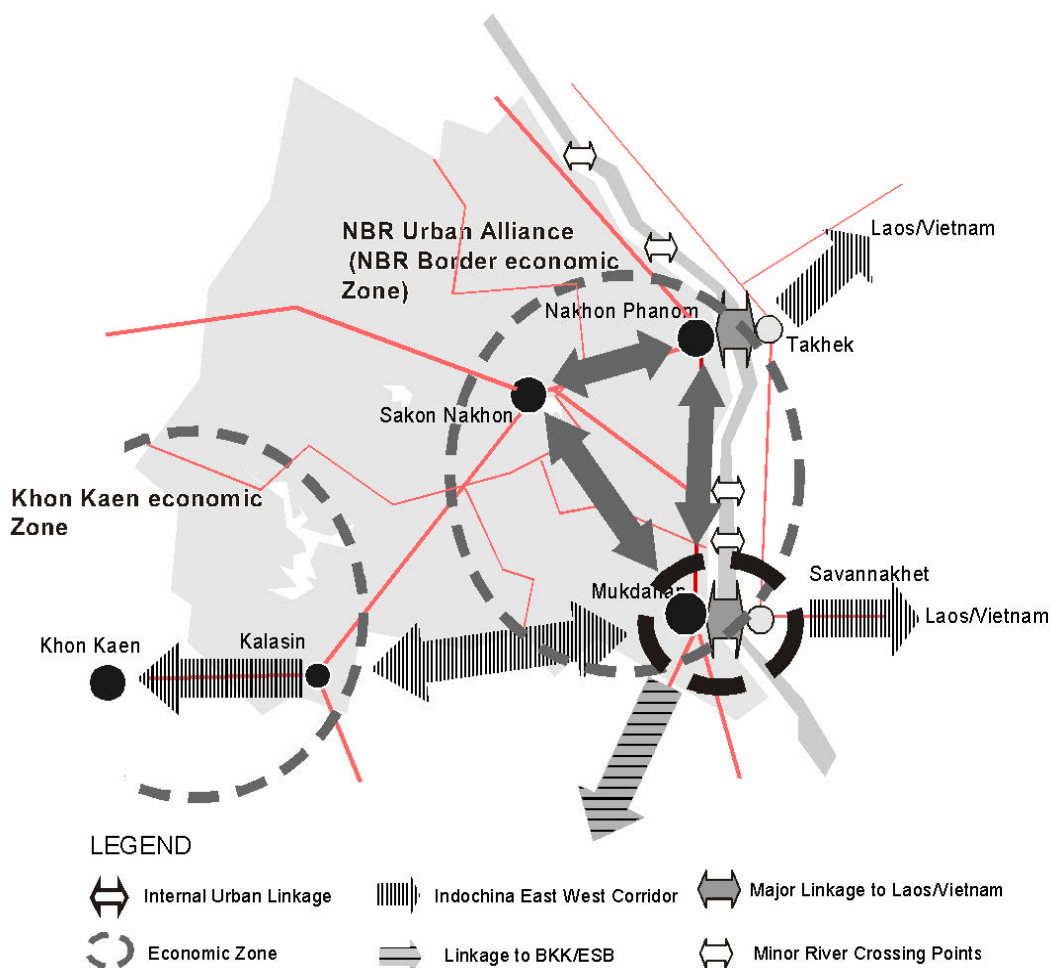


Figure 6.5: Urban Development Concept

6.5.2 Proposed Actions

(1) Urban Center Development

1) Nakhon Phanom

Nakhon Phanom will utilize two advantages in its location, namely, proximity to the Indochina market and its further potential of agricultural production towards an industrial development center in the NBR. It is also an important strategy for Nakhon Phanom to jointly promote tourism and border trade with Lao PDR.

Urban area should be appropriately expanded to accommodate a population of 150 thousand people. And to better serve this population and facilitate urban activities, such facilities of wastewater treatment, final disposal site and river crossing should be improved.

2) Sakon Nakhon

Sakon Nakhon should take advantage of its accumulation of higher educational institutes, and develop a research and human resource development center in the NBR. Based on its research and higher educational functions, Sakon Nakhon will be the center of cultural and human interchange between Thailand and Laos in the short/medium term, and among GMS in the long term.

Since Sakon Nakhon is located in a very environmentally sensitive area along the Nong Han Reservoir, in this sense, an "Infra-led urban development control" is indispensable for Sakon Nakhon to sustain its environment with avoiding disordered urbanization.

3) Mukdahan

Mukdahan is a gateway city to Laos and Vietnam through the Indochina East-West Corridor. Utilizing the anticipated potential derived from the 2nd Mekong International Bridge, Mukdahan should contribute to the NBR as a goods distribution and related business center of the NBR.

For the urban development, it is of importance to pay careful consideration on water quality management of the Mekong River to avoid water deterioration due to population and economic expansion.

4) Kalasin

Kalasin is the closest province to Khon Kaen. By taking advantage of its proximity to Khon Kaen economy and its agricultural products, Kalasin should develop as a base of supporting industries and agro-processing of the NBR.

Kalasin is also to be developed as a tourism destination by utilizing its villages and fossil dinosaur attraction.

(2) NBR Urban Alliance

Instead of fostering a single large urban center in the NBR, the "NBR urban alliance system" is proposed. The alliance aims at closely linking Sakon Nakhon, Mukdahan and Nakhon Phanom with:

- High capacity and high-speed communications by highways and telecommunication networks (optic fiber cable);
- Integration of certain public services such as a public health referral system, a local government community development information system, an educational network system, an industrial and agricultural information system and a local government network; and
- Networking industrial and business leaders to initiate joint promotion activities to exchange market information for medium- and small-scale companies among the cities.

(3) Pair City Development in Mukdahan and Savannakhet

Mukdahan and Savannakhet are to be connected by the Second Mekong International Bridge. Both cities will be strategic urban centers for Thai-Lao cooperation across the Mekong River. To encourage economic linkages, a strategy of "Pair City Development" is proposed to maximize mutual benefits through joint use of the infrastructure and public service functions and to ease traffic flow to/from the two areas. For this purpose, the following four (4) projects are proposed:

- Joint utilization of the Savannakhet

- Airport (Internationalization);
- Secondary (minor) river crossing points development;
- Telecom gateway development; and
- Emergency medical service.

(4) Infrastructure Development

NBR has a relatively well-organized infrastructure, in particular a highway network. However, it is still necessary to physically support the two development concepts, namely, the “NBR Urban Alliance” and the “Pair City.” These are the spatial and physical basis of the future regional development along the Master Plan. In this context, the following projects are identified:

1) Transportation

To support urban center development under the “NBR Urban Alliance” concept, the following road-widening projects should be additionally included in the widening plan by DOH to form a triangle highway network:

- Sakon Nakhon – Mukdahan (R223); and
- Nakhon Phanom – Mukdahan (R212).

To form the Indochina East-West Corridor in the Thai portion, the highway network should be developed on schedule; this is already listed in the second phase widening plan of DOH:

- Khon Kaen – Kalasin (2000-2002);
- Ubon Ratchathani–Mukdahan (2000-2007); and
- Udon Thani – Sakon Nakhon – Nakhon Phanom (2000-2004).

As the core facilities for promoting goods distribution business by fully utilizing the emerging potential of the Indochina East-West Corridor as well as the GMS market, the following projects should be carried out:

- Rural products home delivery service center at Sakon Nakhon and Mukdahan;
- Goods Distribution and Processing Center at Mukdahan;

- Mukdahan City Air Terminal; and
- The Third Mekong Bridge at Nakhon Phanom.

2) Information and Communications

Information and communication technology (IT) related infrastructure is indispensable for modern business. To compete in industrial location against other regions, business environment should be improved in this regard. Besides, IT exploits new marketing methods, which preferably support local products by providing a direct channel to other markets. The local area network by IT, therefore, aims at:

- improving the information network for the agricultural and industrial sectors;
- creating new market channels for agricultural products and handicraft through E-commerce; and
- improving the public service delivery system in the areas of public health, social, educational, administrative services for community development.

In this context, the following projects are proposed:

- Rural telecom improvement (voice communication);
- Optic fiber extension project in NBR;
- Rural cargo information center at Mukdahan;
- Local CATV network;
- Agricultural market information centers
- Seasonal labor marketing center;
- International telecom gateway project at Nakhon Phanom and Mukdahan;
- IT Training Course in Rajamangala Institute, Kalasin; and
- IT Training Program (IT training delivery by bus etc).