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Fast Travel, Expensive to Sustain? An Evaluation of the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Rail Policy

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ABSTRACT

The Jakarta–Bandung High-Speed Rail (Whoosh) project is a National Strategic Project that represents an effort to modernize Indonesia's national transportation system. This study aims to evaluate the alignment of the Whoosh development policy with the direction of national development as outlined in the National Long-Term Development Plan (RPJPN) and the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN), and to identify policy dynamics and sustainability challenges. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical research type. The data used are secondary data obtained through literature studies, including regulatory documents, development planning documents, scientific journals, official reports, and media coverage. The analysis was conducted using David Easton's Political System Model, which includes input, process (conversion), output, feedback, and policy environment stages. The results show that the Whoosh project is substantially in line with the transportation modernization and national connectivity improvement agenda in the RPJMN. However, the project's contribution to equitable development as mandated in the RPJPN is still not optimal, marked by the concentration of benefits around the station area and the existence of serious challenges in the aspects of financing and operational sustainability. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen policy governance, integrate transportation modes, and adjust financing strategies so that the Whoosh project can provide more inclusive and sustainable benefits for national development.

Keywords*: Whoosh Train; Public Policy; Political System David Easton*

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INTRODUCTION

National development is a long-term process aimed at achieving comprehensive and sustainable public welfare. In developing countries like Indonesia, development focuses not only on physical aspects but also encompasses social, economic, and environmental dimensions, requiring targeted planning across government. However, the dynamics of leadership transitions often influence policy continuity, leaving national strategic projects vulnerable to adjustments or even termination (Arifin, 2024). This situation makes a strong legal foundation and development planning urgently needed to maintain consistent development direction, particularly in critical sectors like infrastructure, which require program continuity from one administration to the next.

Infrastructure is a key driver of economic growth in a country, as it is a basic necessity for a country to serve its citizens, ensure their well-being, facilitate economic activity, and foster regional development. Given infrastructure's position as a sector that relies heavily on policy continuity, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, the government needs to maintain a stable development direction to ensure strategic projects can be implemented effectively. In this regard, President Joko Widodo initiated accelerated infrastructure development since his election as President in 2014. One of the infrastructure projects undertaken by President Joko Widodo is economic infrastructure in the transportation sector (Dina et al., 2021). The national transportation system plays a crucial role in supporting development and connecting developed and isolated regions, thus promoting equitable development throughout Indonesia. The transportation services sector also supports community activities because it is a strategic tool for smoothing the economy, strengthening unity, and influencing various aspects of life (Lestari et al., 2024).

The need for transportation is increasingly evident in the increasing demand for transportation services for the movement of people and goods, along with population growth and the expansion of residential areas, particularly in large cities like Jakarta and Bandung. High urbanization in Jakarta has created an increasingly urgent need for a more efficient transportation system. Severe congestion not only hampers community mobility but also reduces economic productivity and quality of life. According to the Central Statistics Agency of Indonesia, more than 10 million people live in Jakarta, with millions more commuting daily within the Greater Jakarta (BODETABEK) area (Pratista et al., 2025). One example of this infrastructure development is the modernization of rail transportation through the construction of the Jakarta–Bandung High-Speed Railway (Dina et al., 2021).

The Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway (KCJB) began construction in 2016 and officially began operations in 2023. This project aims to provide faster and more efficient modern transportation services for residents of the Jakarta-Bandung area. With a travel time of approximately 36–45 minutes, the KCJB is expected to address congestion on the Jakarta-Cikampek route and meet the high daily mobility needs between the two cities (Sitorus, 2024). The construction of this high-speed railway not only reflects the advancement of transportation technology in Indonesia, but the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway (KCJB) project is being built through Indonesia-China cooperation within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative policy, which aims to strengthen connectivity and development transformation and integrate economic, political, security, and cultural interests (Pratista et al., 2025). However, the construction process has not been free from obstacles, such as technical, managerial, financial, and social issues, which have hampered the project's progress, particularly regarding the provision of connecting transportation to and from the high-speed railway stations (Sitorus, 2024). This situation demonstrates that the success of long-term infrastructure projects depends heavily on policy consistency and the continuity of program implementation.

The sustainability of national development programs is crucial for achieving long-term goals, especially for developing countries that emphasize not only physical development but also social, economic, and environmental aspects. However, leadership transitions often hinder this sustainability, as changes in government can affect the continuity and cohesion of development policies (Arifin, 2024). Changes in government often bring new policies that potentially force adjustments to development programs, including large-scale infrastructure projects. This can lead to implementation uncertainty, cost overruns, and delays in the completion of national strategic projects. Therefore, legal certainty and a strong policy foundation are necessary for consistent development (Arifin, 2024).

In this context, the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJPN) and the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) should serve as legal instruments that guarantee the sustainability of strategic programs across governments. However, research shows that although the RPJPN provides a long-term development framework, the legal mechanisms supporting its implementation during changes in government remain weak. As a result, national strategic programs remain vulnerable to short-term political changes (Arifin, 2024). The RPJPN is a 20-year long-term national development planning document that first came into effect in 2005 and will be reformulated in 2025. Meanwhile, the RPJMN is a five-year medium-term plan that is delegated to the RPJPN and is divided into four periods from 2005 to 2024. It contains national strategies, general policies, cross-ministerial/institutional programs, and a macroeconomic framework that is further elaborated in the Government Work Plan (RKP) (Rahmansyah, 2023). The RPJPN is also an elaboration of the state's objectives as stated in the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution and is visionary in nature so that it only contains basic matters to provide space for the preparation of regional, medium-term, and annual development plans. The existence of the RPJPN is a mandate of Law Number 25 of 2004 concerning the National Development Planning System (SPPN Law) which is the legal norm for national development planning (Rahmansyah, 2023).

In line with this, the construction of the Jakarta–Bandung High-Speed Railway (Whoosh), as a national strategic infrastructure project, raises various questions regarding its alignment with the national development direction set forth in the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJPN) and National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN). This project not only reflects efforts to modernize transportation but also has consequences for regional equity, interregional connectivity, and the effective utilization of the state budget. Issues raised not only relate to the benefits of mobility but also to whether this development truly supports long-term development priorities that emphasize equity, sustainability, and balance between regions. This situation emphasizes the need for an in-depth study to determine the extent to which the Whoosh development policy aligns with the overarching goals of national development or whether it leaves inconsistencies in several aspects.

Based on this, this study aims to evaluate the extent to which the Jakarta–Bandung High-Speed Railway (Whoosh) is consistent with the national development direction as outlined in the RPJPN and RPJMN, and to identify potential inconsistencies related to government-established targets, strategies, and development priorities. This study aims to analyze the project's alignment with long- and medium-term development planning and identify aspects that do not optimally support the regional equity agenda. Theoretically, the research findings are expected to enrich public policy studies related to the evaluation of strategic infrastructure projects. Practically, these findings can provide input for the government in formulating development policies that are more focused, targeted, and tailored to regional needs. The urgency of this research lies in the importance of ensuring that large infrastructure projects like Whoosh are not merely symbols of technological progress, but truly drive national development, strengthen

equitable development, and reduce regional disparities in Indonesia.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical research type. The qualitative approach was chosen because the study aims to understand in-depth the development policy of the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Rail (Whoosh), particularly in relation to the project's suitability to the direction of national development as stated in the National Long-Term Development Plan (RPJPN) and the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN). This approach allows researchers to examine the meaning, context, and dynamics of public policy comprehensively and contextually, not limited to quantitative measurements alone. Descriptive-analytical research is used to systematically describe the characteristics of the Whoosh development policy, starting from the legal basis, program objectives, implementing actors, to implementation and financing issues, which are then analyzed using a public policy theoretical framework (Creswell, 2014; Sugiyono, 2023).

The analytical framework used in this study is David Easton's Political System Model, which views public policy as a systemic and cyclical process, encompassing input, process (conversion), output, feedback, and the environment (Easton, 1965). This model is used to analyze the demands and support underlying the development of Whoosh, examine the government's policy-making and implementation processes, assess policy outputs in the form of high-speed rail project implementation, and understand public feedback and the economic-fiscal environment that influence policy sustainability. Using this framework, the study assesses not only the project's physical outcomes but also the policy dynamics and its long-term implications for national development.

The object of this research is the Jakarta–Bandung High-Speed Rail (Whoosh) development policy, a National Strategic Project. The research focuses on the alignment of Whoosh development with national development trends, the policy structure and project governance from David Easton's political system perspective, and the challenges of policy implementation, particularly those related to project financing and sustainability. The data used in this study are secondary data obtained through library research. Data sources included regulatory documents, national development planning documents, scientific journals and academic books, reports from official government agencies, and national media articles relevant to policy developments and the financial condition of the Whoosh project (Sari et al., 2025).

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively through data reduction, data categorization based on components in David Easton's political system model, interpretive analysis of the data findings, and drawing conclusions based on the relationship between the empirical data and the theoretical framework used (Miles et al., 2018). To maintain data validity and legitimacy, this study utilized source triangulation by comparing information obtained from various sources, such as official government documents, academic publications, and media reports, to minimize bias and increase the reliability of the analysis results (Sugiyono, 2023).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1) Jakarta–Bandung High-Speed Rail Project (Whoosh): Legal Basis, Institutional Governance, and Financial Sustainability Challenges

The Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Rail (KCJB) project, now identified by its commercial brand

"Whoosh," is a concrete representation of Indonesia's ambition to modernize the transportation sector. The name "Whoosh" itself is an abbreviation of "Time Saving, Optimal Operation, Great System." This is not just a name, but rather a statement about the promise of high-speed rail service: drastically reduced travel time (around 35 minutes) with operating speeds reaching 350 km/h, making it a critical solution to alleviate acute congestion in the West Java corridor. Essentially, Whoosh is a strategic connectivity facility designed to enhance regional economic competitiveness by integrating two major metropolitan centers in Indonesia (Prasojo & Silmina, 2025).

The implementation of this massive project has a strong and multi-layered legal foundation to validate its legitimacy and expedite the process. First, the primary legal umbrella in this sector is Law Number 23 of 2007 concerning Railways, which serves as the basic reference for all aspects of rail transportation in Indonesia, including high-speed rail technology. Second, the acceleration of this project is specifically stipulated in Presidential Regulation (Perpres) Number 107 of 2015, which serves as an executive mandate to initiate and manage the development of KCJB infrastructure and facilities. Finally, the crucial status of this project is emphasized by its designation as a National Strategic Project (PSN), referring to Presidential Regulation Number 3 of 2016 in conjunction with Presidential Regulation Number 109 of 2020. This PSN status effectively cuts bureaucracy and facilitates the acceleration of complex issues such as land acquisition and licensing, underscoring the government's serious commitment to completing this vital infrastructure (Al-Ghifari, 2024; Zahrayanti, 2024).

In the context of implementing stakeholders, the Whoosh High-Speed Train project occupies a unique position, with a split function between state oversight and business execution. Regulatory-wise, Whoosh falls under the full authority of the Ministry of Transportation (Kemenhub). As the highest regulator of the railway sector, based on Law No. Under Law No. 23/2007 on Railways, the Ministry of Transportation has the vital authority to issue operating permits, determine technical safety standards, and oversee public service aspects, making the Ministry of Transportation the arbiter that ensures KCIC operates according to the rule of law. Meanwhile, the role of PT Kereta Api Indonesia (Persero) or KAI is central, but does not act as the sole operator. KAI is the leader of a consortium of Indonesian state-owned enterprises that owns a majority stake in PT Kereta Cepat Indonesia China (KCIC), which is also a Joint Venture that is the operator and independent manager of Whoosh. In other words, KAI is a representative of the state that invests capital and provides crucial operational links (such as feeder services), but the daily management and business responsibilities of Whoosh are fully held by KCIC. This scheme reflects an effort to balance the B2B business interests of KCIC with the public service mandate regulated by the Ministry of Transportation (Afrilia, 2024; Maghfiroh, 2024; Nursalsabila et al., 2024).

The Jakarta-Bandung Whoosh High-Speed Rail (HSR) program aims to improve connectivity between the two major cities by providing a significantly faster, more efficient, and modern mode of transportation. The project is designed to reduce the Jakarta-Bandung travel time from approximately 2.5–4 hours to just 36–45 minutes, making public mobility easier and more productive. Furthermore, the Whoosh program is part of the government's efforts to accelerate the modernization of the rail-based mass transportation system, providing high-speed services comparable to those of developed countries. The program also aims to reduce dependence on private vehicles and alleviate congestion in the Jakarta-Bandung corridor, while also supporting carbon emission reductions due to the high-speed rail's electric powertrain. Furthermore, the project is expected to stimulate new economic growth in the areas surrounding the stations through Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) development, creating jobs, and strengthening metropolitan integration. Another strategic objective is to build a foundation for technology transfer and

enhance the competency of Indonesian human resources so that the operation and maintenance of the high-speed rail can be entirely handled by local personnel in the future (Banjarnahor et al., 2025; Tampubolon et al., 2020).

The Whoosh program's objectives encompass several dimensions. From a user perspective, this project targets people traveling regularly and periodically between Jakarta and Bandung, including commuters, businesspeople, students, and tourists who require fast, comfortable, and timely transportation. Operationally, the program aims to increase capacity and frequency to meet growing mobility demand, while ensuring high-standard service with consistent safety and punctuality. Environmentally, the program aims to encourage people to shift from private vehicles to mass transportation, thereby reducing congestion and air pollution. Meanwhile, from a regional development perspective, the project aims to develop new growth centers around high-speed train stations, attract investment, strengthen the regional economy, and support equitable development. The long-term goal is to establish a national high-speed train ecosystem that will serve as a foundation for the development of the HSR network in other strategic corridors in Indonesia.

However, the implementation of the Whoosh High-Speed Train program has not been entirely without challenges. Several dynamics have emerged, including public debate and financial issues, affecting perceptions of the project's sustainability. Data shows that the total cost of building Whoosh reached approximately US$7.26 billion (approximately Rp 116 trillion), with approximately 75 percent of this coming from Chinese bank loans. This situation creates a significant financial burden, including interest payments reaching approximately Rp 2 trillion per year, which must be borne by the KCIC consortium. This burden is further burdened by the project's operational performance not yet showing a profit; the 2024 financial report recorded a loss of approximately Rp 2.6 trillion, and in the first half of 2025 an additional loss of approximately Rp 1.6 trillion was recorded.

Table 1. Financial Analysis of the Jakarta–Bandung High-Speed Rail (Whoosh) Project: Costs, Debt Structure, Losses, and Restructuring Burden

Indicator	Value
Total project cost	US$ 7.26 billion (Rp 116 trillion)
Share of foreign loan financing (Chinese banks)	Approximately 75% of total project cost
Annual interest burden	Approximately Rp 2 trillion per year
Operator loss (2024)	Rp 2.6 trillion
Losses (first half of 2025)	Approximately Rp 1.6 trillion

(Source: Marta, 2025; Nugraha & Pusparisa, 2025; Saputra, 2025; Wijaya, 2025)

Several government responses have emerged in response to the significant financial burden of the Whoosh High-Speed Rail project. Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, Chairman of the National Economic Council, emphasized that debt settlement will be carried out through a restructuring scheme and will not burden the State Budget. In line with this, the government has appointed Danantara, a wealth fund overseeing the relevant state-owned enterprises, as the party projected to bear the debt repayment obligations without shifting the burden to the state. Meanwhile, President Prabowo Subianto stated that the government is ready to assume the debt repayment obligations for this project and believes that Whoosh financing is not an issue

as it is part of the state's commitment to strategic development. Meanwhile, the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR RI) stated that it will strengthen its oversight function regarding the financial condition and management of the Whoosh project, including reviewing various decisions and processes that occurred in previous stages.

2) The Dynamics of the Jakarta–Bandung High-Speed Rail Development Policy from the Perspective of David Easton's Political System

The development of the Whoosh high-speed train project demonstrates strong consistency with the national transportation system modernization agenda. This aligns with the 2020–2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN), which emphasizes the importance of strategic infrastructure development that enhances connectivity, improves the quality of public transportation services, and supports community productivity. The reduction in travel time between Jakarta and Bandung through high-speed service demonstrates increased effectiveness of public services and the utilization of modern transportation technology. However, when linked to the goal of regional equity in the RPJPN (National Medium-Term Development Plan), the Whoosh project has not fully achieved its intended target. Development benefits remain concentrated in specific areas around the stations and high-speed train lines, while more distant areas have not yet experienced significant economic or social impacts. This situation demonstrates that the project's contribution to equitable development is a crucial dimension of the RPJPN. Therefore, the project must be supported by other systematic policies to ensure all elements of society benefit, such as the development of integrated transportation modes.

Through the perspective of David Easton's Political System Model, the dynamics of the Whoosh development policy can be more comprehensively understood (Easton, 2024). At the input stage, this policy emerged as a response to the increasing public need for a modern, fast, and efficient transportation system, which can overcome chronic congestion in the Jakarta-Bandung corridor. In addition to the demands of public needs, high-speed trains are an environmentally friendly transportation effort. This high-speed train is considered a transportation that considers the future of future generations, this is because until now the high-speed train has been named as an environmentally friendly public transportation as seen from the energy produced, fuel use, sustainable development concept, and its AMDAL approval (Lestari et al., 2024). Legal umbrellas such as the Railway Law, specifically Law Number 23 of 2007 which is realized in the form of Presidential Regulations Number 38 and 107 of 2015 are part of the input that strengthens the legitimacy of the development of the National Strategic Project (PSN).

In the conversion process, the government translates the input into a series of administrative and technical actions, such as the preparation of a feasibility study, the formation of the Indonesia-China High-Speed Rail (KCIC) consortium as stated in Article 3A of Presidential Decree Number 17 of 2015, international cooperation negotiations, and the construction of supporting infrastructure including Transit-Oriented Development (TOD). However, this process is not without challenges, such as the issue of financing as explained in Article 4 paragraph 1 of Presidential Decree Number 17 of 2015 that funding sources come from loans, bonds, and other funding. Efforts made by the government to accelerate the high-speed rail project by issuing Ministerial Regulation of Finance Number 39 of 2023 concerning Procedures for Providing Government Guarantees for the Acceleration of the Implementation of High-Speed Rail Infrastructure and Facilities between Jakarta and Bandung. Land acquisition is one of the main challenges in the high-speed rail project. Obstacles in land acquisition for infrastructure development are the number one factor among 11 factors contributing to delays in the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed rail infrastructure

project (Yurianto & Kadri, 2020). The dynamics of cross-border cooperation and technical issues also pose challenges in the construction of the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed rail.

The policy output stage is evident in the operation of the Whoosh High-Speed Train, including the provision of supporting infrastructure in the form of stations and connecting transportation networks. This output achievement is substantively aligned with the RPJMN target of improving national connectivity through the development of rail-based mass transportation. However, other outputs, particularly those related to broader economic and social impacts, show suboptimal results. The substantial financing burden, including a total construction cost of US$7.26 billion, with 75% funding coming from foreign loans and 25% from domestic equity, could pose long-term financial risks (Silalahi, 2025). Furthermore, KCIC's operational losses of IDR 2.6 trillion in 2024 and IDR 1.6 trillion in early 2025 have raised public concerns about the project's sustainability and management effectiveness. This situation demonstrates that although physical and operational outputs have been achieved, financial output and service sustainability have not met expectations.

Feedback from the public and stakeholders has shown a mixed response. Public sentiment toward the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed train was found to be 44.18% positive and 55.82% negative (Hakim & Sugiyono, 2024). Some expressed appreciation for the technological advancements and time-saving benefits provided by Whoosh.

Figure 1. Passenger Satisfaction Survey
(Source: *info.populix.co*)

A Populix report, "Whoosh High-Speed Train Passenger Satisfaction and Future Potential," shows that over 90% of respondents who have used the Whoosh High-Speed Train are satisfied with this mode of transportation and the service it provides. Whoosh's success lies in its ability to deliver a travel experience that is not only fast and efficient, but also comfortable and enjoyable. The findings indicate that comfort, punctuality, and service quality play a crucial role in building customer satisfaction and loyalty. The survey also highlighted that passenger satisfaction levels encompass various service aspects, from station facilities, safety and comfort during the journey, to the quality of customer service.

Criticisms have arisen regarding the financing burden. This relates to the use of the state budget to cover operational costs for the high-speed train, which is considered unprofitable. Furthermore, the potential dependence on foreign funding is feared to have long-term impacts on Indonesia's relations and image with foreign countries. The uneven distribution of benefits has also come to the fore, and the prohibitive price of high-speed train tickets for the lower-middle class is another factor. This response has prompted the government to make adjustments, such as through financing restructuring, plans to expand

the high-speed train line to Surabaya, and efforts to improve intermodal integration. Based on this, a review of financing for both construction and operations is necessary. This public feedback is crucial in the context of the Easton model, as it informs the next policy cycle and demonstrates that public policy is dynamic and requires continuous adjustment.

These adjustments include more targeted public needs and addressing all levels of society. One example is the provision of working-class and merchant-class carriages, which, of course, offer more affordable fares. PT KAI has implemented policy innovations on the Rangkasbitung-Tanah Abang commuter line route. This policy aims to facilitate public mobility, particularly for traders and farmers who often struggle to distribute their produce or goods. This can serve as a benchmark for PT KCIC in increasing ridership, which in turn will lead to increased public satisfaction with the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed rail. On the other hand, integration with public transportation or other modes of transportation is equally important. The limited number of high-speed train stations makes it difficult for people to reach them. If such integration is established, it is hoped that the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed train will be more accessible to the public.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the analysis shows that the Whoosh High-Speed Train development strongly aligns with the national modernization and connectivity improvement agenda outlined in the RPJMN (National Medium-Term Development Plan), but has not yet fully met the goal of equitable development, a key focus of the RPJPN. The project offers significant benefits in terms of travel efficiency and improved transportation technology, but challenges such as financing for both construction and operations, intermodal integration, and the distribution of benefits indicate the need for future policy improvements. Therefore, leveraging public feedback, improving financing governance, and further inclusive development are strategic steps to ensure the Whoosh development can make a more comprehensive contribution to long-term, equitable national development that benefits all levels of society.

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