

**INFRASTRUCTURE**

# More Northeast transport links to Laos in the works

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Numerous transport infrastructure projects in the Northeast are in the pipeline to establish links between Thailand and Laos, Transport Minister Arkhom Termpitayapaisith says.

The first project is the sixth Thai-Lao friendship bridge, linking Ubon Ratchathani with Salawan, he said. The cabinet on Tuesday gave approval for the Department of Highways to construct the bridge, Mr Arkhom said.

The minister said the scheme required 2.63 billion baht to build the bridge on the Thai side and another 400 million baht for land expropriation.

About 1.3 billion baht will be spent by Laos to construct the bridge on its side.

According to Mr Arkhom, the Lao government has sought a loan for the project from Thailand's Neighbouring Countries Economic Development Cooperation Agency (Neda).

Neda will have to hold further talks with Lao authorities about the loan conditions, he said.

The minister said the second project is a four-lane motorway between Udon Thani and Bung Kan covering a distance of 139 kilometres.

The new route, costing 10 billion baht, would facilitate border transport and make it easier for goods from Laos to be ferried to Laem Chabang port in Chon Buri, he added.

It could take one year to draft the details of the project and come up with an environmental impact assessment report, he said.

Construction, which is likely to begin in 2021, could take four years, Mr Arkhom said.

The third project is a four-lane road by the Mekong River, passing through Nong Khai, Nakhon Phanom, Mukdahan and Amnat Charoen.

The minister also mentioned rail

routes from Thailand to Vietnam via Laos, saying these could help build a transport route between a deep-sea port in Vietnam and Laem Chabang port, located in Thailand's so-called Eastern Economic Corridor.

Meanwhile, southern China, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Thailand have been allowing a limited quota of lorries and coaches to traverse the border area since last month, according to the Department of Land Transport.