

2.0 MAIN THEMES OF THE PLAN

The Structure Plan is a framework of action.

The Structure Plan is the laying down of the basic themes, elements and components, which will temper our thinking later when we are engaged in the technical task of “plan making” at the local level. The Structure Plan lays out the unchangeable “givens” in the form of precincts, roads, open spaces and amenities. The Structure Plan is a statement of the possibilities: it is about the suburbs; it is about the Samtse town core; it is about the town; it is about the region; and it is about the nation. Local Area Plans are prepared within the “framework” of a Structure Plan.

The main themes of the ‘Structure Plan’ give it character and define its function. These are elemental as they all work together in a symbiotic manner, supporting a whole larger than the sum of the parts! These are structural because they have a kind of finality about them in defining the urban systems and networks of the future city which will grow out of the town. In this sense Structure Plans are futuristic...they are looking towards years to come and making way for a population many times the present; making places for activities unthought-of today; creating possibilities for services and facilities which will be essential a century from now!

In brief a Structure Plan is a skeleton which holds all the future organs, appendages and networks together.

2.1 POTENTIALS OF SAMTSE

Looking at the history of Samtse, one can characterize the past of the town as unsure. It experienced everything from natural calamity like floods and land slides to social and political unrest in the neighboring Indian states of West Bengal and Assam. The strategic location of the town was both its advantage and disadvantage. Any development plan devised in the future should overcome the disadvantages and capitalize on the advantages of the place. However, it is important to discuss and understand the shortfalls and the developmental potentials that the town has to offer.

2.1.1 Building of Civic Society

Building up of a responsible civic society is a vital dimension in any urban development process. Right from early civilizations of the Indus Valley, Greek and Roman times, civility, and in fact civilization, have emerged from the concept of individuals compromising on the rustic freedoms of village life, in favor of a more cultured ‘civil society.’ By giving up something, each member of the community gets something more. From this mutual venture a society gains its pride, its identity and its unique sense of worth. Thus, urban development and “civic society

building” are at the core of a nation’s survival and development. The development of Samtse is the development of citizenry.

Having said this we also maintain that all societies, all institutions, and all cities are mere experiments! None is granted surety of success, or even survival. The past century has seen the rise and fall of numerous societal and national experiments and ventures. Let us not be complacent in our steps into the future. There is no guarantee that any societal experiment will succeed. Success must be believed in; success must be nurtured; success must be well conceived and well planned for.

When we talk about the issue of building up a responsible civic society, we are talking about something very vital to the people of Samtse; we are also talking about something very vital to the people of Bhutan, and to the world community. The building up of such a society has a mission that goes beyond the welfare of its subjects. It goes beyond the participation of stakeholders in the town, or of the professional principles of planners and advisors! It goes beyond the physical setting, the current situation, the image or the ecology of the town. The issue here is one of sustainability of the human spirit and lifestyle in a future driven by technology, industrialization, fragmentation, division and isolation. Herein, the structure plan of Samtse becomes a test of our imagination, our vision and, indeed, our wisdom.

Bhutan is one of the special places in the world, where individuals have time to think, have time to reflect, and have time to meditate. It is one of the places where humans are in harmony with their natural setting and there is a balance between the two. It is one of the last places where global and faceless corporate managements do not rule the moment-to-moment lives of the people. It is the place of beautiful innocence and the ‘honest smile’. In such a society there can be peace of mind and contentment. There can be a resurgence of the human spirit.

This does not mean that the society can be complacent about the present, or careless about the future. Change is an essential element of growth and development and many of the outcomes can be counter productive, or even painful. There are unavoidable issues facing the society in which cities and towns can play a critical role. Urban areas are the vehicles of development for better or worse.

To harness the potential “good” of urban development we must grasp the facts that towns and cities are:

- The engines of economic growth;
- Centers of constructive social change;
- Promoters of physical, and social security;



- Incubators of invention, new ideas and artistic creation;
- Creators and distributors of information;
- Homes of transparent and civil institutions;
- Places of opportunity; and,
- Arenas of self-discovery and personal reinvention.

We must realize that urban growth is unavoidable and sure. What is crucial is that we respond to this inevitable change in a positive and imaginative manner. Again, urbanization is both the means and the end of development. Cities and towns can be used to bring into existence a highly cultured and civilized lifestyle. Or they can be left on their own to create squatters and decline into decadence. Their protective security, social and economic opportunities, economic infrastructure and financial institutions, plurality, and political expression all lead to the development of the capability of “the person”.

The term “Gross National Happiness” is not just an increase in the standard of living, nor is it the enhancement of the Physical Quality of Life. It is the creation of an opportunity system in which each individual can explore their own potentials and develop themselves to the maximum extent possible. This has never meant that one can do whatever he wants to do. Building up of a responsible society which focuses on things beyond individual interests is an essential and crucial responsibility of each and every individual of the town. Samtse presents an ideal open “playing ground” on which Bhutan can create a dynamic, productive, vibrant modern city.

2.1.2 Development Potentials and Opportunities

The dual advantage of Samtse’s strategic location and the availability of a relatively large area of flat land, make Samtse one of the most potent towns for future development.

Other advantages like:

- Easy and open access to the sub-continent;
- Cheaper development of land;
- Presence of industries like Bhutan Fruit Products Limited and Samtse Distillery in the town and cement industries in the region;
- Availability of labor;
- Low cost of living and construction;
- Center for higher level education in form of National Institute of Education and Health Care; and,
- Emerging wholesale and retail centre;

all add to the potential of the town to become a booming industrial, trading and service zone in the future, serving the entire region.

At this point of the discussion we feel that it is worthwhile discussing other potentials and opportunities the Sipsu–Samtse corridor has to offer. This will help us to focus on a rational selection of development possibilities.

The abundance of water in the region, and the availability of flat land, creates a high opportunity for developing water intensive agriculture and aqua-culture activities. The availability of vast markets of the sub-continent further increases these development potentials. The region to the north of Samtse is rich in the production of oranges and this provides an excellent opportunity for Samtse to act as a market place, processing and export center for its hinterland.

The availability of a large population catchment, and the existing trading activities, bring the potential of retail trade outlets to the town. A ‘Free Trade Zone’ in the area, where multi-national companies will be allowed to perform trade related activities freely is worth considering. Highway construction between Phuentsholing and Samtse, forming part of the Sipsu-Daipham National Highway, promises well for the region!

Samtse’s regional importance in terms of institutions and the availability of facilities and services provides opportunity for developing the town into a regional Service Center with advanced health, education, entertainment and institutional facilities and services. It is gleaned from discussions with officials, regarding the ground realities that most of the lands in and around Samtse are owned by the people living in the higher altitude regions of the nation and most of them visit Samtse during winters to live here and return back to their respective places during summers. This opens up an opportunity for Samtse to develop as a winter retreat for the people of the nation.

Being a major entry point to the Royal Kingdom, once the Sipsu-Daipham National Highway is constructed, Samtse can serve as a gateway for Indians visiting the country, and as a tourist service centre, if conceptualized properly. It can be linked to Darjeeling, Gangtok and Kalimpong to attract an existing tourist base.

The flat land also creates a high potential for developing sports and recreational activities.

At this point one can conceptualize regionally regarding the need for Sipsu-Daipham National Highway connecting all of the important towns of the southern region; which will enhance the economy, connectivity and security concerns of the region and of the nation.

The main intention of this section has been to bring into light all the possible opportunities for development. In no way one is trying to derive which is good or bad. A thorough discussion and analysis is of crucial importance to access the right kind of development matrix, which suits the objectives. Certainly the possibility of adopting a symbiotic combination of all the above development opportunities can also be thought about, because it is a universal fact that a city, or a town, cannot survive with one single, specialized kind of activity. The aim of this section is



to initiate discussion that will bring forth the best possible development solutions, in terms of opportunities for the town of Samtse and its role in the nation in the future!

2.1.3 Challenges of the Future

When one tries to list down the problems of the past the first thing which emerges for discussion is the threat created to the north of the town due to the possibility of floods in the Devithan and Central Jail area. The silt deposits in the river bed have created a serious threat to the future of the town. The reason for this can be attributed to the natural landslides and minor mining activities, and the deforestation activities on the hill slopes, as well as the plains. The phenomenon of the river reaching the plains from the mountains very near to the town makes the speed, and the path, of the river unpredictable. The reason for the flooding should not be overlooked at the same time in this context. There is an urgent need for soil stabilization activities and checking the land slide zones on the upper slopes of the hills to stop the soil erosion. The concept of river training in the area needs to be worked out immediately and on a war footing. Work should start from upstream and proceed down to the terai.

Another important aspect which needs attention is the present nature of urban development in Samtse, where the majority of land available is owned by institutions, industries and worker's housing with low density and sparse development. The issue of "image creation" and urban form now need more clarity. Except the market area, embedded in an oval form which was conceptualized in the 1960's, there are hardly any efforts of creating imagery. Such an approach is a serious challenge for future plans.

When looking to the ruins of the past, though the issues fall beyond the implications on the physical structure of development, one cannot overlook the social chaos in the city during the early 1990's and the insurgency in the region, with subsequent military action. These events have slowed down the development of the town for over a decade. This issue has put forward a challenge for the future plans which should address the physical, social and security aspects of the town. The security forces have restored law and order and a new sense of confidence to the area.

Most important, the town of Samtse, along with the region to its west, does not enjoy any connectivity with the rest of the nation. To commute from the capital, or any part of Bhutan, one is dependent upon the neighboring country of India which makes the situation worse. The Sipsu-Daipham National Highway is beginning construction, which will allow Samtse to dream of becoming another 'Gateway' to the Kingdom of Bhutan. There shall be abundant opportunities that will come Samtse's way, primarily import and export opportunities, which can be facilitated by a dry port.

The presence of the international boundary being so close, and the vast market of the sub-continent, presents a healthy challenge for the future prospects of the town. There will be a

number of development agencies for investment and skill enhancement. Herein lies a potential for collection centers of raw materials, processing facilities and economic infrastructure and facilities, which will facilitate economic development in the region. The challenge is how to integrate these aspects into the structure plan. This is of paramount importance for the future of the town and the nation.

2.1.4 The New Image of Samtse

For a Bhutanese national the region of the town of Samtse is almost a dream place, because of its relatively flat terrain when compared with the rest of the nation. This might be the reason why many of the people in Bhutan, after retirement and when given a chance to resettle, choose this location for a peaceful and calm life. For an average blue collar worker living in the region, the image of the place is like a place of one's livelihood. For a trader the image of the town is a booming market place to carry out business. For the youth playing sports on the new play fields, relaxing on the velvet lawns of a place, or strolling in the new retail-entertainment hub is a happy image. For new graduates, a secure, well-paying job in one of the new high-tech industries is a dream come true. For investors the new sites with excellent infrastructure is a positive image. For a farmer the image is of land with all the potentials for intensive water-crop farming activities. Every individual be it industrialist, or economist, has an image about Samtse. Though this view does not match ground realities, the current situation matters at the time of preparing the plan. One of the goals of the new Samtse Structure Plan is to "turn the image around!" What could this new image be?

Creating and building a positive image for the town is a crucial and essential part of any development activity not only from an economic point of view but also for prosperity, social and cultural up-liftment. As planners and designers we have the image of Samtse as a region that has vast potential in the future to develop into a Service Center for the southern part of Bhutan, as well as for the western region. It can contribute value added, employment and capital formation to the western region. It can contribute value added, employment and capital formation to the entire nation.

All these images are achievable and all the potential images are to be worked for. All of these must be considered at the time of conceptualizing the future plan for the town. Around each of these images there arise certain principles, guidelines and themes. These are the essence of the planning process. Through consultations with the people of Samtse and their officials we will arrive at both physical representations of these principles as well as written rules and guidelines. Public consultations will also help us in refining the potentials and the future image of the town of Samtse. After a review by the Town Committee Members these will be put up to the Royal Government. Throughout this consultative process it must be understood that there are aspects of future development potentials specific to the region, which the government must protect and capitalize on, We, as advisors and subjects, are participants in that process.



To a greater extent we are just articulating existing options, dormant dreams, and current thinking among stake-holders.

As professional advisors we have to use our skills and sensitivities to design, structure and plan the image and the related themes of the town towards deciding its fate in the future. If we hold these themes to be critical, we must make them central through urban planning and design!

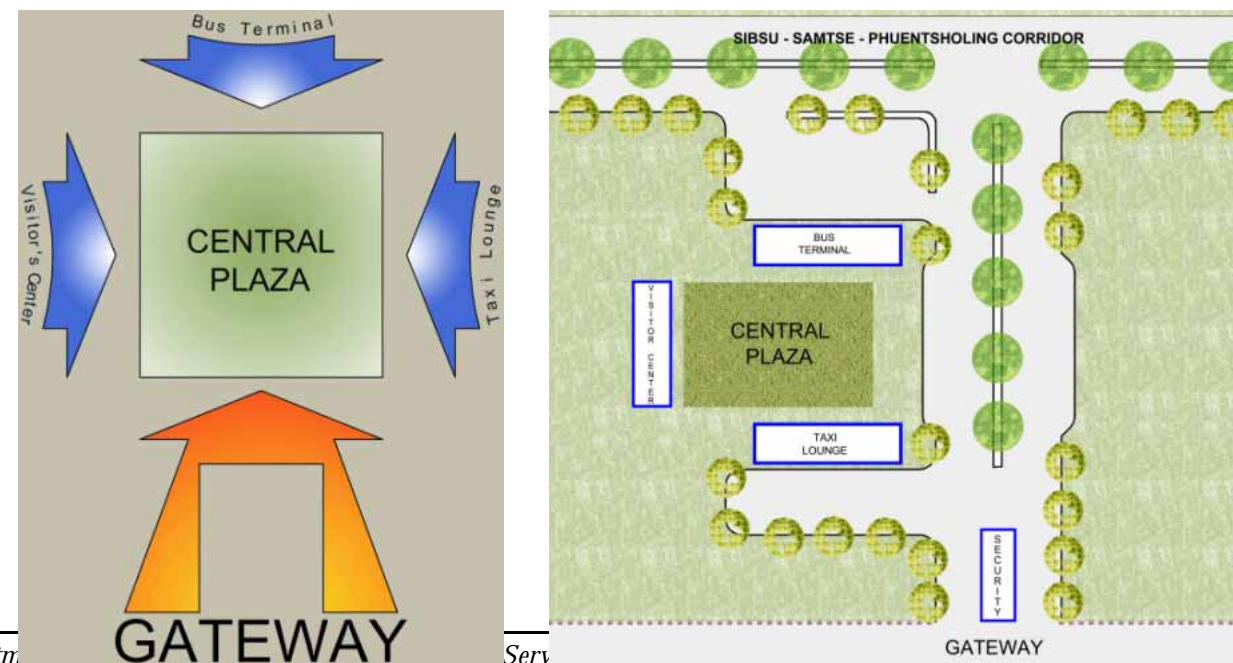
2.2 GATEWAY TO THE KINGDOM

The magnificent international airport at Paro acts as a gateway to the nation for foreign visitors. In Phuentsholing one enters the kingdom through a large royal gate. In a similar manner there must be an impressive entrance into the city of Samtse through a portal from India. In fact there must be two entrance points, each with its own gate:

- (1) One for passenger vehicles such as buses and automobiles; and
- (2) Another for cargo vehicles.

Passenger Entry and Transport Terminus

The passenger entry would not be a mere gate in the sense of a physical portal, but as a modern transport terminal, designed much like an international airport terminal, with arrival and departure lounges. However, it will be a multi-modal terminal! It will have a Tourist Visitor's Centre and Rest Area for passenger cars; it will have a bus stand with comfortable buses headed west towards Sipsu, east towards Phuentsholing on the proposed new Sipsu-Daipham National Highway and north towards Dorakha and the hinterland. A regional airport serving the entire region could be located between Phuentsholing and Samtse more closer to Phuentsholing. Outsiders arriving by any of these modes can easily change modes and local departing passengers from the region will embark at the same multi-mode terminus.



Conceptual Diagram showing 'Tourist Entry Point' to the Royal Kingdom of Bhutan

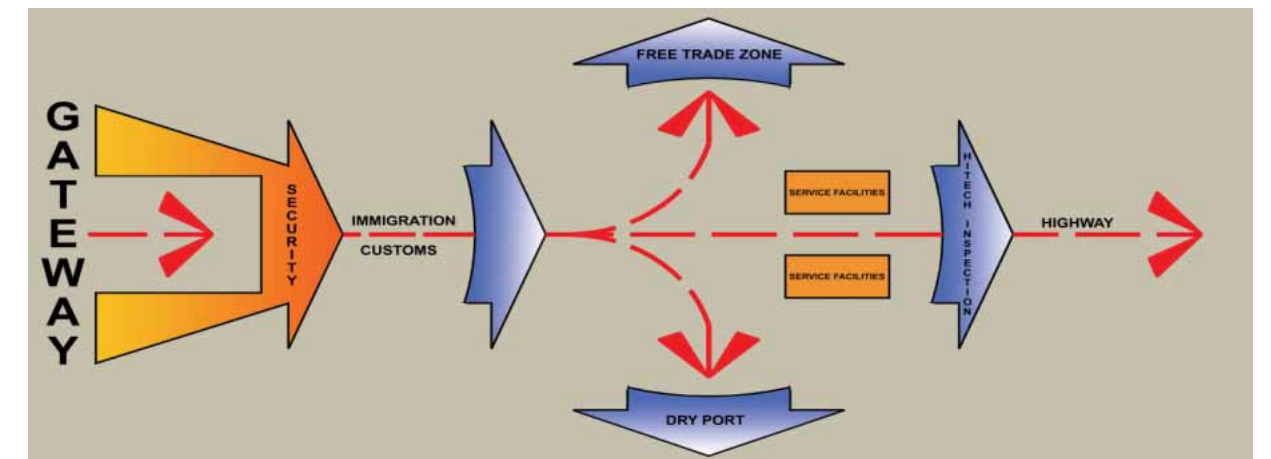
These will avoid confusion, frustration and unnecessary movement on the part of residents and visitors alike. Three structures (Bus Terminus; Taxi Lounge and Visitors' Centre) will define an Atrium Garden which will be a pedestrian hall through which passengers can push their luggage trolleys from one area to the other. The Visitors' Centre and the Taxi Lounge will serve the passenger cars as well accommodating a commercial cum hospitality hub, with a tourist information centre, ATM, cafes, phone kiosks, convenience and souvenir shops, clean toilets and showers, luggage storage, petrol pump with minor repairs shop, transit hotel and rest areas.

This entrance will be located close to the present border crossing. It will also house Immigration and Customs offices.

Cargo Entrance

The present border crossing point will be modernized into the goods and services portal to western Bhutan. It will have customs inspection facilities, immigration facilities, and high technology inspection equipment. Upon entrance there will be a modest Free Trade Zone where bonded warehouses, small assembly units and manufacturing units will be placed.

There will be a visible security post, drivers rest and lodging facilities, cafes, phone kiosks, clean toilets and showers, barber shop, TV lounges and convenience shopping. This part of the entrance will also act as a Dry Port Entry for Western Bhutan. There will be a diesel and petrol pump here.



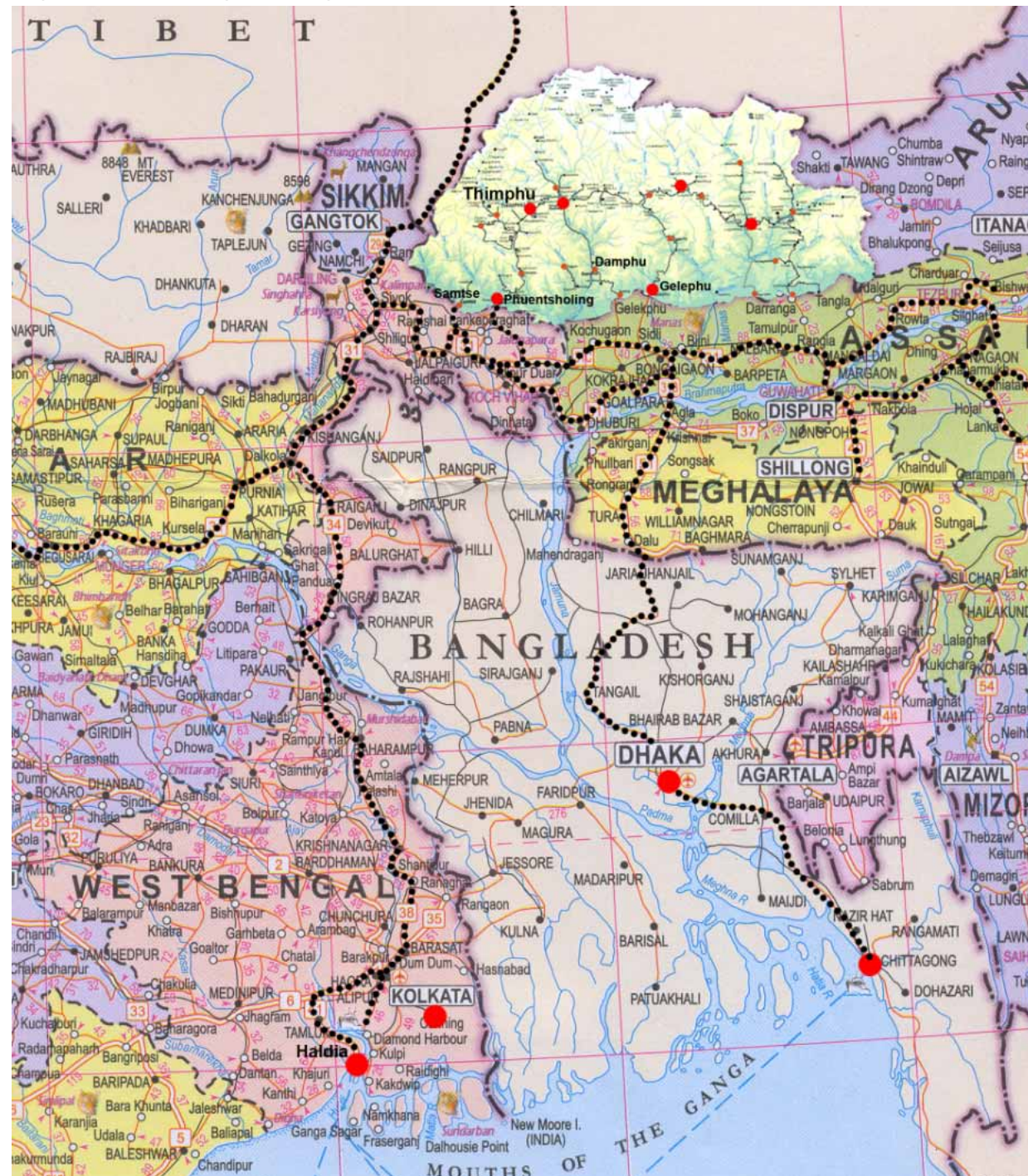
Conjectural Diagram showing 'Cargo Entry Point' to Royal Kingdom of Bhutan

There will be a fast lane for on-ward traffic. The exit from this Free Trade Zone into Bhutan will house Immigration and Customs, a Weighing Station and Vehicle Safety Check Post. Just beyond these formality activities there will be a major Transport Area with spare parts shops, tire repair and sales, welders and mechanics. There will be a major facility for container



shipments where containers can be shifted from international flat bedded trucks onto Bhutan carriers for further trans-shipment into the country.

This Entry Zone will be more than just a "pass through" place. It will be a well organized, neat and clean transport centre and will serve as a major attraction for industries to invest in the area, as their exports can move directly from the Dry Port to the shipping ports of Chittagong, Kolkata and Haldia Ports for maritime trans-shipment within twenty-four hours of departure from Samtse. Samtse is also very close to the new India-China highway offering it a new trade option. Thus, the Gateway to West and North-Western Bhutan not only facilitates the inward movement of tourists, citizens, businessmen and traders, but more important it creates a major Export Channel for products produced in this economic zone.



Department Regional Map showing Economic Corridor by the Indian States of Sikkim, West Bengal, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, Tibet and Ports of Dhaka, Kolkata and Haldia with road linkages

2.3 CREATING AN ECONOMIC BASE : PROPOSED PHUENTSHOLING-SAMTSE-SIPSU DEVELOPMENT CORRIDOR

All economic activities can be divided into BASE ACTIVITIES and SERVICE ACTIVITIES. BASE ACTIVITIES export their goods and services outside of the economic region, resulting in an inflow of money in the form of payments for those export commodities. SERVICE ACTIVITIES like bakeries, barber shops and laundries, circulate goods and services and the payments for these, within the economy. Every industry, or economic activity, imports some percentage of its "productive inputs," but even if all the components of a complicated assembly are imported, both the labor component (salaries) and the "value added" stay in the country. The imported parts are then assembled and exported, paying for the cheaper imports. Thus, the nation has imports for consumption and imports for production, a good deal of which can be re-exported. When the value of the exports exceeds the value of the imports, the country has a positive balance of trade, and the surplus represents accruing wealth! Urban economics is based on exactly the same theory, in which the economic region is taken as the closed economy, and the city's imports and exports are analyzed to determine if the city is in decline, or a center of wealth creation.

A country that does not aggressively plan, invest in and expand its ECONOMIC BASE activities is living in a dream world, which can only turn into a nightmare! A country which creates a strong economic base is a viable, growing nation!

When there is a surplus of exports in all forms, there is a surplus of inflow of money. This money pays for salaries, becomes profits, generates investment capital in financial institutions of the country, and is taxed to generate still more social and economic infrastructure. There is a point where enough internal surplus capital is generated when the economy can generate its own growth. This is called "Economic Take-Off!"

Even salaries have a tremendous "spin-off" effect within the SERVICE SECTOR of the economy! Consumers buy automobiles, apartments, televisions, consumer goods, food and entertainment. They invest in the education of their children and they save through retirement and insurance funds! Studies show that for every one hundred dollars of new salary brought into the economy, \$164 dollars is spun around in the SERVICE SECTOR as the new income buys cakes, the bakery owner uses the same money to engage a tailor, and the tailor uses the same money to get a hair cut! The same pay check "spins around" in the local economy.

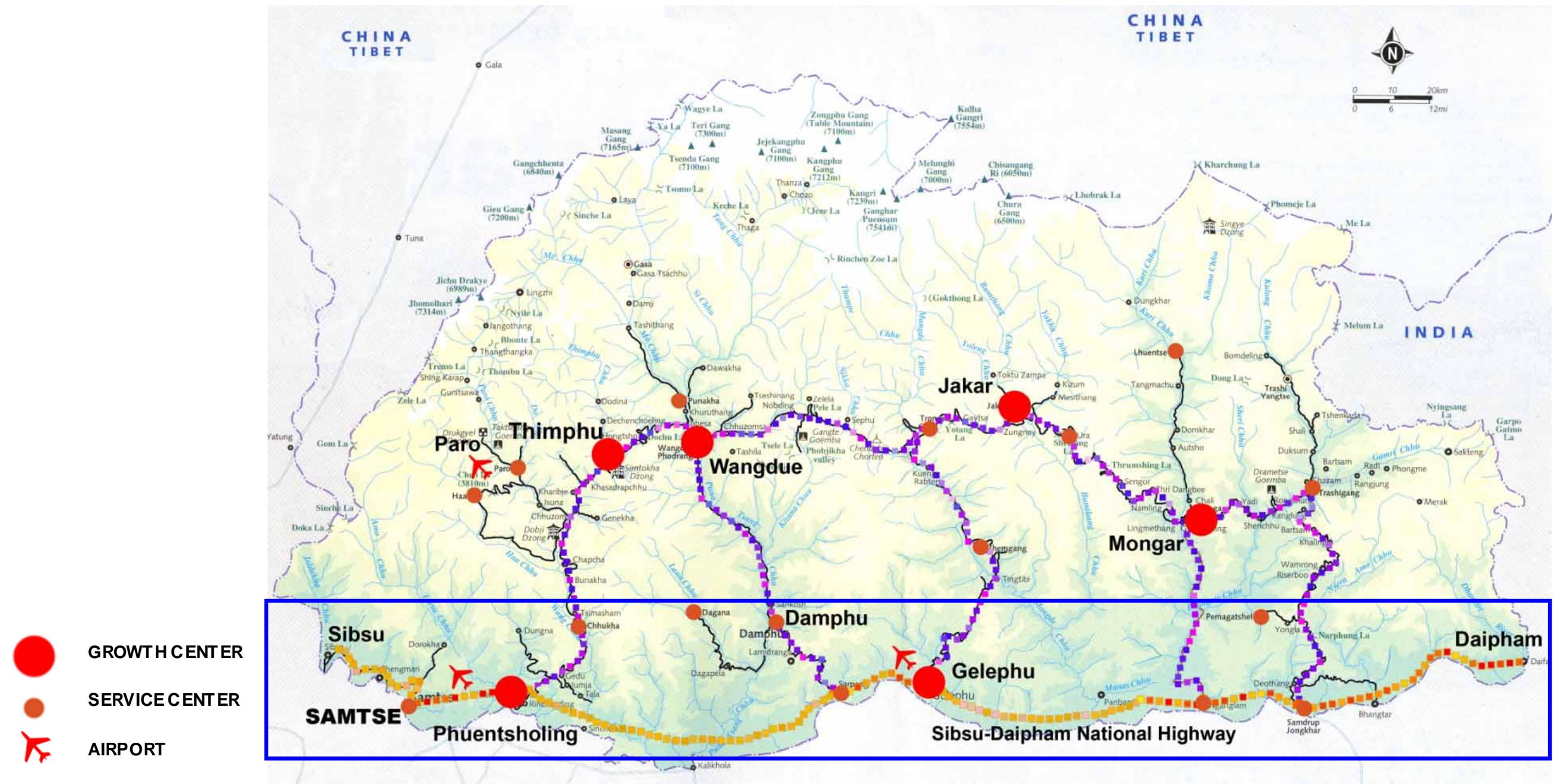
Thus, creating a strong ECONOMIC BASE generates employment, spins money in the local economy, creates investable capital, eradicates trade deficits, and creates a range of wealth. Urban and regional planning creates the scenario and the structure for this. Good town plans attract investment, the managers and technicians who are the captains of modern industry.



Historically Samtse has been isolated from most of Bhutan, necessitating passage through India. The south-west of Bhutan has existed as an economic and administrative island, except for those sturdy enough to trek down from Haa! The plan to connect Samtse with Phuentsholing will pull this island to shore and make it an integral part of the country. A cluster of isolated opportunities will now “gel” in to a string of potentials along a corridor. That corridor will have vibrant sections where industries can be built and new settlements can emerge and it will have static sections where the new Sipsu-Daiphram National Highway will run through steep mountains. The new road will also connect north of Phuentsholing making the capital city of Thimphu and the airport of Paro still more accessible. At some point a commuter airport serving both Phuentsholing and Samtse would emerge along this corridor.

The Samtse Service Center

Samtse is envisioned as a unique Service Center. It is unique because it has superior industrial and trade potentials when compared to most Service Centers in the urban hierarchy of settlements. In this manner it will share characteristics with Phuentsholing and Gelephu, having a Gateway, Dry port, Container Center and several Industrial Estates. It also has a national level institution, the National Institute of Education. The hospital will be strengthened to support smaller health facilities in the south-western region of Bhutan. There will be a college imparting arts, science and commerce education leading to bachelors degrees. There will be financial institutions to support agriculture and medium scale industry.



Potential Growth Centers, Service Centers and Airport Locations in Bhutan and Proposed Sipsu-Daiphram National Highway



As a Service Center, Samtse will refer complicated medical cases to Phuentsholing and the financial institutions in the Growth Center at Phuentsholing will support major investments in the Samtse area. But Samtse shall also facilitate smaller settlements in the south-west region, extending services to them and acting as a step on up to higher level services and facilities in Phuentsholing and Thimphu.

As the nodal Service Center in the south-western Bhutan, the town will require locations for a variety of health, educational, communications, information, financial and recreational facilities. These facilities will be integrated into the town fabric in the form of a large Institutional Park where there will be a convergence of services, allowing a visitor to Samtse to easily carry out several tasks in a one day visit to the town. The town will have a modern library cum knowledge center, a sports stadium and playing fields, a swimming pool, archery ranges, cricket ground, banks, insurance companies and lots, repair and services.

The Samtse Administrative Center

Samtse is already the headquarters of the district administration to which much of the development activity in the sub-region has been decentralized. As the decentralization process continues in the country more departments of ministries will post their representatives and technical staff in Samtse to support the Dzongkhag administration. These are necessary for carrying out functions in engineering, health, education, communications, agriculture, human resource development, trade and industry, power distribution, water supply and a myriad of services which will be required as the population grows and the human settlements mature with diverse functions, activities and processes.

Economic Infrastructure and Industrial Development

Some of the oldest industries in Bhutan are located in Samtse and in nearby hamlets. With the co-operation of the Ministry of Trade and Industry several new industrial estates will be located along the Samtse to Sipsu road, and the existing industries will be tied via spur roads to the new Sipsu-Daipham National Highway. These activities will be given a fillip by rationally laid out sites in Industrial Estates, which also have access roads, adequate electric power, industrial water supply, nearby labor settlements and excellent security. All financial institutions in Bhutan will have small branches in Samtse.

Special Policies for Catalyzing Growth

The underpinning public policy required to create a huge profit centre for Bhutan will be articulated in three areas. These areas are

- (1) Infrastructure investment;
- (2) Incentives; and,

(3) Facilitative Regulation.

These policy initiatives will act as a convergence of "development fillips," which serve multi-dimensional goals:

- Increasing exports to create a positive balance of trade,
- Creating attractive, well paying jobs for Bhutanese youth,
- Capitalizing on the "value added potential" of inexpensive energy, instead of exporting that potential to neighbors who use the energy as an investment input, and re-import the products of those investments into Bhutan. This strategy brings "value added" and profits from energy to the country itself!
- Increasing the yields of long term corporate income tax yields,
- Enhancing national financial institutions and building up surplus capital for reinvestment in new economic activities; and,
- Turning around the stagnant scenario in the Samtse region, making it a vibrant, national node of happiness and hope!

Dry Port and Free Trade Zone

As the portal to western Bhutan, and the "staging center" for all major infrastructure development in western Bhutan, it is essential that sea born and road born shipping containers can be imported and exported from Bhutan directly, without the added costs of customs and clearances through neighboring ports. In this regard, it is of utmost importance that a Dry Port be established in Samtse, and a Free Trade Zone as well. In this manner manufacturing units can import components into the region, assemble them and re-export the completed products with the "value added profits," capital assets, jobs and corporate taxes staying within Bhutan.

New Sipsu-Daipham National Highway

At present the south of Bhutan holds huge potentials for employment, exports, import substitution, capital formation, revenue generation and maturing all sectors of the economy. The major bottleneck today is access via good road transport. With the up-gradation of the existing roads, and filling in gaps along the southern border of the country, Bhutan could within a matter of a decade have its own, secure southern east-west road system! The present plans for sectors of the Sipsu-Daipham National Highway, as in the case of Samtse to Phuentsholing, are great steps in filling this strategic lacuna. The portion from Samtse to Phuentsholing has been aligned and the budget for initiation has been allotted. Alignment along the Phuentsholing to Gelephu link has also been carried out, which will connect the eastern part of southern Bhutan to major centers. This is essential for trade to develop in the southern belt and for the easy movement of security forces. It will open up the entire southern zone for development in stages, through strategies which are evolving in Samtse and Phuentsholing

