

Work begins on Kanal Istanbul

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The long-promised Turkish Canal project, Kanal Istanbul, was officially launched by the country's President Tayyip Erdogan on June 26th. The 45km canal, with an initial estimated total cost of \$15bn, is being constructed to ease pressures of traffic on the Bosphorus Strait. However, critics have called it a “vanity project” that aims to regain some political ground for the President in Istanbul, but will damage the environment.

Erdogan has said that the canal would take six years to complete.

The Turkish government has noted that some 43,000 ships a year pass through the Strait, linking the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara, compared with the 25,000 limit the government considers safe. Turkey estimates that by 2050, the annual number of ships passing from the Sea of Marmara to the Black Sea and in the other direction will rise to 78,000.

However, one survey suggested that most Istanbul citizens opposed the project, as does Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu and the opposition CHP party, in which he is a senior figure. There are claims that the canal will destroy a marine ecosystem and threaten some of the city's fresh water supply.

The financing of the canal; is also a matter of speculation. With ESG a hot topic in the commercial world, some of Turkey's biggest banks were reported to be reluctant to finance a project causing such environmental controversy.

Russia has expressed concern that the canal might not be covered by the 1936 Montreux Convention, which restricts the passage of non-Black Sea states' warships through the Bosphorus.