EXPANSION OF RAIL NETWORK IN JAMMU & KASHMIR AND NORTH EAST

February 2021

Ministry of Railways
Government of India
Introduction

Indian Railways has prepared a National Rail Plan (NRP) for India – 2030. The Plan is to create a ‘Future Ready’ Railway system by 2030. The NRP is aimed to formulate strategies based on both operational capacities and commercial policy initiatives to increase modal share of the Railways in freight to 45%. The objective of the plan is to create capacity ahead of demand by 2030, which in turn would also cater to future growth in demand right up to 2050 and also increase the modal share of Railways to 45% in freight traffic and to continue to sustain it. As part of the National Rail Plan, Vision 2024 has been launched for accelerated implementation of certain critical projects by 2024 such as 100% electrification, multi-tracking of congested routes, upgradation of speed to 160 kmph on certain routes, upgradation of speed to 130kmph on all other Golden Quadrilateral- Golden Diagonal (GQ/GD) routes and elimination of all Level Crossings on all GQ/GD routes. New Dedicated Freight Corridors have been identified and Detailed Project Report for which are underway. In order to fulfil the vision and plan of railways, Indian Railways has given special emphasis for expansion of Rail Networks in Jammu and Kashmir and North eastern region of the country.

Expansion of Rail Network in Jammu & Kashmir

Jammu & Kashmir is the northernmost part of our country and the erstwhile state occupies a strategic space on the country’s map with its borders touching to Pakistan, Tibet and China. The entire area of Jammu and Kashmir is mountainous except Jammu and Kathua districts. It is having geographical spread of 2,22,236 Sq. Kms and 19.95% of the total geographical area is under forest. This valley has an average height of 1,850 metres (6,070 ft) above sea-level, but the surrounding Pir Panjal range has an average elevation of 10,000 feet (3,000 m). Total population as per 2011census is 1.25 crore which is 1.04% of the total population of the country. Railway network in J&K is the highest altitude network in India.

Justification for rail infrastructure

Owing to the strategic location of J&K, connectivity to this region is very important for national security, prosperity and socio-economic developments. Despite having abundance of resources the UT could not make desirable development due to various factors and one of them is its connectivity to the rest of the country. Efforts are on for establishing rail connectivity to the region for which a number of railway projects has been initiated which are under execution in different stages. The execution of rail projects in J&K is a very challenging task because of its topography and it other geographical factors.
Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link Project (USBRL Project : 272 km)

The Jammu-Baramulla Railway link connects the Kashmir Valley with Jammu Railway Station and the rest of the country. The project has been declared as National Project. Institutions like IIT Delhi, IIT Roorkee, Geographical Survey of India and DRDO are providing expertise in the project planning and implementation. This route will also see the construction of world’s highest railway bridge and India’s first cable stayed Railway Bridge.

After completion this line will be all weather convenient and cost effective mass transportation system and will act as a catalyst for the overall development of the northernmost alpine region of the country. This project has great significance for security and socio economic development. It can play important role in rapid industrialization, movement of raw materials and finished products from J&K and encourage trade and tourism in the region apart from providing opportunity for employment. Similarly it will be a boon for development of agriculture, horticulture and floriculture of this area.

Construction of the first 3 phases of the railway project has been completed and the line is operational between Banihal - Baramulla in Kashmir Valley and Jammu-Udhampur-Katra in Jammu region. Work on the intervening 111 kms. of Katra-Banihal section is going on and this section is the most challenging portion for construction due to its geology and extensive riverine system with deep gorges. The work has been going on in the mission mode. Presently, 95% arc work of Chenab Bridge has been completed while work on the Anji Khad Bridge is in full swing which is Indian Railways’ first asymmetric cable stayed bridge. This bridge stands on the height of 331 meters above the river bed and its total length is 473.25 meters. The bridge is designed to handle heavy storms due to its high altitude. The work is going on full swing and out of the 111 kms. section, 97 kms. rail line is to be laid in tunnels.

The Hon’ble Prime Minister sets 15th August, 2022 as deadline for Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link Project.
Status and details of Udhampur-Shrinagar-Baramula Rail Link (USBRL) Project

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Salient features of the project:

❖ Most challenging Railway project undertaken by Indian Railways post independence

❖ Alignment involves large number of tunnels, bridges in highly rugged, difficult mountainous terrain with Complex Himalayan Geology

❖ To reach the construction site, more than 200 Km long approach road constructed including 1 tunnel and 320 small bridges

❖ These roads provide connectivity to far flung and inaccessible areas leading to socio economic development of the region

❖ Chenab Bridge – 1315m Mega Iconic highest bridge in the world

❖ Anji Bridge – 290m (1st Cable stayed rail bridge in India)
Challenges of the Project:

1. Inaccessible sites
2. Very difficult Geology of young Himalayan Mountains
3. Repeated PIL in High Court affected the project adversely from 2008-16
4. Law & Order issues
5. Extreme Weather Conditions (Rainfall & Snowfall prone area)
6. Impact of COVID-19

After completion of this project, it would be a splendid project of engineering of 21st Century and this project will write a new story of development, progress, prosperity and security of the nation.
Expansion of rail network in North Eastern Region

North Eastern region refers to eight, North Eastern States of India, which are strategically located and surrounded by China, Bhutan and Nepal in the North, Myanmar in the East and Bangladesh in the Southwest. North eastern region covers an area of 2.62 lakh sq. kms. As per 2011 census, the total population of north eastern region is 4.54 crore, 68.37% of this population lives in Assam. North eastern region is well endowed with natural resources like oil, gas, minerals, forests and immense hydro-electric potential.

India’s north east rail connectivity projects aim to connect north east India to East Asia and ASEAN. Guwahati is called Gateway to North East. Since this region has the strategic importance for the country as these states share the International borders with China, Myanmar, Bhutan and Nepal, role of connectivity has the utmost importance for national and internal security besides the development of the region. Railway is the lifeline of north east transporting essential goods to this region. The major commodities transported are coal, petroleum, fertilizer etc..

Railway network also serves as a rail head for land locked Himalayan countries of Nepal and Bhutan and provides interchange facilities with Bangladesh. Currently large number of projects comprising new line, gauge conversion, doubling and railway electrification are under execution. Important projects have been declared national projects which are mainly funded by the central government.

Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region was established by Government of India as a nodal department dealing with the matters of socio-economic development of north eastern states. It acts as a facilitator between the Central Ministries, departments and State Govts for rapid economic development, removal of infrastructural bottlenecks, provision of basic minimum services, encouraging private investments and removing impediments in lasting peace and security of north eastern region.

Justification for development of Rail Network in the North Eastern Region:

The road and rail connectivity of the main line to the North Eastern region is through Siliguri corridor. Providing rail connectivity to this region has been the topmost priority of the Government of India. Existing Rail network to the entire north-eastern region has been planned to be converted to the Broad Gauge. Rail link from Balipara-Bhalukpong in Arunachal Pradesh, Rangia to Murkongselek and Lumding to Silchar in Assam, Agartala to Kumarghat in Tripura, Arunachal to Jiribam and Kathakal to Bairabi in Mizoram have been converted into broad gauge.

All the North Eastern states except the State of Sikkim have been connected to rail network. Emphasis has been given on developing rail infrastructure in North Eastern region to meet the aspiration of the people which will play significant role in better integration of this region with the main stream and will address our national security concerns. Major objectives of Rail-Vision for the region are as follows:

1. Connectivity to all state capitals
2. Uni Gauge (broad gauge) network
3. Strengthening of International borders
4. Expansion of rail network to unconnected areas
5. Augmentation of rail network to enhance the capacity to meet the future growth of traffic
6. Improve rail connectivity with the neighbouring countries

Bogibeel Rail-cum-Road Bridge in Assam

The Honourable PM stated “North-East can be the New Engine of India’s growth.” Five major rail projects have been identified for providing rail connectivity to North Eastern region. Capitals of Tripura, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have already been connected with rail networks.

1. Dimapur-Kohima Railway Project: In the state of Nagaland, capital Kohima to get rail connectivity through 82 km long Dimapur-Kohima project. This rail project is expected to be completed by March 2023.
2. **Teteliya-Byrnihat Railway Project:** The capital of Meghalaya, Shillong will be connected to the Indian Railways network through 22km long new project Teteliya-Byrnihat. TDC of this project is not fixed yet.

3. **Sivok-Rangpo Railway Project:** The capital of Sikkim, Gangtok will get Indian Railways connectivity through the 44 km Sivok-Rangpo railway project. This rail project is expected to be completed by March 2023.

4. **Jiribam-Imphal Railway Project:**

   In the state of Manipur, the capital Imphal to get Railways connectivity through the 111 km long Jiribam-Imphal project. This railway project is likely to be completed by March 2023. The section from Jiribam to Vangaichungpao (12 km) was commissioned in March 2017 and work from Vangaichungpao to Tupul-Imphal (99 km) is under execution.
5. **Bairabi-Sairang Railway Project:**

In the state of Mizoram, the capital Aizawl to get railway connectivity through the 51 km long Bairabi-Sairang Project. This railway project is likely to be completed by March 2023.

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**PM Modi fixes fresh deadlines for 6 infra projects in metros and Jammu & Kashmir (ET)**

PM sets Aug 15, 2022 deadline for Kashmir rail link project

**Rs 27,000 crore of capital investment made by Indian Railways in North East Projects during last 6 years**

*August 5, 2020 Rail News*