

Standing Committee Report Summary

Construction of Road over Bridges, Road under Bridges, Service Roads, and review of road survey guidelines

- The Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture (Chair: Mr. V. Vijayasai Reddy) submitted its report on ‘Construction of Road over Bridges, Road under Bridges, Service Roads and Review of Road Survey Guidelines,’ on August 10, 2023. Road Over Bridge (ROB) and Road Under Bridge (RUB) are structures that separate road and rail traffic. ROB elevates the road over railway tracks, while RUB allows the road to pass beneath the tracks. Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:
 - **Construction of ROBs and RUBs:** Level crossings (LC) are intersections between railway tracks and roads, posing risks of collisions between vehicles and trains. Since its launch in 2016, the Setu Bharatam program, aimed at building ROBs/RUBs, has achieved only 25% completion. The Committee also noted that the replacement of 1,100 LCs in 2023-24, is lower than the yearly average of the past decade. It recommended that the replacement target and pace of LCs with ROBs/RUBs must be increased. It also recommended the Ministry to allocate more funds and assess the feasibility of a public-private partnership model for ROBs/RUBs.
 - **Delay in construction:** The Ministry of Railways cited construction delays for ROBs/RUBs due to: (i) environmental clearances, (ii) land acquisition, and (iii) delay in submission of proposal drawings. The Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change has streamlined the process for forest clearances by allowing online submissions of drawings and holding fortnightly regional coordination meetings. The Committee recommended that the Ministry of Railways and the Ministry of Road Transport and Highway should regularly coordinate with the Environment Ministry to expedite the process.
 - **Contract management:** The Committee noted contract management issues such as delays in the finalisation of negotiated rates and granting extensions despite poor progress. It recommended the Ministry investigate the issue on priority and incorporate performance incentives and penalties into contract terms. It also recommended assigning competent contract managers to effectively manage contracts.
- **Inter-ministerial coordination mechanism:** According to the Ministry of Railways, project delays are also caused due to the lack of inter-ministerial coordination. The Committee recommended creating a Central Coordinating Body and information-sharing mechanisms to enhance coordination amongst key ministries such as Road Transport and Highways, Finance, Environment, Forests, Climate Change, and Railways.
- **Design-related issues:** Delays in land acquisition led to fragmented service roads, elevating accident risks as vehicles are compelled to enter the highway for uninterrupted travel. The Committee noted that merging and diverging points are vital transitions where vehicles join or exit the main traffic flow. It recommended designing roads with local traffic in mind, including merging lanes, acceleration, deceleration zones, and clear signage.
- **Use of technology for inspection and implementation:** As per the standard operating procedure regular inspection by site engineers is carried out for problem identification using tools like the Bridge Health Monitoring system and material quality tests. The Committee recommended adopting modern technologies for inspection and implementation. These include: (i) drones with high-resolution cameras and sensors, (ii) laser scanning instruments to generate 3D models, and (iii) Structural Health Monitoring systems to monitor structural performance.
- **Community engagement in road construction projects:** The “Manual for Survey, Investigation and Preparation of Road Projects” provides detailed instructions for conducting surveys, investigations, and preparing road projects in India. The Committee noted that guidelines lacked emphasis on community engagement elements, which is vital as roads cater to their needs. It recommended incorporating these elements into the guidelines.
- **Capacity-building:** The Committee noted the issue of staff shortage. It recommended capacity-building steps like organisational restructuring and reframing policies.

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