

“We Will Compete with Airlines, Not with Railways”

Vinay Kumar Singh, MD of the National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC), speaks to **Shantanu Nandan Sharma** about the Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) corridors under it and the future of rails outside Railways. Edited excerpts

What is the progress of the three priority RRTS corridors that you have taken up?

We are building the first corridor between Delhi and Meerut. It's an 82 km project of which 13 km, all in Delhi, will be underground. The project cost is ₹30,274 crore. Our deadline for completion of the project is June 2025. Under the same project, we have also built a 21 km metro rail around the city of Meerut.

Delhi-Alwar will be our second corridor. The NCR Planning Board wanted to develop Alwar as a counter magnet to Delhi. But the government of Rajasthan feels it will be better to take the corridor towards Jaipur along the highway rather than go straight towards Alwar. So we are building the line up to 140 km towards Jaipur (to a place named Sotanala) apart from connecting it to Alwar. At present there is no plan to build the entire 250-km-long line from Delhi to Jaipur. But the government of Rajasthan has written a letter to our ministry, urging that the line should be extended to Jaipur. So we are planning the system in such a way that if the line has to be extended to Jaipur it can be executed easily. The 103-km-long Delhi-Panipat will be our third corridor.

What is so unique about RRTS from the commuters' point of view?

Our USP is speed. We will run up to 160 kmph and, on an average, we will get about 90-100 kmph. The Delhi-Meerut journey will take an hour. The system is designed for a frequency of three minutes. But we will start the operation with a 10-minute frequency during peak hours. We will operate between 6 am and 11 pm. As far as ticket price is concerned, we are in the process of finalising it. We will announce the price a month before our operation starts. There will be automatic fare collection system that will also work on QR codes. Our objective is to decongest

Delhi. The moment we provide fast and seamless connectivity to a metropolitan city, people will prefer to reside outside it – up to 100 km or so.

Are other cities also planning to introduce inter-city regional rail?

Various state governments have been in touch with us to replicate our model. The Haryana government is planning such a system between Faridabad and Gurugram. One more RRTS is being planned between Lucknow and Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh. Another such route may come up between Hyderabad and Vijayawada. The Telangana government has been in touch with us regarding this.

Will your venture be profitable?

Operationally, we will make good profits. In economic terms, the country will accrue very big profits. But as we have to pay back the debt with interests, in financial terms, we will be a loss-making project. In the Delhi-Meerut project, 20% of total investments is coming from the central government, 20% is shared by Delhi and UP, and the rest 60% is funded by three multilateral agencies – the Asian Development Bank (about \$1 bn), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (about \$0.5 bn) and the New Development Bank (about \$0.5 bn).

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Won't you end up competing with the Railways?

Once we provide Delhi-Jaipur connectivity, we will be competing with airlines, not with Indian Railways. With 5-6 stations, the travel time between Delhi and Jaipur will be just two hours. The railway ministry is feeling bad not because someone else is operating short-distance trains but because newer technologies are happening outside the railway ministry. Our signalling system (ETCS level 2), for example, is better than what is being deployed in Europe.

