

“RRTS HAS SET GLOBAL BENCHMARKS FOR RAILWAYS INFRASTRUCTURE”

The 17-km Sahibabad-Duhai priority section of the Delhi-Meerut RapidX, the regional rapid rail transportation project for NCR, is up and running. **VINAY KUMAR SINGH**, MD, NCRTC, which owns RapidX, talks to BW Businessworld’s **ARJUN YADAV** about the urban transportation overhaul in India, the country’s leadership in railways infrastructure globally, and much more. Excerpts from the chat

The priority section of the Delhi-Meerut RRTS has become operational. What does the road ahead look like?

It has been a very eventful year with the focus on the priority section. With the Prime Minister inaugurating the priority section, the efforts of the NCRTC team over the last five years have fructified. The enthusiasm is very high, and now the endeavour is to ensure world-class commuter services. Work on Stage 2 of the project is in full swing, and the complete Delhi-Meerut stretch will be operational by June 2025.

What has been the response of the public in the three weeks since the inauguration of the Sahibabad-Duhai priority section?

We are getting a decent response; however, high ridership was not the objective behind operationalising this priority corridor. It was rather a strategic decision to help the systems and interfaces among various operations and maintenance partners acclimatise to the needs of the commuters. Phase-wise operationalisation is important because of the many firsts in technology, operations, and maintenance.

Deutsche Bahn India has been awarded the contract for operation and maintenance of the 82-km-long Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut RRTS corridor for 12 years. Moreover, since the rolling stock of this project is unique, we have signed a 15-year contract for maintenance of the rolling stock by the OEM along with a supply contract with Alstom.

What went behind the naming of the train? From RapidX to Namu Bharat, what was the philosophy?

‘RapidX’ was an influence of what the local press or people in Ghaziabad

or Meerut used to call it, simply as ‘Rapid Rail.’ The government later decided to call it ‘Namu Bharat’ as it identified it as an important component in modernising Indian Railways. This was reflected in the Prime Minister’s speech during the inauguration when he said ‘Namu Bharat,’ ‘Vande Bharat,’ and ‘Amrit Bharat’ are set to revolutionise the railways sector in the seven years till 2030. The train is now part of a bigger vision and a national phenomenon.

Based on the current fare structure, what will be the estimated cost to the commuter for the complete journey from Delhi to Meerut?

It should be about Rs 300. However, it is the upper limit, the usual fare will always be lesser. We have schemes and discounts planned for frequent commuters ranging from free journeys to travel points. However, if the ridership is massive on the system and if people are willing to pay, then such discounts would not be given.

What are some of the non-farebox revenue streams that NCRTC is looking at?

We are also aware that on a standalone basis, just by farebox revenues we cannot survive. So, having non-



Photographs by Naval Kishor

farebox revenue streams is essential. These include property development, both within the stations and outside them. We can go for developing residential and commercial complexes and hotels because this whole system focuses on transit-oriented development.

Being a transit hub, there will be a lot of requirements of other ancillary facilities like food and beverages through which we will generate revenue, and passengers will get quality

service from national and multinational food chains. Advertisements also will be an important source of revenue generation within and outside stations. We are also working with state governments on value-capture financing. We have already worked with the UP government, and much land use has been changed to mix land use in the master plan. Whatever will be the earnings of the state government through these instruments, a part of that will be

shared with us.

What are some of the things in the train's day-to-day operations that would ensure environmental sustainability?

Being a rail-based transit system, due to reduced friction owing to steel-to-steel rolling contact, it will have 1/5th of fossil fuel consumption compared with road vehicles. Moreover, Namo Bharat rolling stock is provided with a state-of-the-art regenerative braking system which converts the train's kinetic energy into electrical energy.

NCRTC aims to cover 70 per cent of the total energy requirement of the entire Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut RRTS corridor through solar energy. All elevated stations and depots will be provided with solar panels.

“German operator Deutsch Bahn is talking about learning from RRTS and implementing it back in Germany. We have taken railway technology to a level where Europeans will follow us”

Once operational, it will take more than one lakh private vehicles off Delhi-NCR roads, with an estimate to reduce ~2,50,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide in vehicular emissions annually.

How do you see NCRTC becoming a consultant to various states in India who may look to adopt such regional transit system?

We now have a very special positioning in the industry as implementers of the first RRTS and have brought in a large number of technologies, many of which are industry-first. Today, we are in a position where we can support other states or organisations, and we are already doing certain things on that front. But because we are consultants to these states or organisations, we cannot talk much about it as they are the owners of the respective projects. That is the disci-



pline we follow.

Timely project implementation is a big concern for any government, organisation, or project owner. We have demonstrated expertise in this aspect and are supporting various projects to expedite their implementation.

Consultancy is a big priority for us. Not only our states but soon NCRTC will be working on international projects as well. Asian Development

Bank and the World Bank are in talks with us. We have made several presentations at their headquarters for various projects. International delegations from Japan and Brazil are also coming to see our work.

Your thoughts on India's urban transportation overhaul and what more needs to be done?

Of late, India has made huge strides

in urban transportation infrastructure, be it roads, railways or civil aviation. However, considering the geography and population density, much more needs to be done. The rate at which urbanisation is increasing, we have a serious task of providing urban transportation infrastructure. If it is not done in time, we will be in a severe crisis of managing our urban centres.

However, when discussing urbanisation, railways can solve most of the problems. While India's highway network has expanded multi-fold in recent years and results in a large volume of high-speed traffic, ultimately that traffic has to reach the cities, which at present cannot accommodate such traffic. Railways are electrified and have an independent and fixed path, which doesn't lead to congestion.

Any transit or railway system from around the world which has personally inspired you?

The European and Japanese railway systems have inspired me, but today, with RRTS, we have set global benchmarks in railways infrastructure. India no longer needs to look outside for leadership in railways infrastructure. We have brought and implemented technologies in signal and telecommunications, which countries like England and the Netherlands are still researching.

Our German operator, Deutsch Bahn, is talking about learning from RRTS and implementing it back in Germany. We have taken railway technology to a level where Europeans will follow us. The irony is it is not Indian technology; it is their technology, which they invented but somehow could not implement, but we did it and have the Namo Bharat running successfully today. **BW**

arjun@businessworld.in