Exploiting the Potentials of Dedicated Passenger Corridor

What is the issue?

Union government can consider Dedicated Passenger Corridors (DPCs) over Dedicated Freight corridors.

What are the issues in working of freight corridors in India?

- The Indian Railways (IR) is one of the biggest railway systems in the world, transporting about 23 million passengers and 3.35 million tons of freight daily.
- IR runs passenger and freight trains on the same track, this leads to suboptimal usage of track capacity.
- As passenger and freight trains run at vastly different speeds, freight trains are stopped for allowing faster passenger trains to pass.
- While a freight train waits for passenger train(s) to pass, the track remains unutilized, leading to wastage of capacity.
- Steady increase in the number and speeds of passenger trains and a marginal increase in speeds of freight trains have continued to impact track capacity negatively.
- Freight services earn profits for IR, most of which are used to make up the losses incurred in passenger business.
- Hence, the need for segregating the passenger and freight streams is obvious.
- The latest Budget states that commissioning of the DFC would create room for more passenger services.
- Unless passenger tariff is rationalized, adding more DFCs and running more passenger services would only lead to the losses going up further.

What is India’s plan on Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC)?

- The concept of Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) was mooted in 2006 to generate substantial capacity for freight traffic by developing separate tracks on identified routes.
- The Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India Ltd (DFCCIL) was incorporated as a separate company under the Ministry of Railways.
- Two corridors, Dadri to Jawaharlal Nehru Port (western DFC) and

Ludhiana to Son Nagar (eastern DFC) are currently under construction.
- Other freight corridors on the Kolkata-Mumbai and Kolkata-Chennai routes have also been planned.
- Cost of construction of the eastern and western DFCs is currently estimated at around Rs. 81,000 crore for 2,822 kilometres, averaging Rs. 29 crore per km, as compared to around Rs. 10 crore per km for the track on the IR system.
- The cost is higher in the case of DFC as land had to be acquired and the tracks and bridges are designed to carry much heavier trains
- The logic of running heavier trains on the eastern DFC is to cater to the burgeoning traffic in minerals, particularly coal, which constitutes 48 per cent of IR's freight traffic.

What are the operational challenges?

- With the emphasis on generation of power through renewable sources of energy, the future of coal demand appears to be uncertain now.
- Further, running of heavier trains on both DFCs, as planned, would also require strengthening of tracks from the DFC to the consumers' locations.
- This would enlarge the scope of the projects considerably.
- The revenue for a DFC would come from a fee called "track access charge" which IR would pay to the DFC for every train.
- Consequently, the revenue earned by IR from trains run on DFCCIL would be reduced to the extent of the "access charge" paid by IR to the DFC, At least initially, IR would lose some revenue.

How DPCs can address the challenges in DFCs?

- Instead of new DFCs, the case for Dedicated Passenger Corridors (DPCs) could be considered.
- DPCs (either under the Railway Ministry or as a separate company) would create a separate carriageway for passenger traffic where high-speed trains could run, leaving the existing IR network free to run the freight services.
- DPCs could cater to super-fast mail/express trains and intercity trains.
- Suburban services would remain with the existing IR system, the movement of freight to customers would continue to remain seamless as it is now.
- Sufficient capacity would remain to cater to the growth in demand for freight in the foreseeable future.
- Addition to the capacity of the existing IR network may be done selectively

where required.

What are the advantages of DPCs over DFCs?

- The project would cost much lower than for a DFC as the track standards required for passenger movement would be as obtaining on the IR system at present.
- Shifting of passenger services to DPC would generate capacity for freight services on IR's existing network and leave room for future growth in demand. Consequently, profits would increase.
- The DPC would be connected to the existing passenger terminals on the IR system.
- With the DPC, the level of punctuality of passenger trains would be higher than at present.
- Overnight services between major metros could be planned, similarly, fast intercity connections for medium distances can also be planned.
- It may be possible to exploit the real estate potential of the new and existing terminals and also to offer trains on a franchise to operators who would pay an "access charge" to IR or the company owning the DPC.
- With better service quality and savings in time, the customers would also be willing to pay more, hence revenue could be higher
- The DPC could be used for running time-tabled super-fast parcel services and high-value consignments like cars and other consumer durables between important urban centres.
- A lot of traffic could be diverted from road to rail, thereby providing enormous savings in fuel costs to the economy and reducing pollution.

Source: Business Line

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