# HC Order on Chennai-Salem Highway

## Why in news?

The Madras High Court has quashed the land acquisition proceedings for the proposed Chennai-Salem greenfield corridor.

## What is the project proposal?

- The Chennai-Salem greenfield corridor is a 277.3 km long, 8-lane highway project, proposed to connect Salem to Chennai.
- The proposed highway passed through Kanchipuram, Tiruvannamalai, Krishnagiri, Dharmapuri and Salem districts of Tamil Nadu.
- This is an agrarian region comprising reserved forest areas and several industrial zones.
- A feasibility study for the project pegged the total cost at Rs 9,106 crores.
- In addition, a tentative cost for rehabilitation and resettlement had been worked out to Rs 415 crores.

## What was the proposed objective?

- There are three existing routes between Salem and Chennai:

i. Ulundurpet to Chennai
ii. Walajah to Chennai
iii. the Chennai – Tiruvannamalai – Harur – Salem routes

- The government argues that the first two existing stretches are facing abnormal delays due to increasing traffic volume.
- The second stretch may not reduce travel time even if a bypass route was introduced.
- Thus a direct Salem - Chennai highway may be the only solution to ease traffic and reduce the travel time.
- It was stated that the corridor would mostly involve drylands, but the land acquisition cost may not be very high when compared to the benefits.

## What is the HC's rationale?

- **Approval** - The project first came to light on February 25, 2018.

- It was mentioned in a letter written by Tamil Nadu CM to the Union minister for road transport, highways and shipping.
- The Centre gave its nod on the same day.
- Eventually, the process for the expressway was on track and instructions were given to call for tenders in two months.
- In other words, a single letter from the state CM and the Centre's nod on the same day kick-started the project work.

- **Clearance** - The state did not receive prior environmental clearance from the Centre as mandated.
- The court also cited the failure of the state government in conducting a mandatory public hearing.
- As the court noted, farmers in the five districts complained that they were not consulted.
- **Impact** - The farmers feared that the project would destroy the most productive farmlands in Kancheepuram and Tiruvannamalai districts.
- It will have a huge impact on the environment and water bodies in the area.
- The court order also raised questions about a vulnerable reserve forest stretch near the project alignment.
- The court also based its judgment on major flaws in the project report submitted by a private consultant.
- Given the above drawbacks, the HC scrapped the feasibility study report which said the project would generate employment opportunities and lead to development.

**Source: Indian Express**

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