



Linear forest clearance for highways likely to get easier with portal-based automatic approval

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NEW DELHI: The government is likely to have a portal-based automatic approval mechanism for "linear forest" to expedite the execution of road projects. The proposal mooted by the road transport and highways ministry was presented before the Council of Ministers meeting on Wednesday to fast-track highway projects, sources said.

The highways ministry has set the target to construct 12,000 km of NH during this year and also to bid out another 12,000 km. The ministry has prepared the plan to complete 36,500 km in the next three years, by March 2024 and also to raise Rs 85,000 crore from monetisation of completed projects.

Sources in the government said the main cause of delay in getting forest clearance for linear projects like NH is identifying the land for compensatory afforestation. They added a proposal was earlier sent to the environment and forest ministry to give the go ahead for linear projects once the department concerned deposits the money for afforestation.

Three ministries including the road transport and highways ministry made a detailed presentation to the Council of Ministers chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. There are possibilities of similar presentations in coming weeks by the rail and shipping ministries. The PM is scheduled to chair the review meeting of these ministries on July 5.

Accelerating infrastructure projects will be the key for a quick bounce back of the economy, which has been hit by Covid-19 pandemic. Considering that private investment will also be crucial for this, the highways ministry has set the target to bid out 30% of these projects in the next three years through public private partnership (PPP) mode. The ministry has set the target for claim resolution of contractors of around Rs 41,500 crore during 2021-22, which is expected to increase the liquidity in the market.

The progress in highway construction has been one of the major achievements of the Modi government. While the annual average construction of NH was around 4,900 km during 2009-14, it increased by 83% during 2014-21 to 8,993 km annually. This means while during the second tenure of UPA the daily construction was less than 13 km, in the Modi regime it increased to 30 km a day.

Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/linear-forest-clearance-for-highways-likely-to-get-easier-with-portal-based-automatic-approval/articleshow/84053762.cms>