INTERVIEW / ROAD TO $5 TRILLION

"Ease Of Living Will Unlock Indian Economy's Potential"

A key strategy for decongesting metro cities is connecting them through seamless multimodal transport integration. Citing the example of the capital, **Vinay Kumar Singh***, Managing Director, National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC), discusses the rapid rail system that will ensure ease of living and unlock the economy's potential in a conversation with* **Arjun Yadav** *of BW Businessworld. Excerpts:*

The Economic Survey this year highlighted that we need to spend about $1.4 trillion on infrastructure by FY25 to achieve the $5-trillion target. Heading one of India's premier infrastructure agencies, how do you see the prospects of the thrust on infrastructure to create jobs and demand – the two booster doses that our economy needs?

Infrastructure development certainly has a multiplier effect. If we spend one rupee on the railway, the sector in which we work, it translates into six rupees in the system. If we see the capital side when we spend on infrastructure, that money is going to some cement, steel and aluminium manufacturers and the active labour. When this money reaches these people, demand is created, and ultimately it goes back to the economy.

So, there's huge employment generation through infrastructure development.

The government has set enormous targets for this fiscal and the next fiscal, not only for us but also for other agencies like the National Highways Authority of India. However, due to the pandemic situation in countries like China, there is a direct impact on the supply chains. This delays the import of some essential machinery and hence the project timeline. However, I can confidently say that the targets fixed for us by the government are on track, and we are doing much more than that.

One of the core philosophies to decongest Delhi and ensure a balanced development of the NCR region

is by improving regional connectivity. If you could elaborate on the integrated multi-modal transport plan and its role in boosting alternative urban centres and ensuring balanced development?

For any economy to grow, government and private spending must complement each other. For these investments to thrive, ease of doing business is of utmost importance. Under Prime Minister's leadership, we have improved on that front in the last three years. However, ease of doing business comes when there is ease of living for people. This is precisely what this Regional Rapid Transport System (RRTS) will provide, and it will unlock the Indian economy's potential.

The public transport system in NCR is very fragmented today. There is no direct connectivity between many economic centres such as Noida and Manesar or from Gurugram to Meerut. This results in people using road transport which takes about five hours daily, which in the long run affects work productivity and efficiency. On the other hand, this RRTS will ensure safety, comfort, punctuality, reliability and affordability. These are the five pillars of any sound public transport system.

Another area we have focused on is multimodal integration. We have created this with various modes of transport, be it flights, railways, intercity buses, city metros and, of course, taxis which ensures last-mile connectivity. With such connectivity, employment will move beyond Delhi to regions like Meerut, Modinagar etc. and eventually help on various counts.

What's the progress on corridors being developed under RRTS Phase 1?

Out of eight identified corridors, three are prioritised in Phase-I: Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut RRTS Corridor, Delhi-Gurugram-SNB-Alwar RRTS Corridor and Delhi-Panipat RRTS Corridor. The 82-km-long Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut RRTS corridor will become fully operational by 2025. The 17-km priority corridor from Sahibabad to Duhai will be operational by 2023.

For the Delhi-SNB RRTS corridor, we have completed almost all the pre-construction work. The shifting of electrical high-tension lines has also been completed. Once the Detailed Project Report (DPR) gets the Union Cabinet's approval, we will commence the construction work.

Delayed infrastructure projects are usually prevalent and lead to cost overruns. What makes project completion and implementation such a big challenge in our country?

Project implementation in our country is undoubtedly a challenge, and I would say 98 per cent of the infrastructural projects are not completed on time. The primary reason is that various departments lack coordination and are unwilling to help each other. When this happens, most organisations take the softer route. This means that decisions regarding the project are taken without bothering about how they can affect the original intended objective of the project in the long run. This is precisely why the prime minister has now stressed this too much through the Gati Shakti Master Plan becaus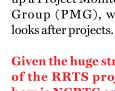e he knows how lower-level officials work. He has now also set up a Project Monitoring Group (PMG), which looks after projects.

Given the huge stretch of the RRTS project, how is NCRTC ensuring effective monitoring and what makes the team so confident about completing the project well before time?

We have created a very robust system to monitor the entire stretch of the project. Firstly, we identified the threats to the projects. Once we listed these, we ensured that this was with every NCRTC employee. Then, with our resources and IT team, we created software called SPEED that provides risk mitigation. NCRTC will not only complete the project on time but before time.

If we identify the risks involved, we can make strategies to manage them, but it is easier said than done. The infrastructure agency's leader should have a clear vision of the project. I walked the entire stretch of the project at least 20 times to understand the problems that could occur during the construction because this is the first of a kind project in India. We have the technology intervention, but you have to be very careful in deciding which technology to use and how much human dependency on technology should be. **BW**

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