

Railways registers 70% loss in passenger earnings; sees profit in freight



The Railways suffered a loss of Rs 38,017 crore in the passenger segment in the last fiscal due to the [coronavirus](#) crisis, but some of what it lost was compensated by the goodwill it earned by running Shramik Special trains, ferrying essentials and through innovation in freight movement which helped surpass last years' revenues.

While regular train services are yet to resume, the focus of the Railways has been to ensure that its freight revenues hold steady.

The Railways managed to surpass the freight revenues of last year by Rs 1868 crore or two percent as of March 22 -- paltry gains, but a huge boost, given the problems that came with the coronavirus lockdown.

As far as the passenger segment is concerned, while it netted Rs 53525.57 last year as revenue, this year it could earn only Rs 15507.68, 71.03 per cent less.

The total passenger revenue between the period April 2020 to February 2021 is Rs 12,409.49 crores as against the Rs 48,809.40 crore for the corresponding period the previous year.

Even as it faced restrictions in moving passengers, on May 1 railways began to ferry migrant workers home. Between May 1 and August 30, the Railways ferried 63.15 lakh such workers home across 23 states in over 4,000 Shramik Special trains.

What earned the Railways immense goodwill through the lockdown was its drastic changes in freight movement, introducing parcel services, carrying essentials like milk, medicines and even ventilators.

The innovation was to realise that if the Railways could not move passengers freely, it could move freight instead.

Applauds galore were received from across the country -- from mothers who received medicines for their ailing children, some who received specialised products like camel milk thanked the railways through social media posts.

However, identifying opportunities and building on them with innovations are set to hold the national transporter in good stead in the coming fiscal. To make the most of it, Business Development Units (BDUs) have been set up at Railway Board, Zonal Railway and Divisional levels. These multi-disciplinary teams have reached out to customers to attract new business.

It has also introduced time-tabled parcel services to provide reliable services to courier services, e-commerce companies.

According to data provided by the Railways as of March 22, its freight loading for the year stood at 1191.76 MT as compared to 1185.99 MT during the same period last year, showing a growth of around 0.5 MT

The highest growth in non traditional commodities, according to rail ministry data has been led by chemical salt (439 per cent), sand (274 per cent), cotton (266 per cent), onion (234 per cent) and automobiles (84 per cent).

Railways' increase in loading of farm produce can be attributed to the Kisan Rails that were introduced in July 2020 with a 50 per cent subsidy for transportation costs of fruits and vegetables on these rails.

Keeping in mind the increasing requirement of freight locomotives in the coming future, the Railways in January this year instructed Chittaranjan Locomotive Works (CLW) to upgrade 200 of the existing 6000 HP freight locomotives to 9000 HP locomotives. Since then, CLW has turned out three such locos, two of which have been commissioned after successful trials.

However, it's not just in loading that the freight segment has benefited during the corona crisis. The average speed of goods trains has doubled from the previous 23.71 kmph to around 45.36 kmph. The struggle will be to keep them going at this speed when passenger trains start plying.

Currently, the Railways is operating 8634 special trains, which includes 2402 mail/express trains, 5381 suburban trains and 851 passenger trains. While it has restored 75 per cent of its mail/express trains, only 18 per cent of its passenger trains have been restored.

With 7377 trains running per day, overall, the Railways so far has restored 65 per cent of its pre-COVID tally of 11,319 trains.

While the Railways has restored these services, the trains are running as specials with a slightly higher fare, which the national transporter said was to discourage unnecessary travel.

To discourage such travel, the Railways has also hiked platform tickets in some areas, stopped providing linen as well as food to passengers and completely withdrawn concessions in fares except in a handful of categories.

It has also made masks mandatory while travelling.

While it is not clear when regular train services are set to resume, the coronavirus pandemic has ensured that not just the rules of travelling, but even the norms of ferrying goods have seen a 360 degree change.

Coronavirus