Sri Lanka Railways

The **Sri Lanka Railway Department** (more commonly known as **Sri Lanka Railways** (SLR)) (Sinhala: ශ්‍රී ලංකා දුම්රිය සේවය *Śrī Laṃkā Dumriya Sēvaya*; Tamil: இலங்கை புகையிரத சேவை *Ilankai Pugaiyiradha Sēvai*) is Sri Lanka's railway owner and primary operator. As part of the Sri Lankan government, it is overseen by the Ministry of Transport. Founded in 1858 as the Ceylon Government Railway, it operates the nation's railways and links Colombo (the capital) with other population centres and tourist destinations.

The Sri Lankan rail network is 1,508 km (937 mi) of 5 ft 6 in (1,676 mm) broad gauge. Some of its routes are scenic, with the main line passing (or crossing) waterfalls, mountains, tea estates, pine forests, bridges and peak stations.

Contents

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Native name	ශ්‍රී ලංකා දුම්රිය සේවය (Sinhala) இலங்கை புகையிரத சேவை (Tamil)
Type	Government-owned corporation
Industry	Rail transport
Founded	1858
Headquarters	Colombo, Sri Lanka
Key people	Dilantha Fernando , (General Manager)[1]
Services	Passenger railways Freight services Parcel carrier Catering and tourism services Parking lot operations Other related services
Revenue	▲ Rs 7.412 billion (2018)[2]
Operating income	▼ Rs −22.21 billion (2018) [2]
Net income	▼ Rs −6.97 billion (2018) [3]
Owner	Government of Sri Lanka
Number of employees	▲ 14,885 (2018)[2]

Rail map of Sri Lanka

Overview	
Reporting mark	SLR
Technical	
Track gauge	1,676 mm (5 ft 6 in)
Electrification	78 kilometres (48 mi)[4] (Planned)
Length	1,508 km (937 mi) (track length)
Website	railway.gov.lk (http://railway.gov.lk)

History

Beginnings

The rail network was introduced by the British colonial government in 1864. The main reason for a rail system in Ceylon was to transport tea and coffee from the hill country to Colombo. The service began with a 54-kilometre (34 mi) main line connecting Colombo and Ambepussa.[5] Guilford Lindsey Molesworth, the first chief engineer, became director general of the government railway. Many Ceylonese people referred to the trains as (Sinhala:අඟුරු කකා වතුර බිබී කොළඹ දුවන යකඩ යකා) *Anguru Kaka Wathura Bibi Colaba Duwana Yakada Yaka*[6] ("coal-eating, water-drinking, metal devils which are sprinting to Colombo").

Extensions were made to the main line in 1867, 1874, 1885, 1894 and 1924 to Kandy, Nawalapitiya, Nanu Oya, Bandarawela and Badulla.[7] Other lines were added to the rail system during its first century, including an 1880 line to Matale; the 1895 Coast Railway Line; the 1905 Northern Line; the 1914 Mannar Line; the 1919 Kelani Valley Line; the 1926 Puttalam Line, and the 1928 line to Batticaloa and Trincomalee. For more than 80 years after that,[8] no major extensions were added to the Ceylonese rail network.

1880 steam-powered train on the hill-country Colombo-Badulla line

Golden age

The golden age of Ceylon Railways was from 1955 to 1970 under the management of B. D. Rampala, chief mechanical engineer and general manager of the Ceylon Government Railway.[6] Emphasising punctuality and comfort, Rampala led upgrades to major stations outside Colombo and the rebuilding of track in the Eastern Province to facilitate heavier, faster trains. He introduced express trains (many of which had iconic names), and ensured that Ceylon's rail system was up to date and offered comfort to its passengers.[6][9] Until 1953, Ceylon's railways used steam locomotives. During its golden age, they changed to diesel locomotives under Rampala's leadership.[9]
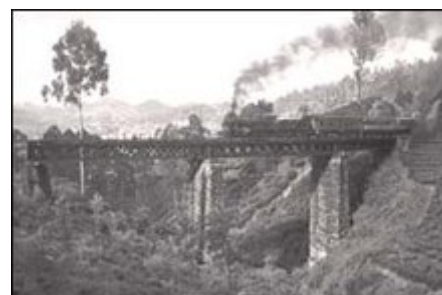
Decline

During the late 20th century, the railway began to decline; for three decades, it was neglected and poorly run.[10] The Sri Lankan economy had shifted its focus from plantation agriculture to industry, and its road network grew. With the increase in lorries and highways (a faster means of transporting goods), the amount of goods transported by rail declined and the railways experienced heavy losses.

Rail lines near Colombo in 1940

SLR failed to adopt the technological innovations of foreign railways, and problems with travel time, reliability and comfort caused it to lose much of its passenger market share. By 2011, it had a seven-percent share of the market.[6]

Rebirth

The government began a 10-year railway-development strategy to return the network to satisfactory condition in the early 2010s, ordering replacement DMUs.[6][10][11] The southern line, which was damaged in the 2004 tsunami, was upgraded from 2010 to 2012; its track was upgraded to handle train speeds of 100 km/h (62 mph).[12] Sri Lanka Railways began partnering with ExpoRail and Rajadhani Express in 2011 for premium service on major routes.[13][14] Its northern line, affected by almost three decades of war, is being rebuilt; in 2015, it was restored to Jaffna and Kankesanthurai at pre-war levels The maxiumum speed on this line is currently 120Km/h(74mph)..[15] The southern line is being

S12 DMUs were imported in 2012.

extended from Matara to Kataragama to serve the developing city of Hambantota.[8] In 2015, track construction to Beliaththa was delayed.

Operators

The state-owned Sri Lanka Railways operates nearly all of the country's rail services: passenger intercity and commuter rail, and freight transport. Private operators provide some services for the railways' equipment and infrastructure, including the *Viceroy Special*: a heritage train with a steam locomotive.[16][17]

On 6 October 2011, Expolanka introduced its ExpoRail service;[18][19] the competing Rajadhani Express was introduced by Blue Line Express on the same day. Although ExpoRail is reportedly no longer in operation, the Blue Line Express is a premium section on Sri Lanka Railways trains.[18][20]

An ExpoRail carriage in 2012

Rolling stock

Sri Lanka Railways' locomotives are primarily diesel. Steam locomotives, in regular service until the late 1970s, are used on heritage trains such as the *Viceroy Special*.[9][21]

The first locomotives pulled trains during the 1860s on the original 54-kilometre (34 mi) main line connecting Colombo and Ambepussa.[5] Sri Lanka Railways converted to diesel locomotives in 1953,[9] and several types were added to its fleet. Although Sri Lanka did not have commercially-operating electric locomotives or trainsets in 2011, electrification has been proposed to improve energy efficiency and sustainability.[22]

Most passenger coaches are manufactured by the Romanian Astra Rail Industries[23][24] or the Chinese CSR Corporation. On most lines, service is being upgraded with long-haul diesel multiple units from CSR Corporation and India's RITES.[10][11][25]

An S13 DMU

Network

The 1,508-kilometre (937 mi) Sri Lankan railway network is 5 ft 6 in (1,676 mm) broad gauge.[9] All service is diesel-powered.[26] The network is divided into three operating regions based in Colombo, Anuradhapura and Nawalapitiya.[27][28] The railway is modernising and extending the Coastal Line for faster trains and improved efficiency.[29]

M6 locomotive pulling the *Udarata Menike* from Badulla to Colombo

Electrification

Although electrification was first proposed in 1928, the cabinet did not approve the electrification of suburban railways until 2015. Electrification of the Panadura-Veyangoda line is proposed in phase one of the Western Region Megapolis plan with a soft loan from the Asian Development Bank.[30][31][32]

A contract was signed by Malaysia's Airport Express Air and Rail Company and the government of Sri Lanka for a new electric rail line between Negombo and Colombo, and the project was expected to be completed by 2018.[33] Electrification of the busiest sections of the network was proposed several times to improve energy efficiency and sustainability. Around 1998, the Institution of Engineers, Sri Lanka (IESL) submitted recommendations for railway electrification. Although they were approved by the cabinet, they were not implemented. The IESL made new proposals for electrification in 2008 and 2010, but no work was done because the voltage systems were undefined. System electrification is favoured by the IESL to reduce pollution and travel time and increase passenger comfort.[34][6]

Although Sri Lanka Railways is planning to electrify the 120-kilometre (75 mi) Colombo commuter-rail system from Veyangoda to Maradana, Maradana to Kaluthara and Ragama to Negombo, their voltage systems are unknown. Fifteen electric multiple units will be imported for commuter service.[35]

Signalling

Much of the network uses a lock-and-block signaling system. During the mid-twentieth century, the busiest sectors (around Colombo) were upgraded to electronic signalling connected to a CTC control panel at the Maradana railway station.[9]

In 2011, a project to add electronic signalling to the northern lines began. Track between Anuradhapura, Kankesanturai, and Talaimannar would have electronic signalling with centralised traffic control: an interlocking colour-light system with electrically-operated points and a track-detection system. Level

crossings would be connected to the signalling system, ensuring safety.[36]

After the 2011 Alawwa rail accident, SLR began installing a GPS-based train-protection system on its fleet. The system warns a train driver of a possible collision in time to manually stop the train. The fleet can also be monitored by a central control room with the system. A trial run with ten trains was conducted in early November 2011.[37][38]

Routes

Major population centres and tourist destinations are connected by rail. Service began in 1864 with the construction of the Main Line from Colombo to Ambepussa, 54 kilometres (34 mi) east, and the first train ran on 27 December 1864. The line was officially opened to traffic on 2 October 1865. The Main Line was extended in stages, with service to Kandy in 1867, to Nawalapitiya in 1874, to Nanu-Oya in 1885, to Bandarawela in 1894, and to Badulla in 1924.[39] Other lines were completed to link the country: the Matale Line in 1880, the Coast Line in 1895, the Northern Line in 1905, the Mannar Line in 1914, the Kelani Valley Line in 1919, the Puttalam Line in 1926, and the Batticaloa and Trincomalee Lines in 1928.[40]

Main Line
The Main Line begins in Colombo and runs east and north past the developing centres of Ragama, Ganemulla Gampaha, Veyangoda, Mirigama, Ambepussa and Polgahawela. At Rambukkana, the line begins a steep climb into the hills. The track runs along the edge of sheer cliffs between Balana and Kadugannawa, allowing passengers a view of Batalegala. The line then continues climbing through tea country, connecting market centers at Gampola, Nawalapitiya and Hatton before reaching Nanu Oya. This is the connection to the former colonial resort of Nuwara Eliya, still visited for its temperate climate, classic hotels and British-style gardens. The Main Line reaches its summit at Pattipola, 6,226 feet (1,898 m) above sea level, before descending past Bandarawela to Badulla. Passengers can view tea gardens, mountains, valleys and waterfalls.

Coastal line

The coastal line runs south from Colombo, following the Indian Ocean, with views of tropical beaches and coconut palm trees. It links the regional centres of Moratuwa, Panadura and Kalutara, and beach resorts at Aluthgama, Ambalangoda and Hikkaduwa. The line continues past Galle (known for its historic, preserved Dutch fort), ending in Beliatta.

The coastal line's Matara terminus

From 1895 to 2013, the line ended in Matara.[41] From 2013 to 2019, the China National Machinery Import and Export Corporation extended the line to Beliatta in phase one of the Southern Railway project;[42] it was the first new railway built in Sri Lanka since its independence from Great Britain in 1948.[43] Phase two will serve Magampura Mahinda Rajapaksa Port in Hambantota, and phase three will reach Kataragama; in April 2019, they had not yet begun construction.[42]

Puttalam line
The Puttalam line branches off the Main Line at Ragama, extending north past Kandana Ja-Ela, Seeduwa, Katunayake (Colombo International Airport) and Negombo (a commercial centre and regional tourist destination). It connects northwestern Sri Lanka, reaching Negombo Kochikade, Waikkala, Lunuwila (and the National Coconut Research Center), Nattandiya, Madampe, Chilaw, Bangadeniya, Mundel and Puttalam. The line also

links other market towns and fishing villages. Passenger service ends at the Noor Nagar station, just north of Puttalam. Beyond that, the tracks are used by Holcim trains to haul cement.

Kelani Valley line

The Kelani Valley line extends from Maradana east to Avissawella. Originally a narrow-gauge line, it was converted to 5 ft 6 in (1,676 mm) broad gauge between 1991 and 1997. The line connects the Colombo suburbs in the district with the city.

Matale line

The Matale line branches off the Main Line at Peradeniya Junction, near the Peradeniya Botanical Gardens. It runs to Kandy, home of the Sri Dalada Maligawa (which houses the relic of the tooth of the Buddha), before descending to Matale.

Northern line

The northern line branches north from the Main Line at Polgahawela, passing Kurunegala (capital of North Western Province) before continuing to the cultural center of Anuradhapura: the island's capital around the 4th century BCE, and home to a number of religious and archaeological sites. Service has been extended to the line's terminus at Kankesanthurai on the Jaffna Peninsula, past Kilinochchi.[44]

Northern line

Mannar line

The Mannar line branches westward from the northern line at Medawachchiya, passing Madhu Road (location of the Shrine of Our Lady of Madhu) and continuing to Mannar Island: home of the district capital and terminus of the former Talaimannar line.

Batticaloa line

The Batticaloa line branches eastward from the northern line at Maho to Polonnaruwa, site of an 11th-century capital and home to a number of historic monuments, before continuing to the city of Batticaloa.[45]

Trincomalee line

The Trincomalee line branches north and east from the Batticaloa line at Gal Oya Junction and extends to Trincomalee.

Mihintale line

The Mihintale line is a short branch line which connects Mihintale (home of the Mihintale Temple, where Thera Mahinda – who brought Buddhism to Sri Lanka – arrived) with Anuradhapura (the capital of Sri Lanka for over 100 years) via the northern line. It branches off the latter at Mihintale Junction and runs eastward to Mihintale (the line's only stations).

Intercity network

The intercity network radiates from Colombo, connecting most major population and industrial centres with passenger and freight service,[28] and includes hubs at Colombo Fort and Maradana.

Passenger service

Sri Lanka Railways has intercity service connecting major population centres, and commuter rail serving Colombo commuters.[46] The railway also transports freight. Most intercity trains have several classes:[47]

- *1st class sleeper*, with sleeping berths, is available on a few overnight trains.

- *1st class observation car* is available on some day trains, primarily on the Main Line. Normally at the rear of the train, it is occasionally behind the locomotive.
- *1st class air-conditioned*[47] seats are available on some intercity express trains between Colombo and Vavunia and Colombo and Batticaloa. They are also available on the main-line *Udarata Manike* and *Podi Manike* trains.
- *2nd class* seats, available on all intercity trains, are unreserved or reserved.
- *3rd class*, available on most trains, has basic facilities.

Commuter trains serve the busiest portions of Colombo and its suburbs.[48] Most commuter trains are diesel multiple units and lack the three-class configuration of intercity service.[46] Commuter trains, which alleviate rush-hour congestion on city roads, can be crowded. Electrification of the commuter-rail network has been proposed to improve energy efficiency and sustainability.[22]

Train types

- *Intercity express*: Among the fastest trains, with few stops. Passengers get special tickets and pay a premium.
- *Night mail*: Night-time express trains with freight transport
- *Express*: Links Colombo and major transport hubs
- *Suburban*: Stops at each station on the route

Routes and trains

SLR divides its network into three operating regions, based in Maradana, Nawalapitya and Anuradhapura.[49] The network consists of nine lines, and several services were named during the 1950s.

	Route	Major trains
Main Line	Colombo Fort to Nawalapitya, Nanu Oya, and Badulla	*Udarata Menike*, *Podi Menike*, *Tikiri Menike* (to Hatton), *Senkadagala Menike* (to Kandy), *Colombo - Badulla Night Mail Train*, *Denuwara Menike*
Matale line	Peradeniya Junction to Kandy and Matale	

	Route	Major trains
Northern line	Polgahawela Junction to Kurunegala, Anuradhapura, Jaffna and Kankesanthurai	*Yal Devi*, *Rajarata Rejini* Jaffna night mail, Jaffna intercity
Mannar line	Medawachchi Junction to Mannar and Talaimannar	
Batticaloa line	Maho Junction to Polonnaruwa and Batticaloa	*Udaya Devi*, *Meena Gaya*
Trincomalee line	Gal Oya Junction to Kantale and Trincomalee	

	Route	Major trains
Coastal line	Colombo Fort to Galle, Matara and Beliatta; Beliatta to Kataragama under construction	*Ruhunu Kumari*, *Samudra Devi*, *Galu Kumari*, *Sagarika*, *Rajarata Rejini*, Dakshina intercity
Kelani Valley line	Colombo Maradana to Avissawella	
Puttalam line	Ragama to Puttalam	*Muthu Kumari*, Puttalam mixed and express trains, Chilaw express

Links to India

A proposal to link the railways of Sri Lanka and India did not materialise, but a combined train-ferry-train service (known as Boat Mail) connected Colombo with Chennai for much of the twentieth century.[50] A 35 km (22 mi) bridge linking the countries was proposed in 1894 by the consultant engineer for railways in Madras (Chennai); a blueprint and cost analysis were made. The Mannar line was built by 1914 to connect Talaimannar on Mannar Island to the Sri Lankan mainland, and the Indian rail network was extended to Dhanushkodi; however, the bridge linking them was not built.[50]

Ferry service connecting the railheads at Talaimannar and Dhanushkodi lasted until the 1960s, when a cyclone destroyed the pier and rail line in Dhanushkodi. Ferry service resumed from the Indian terminus at Rameshwaram until the Sri Lankan Civil War.[50] A rail bridge (or tunnel) was proposed again during the 2000s, highlighting the benefits of connecting the ports of Colombo and Trincomalee with Chennai.[50]

Urban rail

Suburban rail

Commuter rail service connects Colombo to its suburbs, helping alleviate rush-hour congestion on city roads. Local commuter trains and intercity lines use the same tracks. Colombo's commuter-rail network is 100 kilometres (62 mi) of track from Panadura to Polgahawela via the Fort and Maradana stations. The route is multi-tracked to provide rush-hour service.[51] Electrification of the commuter-rail network has been proposed to improve energy efficiency and sustainability.[52][34]

Commuter trains

Metro

A 1,435 mm (4 ft 8½ in) standard-gauge metro system was proposed during the 2010s to give Colombo commuters a clean, environmentally-friendly transit option. The metro would reduce the load on the commuter-rail system and alleviate congestion on major roads.[53] A consortium of three companies is conducting feasibility studies on the project.[54]

Light rail

Colombo Light Rail has received $1.25 billion in funding.[55]

Railbus

In areas with little demand for commuter trains, such as the Eastern Province, railbuses connect towns and cities. Railbus service from Batticaloa and Trincomalee allows passengers to travel between the cities with fewer delays.[56]

Former tram

A tram system operated in Colombo from 1899 to 1960, operated by Colombo Electric Tramways and Lighting Company before being transferred to the Colombo Municipal Council on 31 August 1944.[57]

Planned high-speed rail

High Speed Railway Corporation (HSRC) plans to introduce a maglev system to the island with a line connecting Negombo and Colombo 3.[58]

Issues

Discrimination

In February 2017, Sri Lanka's *Sunday Times* criticized SLR for segregated washroom facilities at stations. Foreigners can use clean washrooms, but Sri Lankans are forced to use poorly-maintained, often-unsanitary washrooms; signs distinguish "foreigners' toilets" from other facilities. According to the *Sunday Times* article, foreigners' washrooms were at the Colombo Fort, Mount Lavinia, Badulla, Hikkaduwa and Panadura stations. Transport Ministry secretary Nihal Somaweera said that foreign-tourist toilets were upgraded with funds from the Ministry of Tourism, and the article described the SLR leadership as echoing the colonial era.[59]

Accidents

- 18 March 1964 - A train derailed at high speed, killing over 60 people near Mirigama.
- 19 January 1985 - the LTTE bombed the *Yal Devi*, killing 11 civilians.
- 24 July 1996 - The LTTE bombed a train, resulting in 70 civilian deaths at Dehiwala.
- 19 August 2001 - A train derailed between Alawwa and Rambukkana due to high speed and overcrowding, killing 46.
- 13 June 2002 – A train derailed entering the Alawwa railway station, killing 14.
- 26 December 2004 – 2004 tsunami rail disaster – Over 1,700 people died in the world's largest rail disaster (by death toll) when a train was overwhelmed by the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami at Peraliya.
- 26 April 2005 Polgahawela level crossing accident – A bus trying to pass another bus at a level crossing in Yangalmodara (near Polgahawela) was struck by a train; 37 bus passengers died.

- 17 September 2011 – An S11 passenger train struck the stopped Colombo-Kandy *Udarata Manike* at the Alawwa railway station. Five people were killed and over 30 were injured.[60]
- 17 May 2012 - After a train struck a stopped train, two trains collided between the Wandurawa and Keenawala stations in Veyangoda.[61]
- 30 April 2014 - A northbound intercity express collided with the Colombo-bound *Rajarata Rajina* at Pothuhera, injuring 68 passengers.[62]

2011 Alawwa accident

A number of other accidents have occurred, including collisions with elephants in the north-central region. Other accidents involving road traffic occur at unsecured level crossings. Of Sri Lanka's 1,684 crossings, only 527 are secure. To prevent collisions, SLR has begun

installing a GPS-based train-protection system which will warn drivers of a possible collision in time to avoid it.[37][38]

See also

- List of railway stations in Sri Lanka
- Ceylon Railway Engineer Corps
- National railway museum, Kadugannawa

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External links

- Sri Lanka Railways Official Site (http://www.railway.gov.lk)
- Ministry of Transport (http://www.transport.gov.lk)