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PASSENGERS AMENITIES IN RAILWAYS

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PASSENGERS AMENITIES IN RAILWAYS

INTRODUCTION

The Indian Railway is the world's largest Government Railway. The Railway functions as a vertically integrated organization providing Passenger and Freight services. It is a single system which consists of 66,030 route-km of track that criss-cross the country, on which more than 22,300 number of trains ply, carrying about 23 million passengers and hauling nearly 3.02 million tonnes of freight every day¹.

CRITERIA TO DETERMINE PASSENGER AMENITIES

In 1952, the Railways, for the very first time issued a set of guidelines with regard to passenger amenities. These guidelines were revised during 1995, 1999, 2003 and finally in 2007. The following considerations normally determine the scope and scale of the passenger amenities at the stations:

- Class of Station;
- Volume of passengers handled;
- Special characteristics of the station, such as, those having tourist/religious importance, and;
- Availability of funds²

PASSENGER AMENITIES AT RAILWAY STATIONS

The Railways have categorized their entire 8241 stations into 7 categories (A1 and A to F). Passenger amenities provided at stations have been classified into the following three categories:

Minimum Essential Amenities: Amenities like booking facilities, platforms, shelters/shady trees, drinking water arrangements, waiting hall/shed, seating arrangements and time table

¹ India, Ministry of Railways, Outcome and Performance Budget, 2016-17, p. 2

² *Ibid*, pp.3-4

display are required to be provided at all 'A-1' and 'A' to 'E' category and halts if train stops at night.

Recommended Amenities: The recommended amenities are based on the category of the stations and also the number of passengers dealt with at any time during peak hours, including the inward and outward passengers. These include facilities like water cooler, Public Address system/computer based announcements, parking area and public phone booths, etc³.

Desirable Amenities: These amenities are considered desirable to improve customer satisfaction and the interface process at stations. The quantum of desirable amenities depends upon the category of station. These include items like catering and vending stalls, adequate parking and circulating area, train indication board, public address system, etc⁴.

ON-BOARD AMENITIES

The on-board minimum facilities to be provided to the passengers, while on board a train includes amenities and fittings which should be maintained in proper condition so as to give comfortable services. These include:

- Lighting and fans
- Cushioned berths and seats
- Toilets (except where by design not provided)
- External fittings such as, reservation chart display plates, destination boards.

The guidelines also provide that all long distance trains will have Conductors/Coach Attendants/Train Superintendents/ Travelling Ticket Examiner (TTEs) to assist the passengers and for attending to their complaints and grievances⁵.

³ *Op.cit.*, 19th Report, pp. 51-52

⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 2-3

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 4

BUDGETARY ALLOCATION

The allocation under the Plan Head "Passenger Amenities" in 2015-16 was Rs. 1752.50 crore (Budget Estimate) and Rs. 1212.21 (Revised Estimates). The Budget allocation for the current year 2016-17 is Rs. 1838.28 crore⁶.

PASSENGERS AMENITIES INTRODUCED IN THE RAILWAY BUDGET 2016-17

- 'Clean my Coach' service through SMS
- Baby foods, hot milk and hot water at stations
- E-ticketing facility to cover foreign debit/credit cards
- Bar-coded tickets, scanners and access control on pilots basis
- Integrate booking and complaint facilities in two mobile apps
- For the unreserved passenger-Antyodaya Express and Deen Dayalu coaches
- For the reserved passenger –Humsafar, Tejas and Utkrisht Double-Decker Air Conditioned Yatri Express (UDAY) trains
- Optional travel insurance to passengers at the time of booking
- At least one 'Divyang' friendly toilet at each platform in A1 class stations
- Increased quota of lower berths for senior citizens and women
- Cancellation through 139 helpline
- Additional 30,000 bio-toilets
- CCTV cameras on windows
- Wi-Fi facility in 400 more stations
- Global positioning system (GPS) digital displays inside coaches to provide real time information
- Hourly booking of retiring rooms⁷

EASIER TICKETING

With a view to facilitate purchase of tickets by passengers from convenient and numerous locations, without the need to go to the Railway Counters, various measures have been taken such as Ticketing through Internet, Short Message Service (SMS)/Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD) based ticketing through mobile phones, Station Ticket Booking Agents (STBA) at 'E' category station, Tickets through

⁶ India, Ministry of Railways, Explanatory Memorandum 2016-17, p. 4

⁷ Deccan Herald dated 26.2.2016

Post Offices, Jan Sadharan Ticket Booking Sewaks (JTBS), Yatri Ticket Suvidha Kendra (YTSK), Go-India Smart Card, Unreserved ticket booking through mobile phone, and a scheme of concession based ticketing including online ticketing for the physically challenged persons using Photo Identity Card issued by the Railways⁸.

CLEANLINESS AND HYGIENE ON RAILWAYS

Taking forward the momentum on ‘Swachh Rail, Swachh Bharat’, a string of measures to improve the cleanliness on stations and trains have been taken which are:

- Introducing ‘Clean my Coach’ through SMS
- Ranking of A1 and A classes of stations on a regular periodic basis.
- Setting up waste segregation and recycling centres
- Undertaking ‘Awareness campaigns’ to improve cleanliness
- Installing additional 30,000 bio-toilets in the next financial year⁹
- Intensive mechanized cleaning of coaches
- On Board House Keeping Scheme (OBHS)
- Clean Train Stations scheme
- Comprehensive pest and rodent control
- Setting up of mechanized laundries for washing linen
- Provision of dustbins in Non-AC coaches¹⁰

CATERING

The Railways have developed and operationalized an institutionalized mechanism for monitoring of quality and hygiene of catering services through regular inspections at various levels. The passenger satisfaction levels are also regularly monitored through direct feedback and other means to address catering complaints. The steps taken to improve the quality of food in Railways *inter-alia* include:

- Introduction of station based e-catering at all A1 and A category stations for widening the range of options available to passengers for ordering food of their choice.

⁸ *Op.cit.*, Outcome Budget, pp. 19-21

⁹ India, Ministry of Railways, Speech on Railway Budget, 2016-17, p. 22

¹⁰ *Op.cit.*, Outcome Budget, pp. 27-28

- Introduction of precooked food ('ready to eat' meals) in the range of options available to passengers.
- Operation of centralized Catering Service Monitoring Cell (CSMC) (toll free number 1800-111-321) for prompt redressal of passenger grievances relating to the catering activities and real time assistance to travelling public.
- Imposition of penalties in case of deficiencies detected in services.
- Operation of all India Helpline (No.138) for rail-users to lodge complaints/suggestions regarding food and catering services
- A Twitter handle with the address @IRCATERING has also been made operational to cater to the complaints/suggestions with regard to catering services¹¹.

MEASURES FOR DIVYANG

In order to provide better accessibility to differently abled and patient passengers, the following short term facilities have been planned at all stations:

- Standard ramp for barrier free entry.
- Earmarking at least two parking lots.
- Non-slippery walk-way from parking lot to building.
- Signages of appropriate visibility.
- At least one toilet (on the ground floor).
- At least one drinking water tap suitable for use by differently-abled persons.
- 'May I help you' Booth
- Provision of facility for inter-platform transfer.
- Engraving on edges of platform¹².

JANANI SEWA

To mitigate the hardships that mothers undergo while travelling with their infants, baby foods, hot milk and hot water will be made available on stations and changing boards for babies will be provided in train toilets¹³.

¹¹ Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 661 dated 27.4.2016

¹² Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question No. 466 dated 26.2.2016

¹³ *Op.cit.*, Speech on Railway Budget, p. 25

SMART COACHES

Specially Modified Aesthetic Refreshing Travel (SMART) coaches are designed to ensure higher carrying capacity and provision of new amenities including automatic doors, bar-code readers, bio-vacuum toilets, water-level indicators, accessible dustbins, ergonomic seating, improved aesthetics, vending machines, entertainment screens, LED lit board for advertising, Public Address (PA) system and more¹⁴.

UPGRDATION OF PASSENGER AMENITIES

Upgradation of amenities/facilities at all stations is a continuous and on-going process. Presently, development of stations is undertaken from funds allocated for passenger amenities by the concerned zonal railways on a regular basis. In addition, out of total of 1195 stations identified for development under the Adarsh Station Scheme, facilities at 961 stations have already been upgraded.

The Ministry of Railways proposed to commission Wi-Fi services at 100 stations this year and at 400 more stations in the next two years. This year, an application of Track Management System (TMS) was launched. With this, activities of track inspection, monitoring and maintenance have thus been switched over to an IT platform, and automatic alerts in the form of SMS and e-mails are being generated¹⁵. Similarly, 'Destination Alert' in Rajdhani and Duranto trains which has been launched recently are very useful services for the passengers. All these IT initiatives are in line with the concept of 'Digital India'¹⁶.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 25

¹⁵ PIB, 25.2.2016

¹⁶ PIB, 8.7.2015

Further, as a part of continual improvement in improving passenger amenities in the trains, the following actions have been taken by the Indian Railways:

- 1) Provision of cushioned seats/berths in general Second Class coaches, snack table and magazine bags in Sleeper Class coaches, automatic fire and smoke detection system (so far in 3 rakes), Braille signage in coaches to facilitate visually impaired passengers, improved design of dustbins and washing of linens in mechanized laundries.
- 2) Induction of Linke Hofmann Busch (LHB) coaches in Mail & Express rakes and High Capacity LHB Airconditioned Chair Car coaches on select routes¹⁷.

CONCLUSION

The Railways are mandated to provide for basic facilities like safe drinking water, clean toilets, proper lighting, etc. at the stations as well as in the trains, besides maintaining an acceptable level of cleanliness. Further, the general infrastructure of the stations like lifts, escalators, waiting rooms, etc. are some of the basic services which constitute passengers amenities. The Standing Committee on Railways on Passenger Amenities and Safety strongly recommended that the provision/maintenance/augmentation of amenities should be undertaken by the Railways on a uniform pattern and also that Railways re-visit their station-category-based passenger amenities approach and implement a multi-pronged strategy by synergizing technology, user awareness, provision of mechanized equipment as well as penalty provisions¹⁸.

¹⁷ Business Standard dated 4.12.2015

¹⁸ India, Lok Sabha, 8th Report, Standing Committee on Railways, 2015-16, p. 30

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