

Yogi Adityanath's flagship Purvanchal Expressway nears completion | India Today Insight

The 341-km, six-lane highway linking Lucknow to Ghazipur is planned for inauguration on Republic Day next year

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November 11, 2020 UPDATED: November 11, 2020 16:20 IST



Construction work on the Purvanchal expressway, in May (ANI)

The air in Chandsarai area of Gosaiganj, about 12 km on the Sultanpur highway from Lucknow, is these days filled with the roar of machines and earthmovers. Huge pillars stand erected on both sides of the highway. This is where a link road to the Purvanchal Expressway, which will connect the Uttar Pradesh capital to Ghazipur, is coming up.

The developments have left nearby residents all pleased. Manisha Rai, a third-year engineering student who resides on the other side of the Sultanpur highway, is excited. When Rai's college, which is located in Lucknow, reopened on October 26 after the long shutdown due to the Covid pandemic, one of the first things she did was take a selfie in front of a signboard of the Purvanchal Expressway, put up some distance away from her college gate, and send it to her family members in Ghazipur. "It takes 12 hours by train to reach home in Ghazipur from Lucknow. Once the Purvanchal Expressway is ready, I will be able to get to my college in Lucknow from Ghazipur in about six hours," she says.

According to Uttar Pradesh additional chief secretary (home) Awanish Kumar Awasthi, the Purvanchal Expressway will be inaugurated on Republic Day next year. Awasthi is also the CEO of UPIEDA (Uttar Pradesh Industrial Expressways Development Authority), which is building the expressway. Around 65-70 per cent of the work has been completed. Among the pending work is construction of bridges and flyovers.

The 341-km, six-lane (can be extended to eight lanes) Purvanchal Expressway is being pegged as the longest in the country. Starting from Lucknow, along the Lucknow-Sultanpur road (NH-731), it will be routed through Barabanki, Amethi, Ayodhya, Sultanpur, Ambedkar Nagar, Azamgarh and Mau to terminate at Ghazipur. Like the Agra-Lucknow Expressway, a 3.2-km airstrip is also being built at Sultanpur on the Purvanchal Expressway.

The Yogi Adityanath government is projecting the highway as one of its flagship projects to usher in development in the state. Comparisons with the Agra-Lucknow Expressway, which was built under the previous Samajwadi Party (SP) government in the state, are but natural. According to Ghyas Asad Khan, principal of the Shibli National College in Azamgarh, "The Adityanath government wants to showcase the Purvanchal Expressway as an example in response to the Lucknow-Agra Expressway." Under the Akhilesh Yadav-led SP government, construction work for the 302-km Agra-Lucknow Expressway started in 2014 and was completed in 2016.

A senior UPIEDA officer involved in the construction of the Purvanchal Expressway says the SP government had, in 2016, planned to build the Purvanchal Expressway at a cost of Rs 14,162 crore. The cost was eventually finalised at Rs 15,157 crore, almost Rs 1,000 crore more. Two years on, under the Yogi government, after the financial bids, the project was cleared at a much lower Rs 11,215 crore, says the officer.

The use of new technologies in the construction of the expressway has helped reduced cost. Unlike the Agra-Lucknow Expressway, the Purvanchal Expressway does not have stones being laid on either side of the road. Instead, honeycomb-shaped geocells, which are light-weight and strong, are being used. "The use of stone not only increases the cost of construction but also causes environmental harm due to mining," says A.K. Pandey, chief general manager, UPIEDA. Apart from this, availability of soil for the project has been easy due to the presence of farms along the route, further reducing costs. To strengthen the quality of roads, crumb rubber modified bitumen is being used instead of ordinary bitumen. "In addition to rubber, polymer-mixed bitumen is also being used in some places," says Pandey. "Rubber and polymers do not allow water to stick, so the road surfaces do not deteriorate quickly and vehicles do not slip."

In view of the increasing accidents on the Agra-Lucknow Expressway, various measures are being taken for the Purvanchal Expressway. 'Crush Barriers' will be installed on both sides of the median. In case of an accident, it will prevent the vehicle from jumping onto the other side of the highway. While the width of the median is 4.5 metres on the Agra-Lucknow Expressway, it is being increased to 5.5 metres for the Purvanchal Expressway.

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