

UP expressways as pathways to progress

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Uttar Pradesh's expressway network signifies more than just roads; it symbolises progress, development and transformation

Last week, I had the chance to experience the Purvanchal Expressway, a marvel of modern infrastructure connecting central and eastern Uttar Pradesh. This experience was a revelation, starkly contrasting with my previous road trip to Varanasi five years ago via the National Highway. Back then, the arduous 8-hour journey from Lucknow to Varanasi was a test of patience. However, this time, the Purvanchal Expressway took me to Varanasi in just 5 hours, thanks to its remarkable construction and efficiency, which is a testament to Uttar Pradesh's rapid development.

The extensive network of highways, expressways, and greenways coursing through Uttar Pradesh is not merely changing how people move from one place to another; it's igniting economic growth and fostering social development on an unprecedented scale.

One example of this transformative infrastructure is the Lucknow-Agra Expressway, which has reduced the travel time between Lucknow and Delhi to a mere 6 hours. This reduction has made car travel not only quicker but also more cost-effective than train journeys, especially for families. The Bundelkhand Expressway has further bridged the gap between the rugged terrain of Bundelkhand and Delhi, chopping travel time from 12 hours to 8 hours.

Uttar Pradesh's moniker 'Expressway Pradesh' is well-earned, with the promise of boosting the state's economic prospects. With infrastructure projects like the Purvanchal Expressway, Bundelkhand Expressway, Gorakhpur Link Expressway, Ballia Link Expressway, and Ganga Expressway, the state has set up a new era of development. Once considered one of the 'BIMARU' states, Uttar Pradesh is now firmly on the radar of investors. These expressways are living proof of the saying, "Double the speed, triple the economy."

To bolster the state's road infrastructure and elevate Uttar Pradesh to an 'Expressway Pradesh,' the government has set forth ambitious plans. It aims to complete the Ganga Expressway before Mahakumbh-2025 and is concurrently working to enhance passenger facilities along the Bundelkhand Expressway. The government has allocated Rs 100 crore for the Ganga Expressway and Rs 40 crore for the Bundelkhand Expressway.

Currently, seven expressways are operational in the state, with an additional six under construction. Among these, the Ganga Expressway and the Bundelkhand Expressway take centre stage, connecting numerous prominent cities. The Ganga Expressway, spanning a remarkable 594 kilometres, is being constructed under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model, with an estimated cost of Rs 36,230 crore. Currently, Rs 4,775 crore has been released for the project, with completion expected by 2024.

As per the report, the land-related works for the main carriageway have been completed up to 41 per cent, while the process of clearing and grubbing of the carriageway has been completed 100 per cent so far. The government report claims that 513 structures out of the total 1348 have been completed. These accomplishments collectively indicate that the ongoing tasks associated with the Ganga Expressway project are currently advancing at a pace of 21 per cent. The government's focus is on the Ganga Expressway as his greenfield expressway connecting Meerut to Prayagraj will be special in many ways.

The Expressways are not just the roads but it carries the aspirations of millions of people who live along these highways. Take the case of Bundelkhand Expressway, connecting Chitrakoot to Prayagraj via Agra, which carries the hope of job opportunities for the youth in this historically impoverished region, which is witness to a spate of suicides because of poverty. In summer families after families migrate to cities leaving behind aged, sick, and divyangs. The Bundelkhand Expressway has kindled hope as the scenario is set to change with the development of the Defence Corridor across this Expressway. The industries are ready to set up their shops. Once it happens people from around the world will come to work in Jhansi and Bundelkhand and this region could be transformed into a new hub of jobs and employment.

The Bundelkhand Expressway, a pivotal 4-lane highway connecting various regions, holds immense promise as a trailblazing model for the seamless integration of renewable energy into essential infrastructure. As the nation strives to meet its energy goals and reduce its carbon footprint, this visionary initiative by the Yogi Government stands as a testament to the power of innovation, collaboration, and environmental stewardship.

With the expressway stretching an impressive 296 kilometres, the Yogi Government envisions a holistic transformation of the roadway, powered by renewable solar energy. The Uttar Pradesh Expressways Industrial Development Authority (UPEIDA) has unveiled plans to transform the Bundelkhand Expressway into a cutting-edge 'Solar Expressway.' The initiative aims to seamlessly integrate solar panels into the expressway's infrastructure, aligning with the principles of sustainability and innovation.

The ambitious plan entails the installation of solar panels across the expansive median, spanning approximately 15 to 20 meters, which currently serves as a demarcation zone between the main carriageway and the service lane. "This vacant expanse, previously delineated by fencing, is now slated to house an array of solar panels that will generate clean and sustainable energy," the official said.

These expressways are not just improving connectivity; they are also fueling tourism in Uttar Pradesh. The state, once weighed down by negative perceptions, is undergoing a remarkable metamorphosis. It has evolved into a sought-after investment destination, attracting domestic tourists and securing substantial funds

for industrial growth. Recent reports from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) validate this transformation.

This metamorphosis is a product of well-planned efforts, with due credit accorded to the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's unwavering dedication, and the state

government's inclusive approach. Initiatives like the Geographic Information System (GIS) and the One District One Product (ODOP) scheme have played pivotal roles in rejuvenating neglected sectors and Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSME) clusters, leading to a threefold surge in exports.

Even in the face of the daunting challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Uttar Pradesh is steadfastly progressing towards its goal of becoming a trillion-dollar economy within the next five years. It has firmly established itself as a major investment hub, offering a thriving banking sector and a burgeoning tourism industry. The state's systematic efforts across sectors are now bearing fruit, propelling Uttar Pradesh into the national and global limelight.

In conclusion, Uttar Pradesh's expressway network signifies more than just roads; it symbolizes progress, development, and transformation. These expressways are not only reducing travel time; they are reducing the disparity between aspirations and accomplishments for the people of Uttar Pradesh. As the state strides towards a brighter future, its expressways serve as a testament to the incredible outcomes achievable with visionary leadership and strategic infrastructure development.

(The writer is Political Editor, The Pioneer, Lucknow. The views expressed are personal)