

## The track to success: on the bullet train project

Since they were commissioned more than five decades ago, bullet trains have been the symbol of Japan's engineering prowess. This ambitious project demonstrated Japan's significant engineering skill and expertise, and its success transformed the way Japan was viewed by the rest of the world. Similarly, China has focussed on the development of its high-speed rail network as a symbol of its engineering capabilities.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinz Abe will arrive in Gujarat later this week [to lay the foundation stone for the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail](#) (MAHSR) project — also known as the Ahmedabad-Mumbai bullet train. There is an expectation that similar to the experience for Japan and China, this project could be one of the catalysts in transforming India. India has already experienced success in major projects in the past, which includes building the Golden Quadrilateral and upgrading its national highways, which has added to GDP, created efficiencies in transportation, provided jobs and improved rural development through enhanced connectivity.

This discussion is timely, given the challenges experienced by the Indian Railways due to recent accidents and talk of much-needed upgrades to safety and other infrastructure. This has caused some to question whether the MAHSR is an effective use of resources. However, resourcing is only one of the issues being faced by the Railways. We heard a similar debate about the Indian space programme, which has seen some remarkable achievements.

There are three advantages from the MAHSR project: economic benefits, including infrastructure development and job creation; technological development, in which Indian companies imbibe the new technologies and potentially also become suppliers to HSR contracts worldwide; and cultural transformation through a demonstrated ability to implement large projects and improve safety.

High speed railways in India: success will ride on the details

Investment in infrastructure development has always acted as a catalyst in the economic growth of India. This project could provide an important boost to public investment. The soft funding of the project by the Japanese government is an additional advantage, which brings the two countries together and provides significant economic benefits. In addition to creating demand for local industry, the project would also generate significant employment for a large number of skilled and unskilled workers. The HSR system is more energy- and fuel-efficient. Studies show that HSR systems are around three times more fuel-efficient than aeroplanes and five times more fuel-efficient than cars. Given the traffic density in this corridor, this project could lead to a significant reduction in India's carbon footprint.

A large part of this project will be focussed on bringing new technology to Indian companies. Most of these technologies are not currently available in India and introducing new technology often provides spin-off benefits to other areas of the economy. A dedicated High Speed Rail training institute is being developed at Vadodra. This institute will be fully equipped with technologies such as simulators and will be functional by the end of 2020. It will be used to train about 4,000 staff in the next three years, who will then be responsible for the operations and maintenance of MAHSR, and also provide a foundation for the future development of other high-speed corridors in India.

The success of this project, however, will lie in its execution. Its successful and timely completion could act as a powerful catalyst to create a culture of efficient project implementation in India. Similarly, there should be a focus on leveraging the post-implementation synergies, which could make this a transformational project for India.

*Suresh Goyal is Executive Director & India Country Head, Macquarie Group. The views expressed are personal*

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