

# PERSPECTIVES OF INLAND WATER TRANSPORT DEVELOPMENT IN THE NORTH-EAST STATES OF INDIA

## Executive Summary

Inland Water Transport has been considered as cost effective, relative fuel efficient, environment friendly and more employment generating mode of transport. A number of countries are now taking initiatives to make better use of the existing capacity and making investments in IWT. Several development projects aimed at enhancement of IWT infrastructure and operations are underway not only in the European and Western countries but also in Asian countries like China, Myanmar, Bangladesh and India.

North East India has many large and small rivers providing facilities for water transport, especially in its plain parts and in flat river valleys. From the ancient period until the roads were constructed, the rivers of the Brahmaputra and Barak plains were commonly used as the mode for transportation of goods and passengers. During the British period the Brahmaputra River and Barak-Surma-Kushiyara-Meghna river systems were extensively used for transport and trade between north-east India and the Kolkata port.

It is estimated that the north-eastern region has about 1800 km of river routes that can be used by steamers and large country boats. The inland water transport departments of both the state and central governments have been trying to improve the water transport system in the region. The river Brahmaputra now has several small river-ports like Sadiya, Dibrugarh, Neamati, Tezpur, Guwahati, Jogighopa and Dhubri. Besides, there are more than thirty pairs of ferry-ghats on the Brahmaputra, transporting men and materials. The River Barak also has small ports at Karimganj, Badarpur and Silchar and ferry services at several places across it. The major tributaries of Brahmaputra namely Lohit, Dhansiri and Subansiri, rivers of Tripura namely Gumti and Haora, Tizu river in Nagaland, Kolodyne river in Mizoram are having immense navigation potential and it can be developed for better utilization of both cargo and passenger movements.

With the renewed focus on IWT development and the completion of the ongoing programme and projects it is expected that NW-2 would be a full fledged waterway with

all the necessary infrastructure facilities within a time frame of 8-10 years. With this the IWT can compete with other modes namely rail and road in terms of cargo transportation to/from the Kolkata/ Haldia ports through the Indo-Bangladesh Protocol route and NW-2. The development of river routes like Subansiri, Dhansiri and Lohit will accelerate the development of the hinterland as well as the opening up of new business opportunities along these rivers

Besides the existing Indo-Bangladesh Protocol route, opening of the new inter country IWT routes namely (i) River Tizu- Chindwin- Irrawady system- this will make interconnectivity between Nagaland and Myanmar to the port of Yangoon (Rangoon) (ii) River Nengpui- Chimtupui- Kolodyne system –this will make interconnectivity between Mizoram and Myanmar to the port of Sittwe and (iii) River Gumti- Meghna system- this will make interconnectivity between Tripura and Bangladesh to Dacca and other locations, will accelerate trade and commerce between India and its neighboring countries.

The advantages of IWT routes that can be effectively and profitably utilized can result in the following benefits.

- i)** Cargo transportation to the north east through Sunderbans- Bangladesh- NW-2 waterway system and Sunderbans- Bangladesh- Meghna- Barak waterway system are the shortest as compared to rail and road networks.
- ii)** During flood season, when other modes of transport are not in operation, only IWT mode is the linking route for the NE region to the rest of the country. Food grains and other basic commodities are being taken to the NE region only through IWT mode during flood season.
- iii)** Bulk commodities and over dimensional cargo (for erection of plants, projects etc) can be easily taken through IWT mode to various destinations in the NE after its import at Kolkata/ Haldia ports.
- iv)** A visible modal shift in cargo transportation to IWT in the region. It is expected that the projected cargo of 6 million ton-km will be moved through NW-2 by 2020 AD.
- v)** Increased economic activity through IWT- the average earning due to

additional employment is estimated as Rs 33.32/ man-day.

- vi)** Additional employment generation of 27,047 is expected by 2020 AD which corresponds to Rs 0.9 million/ day.
- vii)** IWT will develop as an alternative mode of transport- the development will make the river way worthy for safe and smooth operation of cargo movement.
- viii)** Moving freight through barges helps in reducing the level of congestion on road and rail tracks.
- ix)** As it is environment friendly, it creates less noise pollution and reduces pollutants levels in the air thereby reducing expenditure on medical aid.
- x)** The development also boost up the social development of the hinterland- the expected economic yield of investment is about 15%
- xi)** IWT advantage will ensure minimum human loss as against frequent accident on rail and roads.
- xii)** Proper bandalling and channel maintenance will prevent soil erosion and siltation of rivers, provide better quality of water and ensure biodiversity in the area.
- xiii)** Development of tourism circuits - Guwahati- Kaziranga via Tezpur, Tezpur-Singri-Viswanath, Kaziranga- Jorhat(Neamati)-Sibsagar.
- xiv)** Increase in trade and commerce
- xv)** Upliftment of people due to increased communications and new opportunities

If the inland waterways have to emerge as vibrant and flourishing centres for fostering large scale cargo movements and commercial use, a number of steps need to be taken. Some of these are providing periodic dredging, river training, night navigation facilities, a minimum LAD of 2 metres, development of berthing facilities with mechanized horizontal and vertical cargo handling at reasonable cost and inter-modal linkages to provide rapid access and egress to truck traffic at terminals. Further more, provision of storage, bunkering and repair facilities will not only enhance the commercial value of the terminals but will also provide sufficient value addition in order to make the IWT terminals an eminently economically viable option.