

Roads sector needed a positive approach for revival: Gadkari

Dipak Dash & Surojit Gupta | TNN

Road transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari is upbeat about the "transformation" of India's road network. In an interview to TOI, he detailed the measures being taken to accelerate growth, and vowed to clean up the sector. Excerpts:

■ What has triggered the sudden investor interest in the roads sector?

(When the NDA took over) The sector was facing a lot of problems, with more than 280 projects worth over Rs 3 lakh crore stuck. I feel 90% of the projects were stalled because of the government either at the Centre or in states. Land acquisition was a problem... The sector needed a positive approach. We decided to solve the problems. Without 80% land acquisition, we cannot give appointment date to any contractor.

The second major step is that clearance for railway overbridges is online now. They have already cleared 78 pro-



“ When I took charge, we were constructing 2 km (of roads) a day. At the end of March, it was 14 km a day. At the end of next March, it will be 30 km a day

NITIN GADKARI

Road transport and highways minister

jects, and environmental clearances are faster now. There are now only 20-22 projects where some issues need to be resolved. Before the end of this year, I am confident we will solve 100% of the problems.

■ And the foreign interest?

People now understand that we are moving fast. The decision-making process is fast and transparent. No contractor can charge a single rupee for corruption. A corruption-free, transparent and time-bound functioning is why foreign investors are attracted to this sector. There are 101 projects where we are charging toll and they don't have any risk. We want to securitise

them through pension funds as well.

■ The roads sector was an engine of growth during the Vajpayee govt. Can that performance be replicated?

I can tell you it will be much more than that. When I took charge as minister, we were constructing 2 km (of roads) a day. At the end of March, it was 14 km a day. At the end of next March, it will be 30 km a day. This is my target. I am confident that within 2-3 years, we will contribute 2% of GDP, and within 5 years, we will create jobs for 50 lakh youths in inland waterways, shipping, ports, roads and transport sector.

■ You have major plans for inland waterways. What are the opportunities and difficulties?

My difficulty is that in the last two Parliament sessions, I could not submit bills to bring about changes in the sector, for permission to use 101 rivers for inland waterways. We have started work on the Varanasi to Haldia route. We have acquired land in Haldia.

■ What is the reform roadmap for NHAI?

We have to change the system. The system is so bureaucratic, it takes time to clear projects. Now, the Dasgupta and R C Sinha committee (on NHAI revamp) has given its report. We are changing the systems, the procedures, and we are taking several decisions to overhaul the NHAI and also the ministry. One cheque had to travel to 16 desks for approvals, now we are ensuring that it only needs approval from two.

For the full interview, log on to www.timesofindia.com