

## Chapter 1 Overview

### 1.1 Background

Jammu and Kashmir strategically situated close to the north western borders of India has traditionally enjoyed limited surface accessibility to rest of the country notwithstanding connectivity by air that mitigates the situation only partially. The roadlink through National Highway No 1A apart from being long, tortuous and difficult becomes particularly unreliable during inclement weather in winter and summer months. Apart from its security and socio-economic implication, this state of affairs has also had an impact on other aspects of life in the state, more particularly the Kashmir valley.

With a view to provide an alternative and reliable transportation system to and within Jammu & Kashmir, the Government of India envisaged a 345 km. long railway line that would extend the railway network in the country from the railhead at Jammu Tawi to Baramulla at the northern end of Kashmir valley. The rail link would traverse the Pir Panjal range of mountains from Udhampur to Qazigund and the Kashmir valley through the capital city of Srinagar. (*see map at page 65*) The initial stretch of 53 km line from Jammu to Udhampur was completed and operationalised in April 2005.

The entire 292 km line from Udhampur to Baramulla (USBRL-Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla-Railway Line) was declared by the Prime Minister in 2002 as a Project of National Importance and is one of the most challenging projects ever undertaken by the Indian Railways considering the extremely difficult terrain, weather conditions and the sensitive security situation prevailing in parts of the area. The project is being executed by three agencies viz., Northern Railway Construction Organization (NRCO), Konkan Railway Corporation Ltd (KRCL) and Irocon International Limited (IROCON). The 119 kms section from Qazigund to Baramulla (within the Kashmir Valley) was completed and operationalised in three phases, the last phase being operationalised in October 2009. The critical 168 kms section from Udhampur to Qazigund, has presented numerous challenges relating to gradient and alignment and is yet to be completed.

#### ***USBRL Project Objectives***

*The objectives of the project are to:*

- *Strengthen the transportation network to the Kashmir valley by providing an efficient all weather transportation channel that could function in adverse weather conditions and reduce the travel time to various destinations in the valley considerably and*
- *Bring about socio-economic development of the State of Jammu & Kashmir.*

## 1.2 Estimated Cost of Project

The estimated cost of the project in 1994- 95, when administrative approval was given was ₹1500 crore. When the detailed project report was prepared in 1999-2000, the cost estimate doubled to ₹ 3,077.23 crore. By 2006-07, the estimated cost rose three-fold to ₹ 9,341.44crore and by 2010 the estimate, sanction for which was accorded in 2012, had escalated to ₹ 19564.83 crore.

The Railway Administration is however, still uncertain about the final cost of the project.

## 1.3 Project Management

The project is being implemented by three principal agencies, namely, Northern Railway Construction Organisation (NRCO), Konkan Railway Organisation (KRCL) and Irocon International Limited (IRCON), each responsible for distinct segments of the USBRL rail link.

The NRCO is responsible for coordinating the progress of the work by the other two agencies and reporting to the Railway Board. The Railway Board was responsible for technical guidance on selection of alignment and financial issues, besides co-ordination of overall progress.

As the project is being funded by the Government of India on strategic grounds, the Cabinet Committee on Infrastructure is responsible for according administrative approvals of project estimates. The Ministry of Finance is responsible for providing finances.

### Organization Structure

