

# Assam Rail Link

## Imported Railway Equipment and Stores

(Valued at Rs 5 lakhs or above per annum)  
(value in Rs lakhs)

I Locomotive Duplicates:	
Ejectors ..	6.40
Steel Castings ..	60.27
Cast iron parts ..	8.05
Steel Forgings ..	10.85
Boiler flanged steel plates ..	7.59
"    "    copper ..	13.81
Tubes and pipes ..	34.27
Springs ..	5.18
Tyres ..	16.10
Electric Headlight equipment and spares ..	12.66
II Carriage & Wagon Compartments and Materials:	
Hard Board Tempered	5.54
Central Buffer Couplers	5.47
Steel Castings ..	5.66
Helical Springs ..	12.11
Dynamos ..	13.94
Batteries ..	30.94
Air-Conditioning Equipment ..	23.04
III Mechanical & Electrical Signalling & Interlocking Material:	
Block Instruments ..	5.05
Cells ..	7.14
IV Electric Traction Material:	
Belting (Power Transmission and Train lighting) ..	11.22
Electrodes for Arc Welding ..	6.40
Tool Steels ..	5.88
Spring Steel Oil Hardening Quality for Coil and Helical springs	7.39

Source: Railway Board.

## Gains or Losses in Working Indian Government Railways

(lakhs of rupees)

Railway	'49-'50	'50-'51	'51-'52
Assam	—4.50	—5.03	4.47
Bengal-Nagpur	1.04	3.51	2.83
Bikaner State	....	14	39
Central	6.65	8.40	9.37
East Indian	5.93	3.18	7.27
Eastern Punjab	63	—2.00	74
Jodhpur	....	28	24
Oudh-Tirhut	—2.00	—1.69	11
Southern	2.20	5.16	7.22
Western	8.85	9.63	10.26
<b>Total</b>	<b>18.80</b>	<b>21.58</b>	<b>33.96</b>

OF the engineering projects completed during the post-war period, none has been so remarkable as the Assam Rail Link. Its completion in record time provided the vital link between Assam and the rest of India which was suddenly snapped by the partition; the Pakistan province of East Bengal now came in between. Moreover, the northern districts of West Bengal namely, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri had become inaccessible except through Eastern Pakistan. In view of its strategic importance, heightened by the tense relations between the two countries, the government gave top priority to this project. After a rapid reconnaissance it was decided to link up the existing metre gauge systems of the Oudh and Tirhut Railway and isolated parts of the Assam Railway (both now part of North Eastern). The proposed railway was to connect Kishengunj on the OTR with Arnin-gaon in Assam. During a period of less than two years, despite adverse weather and health conditions, a 142 mile long link was completed. It was opened to through goods traffic on December 9, 1949 and to passenger traffic on January 26, 1950, the Republic Day. Built with remarkable precision and efficiency, this major operation in which Indian Army Engineers gave a helping hand to Civil Authorities, stands out as an example of great engineering skill and ingenuity.

The Assam Link consists of four different sectors to build which modern methods were employed with good results. The first Kishanganj-Siliguri involved the conversion of 66 miles of existing 2' gauge to metre gauge. Since the old narrow gauge railway was more or less in the nature of a tram line, the conversion practically amounted to the construction of a new metre gauge-railway. The next section Siliguri-Bagarkote—proved to be the most difficult one Besides the provision of a new metre gauge connection of 22 miles, a major bridge over the turbulent Tista river had to be constructed. In this area, which is interspersed with a number of rivers and streams that flow through rugged country, over a hundred bridges had to be built. The one over river Tista has ope span of 250 feet clear and four spans of 150 feet clear. The next section between Madari-hat and Hasimara, though only 8½ miles long, passes over the decep-tive Torsa river, which is bridged

by nine spans of 150 feet each. The fourth section linking Alipur Duar and Fakiragram was completed with no special difficulties. The inter-mediate portion of about five miles, however, passes through thick and impenetrable forests, while the whole country is cut across by the rivers Sankosh and Raidak and their numerous tributaries.

The magnitude of the work can be judged from the fact that some 379 channels, varying from nullahs to swollen rivers, were bridged with-in practically a single working season and considerable expenditure was incurred for making large em-bankments for railway alignment and bunds for river control. Pre-stressed concrete girders of 60 feet and 40 feet spans were used for the first time in India for constructing bridges across Tista, Torsa and San-kosh.

The total cost of the Assam Rail Link was about Rs 9.3 crores, work-ing out to Rs 6.5 lakhs per mile. The railway runs through the Pur-nea district of Bihar for a length of 40 miles, the Darjeeling and Jalpai-guri districts of West Bengal for 78 miles, Cooch-Bihar State for five miles and Goalpara district of Assam for 22 miles.

In view of the heavy capital out-lay on the Link and the high main-tenance cost, the standard telescopic class and wagon load rates on a continuous mileage basis were made subject to mileage inflations—the extent of inflation varying on dif-ferent sections from twice to thrice. For tea and jute which form the main traffic of Assam, rates have been adjusted so as to make them equal to the charges formerly paid for movement by all-rail, all-river or rail-cum-river routes. A similar basis has been adopted for rates for kerosene oil and paraffin wax. The Link has now shortened the distance from principal tea and jute booking stations in the Dooars to Calcutta.

The outstanding achievements of the Assam Rail Link perhaps go to show that the technical skill avail-able in the country is of a high calibre. There are still several urgent open line Works which the Government will have to undertake as part of the railway development programme during the next few years. When successfully completed these will enable the railways to play better the role assigned to them in the economic development of the country.