



Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw Unveils Eight More Structural Reforms under 'Reform Express' to Strengthen India's Freight Operations

New Policies to Reduce Logistics Costs, Improve Supply Chains, Encourage Private Investment and Promote Cleaner Freight Transportation

Reforms to Enable Faster Project Execution and Encourage Innovation across the Railway Ecosystem: Ashwini Vaishnaw

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Continuing the '**Reform Express**', Union Minister for Railways Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw today announced eight more structural reforms to modernise Indian Railways. With this, the total number of reforms implemented under the initiative has reached **17**. The new reforms will bring significant changes in freight transportation, logistics, construction practices, project execution, wagon design, skilling and ease of doing business.

Addressing the media in Rail Bhawan, New Delhi, Shri Vaishnaw said that Indian Railways is undertaking a series of reforms to build a future-ready railway system. These reforms are part of the Ministry's target of implementing 52 reforms in 52 weeks to enhance efficiency, promote innovation and strengthen the railway ecosystem. Shri Vaishnaw said the reforms announced earlier under the Reform Express initiative have already started yielding encouraging results.

Reform 10: Fly Ash Transportation

Shri Vaishnaw said that India generates around **340 million tonnes of fly ash annually**, of which nearly **96 million tonnes** is utilised by the cement industry. Indian Railways transported about **13 million tonnes** of fly ash during FY 2025-26, accounting for nearly four per cent of the country's total fly ash generation.



He said that fly ash has traditionally been transported through open wagons, resulting in dust pollution during loading, transportation and unloading. Fly ash also poses a significant environmental challenge when stored in large ash ponds at thermal power plants.

To address these issues, Indian Railways has introduced a new containerised transportation system for fly ash. Under the new policy, specially designed ISO-standard containers will be used for transportation. These containers can be loaded directly from the power plant through top-loading arrangements and unloaded using side-discharge or pneumatic systems without generating dust pollution.



Shri Vaishnaw said the closed-container system will enable pollution-free transportation, facilitate safe storage within cement plants until the material is required, and significantly improve logistics efficiency. The containers can be handled through reach stackers, allowing seamless end-to-end movement from power plants to cement plants. The reform is expected to increase rail movement of fly ash, reduce dependence on road transport and convert an environmental challenge into an economically productive resource.



Railway Reform in 2026

➡ Making Fly Ash Transportation Cleaner & More Efficient

- ✓ Container-based rail transportation
- ✓ Reduced environmental impact
- ✓ Sustainable freight movement pic.twitter.com/mQJDiuRouW

— Ashwini Vaishnaw (@AshwiniVaishnaw) July 14, 2026

Reform 11: Reforms in the Container Sector

The Union Minister said that diversification of railway freight beyond bulk commodities requires greater containerisation. To promote container traffic, Indian Railways has undertaken a major structural reform in the container train operator licensing framework.

He said that under the existing system, Container Train Operator (CTO) licences were issued under four categories (Category I–IV), with a registration fee of ₹50 crore for Category-I and ₹10 crore for each of the other categories, along with route-specific restrictions and different registration requirements. This has now been replaced by a **single unified Pan-India Container Train Operator licence**.

Under the new framework, operators will be able to run container trains across the entire Indian Railways network without category-based restrictions. The registration system has also been simplified through a uniform **non-refundable registration fee of ₹25 crore** applicable across all routes.



Railway Reform in 2026



Simplifying Container Train Operations across India

- ✓ One unified Pan-India license
- ✓ Easier business & faster approvals
- ✓ Greater ease of doing business pic.twitter.com/tXUH47EJwf

— Ashwini Vaishnaw (@AshwiniVaishnaw) July 14, 2026

Shri Vaishnaw further said that permissions will continue to remain valid for twenty years and can thereafter be extended without payment of any renewal or extension fee, subject to successful operations. The simplified licensing framework is expected to improve ease of doing business, encourage greater private participation, increase containerisation, attract more non-bulk cargo to railways, reduce logistics costs and strengthen the country's freight ecosystem.

Reform 12: Fertilizer Transportation

Highlighting the importance of fertilizer movement for the agricultural sector, Shri Vaishnaw said Indian Railways currently handles nearly **85 per cent** of fertilizer transportation in the country.

He said that the existing freight charging system comprised nearly fifty different slabs, making operations complex. Under the new reform, freight charges have been simplified to a **per tonne per kilometre** basis with a rationalised tariff structure comprising three variations.

रेलवे में फर्टिलाइजर ट्रांसपोर्टेशन के लिए 50 तरीके के फ्रेट स्लैब बने हुए हैं अब इसे बदल कर प्रति टन - प्रति किलोमीटर बेसिस पर तय किया गया है : माननीय रेल मंत्री @AshwiniVaishnaw जी pic.twitter.com/zjpHp72Luy

— Ministry of Railways (@RailMinIndia) July 14, 2026

The reform also permits transportation of fertilizers through containers. Unlike the earlier system, where an entire rake remained detained until complete unloading at a single destination, individual containers can now be unloaded and stored at rake points according to demand. This will enable phased distribution based on the requirements and lifting capacity of distributors.

The Minister said containerised movement will improve wagon turnaround, reduce detention of rakes, facilitate flexible distribution, protect fertilizers from rain and weather-related damage and improve overall logistics efficiency.

Reform 13: Policy for Skilling Artisans in Railway Projects and Works

Shri Vaishnaw said that railway infrastructure projects involve safety-sensitive operations requiring specialised skills, precision engineering and adherence to strict quality standards.

To ensure deployment of competent manpower, Indian Railways has introduced a comprehensive policy for skilling artisans engaged in railway projects and works. The policy establishes a structured framework for identification, assessment and certification of workers engaged in critical trades such as welding, fitting, masonry and other specialised construction activities.

Under the new framework, project-specific skill requirements will be defined and workers will undergo practical and oral assessments through designated testing authorities. Successful candidates will receive **QR code-enabled skill certificates** linked to a live verification database.

The Minister said implementation of the policy will commence with major and complex railway projects, including bridges and tunnels, and will be expanded across all Zonal Railways and Production Units over the next twenty-four months.

He said the initiative will ensure that only certified artisans and supervisors are deployed in specialised railway works, standardise skill assessment across Indian Railways, facilitate real-time verification of credentials, improve workmanship, strengthen quality assurance and promote skill upgradation across the country's infrastructure sector.

Reform 14: Construction Reforms

Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw said that following the success of the contractor qualification reforms introduced earlier this year, Indian Railways has now undertaken another major set of reforms to strengthen the construction ecosystem and improve project execution.

The Union Minister said the reforms are aimed at encouraging serious and capable contractors, improving quality of construction, reducing disputes and ensuring timely completion of railway infrastructure projects.

As part of the reforms, 10 per cent Performance Security will now be obtained at the commencement of the contract instead of being recovered through deductions from running bills. This will ensure that only serious contractors participate in railway projects and strengthen accountability during execution.

To discourage litigation-driven contracting practices, stricter eligibility criteria have also been introduced. Contractors having pending litigation exceeding 50 per cent of their net worth will not be eligible to participate in railway tenders.

The reforms further introduce Contractor's All Risk Insurance and Professional Indemnity Insurance to strengthen risk management during project execution and provide protection against construction-related risks.

Shri Vaishnaw said that Indian Railways has also established a clearly defined and sequential land handover mechanism to minimise disputes and facilitate timely commencement of projects.

The Minister also mentioned Rail Bhoomi, a web-based platform developed by CRIS for end-to-end management of land acquisition. The platform integrates various Railway applications, including IRPSM, IPAS and HRMS, enabling seamless exchange of information, online processing of major land acquisition stages, efficient workflow management and real-time monitoring through dashboards and management information systems. The portal is expected to accelerate land acquisition, improve project planning and facilitate timely execution of railway infrastructure works.

Reform 15: Policy for Wagon Design Approval

Highlighting another major structural reform, Shri Vaishnaw announced a new policy for wagon design approval aimed at promoting innovation and enabling industry participation in designing specialised freight wagons.

The Minister said that under the existing system, wagon designs were largely developed by the Research Designs and Standards Organisation (RDSO), with several critical components such as bogies, couplers and braking systems being restricted to prescribed standards. This limited design flexibility and constrained innovation.

Under the new policy, designers, manufacturers and industries will be able to develop and propose wagon designs suited to specific commodities and operational requirements.

RDSO will evaluate the proposed design and, upon in-principle approval, permit development of a prototype. After detailed design, prototype manufacturing and rigorous static and dynamic testing, a full rake will undergo field trials before safety certification, inspection by the Chief Commissioner of Railway Safety and approval by the Railway Board for induction into service.

अब इंडस्ट्री अपनी जरूरत के हिसाब से वैगन डिजाइन प्रपोज कर सकती है। रेलवे का RDSO ऐसे डिजाइनों का मूल्यांकन करेगा : माननीय रेल मंत्री @AshwiniVaishnaw जी pic.twitter.com/jZLHGWN8sQ

— Ministry of Railways (@RailMinIndia) July 14, 2026

Shri Vaishnaw said the new framework will facilitate development of specialised wagons for sectors such as steel, petroleum, chemicals, milk, plastics and other industries requiring customised transportation solutions. The reform is expected to create a new ecosystem for wagon design and manufacturing, encourage technological innovation and enhance freight efficiency across sectors.

Reform 16: Petroleum Products Transportation

Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw said transportation of petroleum, oil and lubricant (POL) products requires specialised tank wagons. He said the existing system, under which Indian Railways owned all tank wagons, restricted flexibility for oil companies to introduce specialised wagons suited to their operational requirements.

To address this, Indian Railways has removed the structural barriers governing design and induction of petroleum tank wagons. Oil companies will now be able to procure specialised wagons directly or lease them through leasing agencies and induct them on the Indian Railways network for specialised requirements.

ऑयल कंपनीज को अपनी जरूरत के हिसाब से वैगन डिजाइन व इंडक्ट करने की अनुमति दी गई है : माननीय रेल मंत्री @AshwiniVaishnaw जी pic.twitter.com/dwiybOC6HW

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The Minister said the reform will enable introduction of specialised tank wagons, improve logistics planning, reduce transportation costs, promote greater movement of petroleum products through rail and minimise risks associated with road transportation, including product losses and adulteration.

Reform 17: Foodgrains, Flour and Pulses Transportation

Shri Vaishnaw said Indian Railways has also introduced a major reform for transportation of foodgrains, flour and pulses by simplifying freight charges and promoting containerised movement.

Under the new policy, the earlier complex slab-based freight structure has been replaced with a simplified per tonne per kilometre rate structure. The reform permits transportation of foodgrains, flour and pulses through containers, enabling easier handling, flexible storage and phased distribution based on operational requirements.

The Minister said containers can be stored at the premises of sellers or buyers and distributed according to demand, without detaining an entire rake. Since the containers remain sealed, the possibility of contamination is significantly reduced, thereby improving the safety and quality of foodgrain transportation while enhancing logistics efficiency.

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Under the Reform Express initiative, Indian Railways had earlier implemented nine major structural reforms, covering continuous on-board train cleaning, expansion of Gati Shakti Cargo Terminals, the RailTech policy and portal, digitisation of the Railway Claims Tribunal, specialised containers for salt and automobile transportation, seven construction-quality reforms, simplified ticket cancellation and refund rules, and digital change of boarding point.

Shri Vaishnaw said the new reforms will help shift a larger share of freight traffic from road to rail, reducing logistics costs and delivering substantial environmental benefits. He noted that rail transport generates nearly 90 per cent lower carbon emissions than road transport. The Minister said gradual containerisation of additional commodities will diversify Indian Railways' freight basket beyond traditional bulk cargo and further strengthen its freight business.

Railway Reforms by Hon'ble MR

Ministry of Railways - India



Watch on

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