



Good News for Container Train Operators as They Can Operate Across All Routes with a Single All India Licence, Improving Ease of Doing Business

Indian Railways Simplifies Licensing Framework; Reforms to Reduce Transportation Costs and Pollution, Ease Road Congestion and Benefit Industry, Particularly MSMEs

Other Reforms Include a Uniform Registration Fee of ₹25 Crore and No Renewal Fee for Extension

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Indian Railways has approved modifications in the Model Concession Agreement (MCA) governing permission for operators to run container trains on the Indian Railways network. Under the approved changes, Container Train Operators (CTOs) will be permitted to run container trains on all routes across the network under a single All India license, with a uniform registration fee of Rs 25 crore, doing away with the earlier system of separate permissions and fees for different route categories. The changes will be notified through a Gazette Notification.

Single License for All Routes

As part of the approved modifications, the existing route-wise categorisation of licences will be discontinued. Subject to approval by the Ministry of Railways, Container Train Operators will be granted a **Single All India Licence**, enabling them to operate container trains across all routes on the Indian Railways network.

Uniform Registration Fee

The earlier system of charging different registration fees for different route categories has been done away with. Every applicant will now deposit a non refundable **Uniform Registration fee** of **₹25 crore** to operate on all routes on the Indian Railways network.

No Fee on Extension

The approved amendments provide that the permission granted to a Container Train Operator may be extended for a further period of 20 years after expiry. This will be done by the Competent Authority to the same operator on application, subject to satisfactory performance. No extension fee will be charged for this extension or for any future extensions to the same operator.

Relief for Existing Operators

Operators already holding Category I licenses may continue under their existing category until their concession period ends. On renewal or extension under the new license, no fee will be charged to them.

Operators in Category II, III and IV may also continue in their existing categories until their concession period ends. For renewal or extension under the new license, they will pay ₹15 crore. This is the difference between the new fee of ₹25 crore and the ₹10 crore already paid. This amount is non refundable.

These operators may also choose to migrate early to the new license before completing their 20 year concession period. They will pay the same amount of ₹15 crore for early migration.

Benefits for Industry

The uniform registration fee and removal of extension fees are expected to reduce regulatory and compliance costs for operators while simplifying the approval process.

The simplified licensing is expected to encourage greater private participation and expansion of container train operations, leading to improved rail-based freight movement across the country. Greater use of rail for container transportation is expected to reduce logistics costs for industry, particularly MSMEs, by providing a more efficient and cost-effective freight transport option.

Increased modal shift of container traffic from road to rail is also expected to ease congestion on highways, reduce fuel consumption and lower carbon emissions, contributing to more sustainable freight transportation.

Towards a Uniform and Simplified Licensing Regime

The approved amendments are aimed at establishing a simplified and uniform licensing framework for Container Train Operators across the Indian Railways network. The reforms are expected to facilitate a streamlined approval mechanism while providing a common regulatory framework for container train operations under the Model Concession Agreement.

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