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Operational Problems and Prospects of Bangladesh Railway: A Diagnostic Study

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Abstract

Bangladesh Railway (BR), which is fully owned and operated by the Government of Bangladesh. It is operates, maintained and controlled by Director General of Bangladesh Railway under the Ministry of Railways. The purpose of this paper is to provide a diagnostic study on BR from the inception to recent years. Over the years, BR faced a number of problems. Information on mismanagement and corruption in the organization has trickled out in recent years. This study highlights the core problem of the continuing failure of BR to develop and manage their systems in ticket, poor passenger service, corruption in purchasing spare parts, and lack of planning with regard to scheduling, human resource management and so on. The paper identifies several factors, including the importance of governance, capacity building, providing adequate, efficient, and effective service in railway.

Keywords: Bangladesh Railways, Transportation, Gauge

INTRODUCTION

Public transport faces severe problems in almost all countries of the developing world, although the situation varies from one country to another and even from one city to (Vasconcellos, 2001). Public transportation is a term that refers to a mode of transportation that general public may use to move from one place to another against a certain fee. Another meaning of public transportation means mass transportation. In Bangladesh rail is the common form of transport and it available for access by all citizen of the country provided that they are willing to pay a sum of money for transit in location.

Perhaps most important, the lack of financial resources prevents necessary investments in maintaining and upgrading BR. Likewise, many advanced technologies long available in Western Europe are simply not affordable in most developing countries. Rail systems in the Third World are plagued by chronic corruption and inefficiency, overcrowded and undependable service and an operating environment that is often chaotic and completely uncoordinated. Poverty is not only a problem at the individual level, but also in the public sector, railway desperately lacking the necessary financial resources for investment in infrastructure, locomotives, new technologies, and fare subsidies. The financial problems stemming from Bangladesh's low per-capita income are probably the most important challenges. But there are many others as well: corruptions, inefficiency, old locomotives, accidents, lack of planning, overcrowding, noise, and total lack of coordination of any kind.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rahmatullah (2007) identifies misallocation of resources, poor governance, mismanagement, lack of

transparency and rampant corruption in the railway as the culprits.

Vasconcellos (2001). Public transport faces severe problems in almost all countries of the developing world, although the situation varies from one country to another and even from one city to another.

Rui wang, Muhammod Kudrot-E-Khuda (2014) showed that, the shift of passengers from roads to rail is one of the objectives of the National Transport Plan (NTP) in order to reduce congestion and to limit emissions of CO_2 and air pollutants. There is also an expectation that the improved commuter train service will accelerate the regional development. The improvement of the line will further encouraged freight transport between the two industrial cities during the off-time period of commuter train services

According to World Bank (2016), the number of vehicles on city roads in Bangladesh increased 16 times between 2001 and 2013. But the volume of transport by water and rail declined almost in equal proportion. Transport flows in Bangladesh are increasing rapidly.

Bangladesh national conservation strategy(2015) state that, The full potential of railway and waterway has not been capitalized to make a well-balanced and integrated multi-modal sustainable transport system and thereby converse land and resources .

Mr Md. Ikbal(2007) identified that, The role of an efficiency transport and communication system is extremely critical for the socio-economic progress of a country.

Bangladesh Transport Sector study, (1994) the volume of road transport increased by 88 percent from 1985 through 1993, whereas the volume of transport by water as well as rail declined in almost equal proportion. Transport output for passenger flows in Bangladesh is increasing rapidly. In 1992/93, 1.37 billion passenger trips were undertaken in Bangladesh. The average distances traveled for a passenger trip was 48 kilometers.

Khalid, Nasir and Mohsin(2016) argued that the Railway transport is extremely resilient and is able to endure great degrees of cargo as well as passengers usage on a daily basis. It is efficient and economical from an energy usage based perspective as well. It is also the cheaper and more frugal option for those who can't afford the more expensive and costly means of transportation, like air travel for instance.

OBJECTIVES

Identify the current scenario of Bangladesh railway.

Find out the progressive development of Bangladesh Railway.

Recommend some future development strategy.

METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on secondary information and the required information has been collected from related journals, published and unpublished materials of different agencies. The purpose of this paper is to provide a diagnostic study on BR from the inception to recent years. Over the years, BR faced a number of problems. Information on mismanagement and corruption in the organization has trickled out in recent years. This study highlights the core problem of the continuing failure of BR to develop and manage their systems in ticket, poor passenger service, corruption in purchasing spare parts, and lack of planning with regard to scheduling, human resource management and so on.

HISTORY OF BANGLADESH RAILWAY

Bangladesh Railway, a principle transportation agency of the country, is a Government owned and Government – managed organization. It covers a length of 2,877.10 route kilometers employing a total of 25,083 regular employees. As railway is a very important mode of inland transport, linking the entire length and breadth of the country, it's healthy grow naturally contributes to the economic development of the country. Till June 2, 1982, the management and development of railway was vested with a Railway Board, comprising of a Chairman and four members. But, for administrative convenience and operational reason the Railway Board was abolished with effect from June 3, 1982 and the function of the Railway Board was vested with the Railway Division of the Ministry of Communications with the Secretary of the Division working as the Director General of Bangladesh Railway. For the same purpose the Railway bifurcated into two zones, East & West, under the administrative control of two general managers, who are accountable to the Director General of Bangladesh Railway. Subsequently on August 12, 1995 the day to day operation of the Railway was separated from the Ministry and entrusted with director general drawn from the Railway professionals. For policy guidance, a 9(nine) member Bangladesh Railway authority (BRA) was formed with the Minster Ministry of Communications as its Chairman. The Director General is assisted by Additional Director General and Joint Director General to perform all administrative and policy making jobs.

The General Managers of the two zones are assisted by various specialized departments who are responsible for operation, maintenance and financial management. Each zone is again divided in two divisions, which are the basic unit of operation. The division is headed by a Divisional Railway Manager, who is assisted by Divisional Officers of various specialized Departments such as Personnel, Transportation, Commercial, Finance Mechanical, Way and Works Signaling & Telecommunication, Electrical, Medical, Nirapatta Bahini etc. Besides there are two workshop Divisions, one in each zone, located at Pahartoli and Syedpur, each being headed by a Divisional Superintendent .Further there is a locomotive workshop headed by Chief Executive at Parbatipur for general overhauling of both BG&MG locomotives. Bangladesh Railway also has Railway Training Academy headed by a Rector, a planning cell headed by a Chief Planning Officer, stores Department headed by a Chief Controller of Stores and Accounts Department headed by an Additional Director General/Finance for coordinating and advising Accounting and financial management activities of the two zones.

To ensure safety of Railway transportation Government has set up a separate Directorate under Ministry of Communications to inspect different works of BR relates with the train operation.

CURRENT SCENARIO OF BANGLADESH RAILWAY

Track, Bridges AND Stations

Bangladesh Railway has a total of 2,877.10 route kilometers at the end of the year 2014-2015. East Zone has 1,113.57 route kilometers of MG and 194.70 route kilometers of DG track only, and West Zone has 534.67 route kilometers of MG 659.33 route kilometers of BG and 374.83 route kilometers of DG track. The total length of running track on double line, in the yards and sidings is 4,093.15 kilometers (information Book, 2015)

Freight Traffic

Another striking feature of BR's performance is that it is rapidly losing its market share in freight traffic. Most modern railway systems make profit out of freight traffic because it is generally considered cheaper and safer options for transferring bulk transport of agricultural, mineral and import/export containers.

Despite the very rapid growth in the volume of freight traffic in Bangladesh due to a rapid expansion of both domestic and foreign trade, BR has systematically failed to maintain its share in this fast growing and potentially profitable segment. BR appears to have forgotten that the British Administration laid down a very extensive railway network all over South Asia, and more importantly in the undivided Bengal, primarily to carry goods and raw materials. Due to BR's lack of focus on freight traffic, the volume of traffic in ton-kilometer in fiscal year (FY) 2014-15 was significantly below the levels recorded in preceding years. **(Figure I) (Table I)**

Locomotives

Bangladesh Railway now owns basically two types of locomotives viz Diesel Electric (DE) & Diesel Hydraulic (DH). The total fleet as on 30th June 2015 is 282 out of which 274 Diesel Electric (94 BG & 180 MG) and 8 Diesel Hydraulic (3 BG & 6 M.G.) locomotives. The active holding is 282 out of which to 274 Diesel Electric (94 BG & 180 MG) and 8 Diesel Hydraulic (2 BG & 6 MG) Locomotives (Excluding off schedule). **(Table II)**

Locomotives are expensive items; as such it is only through increased productivity that the unit cost of a loco could be reduced. It is argued that a well-managed railway should have above 90 percent of its diesel locomotive fleet available for use on any given day. The availability for uses of MG locos is about 85 percent and for BG locos, it is 75 percent in Bangladesh. In addition, the speed is another factor for locos productivity, which depends on track condition. However, a-mix of factors contributes to reduce utilization of locos in Bangladesh.

Officers and Staffs

As on date 30th June, 2015, there are 463 officers & 27,157 staff of different categories. The staffs are classified as Class-III and Class-IV staff. The ratio of officers and staff is about 1.59. There are eight registered trade unions in BR to maintain a healthy relation between the employees and administration to pave the way for congenial working atmosphere on the system.

Financial Summary

The total operating revenue without considering the effect of Public Service Obligation (PSO) and Welfare Grant of Bangladesh Railway for the year 2014-2015 amounted to Tk.9,354.60 million. After meeting the total operating expenses of Tk. 18,082.98 million, the net operating income for the year came to (-) Tk 8728.38 million.

On the other hand, Government paid an amount of Tk. 860.00 million and Tk. 393.57 million as PSO compensation and Welfare Grant respectively. As a result, the total operating revenue duly considering the effect of PSO and Welfare Grant for the year 2014-2015 amounted to Tk 10,608.15 million. So, the total operating expenses of Tk. 18.082.98 million, the net operating income for the year came to (-) Tk 7,474.83 million.

The interest and installments on foreign loans taken on replacement

account amounted to Tk. 181.00 million and Tk.630.00 million.

During 2014-2015 there was increase in average revenue per passenger as always passenger kilometer as compared to those of 2013-2014. Revenue per passenger increased to Tk. 77.62 from Tk. 75.14 and revenue per passenger-kilometer increased to 57.92 paisa from 57.84 paisa i.e. 0.14%. Average Distance travelled by passenger was from 125.2 kilometers in 2013-2014 to 129.4 kilometers in 2014-2015. In goods traffic, there was increase in average revenue per ton as well as revenue per tone -kilometer. Average revenue per ton increase by 20.48% from Tk. 565.00 In 2013-2014 to Tk. 680.74 in 2014-2015 and revenue per ton kilometer increased by 17.68% i.e. from 202.5 paisa in 2013-2014 to 238.3 paisa in 2014-2015. The average haul of freight traffic increased from 268.4 kilometers in 2013-2014 to 271.6 kilometers in 2014-2015.

The total operating revenue without considering PSO and welfare grant for the year 2014-2015 amounted to Tk.9, 355.58 million as compared to Tk. 8,001.80 million in 2013-2014, representing an increase of 16.91% . Passenger earnings in 2014-2015 amounted to Tk. 5,226.84 million, showing an increase of 7.10% as compared to the earning of 2013-2014 amounting to Tk.4, 880.17 million. Other coaching (Parcel and Luggage) earnings in 2014 2015 was Tk. 184.84 million as compared to Tk 225.71 million in 2013-2014 representing an decrease of Tk. 18.11 %. Miscellaneous earnings showed an increase of 50.03% from Tk.1, 466.60 million in 2013 -2014 to Tk. 2,200.03 million in 2014-2015.

The total operating expenses for the year 2014-2015 amounting to Tk. 18,082.98 million, exhibits an increase of 12.90% as compared to the working expenses of 2013-2014 amounting to Tk.16, 016.96.million. The operating ratio decreased over the previous year from 200.2% in 2013-2014 to 193.3% in 2014-2015 without considering the effect of PSO and Welfare Grant. The Operating Ratio becomes 170.5% in the year 2014-2015 if the effect of PSO and Welfare Grant is considered. (Table III)

PROSPECTS OF BANGLADESH RAILWAY

Railway Recovery and Reform Programme

Bangladesh Railway has undergone several recovery and reform programmes since its independence in 1971, all aiming towards improving the performance of institutional capacity and commercial orientation of BR.

Bangladesh Railway Reform programme launched in 2006: Bangladesh Railway has embarked upon a comprehensive reform programme to achieve the guidelines of the National Land Transport Policy designed to integrate all aspects covered under earlier programme with more focus on Restructuring BR into Lines of Business(LOB)structure, improvement of financial management & accounting system, preparation of asset registry for all LOBs, improvement of HR management structures etc. The programme, like the earlier ones, is funded by Asian Development Bank (ADB). An International Consulting firm has been engaged for achieving the above tasks.

Under this reform programme, it is proposed that BR will be restructured in 8 (eight) Lines of Business (LOB) i.e. Passenger, Freight, Infrastructure, Rolling Stock, Finance, Corporate Services, Project and Estate LOBs. There will be

a Railway Advisory Board vested with the policy making authority on behalf of the Government. A separate Railway Executive Board under the Chairmanship of Director General, Bangladesh Railway will be formed. Passenger, Freight, Infrastructure, Rolling Stock, Finance & Corporate Services LOB heads will be the member of the Railway Executive Board. The proposed Railway Advisory Board and Railway Executive Board are under process of approval by GOB.

An independent Ministry named ``Ministry of Railway'' established for Bangladesh Railway on 4 December, 2011 for rapid development and service improvement of Railway in a dynamic operational environment.

Development Plan

Seventh Five year Plan (2016-2020)

Under take Construction of 856 Kilometer of new railway track. Under take dual gauge double tracking of 1110 kilometer. Under take rehabilitation of 725 kilometer of existing rail track. Construction of bridges and other infrastructure for operational improvement Procure new locomotives to improve service quality. Procure new coaches for passenger comfort. Upgrade railway workshops and maintenance. Improve speed and safety of train running. Improve efficiency of railway Increase railway revenue Total Allocation for implementing the seventh year plan is 663377.10 Million Tk.

Railway Master Plan (2010-2030)

The 20 years Railway Master Plane was approved on 30.6.2013.

The Master Plan includes 235 development projects in 4 phases.

The Plan is expected to guide the overall development of Bangladesh Railway in the foreseeable future.

The potential of the railway in Bangladesh needs to be unlocked through

investment in track, signaling rolling stock, maintenance and human resource.

A prospective lines and compatibility of standards with neighboring countries and Trans Asian Railway Network.

For the unification of Gauge system MG railway network should be gradually converted into BG network over the plan period.

Total Allocation for implementing the seventh year plan is 2339440.00 Million Tk.

PROBLEMS OF BANGLADESH RAILWAY

Gauge Problems:

Bangladesh Railway has been suffering from gauge problem. BR comprises two gauge, Broad Gauge (BG) and Meter Gauge (MG), which involves transshipments of traffic at the break of gauge points. Recently Dual Gauge (DG) has been constructed in some important section to ease the problems.

The railway link over the Bangabandhu Bridge connecting the East and West zones through the construction of 99 km new dual gauge line and rehabilitation and conversion of 245 km Broad Gauge line from Jamtoil to Parbatipur to Dual Gauge has eased out these operational problems considerably. Improvement will be achieved after completion of the following ongoing/ proposed work, viz.(a) railway link between western side of Jamuna Bridge to Bogra.(b) Track doubling between Tongi-Bhairab Bazar and Laksham-Chinkiastana of Dhaka-Chittagong corridor. Further improvement will be

achieved after implementation of 6th five year plan which commenced from 2011.

Physical Problems

The railway network of Bangladesh which was inherited from undivided India is totally unsuitable for present traffic flow requirements. The inherited colonial network does not suit the strategic transport needs of modern Bangladesh. Tracks, locomotives and rolling stock are relatively in poor condition, and a range of physical and institutional issue inhibits the realization of full capacity of the existing network.

Managerial Problem

Bangladesh Railway management system is under experiment for a long time. Till June, 2, 1982, the management and development of railways was vested with a Railway Board, comprising of a Chairman and four members. Railway bifurcated into two zones, East & West zones, under the administrative control of the two General Managers (GM). For this reason it creates operational as well planning and development problems. For this reason, restructuring of BR i.e. organizational reform is very much necessary to develop efficient and active management system.

Poor Service quality

The passengers are awfully suffering in the rail journey due to its woeful services. The compartments are dirty, shabby and in most of the compartments there is no toilet and light. The seats are torn, uncomfortable and the inside of the compartments are dirty and dusty. The seats are mostly broken, limited and passengers most of the time remain standing for the long journey. The railway administration is unable and unmindful to maintain the minimum standard of services not to speak of improving those.

Corruption in Ticket

There is a “syndicate” comprised of some of the railway staff and locals which buys all the tickets, creating an “artificial crisis” of tickets and leaving passengers with no option but to get those from the black market. Most of the ticket supervisors hardly check tickets and most of the passengers travel without ticket or often by bribing the ticket checkers. Unbridled corruption is one of the major ailments of Bangladesh railway. There are about 339 trains operating in the eastern and western zone of the BR. Some of these trains are broad gauge while others are meter gauge. It is found that in most of the cases the rail lines are old and dilapidated in many of the areas and many of the old busy lines are now closed and inoperative.

Bangladesh Railway (BR) authorities have raised the passenger fare by 9 per cent from February 01, 2016 to boost the income of the BR to meet the increased operating cost. The enhanced fare will increase the railway income by only BDT 450 million annually while the annual loss of Bangladesh railway is BDT 9 billion. The new measure to raise the railway fare will only add to the sufferings of the passengers.

Manpower shortage

Track maintenance is one of the crucial issues which need to be maintained for ensuring proper utilization of public fund. The bar chart related to employee productivity shows that it is very low in most of the Asian countries, which calls for improvement. It is partly because the regular departmental staffs maintain the track manually. However, close supervision may increase to some extent the productivity of maintenance labor, which could be and cheaper than mechanized track maintenance.

The mechanized maintenance system is also required, particularly in the main line, where traffic density and speed are of paramount importance. Presently, Bangladesh Railway has been laying concrete sleeper in place of steel sleeper, which are more heavier. This type of replacement needs more manual labor than before. In the context of employee per km of line, the bar-chart shows that Bangladesh is having an average position among the Asian countries. Employee per km of line is 14 in Bangladesh as compared to 25 in India.

The railway is going to recruit 67 more assistant drivers which would ease the driver crisis a little but recruitment of station masters seems a long way off. An attempt to recruit 81 assistant station masters was made in 2006 but it was cancelled amid allegation of irregularities the following year. In the last 10 years, only 14 of them could be appointed. Establishment section officials said a fresh move was underway to appoint 91 assistant station masters. “Three station masters are required to run a station round-the-clock,” said an official, adding that currently two station masters were doing extra four hours of duty to cover the time. Meanwhile, Bangladesh Railway has created 300 new positions of station masters to reopen some closed stations. It is seeking approval for the appointments. Legal complications have also dogged the appointment of gatekeepers. There are only 242 gatekeepers now but the railway needs 785.

SYNOPSIS OF PROBLEMS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Most of the existing problems faced by BR currently are as a result of the lack of full and proper maintenance of BR’s permanent ways, bridges, signals and other ancillary facilities over a number of decades. Bangladesh Railway has its own workshops for maintenance of its rolling stocks. Though the different types of works relating to rolling stocks are undertaken in the various workshops, these workshops themselves had not been maintained or overhauled over the past years to get the maximum productivity. Aging of rolling stocks, such as locomotives, coaches and wagons together with lack of maintenance on a timely manner, decreases the availability of rolling stock on line on any given day. As a consequence, weight restrictions, speed limit, safety issues have become matter of great concern for train operations. In addition, employee productivity, relating to infrastructure maintenance and train operation in Bangladesh Railway is low compared to other Asian countries, although it is a crucial issue for proper utilization of public fund and to get optimal output from human resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

BR is suffering from lack of investment for proper maintenance of tracks. The service life of maximum railway locomotives, tracks, vehicles, bridges, workshop etc have already been expired. Sufficient funds must have been allocated for their maintenance and smooth operation for a long time.

Improved service quality should be ensured by development of existing assets. Should improvement in cleanliness of compartment, improvement in seat, toilet etc. Likewise, the conditions for hygiene and seating within the trains need to be vastly improved as well. Many passengers regarded the apparent deficiency in these aspects with disdain and dissatisfaction.

The management responsible for Bangladesh Railways must ensure the formulation of a proper and effectual training system for its personnel so as

to better incorporate within them the qualities of professionalism, efficiency and enhancement in acumen pertaining to their services.

BR should commercialize of its operation and introduce market-based pricing system. Commercialization should be given priorioty over the institutional issues. BR should be given full commercial freedom to make any decision regarding any problems create and at the same time made answerable for fulfilling the targets. Its route and services need to be integrated with other surface modes to make the railway more attractive to the users. In order to be competitive with road sector, officials must change their mind-set and operate like private sector. The officials should be more dynamic to solve problems.

Towards rationalization of gauges in Bangladesh, the on-going program of dualization from Parbatipur to Dhaka, should be extended up to Chittagong, to facilitate regional integration and provide uninterrupted broad gauge rail service.

CONCLUSION

The potential of the railway in Bangladesh needs to be unlocked through planned investment in tracks, signaling, rolling stock, maintenance and human resources. Donor and supplier-driven projects/programmes should not be considered. The government should take initiative to prepare long-term Railway Master Plan to guide the overall development of BR in the foreseeable future. Once adopted by the government, it will allow BR to go for planned and systematic development. Implementation of the plan along with modern management and operating practices will allow railway to play its full role, not just in the transport system but in fostering the economic and social development of Bangladesh.

BR is still a government owned entity with budgetary support for both train operations and infrastructure investment coming from the government/donor agencies. As such, railway cannot be financially self-supporting either as public or private company. In order to create opportunities for bringing in efficiency as well as to attract more private sector involvement in railway, there is a strong argument in favor of separating infrastructure from operation. Reform of BR is one of the major conditions of donor for financial assistance in development activities and the creation of separate ministry may create problems in convincing donors for financial assistance. The potentials are enormous. Given the fact that it is a bulk carrier of goods and passengers and also a safe mode of transportation, the railway should receive a high priority from here on. With the recent separation of railway into a full ministry, the nation expects a set of effective measures to restore it to its rightful place in a multi-modal transportation system. In the present world, railways play a vital role in fostering greater connectivity within a country as well as the region.

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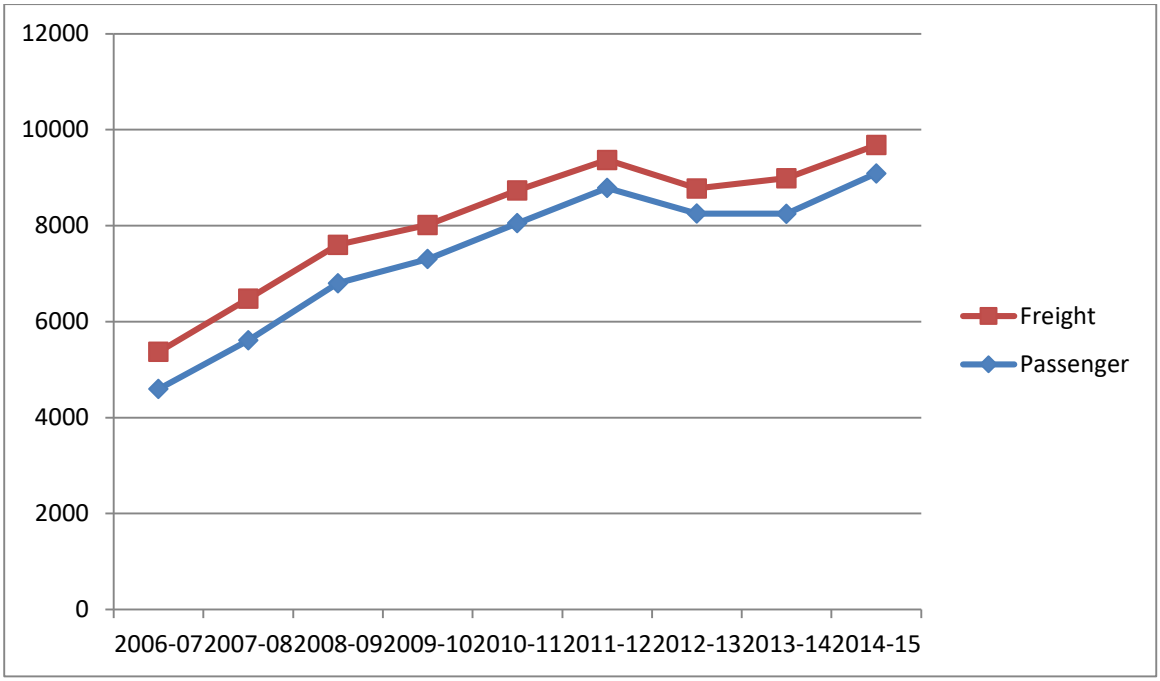
Annexure

Figure I : Freight and Traffic



Source: Source: Bangladesh Railway Information Book, 2015

Table I: Passenger Traffic and freight Traffic

Fiscal Year	Passenger Traffic Passenger-km (million)	Freight Traffic Ton-km (million)
2006-07	4596.04	775.58
2007-08	5609.24	869.59
2008-09	6800.73	800.15
2009-10	7304.95	710.06
2010-11	8051.92	684.63
2011-12	8787.23	582.11
2012-13	8253.42	523.37
2013-14	8250.27	739.09
2014-15	9091.17	589.26

Source: Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh

Table II: Locomotives

Year	BG		MG		DG		Total
	Steam	Diesel	Steam	Diesel	Steam	Diesel	
1969-70	121	18	222	125	343	143	486
2005-06		78		208		286	286
2006-07		78		208		286	286
2007-08		78		208		286	286
2008-09		78		208		286	286
2009-10		78		208		286	286
2010-11		71		188		259	259
2011-12		78		217		295	295
2012-13		73		185		258	258
2013-14		97		196		293	293
2014-15		96		186		282	282

N.B:- 4 nos. of locomotives awaiting for condemnation

Source: Information Book, 2015

Table III: Net operating income of Bangladesh Railway

Year	**Total operating revenue Taka**	**Total operating expenses Taka**	**Net operating income Taka**
1969-1970	30,30,39	1172,74,94	(+)5,02,88
2005-2006	444,27,53	1088,54,57	(-)515,89,50
2006-2007	452,76,06	933,12,72	(-)480,36,66
2007-2008	561,64,41	960,17,03	(-)526,90,16
2008-2009	625,35,28	25,27,51	(-)547,39,66
2009-2010	566,30,42	1257,20,47	(-) 690,90,05
2010-2011	629,54,56	1491,81,94	(-)862,27,38
2011-2012	603,42,93	1567,11,56	(-)963,68,63
2012-2013	804,26,26	1562,38,14	(-)758,11,88
2013-2014	800,17,96	1601,69,64	(-) 801,51,68
2014-2015	935,45,84	1808,29,84	(-) 872,84,00

Source: Information Book, 2015