

# 500 trains, 10,000 stops could go in 'reimagined' Indian Railways post-Covid timetable

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The new timetable will make room to run 15 per cent more freight trains on exclusive corridors at higher speeds. The average speed of passenger trains is projected to increase by around 10 per cent across the network. (File)

Some 500 regular trains will be discontinued and 10,000 stops across the Indian Railways' network will be erased in a new timetable for operations that will be adopted once the pandemic ends and services return to normal.

The Railways expect to increase their annual earnings by more than Rs 1,500 crore through this new "zero-based timetable". This estimated extra earning will come without having to raise fares or other charges – it will be a byproduct of the timetable, and will happen as a result of operational policy tweaks, according to internal projections of the Ministry of Railways.

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The zero-based timetable, so named because it seeks to re-imagine operations from scratch, has been developed by the Railways along with experts from IIT-Bombay. Work started during the nationwide lockdown, when the suspension of passenger services provided an unprecedented opportunity to rethink operations without having to run trains at the same time. The making of this modern operating tool was a top priority of the Railways, which was monitored at the highest levels.

The timetable works on the premise that the existence of every train and stop must be justified based on organisational goals of providing transportation with optimum and efficient utilisation of the available resources. Details of the timetable are not available, but some of the broad principles are as follows, sources said:

\* Trains with less than 50 per cent occupancy on average in a year will not find any place in the network. If needed such trains will be merged with other, more popular trains.

\* Long-distance trains will ideally not have stops within 200 km of each other, unless there is a major city on the way. A total 10,000 stops have been listed to be scratched — however, officials clarified that the removal will only be in respect of certain trains, and there will always be some or the other train that will serve these stations.

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\* All passenger trains will run on a “hub-and-spoke model”. The “hubs” will be cities with a population of a million or more, where all long-distance trains will terminate. Smaller places will be linked to the hubs through connecting trains, as per the timetable. “Major tourist destinations and pilgrimage centres will be classified as hubs,” a senior Railway official told [The Indian Express](#).

\* Suburban networks such as the Mumbai locals, will not be affected by the new timetable, the official said.

\* The timetable will rationalise the use of the rolling stock available with the Railways. Trains will have either 22 Linke Hofmann Busch (LHB) coaches or 24 Integral Coach Factory (ICF) coaches. The LHB coaches are manufactured mainly at the Rail Coach Factory in Kapurthala; the ICF coaches, which currently make up the bulk of the rolling stock but which will be ultimately phased out, are built in Perambur, Chennai. The timetable also envisages use of 18-coach overnight trains. The order for this standardisation has been issued.

The exercise is currently in its final stage, and IIT-Bombay experts are running simulations of the model along with operations professionals of the Railways. The final simulations are scheduled to be completed by the end of this year, sources said.

The timetable could be rolled out early next year, depending on the Covid-19 situation, officials said. The Railways had confirmed at the end of July that the timetable was in the works, but had given no details.

“Train operations will be divided into exclusive corridors for passenger trains, freight trains and maintenance during the day. We would have implemented the timetable by now, but because of the Covid-19 situation we could not do it. It will happen when we are able to resume normal train services,” Chairman Railway Board V K Yadav had said in July.

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