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Is connectivity key to logistics competitiveness?

India's logistics network has expanded rapidly, but the next challenge is making roads, railways, airports, ports, and warehouses work as one connected system. As cargo volumes grow, multimodal logistics efficiency will increasingly depend not just on individual infrastructure assets but on the connections between them.



Pallak Kashyap

India has invested in transport and logistics infrastructure; highways have expanded, DFCs are operational, airports have gained capacity, and logistics terminals are being developed. The next challenge is in making these assets work together seamlessly.

A shipment can move on a highway or DFC and lose time when it changes modes. Waiting for a vehicle, terminal

space, documentation, or cargo handling can delay a journey.

The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade and National Council of Applied Economic Research estimate logistics costs at 7.97 per cent of GDP in 2023–24, equivalent to ₹24.01 lakh crore. Road transport accounted for 41.7 per cent, while warehousing accounted for 24.8 per cent. Rail accounted for 6.7 per cent, waterways 7.6 per cent, and air transport 3.1 per cent.

The numbers underline why improving transport will not be enough. The efficiency of the cargo journey depends on how it moves between various transport modes.

From connectivity to continuity

Air cargo illustrates the challenge. Airports handled 3.72 MMT in FY2025, compared with 2.53 MMT in FY2015 — an increase of 47 per cent. Air cargo provides speed, but that advantage depends on what happens before and



after. Cargo must reach the airport, pass through the terminal, and continue to its destination. Delays on the road or at a terminal can reduce the benefit of air.

Ketan Kulkarni, Managing Director and CEO, Allcargo Logistics, said the focus is shifting from projects towards a more connected landscape.

“India’s logistics sector is moving from individual infrastructure upgrades towards a more connected, multimodal ecosystem. The next phase of efficiency will depend on how seamlessly these modes connect with one another,” he added. For logistics firms, this means designing networks around needs. Allcargo Logistics combined Air Express with its network, while its extended reach covers 100 per cent of India’s PIN codes.

Ravikanth Yamarthy, CEO, Logistics Sector Skill Council, said the country has made progress in training, but the

workforce needs to adapt as logistics becomes digital.

“The real bottleneck is upskilling the workforce.” He added that a skilled workforce can understand its impact on performance and improve it.

Government builds the links

The government is planning logistics infrastructure as one network rather than separate road, rail, airport, and port projects.

PM GatiShakti, launched in October 2021, brings central ministries and departments, states, and UTs onto a single platform. More than 1,700 data layers have been integrated, allowing agencies to identify gaps and coordinate planning. As of February, the Network Planning Group had evaluated 352 projects worth ₹16.10 lakh crore.

Railways are steadily becoming a part of the network. India’s Eastern and Western DFCs cover 2,843 km. By



Ketan Kulkarni
Managing Director and CEO
Allcargo Logistics

“ The country’s logistics landscape is moving from individual infrastructure upgrades towards a more connected, multimodal ecosystem.”

March 2025, 2,741 route km, or 96.4 per cent were commissioned.

The impact is also visible in cargo. At Varna, Container Corporation of India Limited (CONCOR) established connectivity between its Gati Shakti Multimodal Cargo Terminal and the Western DFC through New Makarpura Yard. In December, the terminal received its double-stack rake carrying 180 TEUs.

Gati Shakti Cargo Terminals are also adding connections. As of July, 142 terminals were commissioned with a handling capacity of 224 million tonnes. These terminals handled 146 million tonnes in FY2026, while ₹10,000 crore of investment has been mobilised.

The government has approved 35 locations. CONCOR’s MMLP at Mihan in Nagpur shows how facilities can link cargo with rail. In December 2024, it dispatched its train carrying rice for export to Chennai Terminal. At Jajpur, a CONCOR MMLP moved a 90-container train carrying granulated slag to ICD Amingaon in Assam.

These highlight why the location and connectivity of logistics facilities matter. A warehouse or MMLP creates value when it has access to rail, road, and cargo handling rather than functioning as storage.





“ If the workforce is trained to understand why they do what they do, we will reduce errors, eliminate redundancies, and accelerate systemic efficiency.”

Industry connects the last mile

The principle is visible in rail services. CONCOR operates a network of 66 container terminals in India, including Dadri, Dhandarikalan, Mihan, Tihi, Varnama, Irugur, Naya Raipur, and Jharsuguda. Its network also includes warehouses and inland container depots that connect cargo with ports.

CONCOR's Dhandarikalan facility in Ludhiana is an example. In December 2024, it operated its first block train for CMA CGM to Mundra, with the service scheduled every Wednesday. A return block train was operated from Mundra to Ludhiana. Such scheduled services show how rail links can complement

road movement and provide exporters with an option.

Balagopal Balachandran, National Airfreight Head, FEI Cargo, believed that the industry must move beyond infrastructure. “A shipment should not lose the time saved on a freight corridor to delays at a terminal, documentation issues or poor first- and last-mile connectivity.”

“We need to move from connectivity to continuity — from connected assets to a truly connected supply chain,” he added. This requires companies to select modes according to requirements. High-value, time-sensitive, and perishable cargo may require air, while road remains essential for first- and last-mile movement. Rail can take longer-distance cargo when time allows.

Balachandran said, “Ultimately, the smartest logistics network is not the one that chooses the fastest mode; it is the one that chooses the right combination of transport modes.”

Seamless execution

India has built foundations for multi-modal logistics. The 2,843-km DFC network, 142 GatiShakti Cargo Terminals, 35 approved MMLP locations, and PM GatiShakti represent progress towards a connected system.

The next gains will come from improving points between assets. First- and last-mile connectivity, terminal



“ The smartest logistics network is not the one that chooses the fastest mode; it is the one that chooses the right combination of modes.”

access, cargo transfers, documentation, data sharing, and workforce readiness will determine the value India receives from infrastructure investments.

For the industry, this means designing networks around cargo needs. For the government, the focus needs to remain on how efficiently cargo completes its journey.

Yamarthy highlighted the importance of people. As logistics operations become digital, the workforce needs to understand not only tasks but how each activity affects the supply chain.

“If the workforce is trained to understand why they do what they do, we will drastically reduce errors, eliminate redundancies, and accelerate systemic efficiency,” he added.

For air cargo, the equation is straightforward: The speed of an aircraft delivers only when the shipment reaches the airport on time, moves through the terminal, and continues after landing.

As manufacturing, consumption, and exports expand, closing these gaps can reduce delays, improve predictability, and strengthen competitiveness. India has built links. The next task is to make the journey between the links faster, simpler and reliable. 🇮🇳

