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Speech of Mr. M. R. Masani in the Lok Sabha on February 27, 1964, while moving a cut motion on the Railway Budget

Mr. M. R. Masani (Rajkot): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I speak in support of Cut Motion No. 46 on Demand No. 14, and I would appreciate the Minister looking into the five separate items that form part of that cut motion.

I should like to speak in particular about item (ii), namely, the "need to expedite the construction of the Jhund-Kandle broad-gauge link on the Western Railway and to provide its alignment along the most appropriate route." This matter, Sir, figures on page 133 of the Demands for Grants. It shows that the present estimated cost of this line, which has been sanctioned is eighty million rupees. All except eight thousand rupees of this have still to be spent! Unfortunately, what is disappointing is that the budget estimate for 1964-65 appears to be only to the extent of Rs. 1 lakh — I hope the Minister will correct me if I am wrong — and I hope that the one lakh which has been allotted in the budget estimate of 1964-65 does not mean that the bulk of the work will not be undertaken during the coming twelve months. Because, if that is so, it will cause intense disappointment to the people of Saurashtra.

Sir, according to the President of the Gujarat Chamber of Commerce, in Saurashtra there are only fourteen miles of broad-gauge railway. It is a shocking thought. I myself was not aware of it till I read it in the papers the other day. But, if it is true, it shows gross neglect of an important part of the country with great potential. Fourteen miles of broad-gauge railway! It is true that there are 1,250 miles of metre-gauge. But we know the very great limitations of the latter variety. Therefore, it would be agreed that there is a need for the development of the broad-gauge system in Saurashtra and that the need is urgent.

Dr. M. S. Aney: That is the only broad-gauge line, between Ahmedabad and Viramgam.

Shri S. V. Ramaswamy: You know the historic background, Mr. Masani.

Shri M. R. Masani: The development of both Gujarat and Saurashtra requires that Saurashtra should be linked to the rest of Gujarat by a broad-gauge railway, not only to Gujarat but also to the hinterland of Rajasthan. Because, if Kandle is to be a major port, as we all hope, there is no good having a major port when it cannot be connected expeditiously with the hinterland of Gujarat and Rajasthan. I would therefore urge and request that, whatever be the difficulties, a sense of urgency might be imported into this matter, where there has been, I think, enough delay. I am not blaming anyone, but there has been delay. And I do hope that this does not mean that in the coming year only token progress will be made with this line — I hope there is some mystery about these figures and I will be grateful if the Minister will clear it up when he replies on Saturday morning.

This matter was raised at a meeting of the Gujarat Transport Parishad in Ahmedabad on 31st January this year. I did not have the opportunity to be present, but the hon. Minister of Transport, Shri Raj Bahadur, addressed that gathering and he promised that the implementation of this scheme would be taken

up soon. But the people want to see things moving and feel they have had enough of verbal assurances.

Apart from the question of expediting the scheme, the question of the route is something which I understand is causing some hesitation on the part of the railway authorities. It seems that there are two possible routes for this line. One proposal was that it should take the shortest possible straight line from Jhund to Kandla across the map. If that is done, the line will pass through the northern perimeter of Saurashtra leaving the bulk of Saurashtra unaffected by this development; and the bulk of the benefit of this broad-gauge line will not be made available to the people of Saurashtra. Therefore there is a general demand in Saurashtra, of which I believe the Railway Ministry is aware, that the line should pass through the heavily-populated and industrial centres like Morvi, Wankaner and Surendranagar.

Shri Man Singh P. Patel: We do not agree.

Shri M. R. Masani: You may not agree, but that is what the people of Saurashtra want. This route is supported by public opinion in all the intermediate towns which would then be brought into contact by the railway line with Kandla on the one hand and with the hinterland of Gujarat on the other.

Now that some hon. Member has questioned the representative nature of my statement, let me read a telegram that has been sent to the Railway Minister by the Rajkot Chamber of Commerce, whose Chairman is a leading Congressman, Shri J. Modi:

URGE EXPEDITIOUS IMPLEMENTATION OF BROADGAUGE CONNECTION KANDLA JUND STOP BROADGAUGE LINE VIA SURENDRANAGAR MORVI MALIA FAR SUPERIOR ALTERNATIVE TO ORIGINAL PROPOSAL VIA DHARANGADHRA BECAUSE IT WILL ENSURE VERY GOOD TRAFFIC AND WILL CONTRIBUTE TO RAPID INDUSTRIALISATION OF MAJOR PORTION OF SAURASHTRA REGION WHICH HAS VERY GOOD INDUSTRIAL POTENTIAL STOP SECOND ALTERNATIVE WILL BE MORE ECONOMICAL AND POSSIBLE TO IMPLEMENT MUCH EARLIER AND WILL BE MORE PAYING TO THE NATIONAL EXCHEQUER STOP HOWEVER REQUEST THAT SECOND ALTERNATIVE SHOULD NOT MEAN DELAY IN IMPLEMENTATION.

This is the telegram that has been addressed by the Rajkot Chamber of Commerce which, as I said, is a body dominated by the members of the ruling party, with a Congressman as its Chairman. They have listed in their telegram the advantages, namely, ~~many~~ more people will be served, the centres of population will be affected and influenced and helped; it will help rapid industrialisation of Saurashtra, which all of us want; it will be more economical; and it can be implemented earlier. This is a powerful combination of reasons why this should be the alignment and not the straight line which bypasses the bulk of Saurashtra.

Indeed, I understand, subject to correction, that there is already a survey made by the Western Railway themselves in regard to this alternative route, and, if I am not mistaken, the survey of the Western Railway prefers the route through Morvi, Wankaner and Surendranagar on technical grounds, so that, even the railway's own preference, on merits, is for this route which public opinion is demanding.

Shri S.V.Ramaswamy: With extension to Rajkot.

Shri M.R.Masani: I am glad the hon. Minister has mentioned it. I did not want to mention my constituency, I was not trying to do anything improper for the

people of the constituency I represent, I was only trying to give expression to what is an accepted view of the people of the whole area. I am glad to hear that there will be a possible extension to Rajkot also. If this is the case, then the Minister's task will be easy, because both the technical report of the Western Railway and the wishes of the people happen to coincide. In that case, I hope very little more time will be wasted in pondering over these alternatives further. Like the proverbial donkey between two stacks of hay, the Railway Ministry, I am sure, will not dally further in deciding the route, but make progress with it.

Shri S.V.Ramaswamy: Why compare with the donkey?

Shri M.R.Masani: I am just saying that it will be wrong if we just go on looking at both, each looking equally attractive.

Shri Hari Vishnu Kamath: Like the donkey, not that you are the donkey.

Shri M.R.Masani: It is just a proverbial reference, it has no reference to the qualities of the Ministry. I hope the Ministry will make up its mind. The main thing is that the line should be constructed, and it is also important that it should be constructed where the people want it, where it can be of major service. I do hope that on Saturday the Minister will be able to assure the House, and through it the people of Saurashtra, that this matter is being attended to, that the expert opinion of the railways themselves will prevail along with that of public opinion, and that no extraneous considerations will be allowed to delay the scheme further.

Extract from the speech of Mr.S.V.Ramaswamy, Deputy
Minister of Railways, in the Lok Sabha on February 29, in
reply to the debate on the Railway Budget.

Mr.S.V.Ramaswamy: Specific railways have been urged. Shri Masani is sitting in front of me, and I think I must deal with his point. I can very well understand the anxiety of not only Shri Masani, but friends here, there and everywhere from Gujarat and Saurashtra, who are eager to know something about this Jund-Kandla line. True enough it was provided for in the Second Plan. As you are well aware, we built up the capacity for 450 wagons metre gauge from Kandla to the hinterland, but the traffic that was expected at Kandla Port on the metre gauge section has not come up to expectations. Though the capacity is 450 wagons per day, the traffic has barely reached 300 wagons. Subsequently it was advanced that the point would be to link up Ahmedabad with Kandla by broad gauge. That was examined, and we thought that the shortest route was Jund-Kandla. Subsequently, we found that traffic on the Rajkot line was increasing via Viramgam and Wankaner. The traffic is so great that unless we double it or convert it into broad gauge, we will not be able to cope with the developing traffic. The traffic actually is on this line.

We are not the only Ministry concerned in this. We consult also the Ministry dealing with ports, the Ministry of Transport, and find out the prospects at the

ports, the traffic that they will give. We have asked them and they have said that 75 to 80 broad gauge wagons would be realised by about 1970-71. That is only about $1\frac{1}{2}$ broad gauge trains, and we thought that laying a broad gauge line for this purpose, depending entirely on the port, might not be prudent. Therefore we examined this line and found that even if Kandla port did not give the traffic expected of it, this broad gauge line would pay its way. That is what the survey shows. Therefore, we are thinking of this line, but we have not come to any conclusion. Though there are Members here and outside who would like this line or that line, one thing seems to be common to all hon. Members who come from this area that some decision should be taken as quickly as possible. On that point, the Ministry is also agreed. The question is of relative benefit to the railways. It is not as if we can wholly ignore the commercial aspect of it. True, this is a longer route by about 50 miles; even so, if ultimately this is going to pay as we have found, the question is why we should not take it up. There is also a difference in cost of about Rs.3 to Rs.4 crores between the shorter and this route. Even then, this is more paying. We are considering all this.

We also feel that, in addition to the goods traffic that will move from Kandla, we will have the passenger traffic also, and one great advantage is that broad gauge is taken right into the heart of Saurashtra if the Rajkot line is taken up. As I submitted, we have not come to any conclusion. We are balancing all this, and the House will agree that whatever money we spend is the money of the nation; the railway money is not separate, it is what the nation has given to the railways. So, the money that belongs to the nation has got to be put to the best use. Otherwise, Parliament will question the Ministry as to why they spent the money when they knew that it would not pay. Therefore, we have got to be circumspect, to weigh the things, and to put the nation's money to the best use. Of one thing I may assure the House. We shall certainly come to a conclusion and take up this line, and it will not be disappointing at all to Saurashtra, which I know is very eager to have this line.
