

Hubli-Ankola Railway project raises concerns

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Will the much-sought Hubli-Ankola Railway line project ever be implemented? This is the question haunting the people of North Karnataka and coastal Karnataka. The answer to this question seems to be 'not in near future'. It may sound pessimistic but the hard truth is that the experts committee appointed to study the impact of the project on environment and ecology has not favoured the project whole heartedly. This could be reason enough for those trying to delay the implementation of the project to shelve it.

The team of experts from the Indian Institute of Science appointed by the state government to study the environmental impact of the project submitted a report within six months is of the opinion that the project could cause severe damage to ecology in Uttara Kannada district. The team is expected to submit its report by September-end.

Team coordinator T V Ramachandran on Friday said the team had studied the biological diversity, ecology and environment in the region between Hubli and Ankola. The railway line will be laid for 163.8 km connecting Hubli to Ankola. According to the team, a total of 1,134 hectares of land (727 hectare of forest land, 210 hectare of dry land and 179 hectare of wetland will be completely degraded with the implementation of the project. It has noted that the rail line would pass through the sensitive tiger reservoir area.

“The plan mooted by South Western Railway has indicated that 20 stations will come up in the 164 km stretch and this would cause more damage to the forest area. The project poses threat to the rich flora near Yellapur taluk which is not found elsewhere,” Ramachandran said. Further the project could also affect the elephant corridor near Hosalli and Kolikeri, the team said.

Deforestation to the tune of 20 per cent, landslide during monsoon at Vajralli and Yellapur, construction of labour colonies and blasting of rocks could be other deterrents for the project, according to the experts. The team will also mention in its report the advantages of the project.