

**FAILURE TO IMPLEMENT MINISTRY OF RAILWAY'S  
ORDERS RESULTED IN DAMAGE TO RAILWAY  
CABLES: SOUTH EASTERN RAILWAY AND WEST  
CENTRAL RAILWAY**

**MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS  
(RAILWAY BOARD)**

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE  
(2023-24)**

**SEVENTIETH REPORT**

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**SEVENTEENTH LOK SABHA**



**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT  
NEW DELHI**

PAC NO. 2299

# SEVENTIETH REPORT

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE (2023-24)

(SEVENTEENTH LOK SABHA)

**FAILURE TO IMPLEMENT MINISTRY OF  
RAILWAY'S ORDERS RESULTED IN DAMAGE  
TO RAILWAY CABLES: SOUTH EASTERN  
RAILWAY AND WEST CENTRAL RAILWAY**

MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS  
(RAILWAY BOARD)



Presented to Lok Sabha on:

10-08-2023

Laid in Rajya Sabha on:

10-08-2022

LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT  
NEW DELHI

August 2023/ Sravana 1945 (Saka)

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Minutes of the sitting of the Public Accounts Committee (2023-24) held on 09.08.2023.

**COMPOSITION OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE**  
**(2023-24)**

Shri Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury - Chairperson

**MEMBERS**

**LOK SABHA**

2. Shri Thalikkottai Rajuthevar Baalu
3. Shri Subhash Chandra Baheria
4. Shri Bhartruhari Mahtab
5. Shri Jagdambika Pal
6. Shri Vishnu Dayal Ram
7. Shri Pratap Chandra Sarangi
8. Shri Rahul Ramesh Shewale
9. Shri Gowdar Mallikarjunappa Siddeshwara
10. Shri Brijendra Singh
11. Shri Rajiv Ranjan Singh *alias* Lalan Singh
12. Dr. Satya Pal Singh
13. Shri Jayant Sinha
14. Shri Balashowry Vallabbhaneni
15. Shri Ram Kripal Yadav

**RAJYA SABHA**

16. Shri Shaktisinh Gohil
17. Dr. K. Laxman
18. Shri Sukhendu Sekhar Ray
19. Shri Tiruchi Siva
20. Dr. M. Thambidurai
21. Shri Ghanshyam Tiwari
22. Dr. Sudhanshu Trivedi

**SECRETARIAT**

1. Shri T. G. Chandrasekhar - Addl. Secretary
2. Shri Santosh Kumar - Director
3. Shri Alok Mani Tripathi - Deputy Secretary

**COMPOSITION OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE**  
**(2022-23)**

**Shri Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury - Chairperson**

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14. Shri Ram Kripal Yadav
15. Shri Shyam Singh Yadav

**RAJYA SABHA**

16. Shri Shaktisinh Gohil
17. Shri Bhubaneswar Kalita
18. Dr. Amar Patnaik
19. Shri C.M. Ramesh
20. Dr. M. Thambidurai
21. Dr. Sudhanshu Trivedi
22. Vacant\*

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\* Shri V. Vijayasai Reddy ceased to be a Member of Committee consequent upon his retirement from Rajya Sabha on 21st June, 2022.

**COMPOSITION OF THE SUB COMMITTEE - II OF PAC (2022-23)**

- |  |   |                    |
|--|---|--------------------|
| 1. Shri Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury               | - | <b>Chairperson</b> |
| 2. Dr. Satya Pal Singh                       | - | <b>Convenor</b>    |
| 3. Shri Jagdambika Pal                       | - | Member             |
| 4. Shri Pratab Chandra Sarangi               | - | Member             |
| 5. Shri Rahul Ramesh Shewale                 | - | Member             |
| 6. Shri Rajiv Ranjan Singh alias Lalan Singh | - | Member             |
| 7. Shri Shyam Singh Yadav                    | - | Member             |
| 8. Dr. Amar Patnaik                          | - | Member             |

## INTRODUCTION

I, the Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee (2023-24) having been authorised by the Committee, do present this 70<sup>th</sup> Report (Seventeenth Lok Sabha) on “**Failure to Implement Ministry of Railway’s Orders resulted in Damage to Railway Cables: South Eastern Railway and West Central Railway**” based on C&AG Report No. 22 of 2021 relating to Ministry of Railways (Railway Board).

2. The C&AG Report No 22 of 2021 of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India was laid on the Table of the House on 6 April, 2022.

3. Public Accounts Committee (2022-23) selected the aforesaid subject and allocated the same to Sub Committee-II for examination and report.

4. The Sub Committee-II of the Public Accounts Committee (2022-23) was briefed on the subject by the Audit on 13 December 2022 and they took oral evidence of the representatives of Ministry of Railways on 22 February 2023. The Sub-Committee-II of the Public Accounts Committee (2022-23) obtained information in connection with the examination of the subject.

5. The Public Accounts Committee (2023-24) considered and adopted this Report at their sitting held on 9 August 2023. The Minutes of the sittings are appended to the Report.

6. For facility of reference and convenience, the Observations and Recommendations of the Committee have been printed in **bold** in the body of the Report.

7. The Committee thank the predecessor Committee for taking oral evidence and obtaining information on the subject.

8. The Committee would like to express their thanks to the representatives of the Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) for tendering the evidence before them and furnishing requisite information to the Sub Committee-II of the Public Accounts Committee (2022-23) in connection with the examination of the subject.

9. The Committee also place on record their appreciation of the assistance rendered to them in the matter by the Committee Secretariat and the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

NEW DELHI;  
09<sup>th</sup> August, 2023  
18 Shravan, 1945(*Saka*)

ADHIR RANJAN CHOWDHURY  
Chairperson,  
Public Accounts Committee

# REPORT ON FAILURE TO IMPLEMENT MINISTRY OF RAILWAY'S ORDERS RESULTED IN DAMAGE TO RAILWAY CABLES: SOUTH EASTERN RAILWAY AND WEST CENTRAL RAILWAY BASED ON C&AG'S REPORT NO. 22 OF 2021

## Overview:

Railways play a crucial role in transportation of people and goods across vast distances. The smooth functioning of the railway system depends heavily on the integrity of its infrastructure including cables used for signaling, electrical and telecommunication purposes. However, Railways, in general, and the South Eastern Railway (SER) and West Central Railway (WCR), in particular, have faced significant challenges in implementing orders relating to cable protection, resulting their damages and subsequent disruptions. This report based on C&AG Report No. 22 of 2021 aims to shed light on this particular issue of damage of Railway Cable and matters connected thereto.

2. Various engineering works, such as gauge conversion, doubling/tripling/quadrupling of lines, are carried out by construction units under Chief Administrative Officer/Construction (CAO/C), Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL), Indian Railways Construction Company Limited (IRCON), RailTel Corporation of India Limited (RCIL), Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India Limited (DFCCIL), and other relevant organizations. These works involve extensive digging in close proximity to the working signaling and telecom cables, as well as electrical cables supplying power to cabins, Assistant Station Master (ASM) rooms, Route Relay Interlocking (RRI) Cabins, Intermediate Block Huts (IBH) and other related facilities. In the process, the executing agencies often cut the cables, causing disruptions in train operations. The cables belonging to the Telecommunication, Signaling and Electrical Departments are predominantly laid below the ground along railway tracks. The execution of various engineering projects by above organizations, for gauge conversion, new lines, doubling/tripling and others, involve extensive digging work near above cables. The contractors engaged by the executing departments often fail to coordinate the activities with various agencies, leading to cable damage. This, not only results in increased costs but also impacts the performance of the communication system and disruption in train operations. The damages caused to cables, especially Optical Fiber Cables (OFC), have far-reaching consequences. Each cut in the OFC network results in additional losses in the communication system. Excessive cuts and subsequent joints lead to under-performance and necessitate the replacement of the OFC. Moreover, cable damage poses a risk to train safety and functioning, emphasizing the need for a standardized procedure to minimize such incidents.

3. In light of above and response to a significant accident on the Northern Railway in 2004, which exposed the consequences of careless working practices, a Joint Procedure Order (JPO) under the authority of the Indian Railways Act, 1989 and the



Railway Safety Act, 1989 was issued at the Board level to address cable protection. The JPO outlined guidelines for undertaking digging work near signaling, electrical and telecommunication cables. The purpose of the JPO was to establish a procedure for undertaking digging work in the vicinity of Signaling, Electrical, and Telecommunication cables. The JPO aimed to ensure coordination among departments and contractors to avoid cable cuts, which can result in reduced cable life, degraded service quality and financial losses. It also emphasized the need for strict adherence to the JPO provisions and the realization of penalties from contractors in case of violation. The Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) in a written reply has stated that the JPO, initially issued in 2004 has undergone modifications over the time. The current version, dated 24.06.2013, titled "Procedure for undertaking digging work in the vicinity of Signaling, Electrical & Telecommunication Cable" outlines the necessary measures to protect railway cables during engineering works. It introduces penalties as a deterrent measure, imposing a flat penalty of ₹ 100,000 on contractors for cable cuts. As per the guidelines for protection of cables while doing work in its vicinity, notified vide Telecom Circular No. 09/2023 dated 12.06.2023 from Executive Director (Telecom Development), the following are the penalties to be imposed for damages to cable :

Sl. No.	Cable Damaged	Penalty per Location
1.	Only Quad cable or Signaling cable	₹ 1.0 Lakh
2.	Only OFC	₹ 1.25 Lakh
3.	Both OFC & Quad	₹ 1.5 Lakh
4.	Electrical Cable	₹ 1.0 Lakh

The imposition of penalties for cable cuts is not intended to generate revenue but rather to act as a deterrent against careless digging by executing agencies, thereby reducing instances of cable cuts. The JPO stipulates that contractors would be held liable for penalties for damaging cables, subject to fulfilling certain pre-conditions such as the provision of a detailed cable route plan, alignment of cable tallies with contractor, maintaining a minimum cable depth of 800 mm from the ground level and the presence of a representative from the Signal and Telecommunication department or RailTel at the work site by the respective agencies/Departments.

#### Findings of the Audit:

4. Audit in their report found the failure of the South Eastern Railway (SER) and West Central Railway (WCR) administrations to implement the conditions outlined in the Joint Procedure Order (JPO) regarding digging work near Signaling, Electrical and Telecommunication Cables. As a consequence, penalties totaling ₹ 7.11 crore could not be imposed on contractors in 537 cases of cable damage. The C&AG report highlights the specific instances of cable cuts and deficiencies in meeting the JPO conditions for both the railway administrations of SER & WCR.

**South Eastern Railway (SER):** During the review period from March 2017 to March 2020, a total of 223 locations were identified by the Audit with instances of cable cuts within the SER division. Audit found that the administration failed to fulfill the pre-conditions specified in the JPO before handing over the site to contractors for digging work. Additionally, despite the provision of a penalty clause in the JPO, the SER administration did not include a suitable penal clause in the work orders of the contractors. Consequently, penalties amounting to ₹2.49 crore for cable cuts could not be imposed on the contractors. The SER administration was contacted regarding the matter in December 2020, but no response was received as of November 2021.

**West Central Railway (WCR):** For the period from 2014-15 to 2019-20, a total of 314 locations within the WCR division experienced cable cuts. Similar to SER, the WCR administration too failed to meet the JPO conditions in these instances. As a result, penalties amounting to ₹ 4.62 crore could not be imposed on the contractors. In August 2020, the matter was brought to the attention of the WCR administration and they acknowledged the objections raised by the audit. They subsequently issued instructions to ensure the verification of the cable route plan at the work site before commencing any digging work. However, as of November 2021, no reply was received from the Ministry of Railways (MoR) regarding the matter.

5. The C&AG's report for the year ended 31st March 2020 thus highlighted instances of cable damage in South Eastern Railway (SER) and West Central Railway (WCR). The report stated that the SER and WCR Administrations failed to ensure compliance with the conditions stipulated in the JPO. As a result, the Zonal Administrations were unable to impose penalties amounting to ₹ 7.11 Cr on contractors in 537 cases (233 in SER and 314 in WCR) of cable cuts for the period of Audit. The Ministry has not disputed the amount of loss of ₹ 7.11 crore calculated as per audit report in 537 cases. The Ministry of Railways in their updated Action Taken Note dated 28<sup>th</sup> June, 2023 has furnished that a penalty of ₹ 98 lakhs towards 79 cable cut cases has been recovered. Further, recovery for 98 cases is under process. No recovery is admissible in 145 cases as per JPO provisions and remaining cases are under further scrutiny. It is noteworthy that the Audit has provided additional comments regarding the Ministry's efforts in recovering penalties. As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, the Ministry has successfully recovered a total penalty of ₹ 132.67 lakhs (SER - ₹ 20.67 lakh + WCR - ₹112 lakh).

6. Similar to the findings of the Audit regarding losses incurred by South Eastern Railways and West Central Railways, Audit in their recent Report no. 25 of 2022, (Para 3.8), again reported similar findings that guidelines laid down in Joint Procedure Orders 2013 were not adhered to, resulting again in a loss of ₹ 6.43 crores from Southern Railways. The Ministry of Railways in a written reply stated that Railway's efforts have

always aimed to avoid cable cuts, and periodic meetings at zonal and divisional levels are held to discuss specific issues, including cable cut cases. Sensitization of executives is also carried out. In many cases, permissions from the concerned departments are sought. However, Audit reports have repeatedly highlighted non-adherence to the JPO guidelines across various zones of the railways.

### **Guidelines, Order, Agencies, Requirements regarding Cable Damage:**

7. The following Guidelines, Order, Agencies, Requirements regarding Cable Damage would highlight the issues raised in above Audit:

*(a) Local guidelines vis-à-vis Joint Procedure Order (JPO):* JPO distinguished itself from the local guidelines with respect to conditions and amount of penalties to be recovered from erring executing contractors.

*(b) Relationship between JPO and General Conditions of Contracts (GCC):* The Penalty Clause indicated in the JPO does not supersede or render ineffective the Penalty Clause in the GCC. The GCC enables the recovery of losses but does not specify the penalties to be imposed. The JPO supplements the GCC by specifying the working method near the track and the amount of penalty to be imposed.

*(c) RailTel's role in cable repairs:* RailTel provides joints for the repair of OFC cable cuts at the site. However, the details of OFC cables replaced by RailTel at the site and the associated costs therewith could not be ascertained as it is considered a routine exercise. Hence, annual cost of joining, repairing, and replacing cables due to damage or other reasons could not be ascertained.

*(d) Deployment of Officials:* RailTel/S&T Department officials are deploying their personnel according to the guidelines of the JPO to take preventive and corrective actions at major project sites.

*(e) Non-Inclusion of penal clause in work orders:* Non-inclusion of a suitable penal clause in the work orders of the contractors during award of the digging work within the vicinity of railway tracks is also causing cable cut/damage. The Ministry stated that penal clauses exist in the GCC and the JPO specifies the procedure to be followed for working near tracks and the conditions and amount of penalties to be levied.

*(f) Provision of cable route plans to contractors:* The C&AG has pointed out failure of Railway Administration in providing the cable route plan to the

contractor in time. The Railways Administration thereon has claimed to have provided cable route plans to contractors, if available, in all cases where permission for work was sought. They have further stated that if the plan is not available, the cable route is located and the agency is informed. Plans are also being uploaded on zonal railway websites and local instructions have been issued based on the JPO. Audit has reported that there have been unsubstantiated claims of joint survey with the concerned department and the contractor for showing cable route plan in CKP and KGP Division of SER Zone of Indian Railways.

*(g) Cable damage in limited working space:* The Ministry has informed that S&T/RCIL staff mark the cable path, and earthwork contractors are advised to work away from the marked area to prevent cable damage. Additionally, supervisors from S&T/RCIL are deputed to the site as per availability. The Ministry has also issued instructions based on international best practices, such as laying S&T cables in high-quality prefabricated/precast cable ducts and utilizing Horizontal Directional Drilling (HDD) methods where suitable. They have informed that necessary instructions have been issued by the **Gati Shakti Unit** of the Ministry of Railways in this regard.

*(h) Accidents and Damages to cables:* Since the cable damages are potential causes of accidents, the update about the recent railway accident was sought. The Ministry have replied that the recent derailment of Train No. 12841 Coromandal Express on 02 June 2023 for the Kharagpur Division of South-Eastern Railways, which may have resulted from cable damage, has been completed by CRS and is currently under investigation by CBI.

*(i) Common Duct Policy:* In developed countries, there is provision for providing the common duct for all utilities and future provisions. Similar provision is being planned in India by DoT. Draft of the Common Duct Policy is available on DoT's website. The Gati Shakti Unit of Railways have also issued advisory dated 29<sup>th</sup> March 2023 to the Railway Zones to provide proper quality pre-fabricated/precast cable ducts to avoid cable cuts in future

*(j) Revision of JPO:* The recent increase in infrastructure works and staff shortages have necessitated the proposed revision of the JPO. However, the Ministry clarified that staff shortage is not considered the primary factor affecting the implementation of JPO provisions. Efforts to address staff shortages are being made in accordance with existing rules.

#### **Activities and arrangements regarding damage of Cable:**

8. The type of engineering works that require digging up near cables include major works such as the construction of ROB/RUB/LHS, doubling and third line work, girder replacement, building work, and provision of boundary walls for 160 Kmph work. The minor works involve activities such as soil filling, drain construction, water supply boring, road construction and ground leveling with minimal or no digging involved. The mandatory permissions for digging up works are required from the S&T and Electrical departments. The Joint Procedure Order (JPO) specifies the timeline for granting permissions. As per the JPO, the concerned departments should provide written permission within seven days of the request for major works and within three days for minor works. Work orders issued to contractors include penalty clauses in case of damage to railway property. However, the imposition of penalties is subject to the conditions mentioned in the JPO. If contractors have taken adequate measures and still the cable gets cut, penalty may not be levied. The Ministry stated that the JPO was issued to ensure coordinated digging by contractors engaged by the executing department. However, all cable damages are not due to a lack of coordination. Cable damages also occur due to theft, works by state government agencies, farmers burying dead animals and limited working space along the track. The damage is also due to undertaking digging work without proper authority, improper mechanized digging work, deviations from the provided cable route map. The Zone-wise Cable Cut Details from Year 2017-18 to 2022-23 has been furnished by the Ministry as under:

Sl. No.	Railway	No. of Cable Cut cases in the Zone
1.	Central Railway	820
2.	Eastern Railway	372
3.	East Central Railway	3930
4.	East Coast Railway	751
5.	Northern Railway	3076
6.	North Central Railway	800
7.	North Eastern Railway	662
8.	Northeast Frontier Railway	382
9.	North Western Railway	1509
10.	Southern Railway	1176
11.	South Central Railway	1721
12.	South Eastern Railway	472
13.	South East Central Railway	391

14.	South Western Railway	1049
15.	Western Railway	1874
16.	West Central Railway	715
17.	Metro Railway	0
	<b>(Total)</b>	<b>19700</b>

### Costs and Penalty Imposition:

9. The Ministry of Railways further stated that when cables have multiple cuts leading to under-performance of the OFC communication system, the number of joints in the cable is taken into consideration. If the losses exceed the permitted threshold, patch replacement of the cable is planned. The factors determining losses reaching the permitted thresholds include maintaining loss parameters below 0.4 dB/km for OFC and 0.25 dB/km for Quad cable. The decision for patch replacement is made at the Divisional level. Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) outlined in the Signal Engineering Manual and Telecom Manual, such as transmission loss tests, cross-talk tests, insulation resistance tests, and loop resistance tests, are followed to determine losses beyond the permitted thresholds. If patch replacement is carried out correctly with quality components, the functionality of the OFC is restored within acceptable parameters. In situations where the OFC remains cut and alternate mechanisms are not available, the systems experience down time and manual procedures are implemented. When asked to furnish the costs incurred in replacement of cables damaged due to cable cut by digging works, the Ministry of Railways in a written reply stated that when cables are damaged, RailTel, responsible for maintaining the OFC network, undertakes repairs by providing joints. Replacement becomes necessary only when there are excessive joints leading to degraded communication system performance. However, penalties are imposed on contractors for cable cuts to discourage such incidents and recover costs incurred. Bulk of cable cuts are due to ongoing Railway works. Cable cut by other agencies in WCR is by JVNL-RSEB and GAIL. A cost of ₹ 1,00,000 and ₹10,400 incurred due to their activities respectively. Penalty has been imposed on JVNL-RSEB and a FIR has been registered by Railway against GAIL ₹ 48,000/- has been deposited against the penalty of ₹ 1,00,000/- by GAIL on the orders of Hon'ble Court.

10. The penalty by contractors is liable to be paid subject to the following conditions:

- (i) Provision of a detailed cable route plan by Railways.
- (ii) Alignment of cable tallies with the information provided to the contractor.
- (iii) Depth of cable should be at least 800 mm from normal ground level.

(iv) A representative of the signal and telecommunication department/RailTel should be available at the site.

11. In this regard, the Audit acknowledged that despite the diligent efforts made by Zonal Railways to recover penalties, the complete recovery has not been possible in certain cases due to the partial implementation of JPO (Joint Procedure Order). In response to a query on the list of cases where contractor escaped imposition of penalties for cable cut on grounds that all precautions were taken, the Ministry furnished as under:

Sl. No.	Railway	No. of Cable Cut cases in where penalty was not imposed
1.	Central Railway	243
2.	Eastern Railway	152
3.	East Central Railway	448
4.	East Coast Railway	84
5.	Northern Railway	2805
6.	North Central Railway	341
7.	North Eastern Railway	158
8.	Northeast Frontier Railway	0
9.	North Western Railway	1042
10.	Southern Railway	540
11.	South Central Railway	675
12.	South Eastern Railway	0
13.	South East Central Railway	172
14.	South Western Railway	316
15.	Western Railway	790
16.	West Central Railway	174
17.	Metro Railway	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>7940</b>

12. The Ministry of Railways have stated that work orders are issued to contractors as per tender conditions. The penalty clauses stipulated in the JPO are not included in the work order because joint notes are prepared after cable cuts occur and penalties are determined based on the contractor's measures taken. However, in order to prevent

similar incidents from happening in future, the Civil Engineering Directorate has taken proactive measures. On 18th April 2023, they issued comprehensive instructions to Zonal Railways, urging them to include the provisions of JPO in all tender documents for works specifically pertaining to activities such as digging near Railway signaling, telecom, electrical, and other cables. The Audit has suggested that by incorporating these provisions in the tender documents, Zonal Railways can legally hold contractors accountable for any damages caused due to above activities. This measure ensures that penalties can be recovered in cases of cable cut incidents resulting from the contractors' careless work based on the provisions of the JPO 2013.

#### **Zone wise violation of JPO Guidelines:**

13. The telecom circuits continue working through protection paths and the Railways prioritize rectifying cable cuts as routine maintenance activities. Responsibility has been fixed for damage to cables. In 11,760 cases, contractors were found responsible, while 766 cases involved Railway/Railway Staff responsibility. Zone-wise violations of the guidelines laid down in the Joint Procedure Order (JPO) 2013 are provided below:

<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>Railway</b>	<b>No. of cases where JPO guidelines were violated</b>
1.	Central Railway	577
2.	Eastern Railway	220
3.	East Central Railway	3482
4.	East Coast Railway	667
5.	Northern Railway	271
6.	North Central Railway	459
7.	North Eastern Railway	504
8.	Northeast Frontier Railway	382
9.	North Western Railway	467
10.	Southern Railway	636
11.	South Central Railway	1046
12.	South Eastern Railway	472
13.	South East Central Railway	219
14.	South Western Railway	733
15.	Western Railway	1084
16.	West Central Railway	541



17.	Metro Railway	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>11760</b>

**Review of JPO:**

14. Questions were raised about the need to revisit the guidelines issued in 2013. The Railways acknowledged the need to revise the guidelines in the Joint Procedure Order (JPO) issued in 2013. The review of the JPO guidelines was also prompted by an increase in cable-cut incidents across Zonal Railways and practical difficulties faced in implementing certain provisions due to the rise in infrastructure works and staff shortage. A committee of SAG officers was constituted by the Board to revisit the JPO and suggest practical modifications without affecting the pace of infrastructure works. The committee recommended that Zonal Railways formulate their own JPOs, incorporating provisions for imposing penalties. These instructions were issued by the Ministry of Railways through Telecom Circular No. 09/2023, dated 12.06.2023 and are in supersession of the 2013 JPO. The Civil Engineering Directorate of MoR also issued instructions, dated 18.04.2023, to include JPO provisions in the tender documents of Zonal Railways.

**Standard Tender Document and Work Order:**

15. Railways in a written reply assured that the Indian Railways have established standard tender documents and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for work orders in the engineering department. These documents ensure that contractors take necessary precautions to protect railway property during their operations.

**Learning from Peers:**

16. When asked to furnish whether Indian Railways have learnt from the instances of cable cut due to digging by oil and gas companies or road construction companies, the Indian Railways in a written reply stated that considering that cable cuts can also occur due to activities by other organizations, such as Oil and Gas Companies or Road Construction companies, Indian Railways are studying the procedures implemented by these organizations to avoid such incidents. Additionally, a common duct policy is being drafted by the Department of Telecommunications to prevent cable cuts. Relevant clauses from these sources will be adopted to enhance cable protection on Indian Railways.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee find credence in the Audit findings that there has been a lapse in adhering to the Joint Procedure Orders relating to the digging work in the vicinity of Signalling, Electrical & Telecommunication Cable. South Eastern Railway (SER) and West Central Railway (WCR) Administrations must take responsibility and be held accountable for their failure to ensure compliance with the conditions stipulated in the Joint Procedure Order (JPO). Negligence on the part of Railways has resulted in significant damage to the cables. The Committee feel that it is imperative for the SER and WCR Administrations to promptly respond to the concerns raised in the C&AG's report and take corrective actions to rectify the damage caused by their failure in implementing orders. Further, C&AG's report should be taken as an indication for the entire railway system, urging all stakeholders to prioritize the protection of railway cables and ensure proper implementation of guidelines and procedures. Delayed or absence of responses undermine the accountability and transparency of the railway system and hinder efforts to improve operational efficiency and safety. Failure to address the issues highlighted by the Audit will not only lead to financial losses but also jeopardize the safety, efficiency, and reliability of the Railway. The Committee would emphasize on the Ministry of Railways ensuring timely action on the audit findings.

### Implementation of JPO:

2. The Committee note that the claim of the Ministry that tender documents issued to contractors are on standard lines is not convincing. Apparently there is lacuna in the work orders issued to the contractors and also a visible lack of willingness on part of the Railway Administration in imposing and recovering penalty on account of violation of the provisions in JPO. While the penalty clause is inserted in Tender Documents/Work Order in some cases, no such clause is included in several others. The Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) should take immediate action to enforce strict adherence to the JPO and ensure that 'Penalty Clause' is inserted in each Tender Document and Work Order so that all contractors are aware of their liabilities and responsibilities regarding cable damage. The Committee, therefore, recommend that the Railways Administration should invariably include suitable penal clauses in the work orders of contractors to ensure their accountability for any damage caused during digging work. This will serve as a strong deterrent against indiscriminate digging and cable cuts.

3. The Committee find that pre-conditions such as detailed cable route plans, aligning cable tallies with contractor information, ensuring that the depth of cables is not less than 800 mm from normal ground level and having a representative of the Signal and Telecommunication department/RailTel present at the site, were not fulfilled. Further, due to lack of coordination, neither prior

information to S&T department for deployment of staff before digging was made nor marking of cables could be completed. This has resulted in cable damages and further dislocations. Also, Joint Survey, in case of non-availability of cable route plan, could not be substantiated before Audit. It is quite unacceptable that the site is handed over to contractors for digging work without fulfilling pre-conditions mentioned in the Joint Procedure Order (JPO). The Committee, therefore, recommend that the Ministry must enforce strict adherence to these pre-conditions, including the provision of detailed cable route plans, alignment accuracy, depth requirements, and the presence of Signal and Telecommunication department/RailTel representatives at the site.

4. The Committee note that there has been visible lack of coordination among the various departments of the Railways and many times the Railway Administration has not provided Cable Route plans to the contractors ultimately resulting in damage to Cables. The Committee, therefore, feel that the Railway Administration should invariably provide cable route plans to contractors before initiation of work. Any delay or failure in providing the plans should be thoroughly investigated, and appropriate actions should be taken to rectify the situation and prevent future occurrences. The Committee, therefore, recommend that the Ministry should ensure effective coordination among all agencies involved in infrastructure works near railway tracks, including the Railways, State Government agencies, and contractors. Regular meetings and consultations should be held to address specific issues, such as cable cuts, disruptions etc. and take necessary preventive and corrective actions in time.

#### Shortage of Staff:

5. The Committee note from the replies furnished to them that the Railways could not effect strict implementation of JPO due to shortage of staff. Though this cannot be taken as justifiable plea, however, the Committee feel that the Ministry should allocate sufficient resources and manpower to address the growing infrastructure works and staff shortage across the Railways. Adequate staffing will ensure timely implementation of guidelines, effective monitoring and enforcement of penalties.

6. The Committee note that from 2017-18 to 2022-23, there has been a total of 19700 cases of cable cut in all Zones. Out of this, penalty was not imposed in 7940 cases, whereby it became implicit that there were still 11760 cases of JPO violations involving more than ₹ 100 crores when penalty was calculated at the minimum of @ ₹ 100,000 per case. The Committee further note that the Ministry's reply is not forthcoming in this regard and no efforts have been made by the Ministry of Railways to review the implementation of JPO in all zones. Besides, attributing the problem to shortage of staff is unacceptable as responsibility of implementing the guidelines rest on the Railways. It is crucial for the railway

administrations to prioritize the proper implementation of JPO and thus ensure protection of railway cables. This includes allocating sufficient resources, investing in advanced cable laying techniques, and promoting a culture of accountability and adherence to established procedures. The Committee desire that the Ministry of Railways should closely monitor the implementation of JPO across all railway zones to prevent further instances of cable damage. This can be achieved by conducting regular audits, enforcing penalties, and providing necessary training and resources to railway administration to ensure compliance. The Committee therefore recommend that the Ministry of Railways should establish a robust system for monitoring and reporting instances of cable damage across all railway zones. This will enable timely intervention and applying corrective measures to minimize disruptions in train operations and prevent financial losses due to cable cuts. RailTel, being a Railway PSU, should also be involved to maintain accurate records of the expenditure incurred on the replacement of cables damaged during digging work.

#### Revision of JPO:

7. A committee of SAG officers was constituted by the Board to revisit the JPO and suggest practical modifications without affecting the pace of infrastructure works. This Committee has recommended that Zonal Railways formulate their own JPOs, incorporating provisions for imposing penalties. These instructions have been issued by the Ministry of Railways to Zonal Railways. The Civil Engineering Directorate of MoR has also issued instructions to include JPO provisions in the tender documents of Zonal Railways. The Committee desire that Ministry of Railways should go through the findings and recommendations of the above Committee of SAG Officers and implement the same in letter and spirit. They may also conduct a comprehensive review of existing local guidelines and identify the gaps and shortcomings that have led to the failure in preventing cable damage.

#### International best Practices:

8. The Committee note that in developed countries a common duct is maintained for all utilities. They also note that a proposal for common duct policy has been prepared by DoT. The Committee, therefore, desire that Railways should plan for a common duct for all Signal, Electrical and Telecommunication systems of the Railways, which will go a long way in minimizing cable cut cases and ensuring the safety of the Rail network. The efforts of the Indian Railways should not be limited to issue of advisories in this regard. The Committee therefore recommend that the use of proper quality pre-cast cable ducts/ pre-fabricated ducts should be made compulsory henceforth in all Railway Zones so as to avoid cable cuts in future.

9. In light of the potential accidents that could arise due to cable cuts, the Committee emphatically urge the Ministry to prioritize the protection and maintenance of the OFC communication system. As an example, the recent derailment of Train No. 12841, Coromandal Express, the Committee feel, serve as a stark reminder of the serious consequences such incidents may have. The Committee observe that to mitigate such risks, the Ministry must take immediate action and invest in advanced technology for proactive fault detection. They, therefore, recommend that the Ministry should invest in upgrading and replacing damaged cables to ensure seamless functioning of the communication system. The Ministry of Railways should also provide clear guidelines and parameters for replacing cables that have been repaired with joints but still result in degraded performance of the communication system. By establishing specific criteria for replacement, the Ministry can ensure optimal performance and prevent further degradation of the communication infrastructure.

10. The Committee desire that the Ministry should provide an update on the recovery of penalties in the 85 cases that have already been initiated. It is crucial that the penalties are imposed and the Ministry takes appropriate action to recover the same. Further, the Committee feel that the Ministry should clarify the level at which the cause of cable cuts has been ascertained during the review process in the 113 cases. It is essential to have a well-defined and transparent procedure for reviewing cable cut incidents to identify the parties responsible and take appropriate actions to prevent future occurrences. In light of the recent Audit Report No. 25 of 2022, which once again highlights the non-adherence to JPO guidelines resulting in significant financial losses, the Committee strongly recommend a complete review of similar cases by the Ministry in all railway zones. It is crucial for the Ministry to analyze the root causes of these issues and implement corrective actions to ensure strict compliance with guidelines across the entire railway network. The recurring audit reports pointing to similar findings from other Railway Zones, serve as a clear indication that immediate action and fundamental changes are necessary. The Committee, therefore, stress the importance of conducting a thorough review and implementing robust measures to address these longstanding concerns.

11. The Committee note that zonal railways failed to impose penalties totaling to ₹ 6.7 crore in 263 cases of cable cuts between March 2017 and March 2020. The Committee, therefore, recommend that these cases be investigated so as to find shortcomings in enforcing the conditions stipulated in the JPO on account of which penalties could not be levied. Lessons learnt should be utilized to prevent similar cases in the future.

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MINUTES OF THE SITTING OF SUB-COMMITTEE-II OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS  
COMMITTEE (2022-23) HELD ON 13<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER, 2022.

The Sub-Committee-II met on Tuesday, the 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2022 from 1500 hrs. to 1615 hrs. in Committee Room '2', Extension Building, Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi.

**PRESENT**

**Shri Satya Pal Singh** - **Convenor**

MEMBERS

**LOK SABHA**

2. Shri Jagdambika Pal
3. Shri Pratap Chandra Sarangi
4. Shri Shyam Singh Yadav

**RAJYA SABHA**

5. Shri Amar Patnaik

**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT**

1. Shri T. G. Chandrasekhar - Additional Secretary
2. Shri Tirthankar Das - Director
3. Shri Alok Mani Tripathi - Deputy Secretary

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR  
GENERAL OF INDIA

- |                              |   |                  |
|------------------------------|---|------------------|
| 1. Ms. Ila Singh             | - | Deputy C&AG      |
| 2. Shri Bivash Ranjan Mondal | - | Director General |
| 3. Shri Samar Kant Thakur    | - | Director General |
| 4. Shri Navneet Gupta        | - | Director General |
| 5. Ms. Rashmi Aggarwal       | - | Director General |
| 6. Shri Avinash Chavan       | - | Director General |

2. At the outset, Hon'ble Convenor, Sub-Committee-II welcomed the Members and the officials from C&AG office to the sitting of the Sub-Committee-II convened to have briefing on the subjects; (i) "Failure to implement Ministry of Railways orders resulted in damage to railway cables: SER & WCR" based on Para 3.11 of C&AG Report No. 22 of 2021 and (ii) "Performance Audit on efficacy of Auxiliary Vessels in Indian Navy" based on Chapter II of C&AG Report No. 1 of 2020.

3. The Convenor, then, asked the officers of Audit to first brief the Committee on the subject "Failure to implement Ministry of Railways orders resulted in damage to railway cables: SER & WCR" and the main findings of the Audit as requested by them, status of the action taken replies by the concerned Ministries/Departments on the Audit findings, and recommendations proposed by Audit to address the issues on the subject under examination. The Convenor also asked them to brief the Committee on the next subject, subsequently.

4. After seeking permission from the Chair, the Audit officers made a Power-Point Presentation, highlighting the findings of the audit on the subject, "Failure to implement Ministry

of Railways orders resulted in damage to railway cables: SER & WCR" . The Audit officers briefed the Committee mainly on the following issues:-

- (a) Both the zonal railways i.e. SER and WCR have not adhered to Joint Procedure Order (JPO) on "Procedure for undertaking of digging work in the vicinity of Signaling, Electrical and Telecommunication Cable" which was issued by Railway Board with the objective of controlling and minimizing the instances of cable cut.
- (b) SER and WCR administrations had not fulfilled the pre-conditions mentioned in the JPO before handing over the site to the contractor for digging work.
- (c) Despite the provision of penal clause in the JPO, the zonal railways have not included a suitable provision in the contract/work order as a result of which they could not impose penalty amounting to Rs. 7.11 crore on the contractors for damaging cables.
- (d) Audit had found instances of cable cut in 223 locations at various divisions in SER and in 314 locations at WCR due to lapse of ensuring the conditions stipulated in JPO administered by the Railway Board.
- (e) It was also found that out of 537 cases of cable cut at both Zonal Railways, 113 cases have been under review for ascertaining the cause of cable cut and 263 cases were found where penalty could not be imposed due to non-adherence to JPO provision.
- (f) Audit observed the WCR administration have accepted the objections raised by Audit and instructions to ensure verification of cable route plan at site before starting the work but SER administration and even Ministry of Railways had not yet submitted ATNs.

5. Thereafter, Members of the Sub-Committee-II sought certain clarifications regarding the status of undertaking of digging work in the vicinity of Signaling, Electrical and Telecommunication cables prior to March 2017 to March 2020 as the JPO was framed in 2013. Members also discussed with the Audit officers, whether the scope of the subject also included the status of the total expenditure incurred by Zonal Railways in repairing/replacement of the cables damaged during digging work as well as reasons furnished by the Ministry of



Railways for non-imposing of penalty on contractors to Audit. The Sub-Committee-II desired that Audit should collect the information relating to cost involved in replacement of cables and thus inform the Committee regarding the total cost involved. They also desired that Audit may also find out if such lapses occurred in other divisions of Railways. The Members of the Sub-Committee-II also desired to know whether Audit has come across instances of accountability fixed for the lapse in this regard. The Members further desired to seek clarifications on various issues from the Railway Board before convening the next sitting of the Sub-Committee-II, on the subject.

6. The officials of the C&AG of India, thereafter, briefed the Members on the Chapter-II of Audit report No. 1 of 2020 on the subject "Performance Audit on efficacy of Auxiliary Vessels in Indian Navy" by way of Power Point Presentation.

7. Explaining the role of Auxiliary Vessels, the Dy. C&AG stated that Auxiliary Vessels are designed not only to operate in support of combatant ships and other naval operations but also to have some limited combat capacity. Audit officers further explained the shortcomings and audit findings during the course of examination of the subject, which might have affected the Indian Navy adversely, as under:

- (a) The Indian Navy was forced to exploit vintage ships with limited capabilities due to lag in achieving the desired force levels of Auxiliary Vessels.
- (b) The Ministry of Defence attributed the delays to low timeline provided in the Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP). Consequently, Navy had to resort to redeployment of the existing fleet, without giving them time for regular maintenance, and engage ships from trade.
- (c) In view of the proposed decommissioning of the existing vessels, and timeframe involved in completion of the proposed acquisition, the Navy may be adversely affected due to non-availability of required Landing Platform Dock (LPD).

- (d) The Indian Navy was able to survey only 3.91 million sq.km. (21%) of total demarcated survey area of 18.78 million sq.km. due to deficiency in number of Survey Vessels.
- (e) In the absence of Survey Training Vessel (STV), most of the practical training was being imparted by utilizing Survey Motor Boats, restricted to the limits of Goa harbor, and the trainees are unable to gain practical experience in real time shipborne operations.
- (f) Due to delay in acquisition of different Auxiliary Vessels such as Landing Craft Utilities (LCUs), Diving Support Vessel (DSV), Cadet Training Ships (CTS), Multi-Purpose Vessels (MPVs) and Yard Crafts, Indian Navy might be facing critical shortage of dedicated training ships for their training squadron and is adopting interim measures like hiring of ships or conversion of other warships to meet their training needs.
- (g) Audit also noticed various issues relating to maintenance of the available force level of Auxiliary Vessels deployed and to the maximum exploited them beyond operational constraints limiting their stability endurance and functioned with design deficiencies.

8. The Members of Sub-Committee-II expressed their reservations about the preparedness of the Indian Navy in view of the Audit findings. The Members raised the issue of deficient availability of Auxiliary Vessels resulting in the Indian Navy being forced to redeploy or exploit ageing/obsolete ships with un-serviceability or design deficiencies and operational constraints limiting stability and endurance of the ships. The Members also expressed concern for abnormal delay in acquisition/procurement of required Auxiliary Vessels, non-combat vehicle which provide support with a nature of self defence, as Fleet Tankers, Landing Platform Dock, Survey Vessels, Survey Training Vessels, Deep Water Multi Beam (DWMB) systems, Diving Support Vessel, Cadet

Training Ships and many more on account of non-adherence to the prescribed timelines at each stage of acquisition.

9. The Members also queried about the maintenance of the available auxiliary vessels with Indian Navy. The Members also queried about expenditure incurred on outsourcing of auxiliary services. The Members were surprised at the quality of training imparted to the trainees, at a time when the Indian Navy is facing critical shortage of dedicated training ships and is adopting interim measures like hiring of ships or conversion of other warships.

10. Members of the Sub-Committee-II noted that the Action Taken Notes from the Ministry of Defence on the Audit Para was still awaited even though the Audit Report was tabled in the House in September, 2020. The Members also suggested to the Audit to ask for updated information from Ministry of Defence and Indian Navy and intimate the same to the Sub-Committee-II through PAC Secretariat. The Members of the Sub-Committee-II also suggested to collect relevant materials regarding review meetings purportedly to mitigate issue i.e. deficient availability of Auxiliary Vessels between Ministry of Defence and Indian Navy.

11. The Convenor, then, thanked the officers of the Office of C&AG of India for briefing the Committee on the said subjects.

The Sub-Committee-II then adjourned.

***A copy of the transcript of audio recording of the proceedings of the sitting has been kept on record.***

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MINUTES OF THE SECOND SITTING OF SUB-COMMITTEE-II OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS  
COMMITTEE (2022-23) HELD ON 22<sup>nd</sup> FEBRUARY, 2023.

The Sub-Committee-II met on Wednesday, the 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2023 from 1500 hrs. to 1540 hrs. in Committee Room 'D', Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi.

**PRESENT**

Shri Satya Pal Singh - Convenor

MEMBERS

**LOK SABHA**

2. Shri Pratap Chandra Sarangi
3. Shri Rahul Ramesh Shewale

**RAJYA SABHA**

4. Shri Amar Patnaik

**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT**

1. Shri T. G. Chandrasekhar - Additional Secretary
2. Shri Tirthankar Das - Director
3. Shri Alok Mani Tripathi - Deputy Secretary

**REPRESENTATIVES OF THE OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR  
GENERAL OF INDIA**

1. Ms. Ila Singh - Deputy C&AG
2. Shri Samar Kant Thakur - Director General
3. Shri Subu R - Director General

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## REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (RAILWAY BOARD)

1. Shri Roop N. Sunkar - Member (Infrastructure) &  
Ex. Officio Secretary to the Govt. of India
2. Ms. Aruna Singh - Additional Member (Telecom)
3. Shri Rahul Agrawal - Additional Member (Signal)
4. Shri Anil Kumar Khandelwal - Principal Executive Director/GS

2. At the outset, Hon'ble Convenor, Sub-Committee-II welcomed the Members and the officials of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India to the sitting of the Sub-Committee-II convened to have an oral evidence of the representatives of Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) in connection with the examination of the subject **"Failure to implement Ministry of Railways orders resulted in damage to railway cables: SER & WCR"** based on **Para 3.11 of C&AG Report No. 22 of 2021.**

3. The Convenor then asked Dy. C&AG to further brief the Sub-Committee on the action taken by the Ministry on the shortcomings pointed out and suggestions made by the Audit on the aforesaid subject.

4. After briefing by the Audit Officers on the subject, the representatives of Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) were called in and the Convenor welcomed them to the sitting. Impressing upon the witnesses to treat the proceedings of the Committee as confidential, the Convenor asked the representatives of Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) to brief the Sub-Committee by giving an overview of the necessity of issue of Joint Procedure Order (JPO) in

year 2013 and reasons for the non inclusion of the provisions of the JPO in the work order of the contractors leading to no penal action in the event of cable cuts.

5. The representatives of the Ministry of Railways sought permission to give a detailed overview of the various issues through a Power Point Presentation. During the presentation, various aspects were covered which *inter-alia* included the non-adherence to the pre-conditions mentioned in the JPO before handing over the site to the contractor for digging work in close vicinity of railway track, instances of accountability fixed on some of the officers concerned for the lapses in this regard, status of the total expenditure incurred by Zonal Railways in repairing/replacement of the cables damaged during digging work etc.

6. The Convenor and Members of the Committee raised some specific questions which *inter-alia* include the rationale to issue Joint Procedure Order (JPO) on the undertaking of digging work in the vicinity of railways tracks, justification to penalise the contractors for damaging the underground cables; number of instances of issue of notices for recovering the penalties from the defaulting contractors; details of expenditure incurred by Railways on repair/replacement of cables, action taken by Indian Railway Administration against the officers responsible in the Zonal Railways for not imposing the penalty amount, convening of the quarterly review meeting at the Zonal level for addressing the issue; mechanism to ensure co-ordination among the various departments involved in the digging work; provision of blacklisting the defaulting Contractors etc..

7. The representatives of the Ministry of Railways (Railways Board) furnished reply to some of the queries posed by the Members and sought permission to furnish information to the remaining queries subsequently in due course.

8. After some deliberations, the Convenor, Sub-Committee-II permitted the representatives of the Ministry of Railways to furnish the information that was not readily available with them.

9. The Convenor also asked the representatives of the Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) to furnish written replies to the queries raised by the Members as well as to the list of

points provided by the Committee Secretariat within 15 days. The Convenor also thanked the officers of the Ministry of Railways for appearing before the Sub-Committee and furnishing valuable information. The Convenor, Sub-Committee-II also thanked the officers of the office of C&AG of India for briefing the Sub-Committee on the subject.

The witnesses, then, withdrew.

The Sub-Committee-II then adjourned.

A copy of the transcript of audio recording of the proceedings of the sitting has been kept on record.