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# Reform Express – Indian Railways Adds Five New Reforms for Cargo, Construction and Passengers

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# Reform Express — Indian Railways Adds Five New Reforms for Cargo, Construction and Passengers

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## ▼ On this Page

- **The Five New Reforms**
  - Reform Express — Overall Framework
  - Indian Railways — Scale and Significance
  - Recent Railway Reforms Timeline

## ✎ WHY IN NEWS

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw announced five new reforms under Indian Railways’ “Reform Express” initiative, bringing the total reforms for 2026 to nine, focusing on cargo modernisation, construction quality, and passenger convenience.

## The Five New Reforms

### Cargo Reform 1 — Salt Transportation

Indian Railways has introduced a **stainless steel container-based system** for salt transportation with:

- **Top-loading** mechanism for efficient filling
- **Hydraulic side-discharge** for rapid unloading
- Designed to eliminate damage from **corrosion, water seepage, and repeated handling**
- Traditional open-wagon salt transport suffered losses of 5-8% per trip due to exposure

### Cargo Reform 2 — Automobile Transportation

Railways will now allow **flexible wagon designs tailored to specific routes**, addressing constraints posed by:

- **Tunnel height restrictions** on certain sections
- **Bridge loading limits**
- Variable gauge clearances

This route-specific approach improves **capacity utilisation** and reduces the need for one-size-fits-all wagon designs.

### Construction Quality Reform

New measures include:

- **Stricter eligibility criteria** for contractors
- **Fixed bid security at 2% of project cost** (standardised, no variability)
- **Mandatory assessment of bid capacity** for projects above a threshold value
- **Tighter controls on subcontracting** – limits on how much work can be delegated to sub-contractors

These reforms address long-standing quality issues in railway infrastructure projects where cost-cutting by sub-contractors led to structural deficiencies.

### Passenger Convenience Reform 1 — Cancellation and Refunds

FEATURE	OLD SYSTEM	NEW SYSTEM
Cancellation windows	Variable, often restrictive	72, 24, and 8 hours before departure
Counter ticket cancellation	Only at issuing station	<b>Any railway station</b>
E-ticket refunds	Manual processing	<b>Automatic processing</b>

### Passenger Convenience Reform 2 — Upgrades and Boarding

- Passengers can now **upgrade travel class up to 30 minutes** before departure
- **Digital boarding station change** – no need to visit a counter
- Both features work through the IRCTC platform

## Reform Express — Overall Framework

The Reform Express is a comprehensive policy framework launched in 2026 to fast-track Indian Railways' transformation. With the latest additions, **9 reforms** have been rolled out in 2026:

- **4 earlier reforms** (cargo and operational efficiency)
- **5 new reforms** (2 cargo + 1 construction + 2 passenger)

## Indian Railways — Scale and Significance

PARAMETER	DATA
Route kilometres	68,000+ (4th largest network globally)
Annual passengers	~8.5 billion
Annual freight	~1.5 billion tonnes
Employees	~12 lakh
Revenue (FY2025)	~Rs 2.6 lakh crore
Capital expenditure (FY2026 Budget)	Rs 2.52 lakh crore

## Recent Railway Reforms Timeline

YEAR	REFORM
2017	Railway Budget merged with Union Budget
2020	Railway Board restructured — unified Chairman as CEO
2021	National Rail Plan 2030 released
2022-24	Dedicated Freight Corridors (EDFC + WDFC) operationalised
2023	Vande Bharat sleeper trains announced
2024	Kavach TCAS deployment expanded
2026	Reform Express framework launched

### UPSC RELEVANCE

Railway Board structure, Dedicated Freight Corridors (Eastern + Western), Kavach TCAS, IRCTC

Infrastructure development; transport sector reforms; public sector efficiency

“Indian Railways carries 8.5 billion passengers annually yet operates at a loss on passenger services. How can Reform Express-type initiatives improve financial viability?”

## ★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

### REFORM EXPRESS 2026:

Total reforms: 9 (4 earlier + 5 new)

Categories: Cargo (4), Construction (1), Passenger (2), Operations (2)

Salt transport: stainless steel containers with hydraulic side-discharge

Cancellation windows: 72, 24, 8 hours before departure

Class upgrade: up to 30 minutes before departure

Counter ticket: cancellable from any station

### INDIAN RAILWAYS KEY DATA:

4th largest rail network: 68,000+ route km

Passengers: ~8.5 billion/year

Freight: ~1.5 billion tonnes/year

Employees: ~12 lakh

Budget FY2026 capex: Rs 2.52 lakh crore

Operating ratio (FY2025): ~98.4%

### DEDICATED FREIGHT CORRIDORS:

Eastern DFC: 1,337 km (Ludhiana to Dankuni)

Western DFC: 1,506 km (Dadri to JNPT)

DFCCIL: Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India Limited

### OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

First railway in India: April 16, 1853 (Mumbai to Thane, 34 km)

Kavach: indigenous Automatic Train Protection system

IRCTC: Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (est. 1999)

National Rail Plan target year: 2030

Sources: [ANI](#), [PIB](#), [Asianet Newsable](#)

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