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South Coast Railway: India's 18th Railway Zone Notified, HQ at Visakhapatnam

14 May 2026

POLITY**ECONOMY**

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

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WHY IN NEWS

The **Ministry of Railways** through a Gazette notification on **May 4, 2026** has formally constituted the **South Coast Railway (SCoR)** as the **18th Zone** of Indian Railways, with headquarters at **Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh**. Operations begin from **June 1, 2026**. The notification was issued under **Section 3(4) of the Railways Act, 1989** and fulfils a statutory commitment under the **Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014**.

STRUCTURE OF THE NEW ZONE

DIVISION	ORIGIN
Vijayawada	Carved from South Central Railway (SCR)
Guntur	Carved from South Central Railway (SCR)
Guntakal	Carved from South Central Railway (SCR)
Visakhapatnam (new)	Carved from the Waltair Division of East Coast Railway (ECoR)

- **Zonal HQ:** Visakhapatnam
- **Zonal General Manager:** Senior Administrative Grade officer of the Indian Railway Management Service
- Approximate route length: **~3,500 km**

LEGAL AND HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY

DATE	EVENT
March 2, 2014	AP Reorganisation Act, 2014 enacted; Schedule XIII included a new railway zone for AP as a transitional commitment
June 2, 2014	Telangana formed; residuary Andhra Pradesh becomes a new State
February 27, 2019	Then-Railway Minister Piyush Goyal announces SCoR in principle
2019-2025	Inter-zonal allocation, asset transfer, HR rationalisation through DRMs and PHODs
May 4, 2026	Gazette notification; SCoR formally created
June 1, 2026	Operations begin

The 2014 commitment was a **transitional residuary obligation** flowing from the bifurcation – one of several (e.g., new High Court for AP, new capital, special category status promises).

SECTION 3, RAILWAYS ACT, 1989

Section 3 of the Railways Act, 1989, governs the **administrative structure of Indian Railways**.

- **Section 3(1)**: Central Government may by notification appoint a General Manager and other officers for each Railway zone
- **Section 3(4)**: Central Government may by notification **modify** the limits of any Railway zone or **create a new zone**
- The Notification operates under the **Central Government's plenary executive power** in respect of railways (Entry 22, Union List)

INDIAN RAILWAYS – SNAPSHOT OF ZONES

Until April 2026, Indian Railways had **17 zones**:

- 1 Central
- 2 Eastern
- 3 East Central
- 4 East Coast

- 5 Northern
- 6 North Central
- 7 North Eastern
- 8 Northeast Frontier
- 9 North Western
- 10 Southern
- 11 South Central
- 12 South East Central
- 13 South Eastern
- 14 South Western
- 15 Western
- 16 West Central
- 17 Metro Railway, Kolkata

18th: South Coast Railway (SCoR) – HQ Visakhapatnam.

INDICATOR	INDIAN RAILWAYS (~LATEST OFFICIAL)
Broad-gauge track	~63,000 km
Total route length	~68,000 km
Network rank	4th largest in the world
Daily passengers	~23 million
Daily freight	~3 million tonnes
Trains run per day	~13,200

WHY A NEW ZONE FOR AP?

Bifurcation Logic

- Pre-bifurcation, Andhra Pradesh + Telangana fell under **South Central Railway** (HQ Secunderabad), retained by Telangana after 2014
- AP was left **without a zonal HQ on its own territory** – the only major State in this position post-2014
- The 2014 Act addressed this anomaly

Operational Logic

- The Vijayawada, Guntur and Guntakal divisions carried the bulk of AP's traffic
- Waltair (Visakhapatnam) was administratively under East Coast Railway (HQ Bhubaneswar)
- Carving Visakhapatnam out, and pulling the three SCR divisions into a new zone, creates a **State-coterminous administrative footprint**

Politico-Economic Logic

- Visakhapatnam, the de facto largest city in AP, was being positioned as one of three potential capitals under the **AP Decentralisation and Inclusive Development Act, 2020** (struck down by AP High Court in 2022 but politically alive)
- The zonal HQ enhances Visakhapatnam's stature as an administrative city

OPERATIONAL ISSUES TO WATCH

Asset Allocation

- Locomotive sheds, workshops (Lallaguda is in Telangana; Tirupati in AP), depot infrastructure
- Personnel transfer (with options for continuity in current cadre)

Revenue Allocation

- Freight is the principal earning stream (~65 per cent of Indian Railways revenue); coal traffic from Mahanadi Coal Belt and Talcher transits through Vizag and SCR territory

Loss to East Coast Railway

- Waltair Division was the **highest revenue division** of ECoR; ECoR (HQ Bhubaneswar) loses material traffic
- The Centre is expected to upgrade Khurda Road or other ECoR divisions to offset the loss

CONSTITUTIONAL BACKDROP

- **Article 246** read with **List I, Entry 22**: Railways are exclusively a Union subject
- The Centre alone may create, alter or wind up a Railway zone
- States have no veto on zonal architecture, though Centre-State consultations precede major changes

BROADER RAILWAY REFORM CONTEXT

REFORM	YEAR	NOTE
Merger of Railway Budget with General Budget	2017	Ended a 92-year-old colonial-era separation (1924 onwards)
Restructuring of Railway Board	December 2019	Eight-member -> five-member; functional restructuring
Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS)	2019	Merged eight Group A services into one
Bharatiya Rail Sanhita under consolidation	Pending	Proposed unified railway code

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2 – Polity, Governance

- Centre-State relations; statutory residuary commitments under reorganisation legislation
- Administrative architecture of Indian Railways
- Cooperative federalism

GS Paper 3 – Infrastructure, Economy

- Railway economics; freight-passenger cross-subsidy
- Logistics Performance Index and trade competitiveness

Mains Angles

- 1 Discuss the constitutional and statutory framework governing the creation of a new Indian Railway zone.
- 2 The South Coast Railway fulfils a residuary commitment from the AP Reorganisation Act, 2014. Examine other pending commitments under the same Act.
- 3 Indian Railways is the world's fourth-largest network. Discuss its principal reform priorities in the present decade.

India's **18th Railway Zone; HQ Visakhapatnam**; notified by Gazette **May 4, 2026**; operations from **June 1, 2026**.

Vijayawada, Guntur, Guntakal (ex-SCR) + new Visakhapatnam Division (ex-Waltair/ECOR).

Section 3(4) of the Railways Act, 1989; fulfils **Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014** (Schedule XIII).

Statutory body since the Railway Board Act, 1905; restructured to a 5-member body with CEO & Chairman (post merged in December 2019).

~**13,200 trains/day**; ~**23 million passengers/day**; ~3 million tonnes freight/day; world's **4th largest** network; ~68,000 km route, ~63,000 km BG.

Railways are at **List I (Union List), Entry 22**.

Central, Eastern, East-Central, East-Coast, Northern, North-Central, North-Eastern, Northeast-Frontier, North-Western, Southern, South-Central, South-East-Central, South-Eastern, South-Western, Western, West-Central, Metro Railway Kolkata.

Metro Railway Kolkata, declared a Railway Zone in 2010 (functioning since 1984).

Bifurcated Andhra Pradesh; effective June 2, 2014; created Telangana; many residuary commitments to AP including Special Category Status, Polavaram, new High Court, new capital, new railway zone, AIIMS Mangalagiri.

Indigenous semi-high-speed train; first trainset 2019; manufactured by Integral Coach Factory (Chennai); 100+ services by 2026.

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