

CHAPTER - IV

Individual Paragraphs

CHAPTER-IV

Individual Observations of Compliance Audit

AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT

4.1 Unfruitful expenditure

Infrastructure created by Bidhan Chandra Krishi Viswavidyalaya could not be put to use which resulted in unfruitful expenditure of ₹ 13.78 crore, besides non-achievement of objectives related to development of agricultural activities.

The Bidhan Chandra Krishi Viswavidyalaya (BCKV) with its headquarters at Mohanpur, Nadia was established in 1974 to provide facilities for study of agriculture and allied sciences and for conducting research in these area.

The BCKV received (during 2015-16 to 2020-21) funds from the Government of West Bengal (GoWB) for implementation of four projects¹²³ under the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF¹²⁴) and the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY¹²⁵) which remained incomplete/ non-functional as discussed in subsequent paragraphs:

A. Testing and Training Center for Food and Water Quality

The project -“Establishment of a Testing and Training Center for Food and Water Quality” was taken up by BCKV under RIDF with the following objectives:

- Establishment of a State Level Referral Laboratory for Quality Testing¹²⁶ of Food and Water with recommendations;
- Human capacity building through training on Good Laboratory Practices (GLP), Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Manufacturing Practices; and
- Training for upgrading the skills of academicians, research students, self-help groups and food processing entrepreneurs of the State.

As per the DPR submitted (August 2014) by the BCKV to the Agriculture Department, GoWB under RIDF, the total estimated cost of the project was ₹ 8.45 crore which included ₹ 5.00 crore on non-recurring expenditure¹²⁷ and

¹²³ Establishment of a Testing and Training Center for Food and Water Quality, Establishment of Bio-fertilizer Production Unit, Infrastructure support for Agricultural Mechanisation of State Farm Machinery Training and Testing Institute and Development of farm and tissue culture unit for production and promotion of medicinal plants Stevia as cash crop.

¹²⁴ RIDF was set up by the Government of India in 1995-96 for financing ongoing rural infrastructure projects. The fund is mainly maintained by the NABARD.

¹²⁵ RKVY was initiated in 2007 as an umbrella GoI scheme for ensuring holistic development of agriculture and allied sectors by allowing states to choose their own agriculture and allied sector development activities as per district/State level plan.

¹²⁶ Pesticide residues, metals and pathogenic organisms.

¹²⁷ Equipment, civil and electrical works, furniture, ACs, UPS and accessories.

₹3.45 crore on Recurring Contingencies (RC). RC *inter-alia* included Operational Cost of ₹ 1.00 crore for 10 years besides an expenditure of ₹ 1.48 crore on Contractual Services¹²⁸ for conducting tests and running the laboratory for 10 years.

BCKV sent (January 2015) the budget proposal of ₹ 7.26 crore to the Agriculture Department, GoWB for approval of non-recurring expenditure, which included proposed expenditure ₹ 1.47 crore on civil and electrical works, ₹ 5.52 crore on equipment and ₹ 0.27 crore on furnishing. However, funds requirement to meet the operational cost as well as cost of hiring of contractual personnel to run the laboratory, which were crucial elements, was not communicated to the Agriculture Department, GoWB.

The Agriculture Department released ₹ 7.49 crore (in the period 2015-16 to 2020-21) to BCKV for the implementation of the project and the work was started in July 2015. As of July 2023, BCKV incurred the following expenditure as shown in the **Table 4.1**.

Table 4.1: Details of expenditure incurred on Testing and Training Centre

Sanctioned item	Expenditure (₹ in crore)	Present status
Civil and electrical works	1.45	Minor (civil and electrical) works yet to be taken up.
Equipment	2.97	22 out of 27 equipment were procured and installed. Five machines (analytical equipment) with an estimated cost of ₹ 2.75 crore could not be purchased during 2020-21 due to Covid-19 and Assembly Election-2021.
Furnishing Laboratory	0.25	Some additional items required are yet to be taken up.
Contingency	0.07	Some additional items required are yet to be taken up.
Total	₹ 4.74 crore	Unspent balance of ₹ 2.75 crore.

Thus, from the above it was evident that, even after eight years from its commencement, the project remained incomplete. The joint physical verification (March 2024) by Audit along with officials of BCKV revealed that although a two-storey building was constructed under the project, however the same could not be used for carrying out the intended objectives of testing of water and food samples. This was because there was no provision of funds for operation and maintenance of the proposed laboratory. Thus, in place of the envisaged objectives, Audit observed that the building was being utilised for other projects¹²⁹.

The Principal Investigator¹³⁰ (PI) of the project also accepted (March 2024) that professional testing service could not be initiated due to non-completion

¹²⁸ One Senior Research Associate at the rate of ₹ 30,000 per month, three senior research fellow at the rate of ₹ 18,000 per head per month, three project assistant at the rate of ₹ 9,000 per head per month and two laboratory and field attendants at the rate of ₹ 6,000 per head per month.

¹²⁹ All India Coordinated Research Project (AICRP) on MULLaRP (Mungbean, Urdbean, Lentil, Lathyrus, Rajma and Pea), AICRP on Wheat and Barley Improvement and AICRP on Vegetable crops

¹³⁰ Principal Investigator is a professor of the university and in-charge of implementing the scheme.

of the project. Further personnel for the project had not been hired due to non-provision for the same, which led to non-initiation of professional testing.

Thus, due to deviation from the initial DPR, the project remained incomplete, and the envisaged objective of the project remained unfulfilled. As a result, the amount of ₹ 4.74 crore incurred on the project remained unfruitful.

The Department stated (June 2024) that for fulfillment of all scheme objectives, steps would be taken to scale up activities within another 4-5 months.

B. Bio-fertilizer production unit under Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana

The Project “Establishment of Bio-fertilizer Production Unit at B.C.K.V under Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) fund” was conceived with the following objectives:

- to develop infrastructure for large scale production of bio-fertilizer in order to meet the requirements of Government agencies, departments and other stake holders;
- to assure production of quality fertilizers under the brand name BCKV; and
- to increase the shelf-life of organisms through advanced formulation and improved storage facility.

The project was approved (July 2015) by State Level Sanctioning Committee of RKVY for completion in two years at (October 2018) an estimated cost of ₹ 4.57 crore. The project was taken up in October 2016 by BCKV and the civil and electrical works were completed in March 2020.

The delay in completing the remaining project was attributed to the late release of funds by the Agriculture Department, GoWB as shown in **Table 4.2**.

Table 4.2: Year wise allotment and expenditure of fund

Year	Allotment (₹ in crore)	Expenditure (₹ in crore)
2016-17	1.23	1.22
2017-18		
2018-19	1.05	1.05
2019-20	2.09	2.02
Total	4.37 (unreleased = 0.20)	4.29

Further, major instruments required for the project were installed only after April 2021 and the delay was attributed to prevailing lockdown due to Covid-19. The production of bio-fertilizer could only commence from October 2021 against the stipulated month of October 2018, after incurring an expenditure of ₹ 4.29 crore on the project. The annual production capacity of the plant that was set up was 200 MT but against this, during the period since its completion (April 2021 to March 2024), only 1.2 MT of bio fertilizer could be produced against the installed capacity of 600 MT in three years. Moreover, bulk demand from government/ non-government agencies was not received and only meagre indents from local farmers and Krishi Vigyan Kendras were received by the BCKV. The low demand of bio fertilizer indicates that no pre-project survey was conducted before formulating the project to assess the need. The university decided to formulate the project as the existing bio-fertiliser unit was no longer working due to old age instruments. Also, even after completion of the project,

concerted efforts were not made by BCKV/Department to create awareness about the facility and secure orders in line with its installed capacity. Only one on-line meeting¹³¹ (during lockdown) was held in this regard.

As a result, the project could never achieve its full potential (installed capacity) during the period April 2021 to March 2024).

The joint physical verification (March 2024) with officials of the BCKV revealed that the production unit was not operational at the time of the visit as there was no indent for production.



Figure 4.1: Equipment found lying idle

The PI of the project attributed (August 2023 and March 2024) dismal performance to the following constraints:

- This was an indent-based production as microbes gradually die after six months of production. Therefore, absence of bulk indent limited the potential utilization of the project.
- Absence of funds for maintenance of equipment. Thus, in the absence of institutional demand, the bio-fertilizer production unit remained idle since its completion and the expenditure of ₹ 4.29 crore incurred on its establishment remained unfruitful.

The Department stated (June 2024) that steps have been taken to rationalise the pricing policy of bio-fertilizer and approached Primary Agricultural Cooperatives (PACs), Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), and Tea Gardens besides use in university campus outlets in the State and KVKs for ensuring indent and regular supply. The Department further stated that steps were also being taken to scale up production in the coming 6 - 8 months.

C. Farm Machinery Training and Testing Institute

The project “Infrastructure support for Agricultural Mechanization of State Farm Machinery Training and Testing Institute (FMTTI)” under RKVY fund was conceived with the following objectives:

- to provide hands on training on operation and maintenance of farm implements and machinery to farmers; and
- to provide test certificates to different manufacturers after testing their farm equipment as per the standard test code for maintaining the quality of the machine. Based on these test certificates, the State Government would provide subsidy to farmers to encourage farm mechanization for better earnings from agriculture.

¹³¹ Attended by Director of Agriculture, members of RKVY Cell and Director of Research, BCKV and the in-charge of the project.

The project was taken up (August 2015) by the BCKV for completion in two years, at an estimated cost of ₹ 5.00 crore. The project consisted of a building, furniture for office, training hall and guest house, implements for training purposes, instruments for audio-visual presentation *etc.* A professor (Department of Farm Machinery and Power) of the BCKV was designated as the Principal Investigator (PI) responsible for execution of the project.

Audit observed (August 2023) that the project was not completed even after eight years of its initiation although expenditure of an amount of ₹ 2.57 crore was incurred on training hall with accommodation of farmers, boundary wall, test track, farm equipment, testing instruments, furniture and audio-visual aids for training were purchased under the project. However, purchase of all equipment could not be completed.

The incomplete project was shifted (December 2021) to another PI after BCKV noticed mismanagement on the part of the earlier PI. Seven instruments required for testing¹³² and three instruments required for training¹³³ could not be purchased, as the funds were not provided by BCKV to the new PI after handing over the project, which hampered testing and training activities.

The DPR for FMTTI had a provision of ₹ 10 lakh per year for the first two years (2015-16 and 2016-17) to meet the manpower requirement for running the project. However, the DPR did not mention the source of funds required for meeting funds/ manpower for running the project after two years. Thus, only two residential training programmes upto 2017-18 and three non-resident training programmes upto 2018-19 were organised. Trainings were not organised thereafter due to lack of funds and manpower. Further, commercial testing of only six farm equipment were conducted during the period from 2017-18 to March 2024.

The joint physical verification with officials of BCKV and reply of the BCKV revealed that the residential facilities (25 bedded capacity) created for the FMTTI were being utilised to provide accommodation to PhD students of BCKV.

Thus, the objectives of the project could not be achieved due to lack of fund and manpower and the expenditure of ₹ 2.57 crore incurred on the project also remained unfruitful.

The Department stated (June 2024) that steps have been taken to shift the few remaining students from FMTTI guest house to different university hostels shortly. It further stated that necessary steps were being taken to increase Training and Testing activities in the coming 5-6 months.

D. Tissue culture unit for production/ promotion of Stevia

A project “Development of farm and tissue culture unit for production and promotion of medicinal plants Stevia¹³⁴ as cash crop” was taken up by BCKV

¹³² Forage harvester, Forage baling machine, Paddy transplanter, self-propelled type Sprinkler irrigation equipment, Cut model of engine and Cut model of pumps and other small machinery.

¹³³ Hardness testing machine, Test rig for Engine test and Patternator for testing of Spray Pattern of sprayers.

¹³⁴ A medicinal plant and its leaves are used as a sweetener.

under Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) to establish a Stevia tissue culture lab and produce plantlets for supply to willing farmers for cultivation of stevia as a cash/medicinal crop.

Out of the total allotted fund of ₹ 2.44 crore, expenditure of ₹ 2.18 crore was incurred, and the balance amount of ₹ 0.26 crore was returned to the Agriculture Department. The project was completed in March 2021. However, the PI of the project stated (August 2023) that it remained non-functional due to the following reasons:

- ✓ ACs which were required for successful working and maintenance of the installed instruments in the laboratory, could not be procured as necessary permission was not provided by the BCKV.
- ✓ The generator set which is integral to the project was procured but could not be made operational as electrical panel works could not be done.
- ✓ No manpower was provided for running the project.

Joint physical verification (March 2024) with the officials of BCKV revealed the following:

- The project was a two-storied building. However, parts of the ground floor¹³⁵ and first floor¹³⁶ were being utilised for other projects.
- Some critical parts of the laboratory like Dark Room, Seed Germinator, Shaking Incubator remained un-utilised due to the non-availability of Air Conditioning facility.



Figure 4.2: Generator set kept idle



Figure 4.3: Equipment kept idle

Thus, not only were beneficiaries deprived of the potential benefits of the project but the expenditure of ₹ 2.18 crore was also rendered unfruitful.

The Department stated (June 2024) that the BCKV authorities were ready with the protocol and expected price and would start producing plantlets in the next few months.

Thus, due to poor planning and execution of the projects by the BCKV and the Agriculture Department, facilities created under RKVY/RIDF funds did not achieve the envisaged results for development of the agricultural sector in the State, rendering the expenditure of ₹ 13.78 crore unfruitful.

¹³⁵ All India Network Project (AINP) on Pesticide Residue.

¹³⁶ AINP on Jute and Allied Fibers.

CO-OPERATION DEPARTMENT

4.2 Undue benefit of ₹ 2.01 crore to contractors on use of steel material

The Co-operation Department extended undue benefit of ₹ 2.01 crore to contractors by allowing higher rates of steel material, instead of applicable lower rates for construction of warehouses.

Rule 35 of the West Bengal Financial Rules (Volume I) specifies that ‘every officer incurring or authorising expenditure from public funds should be guided by high standards of financial propriety’.

For the storage of paddy seeds, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) approved (February 2018) the Co-operation Department, GoWB’s proposal for the construction of 10,000 MT model 23 godowns in 14 districts of the State, under the Warehousing Infrastructure Fund¹³⁷ 2013-14. The West Bengal State Co-operative Marketing Federation Ltd. (BENFED) was appointed as the Project Implementing Agency (PIA) for execution of the said project. Accordingly, individual Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) were prepared by BENFED for approval of NABARD for the construction of 23 godowns with a capacity of 10,000 MT each, in 14 districts of the State.

Administrative approval (August 2018) for construction of the godowns was accorded by the Co-operation Department with a total financial outlay of ₹ 240.20 crore, for completion by March 2021. Accordingly, 23 separate work orders were issued (between March 2019 and August 2020) by the BENFED after completion of the tendering process. These 23 godown works were to be completed by July 2023 at a cost of ₹ 236.46 crore.

It was noted that as per the Schedule of Rates (SoR w.e.f. November 2017) of the Public Works Department (PWD), West Bengal, there were two rates of steel materials applicable for various works i) rate of SAIL/TATA/RINL ii) rate of others. The DPRs for the construction of 23 godowns were prepared by BENFED after considering the price of steel materials of SAIL/TATA/RINL make available in SoR. However, in all the 23 cases of construction of godowns, the contractors, instead of using specified steel materials of SAIL/TATA/RINL make, actually used other makes like RASHMI/CONCAST steel that had lower rates.

Audit further observed that in nine out of 23 cases, the bills were prepared on the basis of lower rates of non-branded steel materials (RASHMI/CONCAST/SRMB) as those were used, instead of accounting for higher-priced SAIL/TATA/RINL steel provided in the DPR. However, in the remaining 14 cases, the Co-operation Department paid higher rates of steel material (applicable to brand SAIL/TATA/RINL), even though steel (other than SAIL/TATA/RINL like RESHMI) of lower rates had been used, resulting in undue benefit of ₹ 1.98 crore to contractors. Audit further observed that the Co-operation Department also

¹³⁷ In 2013-14, the GoI instituted Warehouse Infrastructure Fund with a corpus of ₹ 5,000 crore to be managed by NABARD for creation of warehouse infrastructure.

allowed higher loading, unloading and stocking charges¹³⁸ of ₹ 139 per MT against the actual rate of ₹ 96 per MT on steel materials in the same 14 works out of 23 works resulting in undue benefit of ₹ 2.78 lakh to the contractors.

Thus, the Co-operation Department extended undue benefit of ₹ 2.01 crore (**Appendix-4.1**) to the contractors on steel materials along higher loading, unloading and stocking charges.

The Co-operation Department stated (April 2024) that the work orders were issued during March 2019 and August 2020 *i.e.* during Covid pandemic period and the steel materials of ISI approved brand were used in the structural work of the project due to scarcity of SAIL/TATA/RINL make steel materials.

However, the reply is not tenable as the Co-operation Department should have restricted the payment of contractors for using RASHMI/CONCAST/SRMB make steel materials instead of allowing higher rates of SAIL/TATA/RINL materials, as was done in the nine cases.

FOOD & SUPPLIES DEPARTMENT

4.3 Avoidable expenditure

Owing to lapses in ensuring occupancy, delayed termination of lease and poor contract management, the Department incurred an avoidable expenditure of ₹ 14.72 crore.

The Government of India (GoI) introduced the Private Entrepreneurs Guarantee (PEG) Scheme, for augmenting the storage capacity of Food Corporation of India (FCI) under Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode in July 2008.

The Scheme envisaged construction of godowns by private investors at their cost under a five years guaranteed scheme¹³⁹ which was subsequently increased to 10 years (August 2010). FCI was to hire these godowns for storing purposes through the Central Warehousing Corporation (CWC)/State Warehousing Corporation (SWC), who were in charge of operating these godowns.

In West Bengal, the West Bengal SWC and West Bengal Essential Commodities Supply Corporation Limited (WBECSCL) were operating these PEG godowns under the overall control of the Food & Supplies Department, (Department).

WBECSCL and FCI entered into an agreement (27 November 2014) to provide storage space for Decentralised Procurement (DCP) stocks at warehouses constructed under the PEG Scheme at Ratulia, Tamluk in Purba Medinipur district. According to paras 1.4 and 1.5 of the agreement, FCI would reimburse storage charges (monthly rent) as well as pay 15 *per cent* of the monthly rent as supervision charges to WBECSCL. The State Government would also make efforts to ensure at least 80 *per cent* occupancy of the godowns.

¹³⁸ Department allowed loading, unloading and stacking charges of ₹ 139 per MT though as per item no. 1.03(h), page 227 of SoR, PWD(WB), Vol.III 2018, it would be ₹ 96.00 per MT.

¹³⁹ FCI will give a guarantee for assured usage of storage space under Five Year Guarantee Scheme. If in any year, on account of lower procurement or higher off take, the storage space remains unutilized, FCI would continue to pay the hire charges during the period of guarantee to the owner of the godown.

In continuation of the above agreement, WBECSCCL and the private owner¹⁴⁰ (Lessor) of the PEG godowns at Ratulia, Purba Midnapore entered into another agreement on the same day (27 November 2014). According to this agreement, WBECSCCL agreed to pay rent¹⁴¹ to the Lessor, till the contract remained in operation¹⁴², from the date of actual possession of the godown by WBECSCCL.

The Department procured foodgrains from farmers under the DCP Scheme and stored them in godowns, including PEG godowns of WBECSCCL across various districts of the State.

Audit observed (February 2024) that the Department did not fulfil its responsibility of ensuring the mandatory storage occupancy of 80 *per cent*. The godowns remained poorly and intermittently occupied from the very beginning (July 2014), and the situation further deteriorated during August 2017 to April 2018, when the required level of occupancy could not be achieved in any of the months. As a result, FCI reimbursed rent up to July 2017 to WBECSCCL and thereafter stopped any further reimbursement of the same. Accordingly, WBECSCCL also stopped payment of rent to the Private owner from August 2017 onwards.

Audit also observed (February 2024) that based on a reference made, the Advocate General (AG), GoWB had advised (March 2021) WBECSCCL to terminate the said lease. However, WBECSCCL terminated the agreement only in September 2023 *i.e.* more than two years after the advice of the AG and five years after discontinuing storage in the PEG godowns.

The private owner appealed at different forums¹⁴³ claiming the rent of godown along with interest. Finally, an order was issued (November 2022) by the High Court of Calcutta in favour of the private owner for payment of rent due from the period July 2014 to June 2023. Thus, the Department had to pay ₹ 14.72 crore to the private owner through WBECSCCL.

Thus, the Department did not ensure to discharge its primary responsibility of ensuring 80 *per cent* mandatory occupancy of PEG godowns, resulting in discontinuation of FCI reimbursements and stoppage of storage operations since May 2018. Even after being advised by the Advocate General in March 2021 to terminate the lease, the Department allowed the agreement to linger for more than two years without justification. This inaction, coupled with weak contract management and absence of timely corrective measures, culminated in an adverse High Court order, forcing the Department to pay ₹ 14.72 crore to the private owner without deriving any storage benefit. The Department's lapses thus led to avoidable financial loss to the State exchequer.

¹⁴⁰ *M/s MSV Laboratories Pvt. Ltd.*

¹⁴¹ *Monthly rent at the rate of ₹ 8.88 per quintal as specified in the agreement.*

¹⁴² *The lease shall remain in force for a period of nine years three months and sixteen days unless it was terminated due to non-fulfillment of any obligations.*

¹⁴³ *i) West Bengal State Micro Small Enterprises Facilitation Council, ii) Commercial Court at Alipore and iii) Hon'ble High Court at Calcutta.*

INFORMATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

4.4 Unfruitful expenditure on construction of a Multi-Purpose Cultural Complex

Due to selection of a wrong site for construction of auditorium and museum, the envisaged purposes of creating awareness about folk art & culture among the youth, could not be served and it led to unfruitful expenditure of ₹ 5.04 crore.

The Information and Cultural Affairs Department (ICAD), Government of West Bengal sent (August 2005) a proposal to the Ministry of Culture, Government of India (Ministry) for setting up of a Multi-Purpose Cultural Complex (MPCC) to be built and run by the Folk and Tribal Cultural Centre (FTCC)¹⁴⁴. ICAD also requested the Ministry to provide land for the project, free of cost and also bear 50 per cent of the cost, while the State Government would bear the remaining 50 per cent of the cost. In response, the Ministry approved the project as a “Central Scheme for Financial Assistance for setting up of MPCC at AJC Bose Road Kolkata by FTCC, Kolkata” and released (October 2006) ₹ 60.00 lakh out of its total share of ₹ 1.00 crore, as the first installment, in favour of FTCC. The scheduled date for completion of the project was August 2008.

However, it was noted that the sanction of the project got delayed on the part of the Government of West Bengal. As a result, ICAD intimated (April 2007) the Ministry that due to this delay, the GoWB had decided to allot the earmarked land for the MPCC at AJC Bose Road Kolkata in favor of Lalitkala Academy, GoI. Under the circumstances, ICAD requested the Ministry to allow it to set up the MPCC at Chitkalikapur, beside E M Bypass, which was 15 kms away from the heart of the city, under the South 24 Parganas District. The Ministry in its response to ICAD categorically stated (April 2007) that the project was approved by GoI for a specific location. The Ministry also enquired whether the plan, design and estimates prepared for the earlier site would be utilised for the new site.

ICAD informed (May 2007) the Ministry that the plan, design and estimates prepared for the earlier site would not be utilised for the new site but it assured that the new plan, design and estimates would involve no additional cost. No records of communication with the Ministry in this regard were found thereafter. It was also noted that the GoI did not release any further instalment for the project.

Later, ICAD enhanced the scope of work and included an administrative building and museum along with the auditorium building, in the scope of MPCC. It was also decided that the works would be funded by the Government of West Bengal. FTCC engaged (May 2008) a contractor¹⁴⁵ to construct three distinct buildings: - administrative building, auditorium and the museum building at an

¹⁴⁴ An autonomous body, set up in 1994 under the aegis of the ICAD for promotion of folk art and culture.

¹⁴⁵ Makintosh Burn Limited, a Government of West Bengal managed company.

estimated cost of ₹ 9.19 crore¹⁴⁶. These buildings were completed and handed over (December 2010) to FTCC at an expenditure of ₹ 10.93 crore¹⁴⁷.

Audit observed irregularities in the overall utilisation of constructed facilities, through scrutiny of records and joint physical verification (December 2023) as detailed below:

- (i) **Museum Building:** The museum, constructed at a cost of ₹ 2.90 crore was to be a two storied building where one hall was required for the setting up of a studio for recording folk songs/music. However, it was observed that the studio did not have any equipment necessary for its effective functioning as a music studio to record folk songs/music. Further, though certain artefacts related to folk culture were displayed on the Ground Floor, the museum was never opened for the general public which defeated its purpose of creating awareness.
- (ii) **Auditorium:** An Auditorium with a capacity of 300 seats was constructed to help artists showcase their performances related to drama, dance, songs or other forms of folk culture. Audit noted that the Auditorium which was built at a cost of ₹ 2.16 crore was never used for the purpose it was built. FTCC claimed (July 2023) that a total of 39 programmes were organised during 2012-13 to 2016-17 and it earned a revenue of ₹ 2.22 lakh from hire charges of the auditorium from private parties. The purpose of creation of the building was to promote folk art and culture, but the programs organized were not related to folk art and culture and were instead related to organising private functions like film shooting, birthday parties, weddings etc. Further, since 2017-18, the Auditorium had not been used as it was in a dilapidated condition.



Figure 4.4: Unused Museum Building

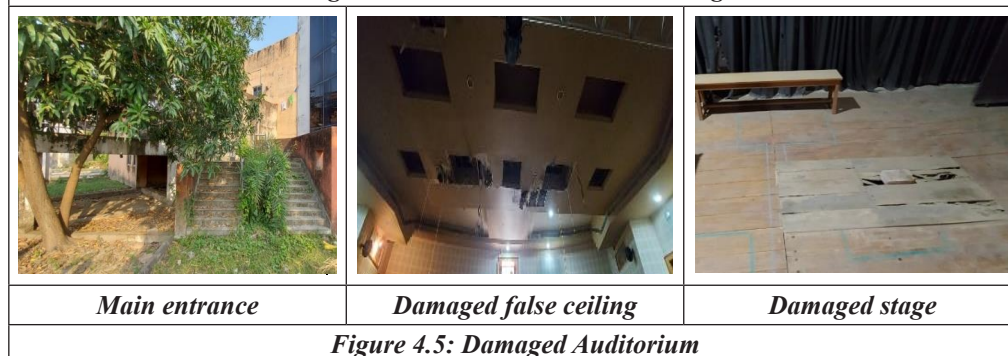


Figure 4.5: Damaged Auditorium

¹⁴⁶ ₹ 6.36 crore for office + auditorium and ₹ 2.83 crore for museum. Total = ₹ 9.19 crore. Since mentioned.

¹⁴⁷ ₹ 8.03 crore for Auditorium & Office Building and ₹ 2.90 crore for Museum.

The Department accepted (March 2024) the fact of non-utilisation of the facilities created. It stated that the basic purpose of creation of the museum was to benefit researchers and not for public viewing. Further, it accepted that the auditorium was in a dilapidated condition. Moreover, it conceded that there were other Government auditoriums under the Department which were located at very conspicuous places and were well connected to metros/ trains/ buses *etc.*, and therefore the auditorium at Chhitkalikapur was not so popular due to poor connectivity, water logging *etc.*

As the Department was well aware of the locational disadvantages of the auditorium and issues like water logging, associated with the revised location, it should have proceeded with the construction of the museum and auditorium only after proper assessment of all related factors. Further, the purpose of the museum and auditorium was to create awareness among the youth and it should have been in a place which could be easily accessed by the general public instead of the present remote location, which remains inundated during the rainy season. Moreover, the Department also unable to provide details of research activities/ workshops/ programmes conducted in the MPCC.

Thus, due to selection of a wrong site the facilities created in the MPCC could not be utilised for their envisaged purposes. As a result, expenditure of ₹ 5.04 crore remained unfruitful for over 10 years.

PUBLIC HEALTH ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT

4.5 Avoidable Expenditure on water lifting arrangement

The Public Health Engineering Department constructed an embankment for storage pond at a higher elevation, leading to avoidable expenditure of ₹ 6.07 crore on water lifting arrangement.

Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) took up (in 2012) the construction of Pond based Piped Water Supply Scheme (PWSS) for Barasukjora and its adjoining areas of 35 *mouzas* of Paschim Medinipur district¹⁴⁸ at an estimated cost of ₹ 22.05 crore¹⁴⁹. The district faced acute scarcity of drinking water during the summer season. The objective of the scheme was to collect water from Tarafeni South Main Canal (North) to a storage pond by siphon conduit¹⁵⁰ with the help of gravity (*i.e.* storage pond to be constructed at a lower level than the canal) and provide drinking water to the people after adequate treatment.

As per the original DPR for the project, prepared (January 2012) by the Executive Engineer, Midnapore Division, PHED, water from the above-mentioned irrigation canal was to be made available three times a year for drinking purpose at an estimated cost of ₹ 21.36 crore. Subsequently, Irrigation and Waterways Department (I&WD), being the custodian of the Tarafeni South Main Canal (North), accorded (February 2013) permission for drawal of water from the canal twice a year instead of thrice a year. Accordingly, I&WD suggested that

¹⁴⁸ Presently under Jhargram District.

¹⁴⁹ Civil Work ₹ 19.80 crore + Mechanical/Electrical Work ₹ 1.56 crore + operation and maintenance ₹ 0.685 crore.

¹⁵⁰ To transfer water through a channel from a storage at higher level to a storage at lower level.

the capacity of the storage pond should be increased to 330 acre-ft against the original storage capacity of 220 acre-ft. As a result, the design of the storage pond was modified (February 2013) to increase its storage capacity to 330 acre-ft by nine m depth cutting. The work was completed (June 2016) by Midnapore Division, PHED at a cost of ₹ 19.57 crore.

Audit observed that a year after modification of the design in storage pond, PHED prepared another DPR (March 2014) on the grounds of restrictions¹⁵¹ imposed by the I&WD. It decided to construct an underground raw water tank on the canal bank wherein water would be collected through gravity from the canal. Thereafter, the water was to be pumped from the raw water tank to the storage pond. It was noted that these works were not included in the scope of the original work sanctioned in January 2012. As a result, a separate estimate of ₹ 10.57 crore for additional work was made for construction of the underground raw water tank. The work was awarded (January 2015) at a cost of ₹ 6.09 crore and was completed at an expenditure of ₹ 6.07 crore (March 2019). However, the Division neither produced documents in respect of alleged restrictions imposed by I&WD (leading to the modifications & a revised DPR), nor were such restrictions mentioned in the NOC issued by I&WD for the project. Besides, on specific query in this regard by Audit, I&WD confirmed (September 2023) that it had not imposed any such restrictions.

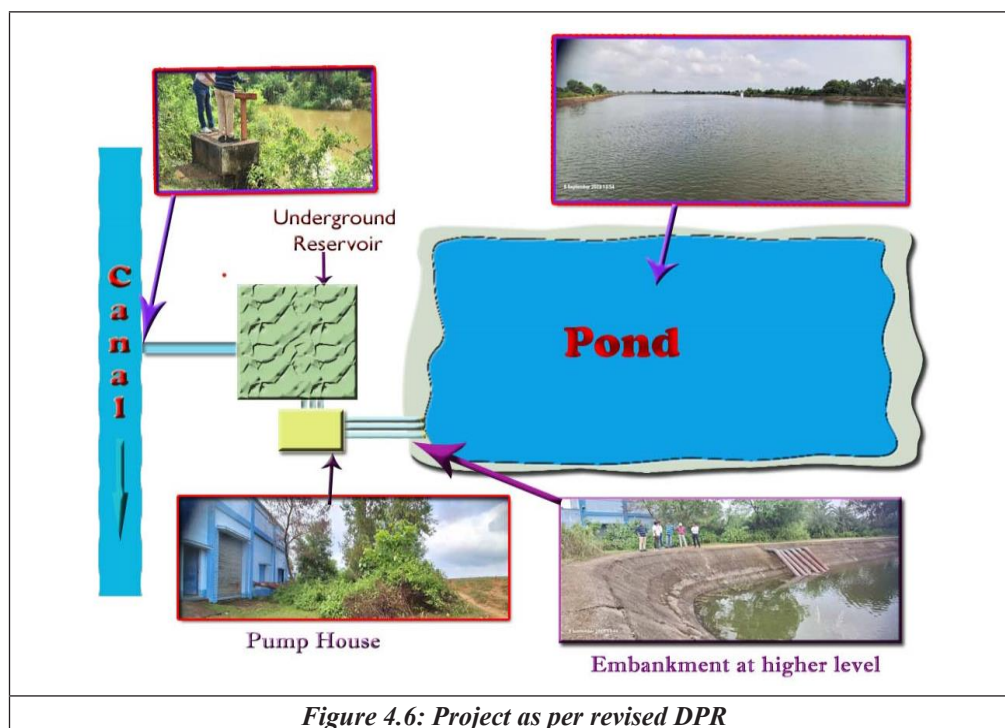


Figure 4.6: Project as per revised DPR

Audit conducted a joint physical verification of the site (September 2023) along with the officers of the PHE Department and I&WD. The verification revealed that although the storage pond was situated within the command area of the irrigation canal and there was a natural downward slope from the irrigation canal to the storage pond, the embankment of the storage pond had been constructed at a higher level to increase the storage capacity of the pond instead

¹⁵¹ i. The water for canal is to be taken from a level of 1.5 m or above from the existing bed level of the canal. ii. The bottom level of the pond will not be below the existing bed level of the canal.

of depth cutting. As a result, natural gravity flow of the water from the canal to the storage tank was restricted.

In the original DPR, the desired storage was to be achieved by excavation of the storage pond upto nine meter from the ground level to maintain the gravity flow of water from canal to the storage pond. However, Audit observed that this approved height of nine meter of storage pond was obtained by three-meter excavation and construction of a six-meter-high embankment around the pond, thereby restricting the gravity flow of water from canal to the storage pond.

Thus, due to construction of embankment above the ground level, the PHED incurred avoidable expenditure of ₹ 6.07 crore on lifting mechanism of water from canal to storage pond. The Department has not furnished any reply (March 2025).

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

4.6 Long Paragraph on Construction and Maintenance of Bridges by Public Works Department, Government of West Bengal

4.6.1 Introduction

The Public Works Department (Department), Government of West Bengal (GoWB) was engaged in planning, designing, construction and maintenance of Government assets like roads, bridges, Railway Over Bridges (ROBs), flyovers *etc.*, in the State.

During detailed audit of 17 test-checked Divisions in seven districts¹⁵², it was found that 67 new bridges were taken up for construction or completed by the Department during the period 2019-20 to 2023-24 at a cost of ₹ 1,338.29 crore. Out of a total of 67 bridges, the construction of 13 bridges was still in progress as of 31 March 2024. It was also found that 453 works related to repair and rehabilitation of bridges, costing ₹ 226.68 crore were taken up and completed during the period under Audit. The Audit findings are given in the subsequent paragraphs.

4.6.2 Planning

The construction and maintenance of bridges necessitate adequate planning, analysis and survey to achieve the desired outcome with limited available resources.

4.6.2.1 Provision of utility services

As per Para 109.1 of IRC 5-2015, a bridge structure shall cater for fixtures for electric posts, lamp posts and suitable ducts for carrying electric cable *etc.*, to cater to utility services. Further, utility services like cables and pipelines for water, gas, petroleum products directly on bridge structure should be avoided. These may be placed on a structure supported on piers and abutments. Further, as per Para 3.7.6 of IRC 98-2011, for all new bridge structures, the authority should consult all public utility authorities (*i.e.* Municipality, Panchayat, WBSEDCL *etc.*) to ascertain their needs, so that appropriate provision in the design may

¹⁵² (1) Howrah, (2) Alipurduar, (3) Purulia, (4) Purb Bardhaman, (5) Uttar Dinajpur, (6) Coochbehar, (7) Nadia.

be made for those services. Furthermore, as per PWD guidelines¹⁵³, the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) shall not lay pipes on the structures like bridges, flyovers *etc.*, to cross the water bodies as far as feasible. If laying pipelines over any such structure is essential, the same can be done only with the approval of PWD. Audit analysis highlighted the following shortcomings:

- Audit selected 15 out of 67 new bridges constructed during 2019-20 to 2023-24 in 17 test-checked divisions for detailed examination. It was observed that provision for essential utility services, other than Optical Fiber Cable and electric lamp posts, was not incorporated in any of the newly constructed bridges, indicating inadequate planning raising the risk of unplanned future interventions, avoidable costs, and potential damage to bridge structures. Further, no records were also made available to show whether necessary consultations with various stakeholders like Municipality, Panchayat, WBSEDCL *etc.*, had been done to incorporate all requirements of stakeholders.
- The construction of a bridge over river *Mansai* on *Sagardighi Ghat* on Dinhata Sitalkuchi road and Sitai Road in the district of Coochbehar under the Coochbehar Highway Division was completed in December 2020 at a cost of ₹ 115.00 crore. However, the provision for cable duct for high voltage electric supply line was not provided during design as well as construction stage of the bridge. It was only after completion of the bridge that permission was sought in May 2022 for laying of 400 Sqmm XLPE cable, Voltage Grade – 33 KV which was approved in July 2022 and the same was laid along the bridge supported by the bridge superstructure as shown in the **Figure 4.7**.

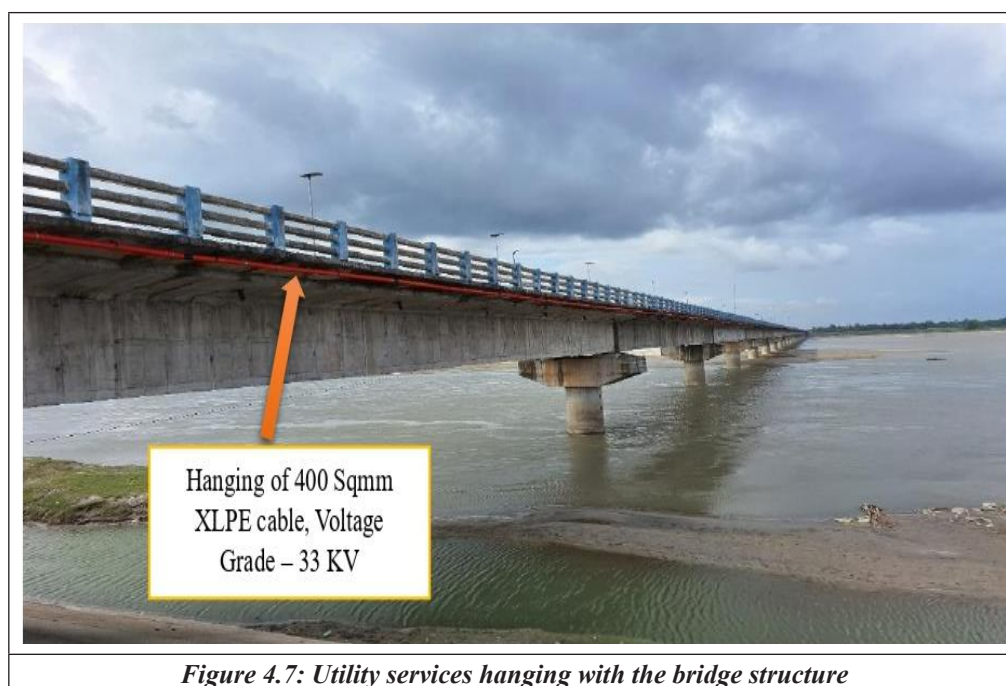


Figure 4.7: Utility services hanging with the bridge structure

(Source: Photograph provided by the Division on 02 September 2024)

Laying the cable line along the bridge by fastening it to the superstructure, instead of routing it through a designated duct, was in violation of the extant

¹⁵³ No. 1m-3/16/192-R/PL dated 17.11.2021 of Joint Secy (Roads), PWD.

IRC code. It may also compromise structural safety as the bridge superstructure was not designed to bear additional loads, vibrations, and anchoring stresses of utility cables, which may weaken critical components over time and accelerate deterioration.

- Similarly, during joint site visits by the Audit team and PWD officials to 30 bridges in the selected 17 test checked divisions, Audit observed that in five old bridges, utility services like water pipelines, electricity cables *etc.*, were laid over the bridge superstructure unauthorisedly as there was no provision of such services in planning or execution stages of bridges. No consultation with PWD was carried out before affixing these additional elements to the bridges. Such unauthorised laying of utility services resulted in blocking the drainage spouts and hampering commuters' mobility. Moreover, the extra dead load¹⁵⁴ of utility services which was not considered while designing the bridge may also lead to weakening of the bridge. Some of such instances of unauthorised laying of utility services are shown in **Figure 4.8** to **4.11**.



Figure 4.8: Pipe line laid on the superstructure of the Bridge at chainage 1.00 km of Makdampur-Bhatol Road under Uttar Dinajpur Highway Division PWD(R)

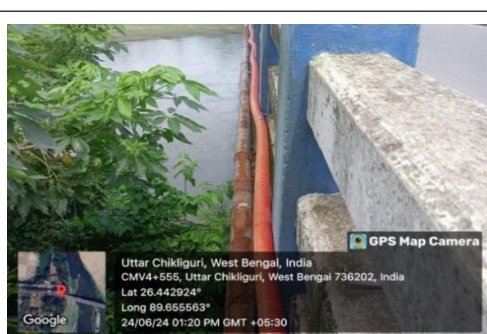


Figure 4.9: Two hosepipes hanging with the railing of Raidak Bridge at chainage 10.70 km of Alipurduar-Volka road under Alipurduar Division (PWD)



Figure 4.10: Pipeline hung with the railing of the Mora Torsha bridge at chainage 2.00 km of Coochbehar Dinhata Gitaldah Road under Cooch Behar Division (PWD)



Figure 4.11: Cable line laid in footpath of the Mora Torsha bridge at chainage 2.00 km of Coochbehar Dinhata Gitaldah Road under Cooch Behar Division (PWD)

(Source: Photograph taken on 08 August 2024, 24 June 2024, 29 August 2024 and 29 August 2024 respectively during joint site visit)

¹⁵⁴ In bridges, the weight of girders, slabs or decks, piers, abutments, pavements, and other attachments of utility services are considered as dead loads.

- During joint physical verification (July 2024 to August 2024), Audit further observed that in 14 bridges of seven out of 17 test checked divisions¹⁵⁵, water carrying pipelines were laid along the footpath or hanging from the railings of the bridges. No prior approval was taken by the PHED from the PWD before laying these water pipelines on the structure of bridges, flyovers *etc.* and the Department did not take any appropriate steps for assessing the impact of such unauthorised laying of pipelines.

In reply, the Department stated (April 2025) that in future, before construction of new bridges, various stakeholders would be consulted to make provision for utility services. In case of Pipeline laid by PHED, the Department accepted the audit observation.

4.6.2.2 Provision of footpath with insufficient width

As per Clause 112.5 of IRC:5 (1998), when a footpath is provided with a high-level bridge¹⁵⁶, its width should not be less than 1.50 meters. For urban and populated areas with a large concentration of pedestrian traffic, the width of the footpath should be suitably increased.

On scrutiny of divisional records and site visits to seven bridges¹⁵⁷ of seven out of 17 test-checked divisions constructed (between June 2019 and May 2024) at a cost of ₹ 103.04 crore, it was noticed that the width of the footpaths was less than 1.50 m (ranges between 0.75 m to 1.25 m) although all the bridges were high-level bridges. Narrow footpaths noticed during joint physical verification are shown in **Figure 4.12 to 4.13**.

¹⁵⁵ (i) Chapra Gongra Road, Ch - 6.75 KM of Nadia (PWD), (ii) Gaznabazar Bridge of Bagula-Nonaganj Road of Nadia HW-I, (iii) Gede Bridge of Barnpur-Gede Road of Nadia HW-I, (iv) Swarnakhali Bridge of Krishnaganj-Gobindapur Road of Nadia HW-I, (v) Mathabhanga Bridge of Krishnagar-Majdia Road of Nadia HW-I, (vi) Bridge at chainage 2.40 km of Chakdah Baghirathi Ferryghat Road of Nadia HW-II, (vii) Bridge of Kanchrapara Railway Station road to Kanchrapara – Gayeshpur road at 0.50 km of Nadia HW-II, (viii) Chaudanga Bridge of Kusumgram - Samaspur Road of Burdwan (PWD), (ix) Mogra Bridge of Memari-Monteswar Road of Burdwan (PWD), (x) Bridge over Teesta Mahananda Link Canal at of Islampur-Amlajhari Road of Uttar Dinajpur (PWD), (xi) Bridge at 1st. km of Mokdampur Bhatol Road of Uttar Dinajpur HW, (xii) Kahata Bridge at 12th km of Kanki – Goagaon Road of Uttar Dinajpur HW, (xiii) Durgapur Kunorhat Road Sahebghata Bridge at 8.00 km of Uttar Dinajpur HW and (xiv) Mora Torsa Bridge on Coochbehar Dinhat Gitaldah Road of Cooch Behar (PWD).

¹⁵⁶ A high level bridge is a bridge which carries the roadway above the Highest Flood Level (HFL) of a channel (including afflux) or the high tide level, with appropriate vertical clearance (clause 101.22 of IRC-5-2015).

¹⁵⁷ (i) Maniktala bridge at 1.00 km of Karimpur Town Bypass road of Nadia, PWD; (ii) Bridge over river Cheriganga at 5th km of Bethuadahari-Agardwip Ferryghat Road of Nadia HW-I; (iii) Mara Nawtara Bridge at 0.7 km of Dawaguri Bazar to Kalijani Health Centre Road of Coochbehar HW; (iv) RCC Bridge at 2nd Kmp of Coochbehar Sitalkutchi Road of Coochbehar, PWD; (v) Bridge over river Mayurakshi at 9.363 km of Lavpur-Ramnagar-Kotasur Road of Birbhum HW-I; (vi) Bridge over river Buri Torsha, Kumai-I and Kumai-II of Alipurduar HW and (vii) Kunoor Bridge at 4th km of Dauradanga-Baramallick Ghat Road of Burdwan North HW.



Figure 4.12: Insufficient width of footpath



Figure 4.13: Insufficient width of footpath

The width of footpath of RCC Bridge at 2nd kmp of Coochbehr-Sitalkutchi Road over river Saltia in the district of Coochbehar and Bridge over river Kunoor at chainage 4.00 km of Dauradanga-Barmallick Ghat Road in the district of Purba Burdwan. Photographs taken on 28 November 2024

(Source: Photograph taken by Audit during site visits)

The Department accepted the fact and stated (April 2025) that due to construction of crash barrier after construction of footpath, the width of the footpath was reduced and in future necessary width of the footpath would be maintained. The reply of the Department is not acceptable as construction of crash barriers is an essential component of bridge safety and should have been factored into the design stage itself, in conformity with IRC specifications. The lack of provision of adequate width for footpaths indicates deficient planning and non-compliance with standards.

4.6.2.3 Narrow Bridges which required to be widened

The existence of narrow bridges acts as an impediment to free flow of traffic and poses a hazard to road safety. To ensure free movement of vehicular traffic on roads, narrow bridges were required to be widened in line with the width of their approach. The Vision Document (Vision: 2016-2026) of PWD also envisioned widening of such bridges to meet infrastructural needs.

Audit observed that in 17 test-checked Divisions, the Department identified 150 narrow bridges for widening by 2026. Out of these 150 bridges, only 60 were widened as of March 2024, while work of widening of remaining 90 bridges was yet to be taken up. Narrow bridges can lead to significant challenges in terms of safety, traffic flow, and economic efficiency and therefore, upgrading or replacing them is crucial for ensuring a safer, more efficient, and sustainable transportation system.

Thus, the Department did not widen the narrow bridges as envisaged to meet growing infrastructural needs of these areas.

The Department stated (April 2025) that due to scarcity of funds, the reconstruction of narrow bridges could not be taken up as targeted in the Vision Document of the PWD. The reply underlines the fact that there was deficient financial planning thereby undermining the achievement of long terms goals of the Department.

4.6.2.4 Sub-soil investigation before preparation of drawing and design

As per Clause 6.1 of IRC SP:54, upon finalization of the alignment of a bridge site, detailed investigations are required to be carried out with respect to topographic survey, subsoil investigations *etc.*

The work of 'RCC Bridge over river Bania of Sonarpur –Hasimara Road via Chilapata Forest at chainage 20.00 km in replacement of narrow weak, wooden Bridge' in the district of Alipurduar during the year 2016-17 was awarded by Executive Engineer, Alipurduar Highway Division to an agency at a tendered amount of ₹ 4.58 crore to be completed by 09 November 2018. Audit observed that detailed sub-soil investigations based on the actual layout were not conducted for the project. In absence of sub-soil characteristics, several technical issues came up during execution of the bridge project, like discovery of large size boulders/gravels beneath the pile foundation. Further, Audit observed that during execution of work there was substantial flow of water from the high-water table. However, this information regarding high water flow had not been previously obtained from the Irrigation and Waterways Department before taking up the work. As a result, pile cap could not be successfully cast, and the agency stopped the work (March 2021) and the tender was terminated (January 2022), after payment of ₹ 1.63 crore. During execution of the balance work through fresh tender, the mode of foundation had to be changed to well foundation from the earlier pile foundation due to site conditions. The balance work was executed (from 06 November 2023 onwards) at a tendered cost of ₹ 7.55 crore with a changed scope of the work.

Thus, due to non-conducting of sub soil exploration, the cost of construction of the bridge increased to ₹ 7.55 crore in 2023 from ₹ 4.58 crore in 2018. Further construction of the bridge was delayed for more than seven years with progress of balance work upto foundation level till date (March 2025).

Accepting the audit observations the Department stated (April 2025) that the Bridge is an exceptional case and should not be treated as general.

4.6.3 Execution

Bridge design that best serves public interest has to be efficient and economical. An economical bridge design is one that puts value on reducing the costs of construction and maintenance while retaining efficiency. Quality Control in bridge construction involves compliance with prescribed standards of materials and workmanship to ensure the performance of the bridge as per its design and specifications.

4.6.3.1 Implementation of recommendation of consultants

The Public Works Department engaged (March 2019) three Consultants for assessment of distress condition of bridges under different divisions, falling under the three zones¹⁵⁸ of the Department. The consultants submitted (March 2020) their reports along with recommendations based on a visual survey

¹⁵⁸ (i) North Zone, (ii) West Zone, (iii) South Zone.

supported by the results of Non-Destructive Tests (NDT)¹⁵⁹ and test results of the concrete cores collected from 374 sites.

Audit observed that based on the above, the consultants recommended reconstruction of 24 bridges in their reports. List of all such bridges with recommendations of the consultants is detailed in (**Appendix-4.2**). The Department, however, did not prepare any timeline for reconstruction of these bridges, based on the recommendations of the consultants. The present (November 2024) status of implementation of all the 24 bridges recommended for reconstruction is shown in **Table 4.3**.

Table 4.3: Status of action taken on recommendations of consultant

Reconstruction work in progress	DPR under preparation / approval	Survey and Design under process	Pending due to non-acquisition of land	No action taken ¹⁶⁰
5	8	4	2	5

(Source: Reply of the Chief Engineer Planning, PWD (Roads))

Hence, even after the lapse of four years, 12 bridges were in different stages of survey and design and preparation of Detail Project Report with the Divisions concerned. Further, the works of two bridges¹⁶¹ were not taken up due to non-acquisition of land by South 24 Parganas and Nadia Highway Divisions. Reconstruction work of five bridges was in progress and no action has been taken in case of remaining five bridges. Inability to reconstruct distressed bridges has far-reaching effects on safety, traffic flow and on the economy.

The Department stated (April 2025) that due to land acquisition issues, some bridges could not be re-constructed as per the recommendations of the Consultants.

4.6.3.2 Award of works without acquisition of land/Utility Shifting

As per Notification¹⁶² of PWD, no tender shall be invited for any proposed construction and improvement of roads and bridge projects before substantial completion of its pre-construction works related to the projects *i.e.* land acquisition, shifting of utility lines, felling of trees, removal of encroachment *etc.*

Audit observed that as of March 2025, in nine bridge works, an expenditure of ₹ 120.36 crore had been incurred under six out of 17 test-checked divisions. The works of these bridges were awarded to contractors during the period from April 2007 to February 2024, before completing the land acquisition process (**Appendix 4.3**). There were delays ranging from 16 to 179 months in land acquisition after award of the work in these nine cases. Due to delays in land

¹⁵⁹ NDT of bridges uses various techniques to assess the structural integrity and condition of a bridge without causing damage.

¹⁶⁰ (1) Teesta Bridge Link Canal Goramore Road of Jalpaiguri HW, (2) Buri Bridge of Teesta Bridge Construction Division (PWD), (3) Single Bazaar Bridge of Darjeeling PWD, (4) Panga Bridge of Jalpaiguri PWD, (5) Noorpur Barrage Bridge of Malda PWD.

¹⁶¹ (1) Samad Setu of South 24 Parganas PWD, (2) Murutia Bridge of Nadia HW-I.

¹⁶² No. 3P-08/11/419-R/PL dt 18.08.2011.

acquisition, two¹⁶³ out of nine works were completed with a delays of 108 and 133 months and the remaining seven works were still in progress with a delays ranging between seven and 146 months as of March 2024. The condition of some incomplete bridges is shown in **Figure 4.14 to 4.15**.

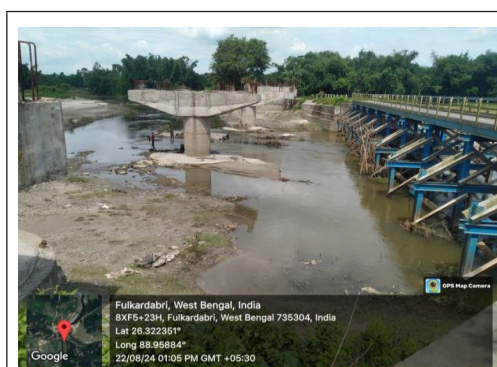


Figure 4.14: Bridge at chainage 1.00 km of Bagdogra-Fulkabari over River Saniajan under Teesta Bridge Construction Division in the district of Coochbehar



Figure 4.15: Bridge over River Saniajan at Kangratoli on Imigration road under Teesta Bridge Construction Division in the district of Coochbehar

(Source: Photographs taken by Audit Party on 22 August 2024)

Similarly, in two test checked divisions, the work of construction of two bridges¹⁶⁴ were awarded to the contractors in September 2017 and March 2019 without shifting of utility lines and removal of encroachment. As a result, there was delay in construction of bridges ranging between 32 and 74 months from the stipulated date.

Thus, due to delay in land acquisition and shifting of utility lines, the bridge projects were delayed and as a result, even after expenditure of ₹ 156.56 crore, the anticipated benefit could not be extended to users.

The Department stated (April 2025) that the land acquisition was not always in their control, and they had to purchase land as per the land purchase policy of the State. The reply is, however, not tenable as the Department should have invited tenders only after substantial portion of the land had been acquired.

4.6.3.3 Avoidable payment to consultant

The Superintending Engineer (SE), Western Highway Circle No.-I P.W. (Roads) Directorate awarded (December 2018) the work of construction of three ROB¹⁶⁵ on Engineering Procurement and Construction (EPC) basis at a bid amount of ₹ 156.83 crore to a contractor. The work order for construction

¹⁶³ (1) Bridge over river Khari on Samaspur-Mukshimpara Road of Burdwan South HW with a cost escalation of ₹ 1.46 crore and (2) Bridge over river Cheriganga at 5th km of Bethuadahari-Agardwip Ferryghat Road of Nadia HW-I.

¹⁶⁴ (i) ROB at km 283/37 on the Koshipur-Adra-Raghunathpur Road of Purulia HW and (ii) ROB at Nalikul over BTC road of Hooghly Construction Division (PWD).

¹⁶⁵ ROB at Memari with its immediate approaches at both end in lieu of L.C. Gate No. 33 at Km 82/9-11 of Bandel-Bardhaman section of Eastern Railway on G.T. road (old NH-2) in the district of Burdwan (and Construction of proposed ROB at Jourgram-Masagram (MCT road PWD) in lieu of LC Gate No. 59 at Km 70/19-21 under Eastern Railway in the Burdwan and Construction of proposed ROB at Simlagarh on G.T. Road in place of L.C. Gate No. 19 at km 66/5-7 under Eastern Railway in the district of Hooghly.

of ROB was issued to the contractor in March 2019. The SE also engaged (March 2019) an agency (Consultant) for supervision of the works of these three ROB at a tendered cost of ₹ 3.53 crore for completion by 540 days (*i.e.* September 2020).

Audit noted that as of April 2025, the contractor engaged for the construction of ROB could not proceed with the work, as the sites in all the three cases, could not be handed over to the contractor. As a result, the tender agreement for construction of ROB was terminated (June 2020) without making any payments. However, the supervisory consultant of this project was paid ₹ 1.31 crore (for engaging Quality Assurance Engineer, Senior Quantity Surveyor, Survey Engineer, Lab Technician and Support Staffs *i.e.* Office Manager, Accountant, Photocopy Machine Operator, Computer Operator and Office Boy by the supervisory consultant) for the period from March 2019 to March 2020.

Thus, the Department paid ₹ 1.31 crore for the supervision of work which had not yet commenced, resulting in avoidable payment to the supervisory consultant.

The Department stated (April 2025) that as per EPC contract, the consultant should be appointed within 30 days from the date of the agreement, and the consultant was entitled to get the payment for the service they rendered. The reply is not tenable as the Department should not have entered into this contract without any guarantee of availability of site.

4.6.3.4 Crash barriers not provided in approaches of bridges

As per Clause 109.6.1(b) of IRC 5-2015, suitably designed crash barriers should generally be located on approaches to bridge structure, where embankment height is more than three meters. A metal beam crash barrier would reduce the risk of serious accidents by guiding the errant vehicles back on the road. Further, as per Memorandum¹⁶⁶, metal crash barrier like (i) “W” beam type steel barriers or (ii) Thrie type steel barriers¹⁶⁷ shall be provided to all old bridges /ROBs /Flyovers, where height of embankment was more than three meters from the ground level.



Figure 4.16: W type steel barriers not provided at 2.00 km of Coochbehar Sitalkuchi road over river Saltia

(Source: Photo taken on 03 September 2024)

A two lane RCC Bridge at chainage 2.00 km of Coochbehar-Sitalkutchi Road over river Saltia under Coochbehar Division, PWD was constructed (January 2022) at a total cost of ₹ 7.50 crore. Audit noticed that “W” beam type steel

¹⁶⁶ No. 1M-25/16/237-R/PL dated 15.02.2018 and 1M-25/16/964-R/PL dated 30.07.2018 of Principal Secretary, PWD Govt of W.B.

¹⁶⁷ W-beam and Thrie-beam crash barriers are types of road safety barriers designed to protect vehicles and occupants from collisions with obstacles. W-beam barriers have a double-wave design, while Thrie-beam barriers have a three-wave design, making them stronger and more robust.

barriers or Thrie type steel barriers were not provided to the approaches of the said bridge. Thus, absence of any barriers in the approaches of the bridge was in violation of extant IRC guidelines. High embankment without crash barrier as noticed during joint physical verification is shown in **Figure 4.16**.

The Department stated (April 2025) that preparation of estimate for providing cash barrier was in progress.

4.6.3.5 Non-assurance of Quality of steel material in bridge works

As per PWD order¹⁶⁸, the manufacturers/producers/ suppliers shall produce manufacture's certificate at the time when materials were brought to site. The reinforcement steel procured should be tested (physical and chemical tests) as per the required frequencies and as per relevant code of the Bureau of Indian Standard by the procuring authority/EIC of the works at any National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratory (NABL) accredited laboratory or premier academic institutions like IITs. The test results (both physical and chemical) should conform to different IS codes (*i.e.* IS 432, IS 1786, IS 13920, IRC: 112) whichever is applicable. As per IS: 1786-2008, the frequency of physical and chemical tests recommended was as given in **Table 4.4**.

Table 4.4: The frequency of Physical and Chemical Tests of reinforcement steel

	Test	Frequency
Physical Test	(a) Ultimate Tensile Strength	1. At the beginning for approval of each source and change of source. 2. Once for every lot. 3. Once in three months.
	(b) 0.2 Proof Stress	
	(c) Percentage Elongation	
	(d) Bend and Rebend test	
	(e) Mast per meter run (Kg)	
Chemical Test	(a) Carbon	
	(b) Sulphur	
	(c) Phosphorous	
	(d) Sulphur + Phosphorous	

(Source: SOR of PW(Roads))

Scrutiny revealed that in 34, out of test checked 39 bridge works, the Divisions concerned could not produce any test certificates and valid license of the original producer of 12,893.638 metric ton of Steel valuing ₹ 92.08 crore used in the bridge works (**Appendix-4.4**).

The Department stated that generally TATA/RINL reinforcement was used in bridge works, and the steel was supplied by authorized supplier, as such testing was not done. The reply was, however, not tenable as the tests were to be conducted as per extant order to ensure quality of the steel materials used in bridge works and non-production of test certificates for steel casts doubt on the quality and authenticity of the material used, exposes bridge structures to potential safety and durability risks, and indicates weak internal control by the Department.

¹⁶⁸ Memo No. – 385/-ENC/2021 dated 02 August 2021 of E-in-C & Ex-Officio Secretary, GoWB.

4.6.3.6 Use of untested and uncertified Bearings and Strip Seal Expansion Joints

Clauses 913 to 918 of IRC:83 (Part-II) 1987 and Clause 929 of IRC:83 (Part-III) 2002 stipulates inspection, testing and certification of Elastomeric Bearings¹⁶⁹ prior to their installation in bridges. As per Clause 919.1 of IRC 83 (Part-II) 1987, bearings shall be transported to the construction site after final acceptance by the authorised Inspector of the Department and shall be accompanied by an authenticated copy of the certificates to that effect. These bearings are essential for ensuring the bridge's ability to withstand load movements, environmental pressures, and seismic activity.

Further, as per Clause 8.2.1 of IRC: SP:69-2011, for a single strip seal¹⁷⁰, modular strip seal¹⁷¹ and finger joints¹⁷², the manufacturer shall produce a complete report of the test of the anchorage system from a recognised laboratory to determine optimum configuration of anchorage assembly.

Audit noticed in five bridge works taken up between the period from November 2012 to May 2022 by five Divisions¹⁷³ the contractors had used 8921 cubic meter of Elastomeric Bearing valuing ₹ 37.70 crore. Further, the contractors had used 12,254.80 MT of POT-PTFE Bearings¹⁷⁴ valuing ₹ 2.07 crore in three bridges¹⁷⁵. However, no documentary evidence supporting inspection, testing and certification of these bearings by the authorized Inspector as prescribed in the IRC norms was available in the divisional records.

Audit further noticed that in nine bridge works taken up between the period November 2012 to February 2021 by six Divisions¹⁷⁶, contractors had used 1,075 meter of Strip Seal valuing ₹ 2.11 crore. However, no documentary evidence of reports of testing by manufacturers, as prescribed in the IRC norms, was available in the divisional records. Thus, without proper testing and

¹⁶⁹ Elastomeric Bridge Bearing is a commonly used modern bridge bearing. The purpose of the Elastomeric Bearings is to support a bridge or other heavy structure in a way that permits the load to shift slightly, in a horizontal direction, relative to the ground or foundation. Without such bearings, the bridge support might crack or fracture when it moves due to ground movements or thermal expansion and contraction.

¹⁷⁰ Single strip seal system uses an inner-locking single layer.

¹⁷¹ Modular joint system are comprised of five important design features.

¹⁷² Finger Joint is a type of bridge expansion joint.

¹⁷³ (i) R.O.B. LC Gate at no-26A/E of Birbhum HW-I; (ii) Bridge Over River Kuyea of Birbhum HW-II; (iii) Bridge at Tulin over river Subarnarekha of Purulia, PWD; (iv) Bridge at Kurchi over Kana Damodar Canal of Howrah HW and (v) Bridge over river buri torsha Kumari-I and Kumai-II of Alipurduar HW.

¹⁷⁴ A type of Pot bearing which along with vertical load bears and transmits horizontal force in one direction only and allows movement perpendicular to that direction and allows rotation about any axis in horizontal plane.

¹⁷⁵ (i) Bridge over river Mayurakshi of Birbhum HW-I; (ii) Bridge over river Ajoy of Birbhum HW-II and (iii) Bridge at Tulin over river Subarnarekha of Purulia, PWD.

¹⁷⁶ i) R.O.B. LC Gate at no-26A/E of Birbhum HW-I; (ii) Bridge over river Mayurakshi of Birbhum HW-I; (iii) Bridge Over River Kuyea of Birbhum HW-II; (iv) Bridge over river Ajoy of Birbhum HW-II; (v) Bally Bridge of Howrah, PWD; (vi) Bridge at Kurchi over Kana Damodar Canal of Howrah HW; (vii) Bridge at Tulin over river Subarnarekha of Purulia, PWD; (viii) Bridge over river buri torsha Kumari-I and Kumai-II of Alipurduar HW and (ix) Bridge over river Titi of Alipurduar HW.

certification, the performance of the bearings and Strip Seal Expansion Joints was not ensured, potentially compromising the durability and safety of the bridges.

The Department stated (April 2025) that normally, the bearings are tested by the manufacturer before being supplied to the site. The reply was, however, not tenable as the tests were to be conducted by the Department as per extant IRC guidelines to ensure the quality of the steel materials used in bridge works.

4.6.4 Inspection, Monitoring and Maintenance of Bridges

Periodic maintenance and inspection are crucial aspects to ensure safety and smooth functioning of bridges. Chapter 2 of the IRC SP-18-1996 prescribes maintenance of a bridge register by each division which may include records of several bridges. However, for each bridge, there must be two reports viz. (i) original bridge report giving the general details of the bridge such as name, location, hydraulic particulars, lower water level, loadings, soil particulars, details of span, design details and drawings, diagrammatic sketch, date of completion *etc.* (ii) Inspection reports containing the details of inspection such as date of inspection, authority which conducted the inspection, observations and recommendations of inspecting officer.

Bridge Inspection Report

As per the circulars¹⁷⁷ issued by Principal Secretary to the GoWB, Public Works Department, Divisions were to maintain a register for each bridge with original drawings and specifications, details of all repair and other work carried out on the bridge and inspection reports related to the bridges. These inspections were to be conducted four times a year by the concerned Division, and the data had to be uploaded under the “Documents” module in the Samiksha portal¹⁷⁸.

Audit observed that:

- In all the 17 selected divisions of seven districts, bridge registers were not maintained, and only current visual bridge Inspection Reports were available in the ‘Samiksha’ portal of the Department. Original drawings and specifications, details of all repair and other works carried out on the bridge, photographs of the present condition of the bridges were not found uploaded in Bridge Module of ‘Samiksha’ portal. Non-uploading of details in the Bridge Module of the Samiksha portal hampered effective monitoring and weakened effective planning and decision-making for maintenance and rehabilitation of bridges.
- Out of 986 bridges under 17 test-checked divisions, the details of 885 bridges were mentioned in the ‘Samiksha’ portal. Details of remaining 101 major and minor bridges were not found uploaded on the portal indicating that there were deficiencies in monitoring and that the bridges were not inspected as per extant order.

¹⁷⁷ No. 1B-36/18/1338-R/PL dated 11.10.2018 and No. 1B-36/1454/18-R/PL dated 14.11.2018.

¹⁷⁸ Samiksha Portal of PWD, West Bengal, is a web and mobile-based project progress monitoring system used by the Public Works Department to monitor and manage the progress of construction and maintenance projects for roads, bridges, and buildings across the state.

- The test-check of records of five divisions revealed that 24 major¹⁷⁹ and minor¹⁸⁰ bridges were constructed between 2021 and 2024 replacing the old bridges. On scrutiny of the Bridge report in Samiksha portal, it was observed that details of these new bridges were not updated *viz.* year of construction, length and width of the bridge *etc.*

The Department stated (April 2025) that the Bridge Inspection Reports would be maintained as a special task.

4.7 Avoidable expenditure due to delay in acceptance of the Tender

Public Works Department (PWD), delayed acceptance (13 months) of the tender, for a road work, which resulted in avoidable expenditure of ₹ 1.81 crore on repair and maintenance.

The Central Public Works Manual stipulates (clause 20.3.1) that top priority should be given to award of work on receipt of tenders. In order to minimise chances of delay, the prescribed timeline for acceptance of tender is 22 days from the last date of receipt of bids. Further, clause 167 of West Bengal Financial Rules-2007 stipulates that during execution of work, if the administratively approved amount was exceeded by more than 10 *per cent*, due to increase in rates or other causes, a revised administrative approval of the competent authority must be obtained without delay.

For early implementation of a road project¹⁸¹, the Superintending Engineer (SE), North Bengal Construction Circle-I (NBCC-I), Public Works Department (PWD), invited (April 2019) a Tender at an estimated cost of ₹ 23.22 crore. It was noticed that the L1 bidder was selected (May 2019) prior to obtaining Administrative Approval (AA) of ₹ 24.14 crore by the Finance Department (FD), which was obtained only in August 2019, due to urgency in completion of the work. Though the tender was floated before AA due to urgency, the Department took 13 months (from obtaining the AA) to award (September 2020) the work to the L1 bidder at a tendered cost of ₹ 23.89 crore. Reason for delay was not on the record. The scheduled date of completion of the project was September 2021. Audit observed that due to the delay of 13 months in award of the work the department had to incur an avoidable expenditure of ₹ 1.81 crore¹⁸², as the road was damaged during the monsoons of 2019 and 2020 and the Department had to repair the damaged road stretches¹⁸³ temporarily through three different tenders between November 2019 and July 2020 *i.e.* before commencement of the original work to make the road traffic worthy temporarily.

The Department admitted (February 2024) that the tender was issued after lapse of 13 months, and the delay was mainly due to pending decisions of the different officials of the Government. Thus, the Department did not adhere to the

¹⁷⁹ Major bridge is a bridge having total length of more than 60 m.

¹⁸⁰ Minor Bridge is a bridge having total length of upto 60 m.

¹⁸¹ Widening & Strengthening of Kumargram - Jorai road from 0.00 km to 25.00 km.

¹⁸² ₹35.34 Lakhs, ₹1.04 Crores and ₹42.08 Lakhs.

¹⁸³ 0.00 km to 3.00 km, 3.00 km to 7.00 km, 9.00 km to 13.00 km, 13.00 km to 14.00 km, 14.00 km to 19.00 km and 20.00 km to 25.00 km.

prescribed timelines for award of work, despite clear stipulations in the CPWD Manual and West Bengal Financial Rules, resulted in a delay of 13 months. This undue delay not only defeated the stated urgency of the project but also led to severe deterioration of the road during successive monsoons. Consequently, the Department had to incur an avoidable expenditure of ₹ 1.81 crore towards additional strengthening and temporary repairs.

4.8 Avoidable expenditure due to unjustified execution of excess thickness of Bituminous layer

The Public Works (Roads) Directorate, in deviation from the Indian Roads Congress guidelines, executed bituminous layers of excess thickness resulting in avoidable expenditure of ₹ 5.07 crore.

The Public Works (Roads) Directorate (PWRD), Government of West Bengal, executes different road works, based on its Schedule of Rates (SOR), Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MOR&TH) specifications, provisions of Indian Roads Congress (IRC) *etc.* Indian Roads Congress (IRC) guidelines include the pavement design catalogue to be used for determination of design pavement thickness for road construction. The guidelines stipulate thickness of road and specification of each layer of road pavement to be constructed on the basis of strength of sub-base soil, which is expressed in terms of California Bearing Ratio (CBR) and projected traffic volume (expressed in msa) during the design life of the road.

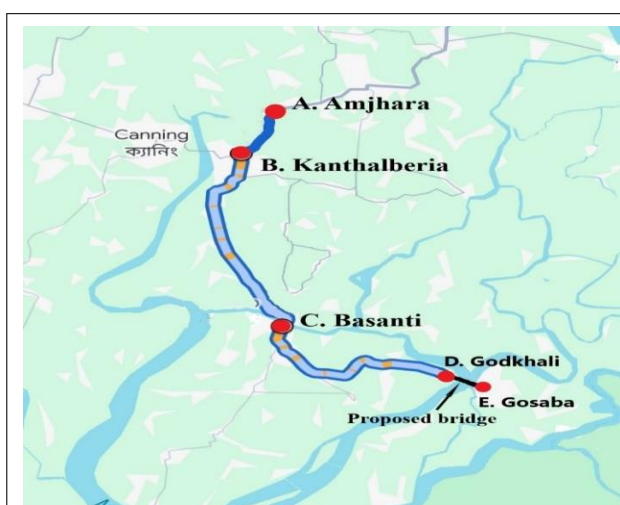


Figure 4.17: Map showing the concerned road work from Amjhara to Godkhali

Superintending Engineer, Southern Highway Circle, (PWRD), Kolkata awarded (January 2021) the work of 'Widening of Kolkata Basanti Road from one Lane to two Lane with Paved Shoulder & Strengthening works from 68.00 kmp to 86.79 kmp of SH-3A and Basanti-Godkhali Road from 86.79 kmp to 96.68 kmp of SH-3A under South 24 Parganas Highway Division, PWRD in the district of South 24-Parganas', at a tendered

cost of ₹ 95.34 crore, for completion by January 2023. The estimate was subsequently (March 2021) revised to ₹ 119.08 crore wherein it was noted that the increase was mainly due to usage of higher specifications of items¹⁸⁴. The work was finally completed in May 2023 at a cost of ₹ 115.80 crore.

¹⁸⁴ 95 mm DBM in place of 50/60 mm DBM layer (in both widening and strengthening portion), patching of potholes *etc.*

Audit observed (March 2023) that the Commercial Vehicles Per Day¹⁸⁵ (CVPD) figures for the road at Amjhara, Kanthalberia and Basanti were determined as 546, 406 and 192 respectively and the corresponding msa for bituminous layer were calculated as 12.02, 4.68 and 2.21 respectively, for a design life of 5 years. Thus, as the msa at Kanthalberia (74.00 kmp) and Basanti (86.79 kmp) of the road was less than five, the Division was required to lay only 50 mm Dense Bituminous Macadam (DBM) layer from Kanthalberia (74.00 kmp) to Godkhali (96.68 kmp) as per the IRC guidelines¹⁸⁶. However, the Department executed excess thickness of 95 mm DBM in violation of the said guidelines, leading to an avoidable expenditure of ₹ 5.07 crore. Requirement *vis-à-vis* actually laid DBM layers on the road stretches are shown in **Table 4.5** below:

Table 4.5: Details of excess laying of DBM layers between *Kanthalberia* and *Godkhali*

Stretch	CVPD	MSA	Thickness of DBM layer (in mm)	
			As per IRC guidelines	Actually laid
Kanthalberia to Basanti (74.00 to 86.79 kmp)	406	4.68	50	95
Basanti to Godkhali (86.79 to 96.684 kmp)	192	2.21	50	95

Audit further observed (March 2023) that while finalising the DPR, traffic estimated at Amjhara had been considered for the entire stretch of the road due to the upcoming proposed Bridge Project connecting Godkhali and Gosaba which was expected to increase traffic volume at Kanthalberia and Basanti.

In this regard, audit noticed that the necessary clearances for the construction of the bridge were not obtained from the West Bengal State Coastal Zonal Management Authority (WBSCZMA) due to which the contract of the bridge had been terminated (April 2022). Further, even if the approval from WBSCZMA was obtained at a later date, this would necessitate fresh land acquisition (due to revised road alignments), which would require substantial time. As the road was completed in May 2023 and its Defect Liability Period (DLP) would expire in June 2026, it is evident that even if WBSCZMA approval is obtained shortly, the bridge cannot be completed within the DLP of the road.

The Department stated (February 2024) that as the project was included in the Central Road Infrastructure Fund (CRIF) scheme (October 2020), the design life should have been 20 years instead of 15 years for Granular layer, thereby requiring 320 mm instead of 285 mm of WMM layer. Further, the Department accepted that process of obtaining CRZ clearance is still underway. Moreover, the Department stated that even if the bridge project could not be completed within the DLP of the road project, carriage of huge quantity of steel, cement, aggregates and earth for construction works would result in increased traffic volume.

¹⁸⁵ It is based on 24 hours traffic counts and the data is used to determine thickness of road layers.

¹⁸⁶ IRC 37-2018.

The reply of the Department regarding laying of excess granular layer is not tenable as the Audit objection is regarding Bituminous layer and not WMM layer, for which the design life period for stage construction as per IRC guidelines is five years only. Reply regarding increase in traffic due to construction of bridge was also not tenable as the construction of the bridge has not yet commenced and even increase in traffic due to construction activity of the bridge cannot justify CVPD of 546 at Amjhara against CVPD of 192 at Basanti.

Thus, the assumption of the PWRD & the Department regarding increase in traffic due to construction of bridge at Godkhali and thereby opting for bitumen layers of higher specification resulted in avoidable expenditure of ₹ 5.07 crore.

4.9 Unfruitful expenditure on road renovation work

Public Works Department undertook renovation of a road without ensuring required protection work, in violation of prescribed specifications, resulting in sub-standard work and leading to the road costing ₹ 7.17 crore being damaged.

Clauses 701, 705 and 707 of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH), GoI specifications¹⁸⁷ stipulate usage of Geosynthetic¹⁸⁷ material in road and bridge works for controlling erosion of embankments. Geocells¹⁸⁸ filled with local soil or granular material placed on slopes hold top cover soil and allow vegetation to grow, to control erosion of embankments. Further, as per Clause 517 of MoRTH Specifications one or two coats of an elastomeric rubber membrane known as Stress Absorbing Membrane (SAM) over a cracked surface, followed by a covering of aggregate chips and a Stress Absorbing Membrane Interlayer -SAMI (which is a material similar to SAM or of bitumen impregnated geotextile), could be provided as crack prevention courses.

Superintending Engineer, Western Circle-II, Public Works Department (PWD) awarded (March 2019) the work of ‘Strengthening of Jagatpur-Dharampota Road from 0.00 kmp to 24.60 kmp under Hooghly Construction Division, PWD’ at a tendered cost of ₹ 48.67 crore, for completion by April 2020. The work was completed in March 2021 at a cost of ₹ 48.64 crore.

Before the preparation of the Detailed Project Report (DPR) in June 2018, an Expert Team¹⁸⁹ was formed (June 2017) to inspect the existing road to find out

¹⁸⁷ Geosynthetic is a general classification for all synthetic materials used in geotechnical engineering application which includes geotextiles, geogrids, geostrips, geomembranes, geonets, geocomposites, geocells, geosynthetic mats, paving fabric and glass grid etc.

¹⁸⁸ Geocell is a three-dimensional cellular confinement system manufactured from high-density polyethylene (HDPE) strips that are ultrasonically welded together to create a strong, lightweight expandable panel. Its unique hoop strength and interconnecting cell walls form a durable composite mattress that can be filled with common materials for load support and erosion control applications.

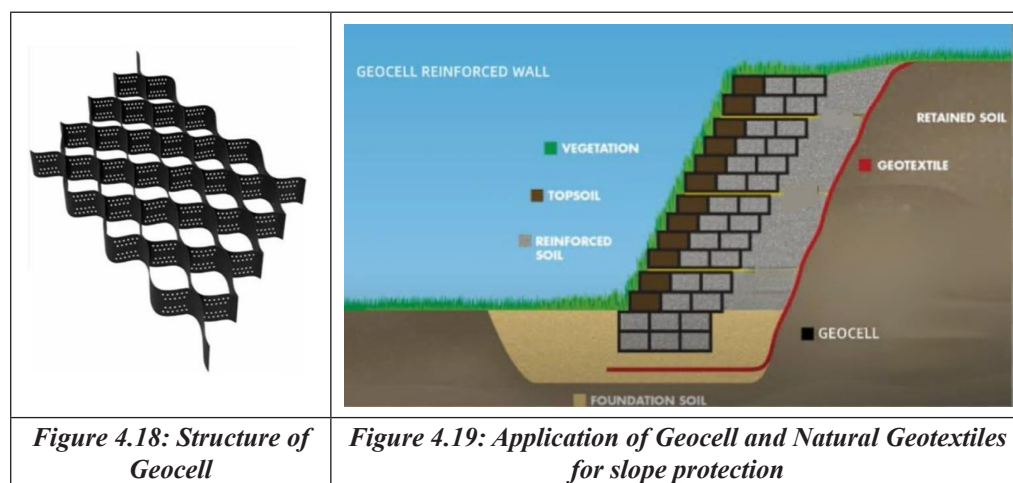
¹⁸⁹ Team consisting of (i) Superintending Engineer, Bridge planning Circle, PWRD; (ii) Superintending Engineer, NH Circle No.II, PWRD, (iii) Chief Engineer, PWD, West Zone, (iv) Superintending Engineer, Western Circle-II, PWD, Executive Engineer, Hooghly Construction Division, PWD and (v) Assistant Engineer, Arambagh Construction Sub-Division, PWD and other officials.

the causes of repeated damage of the road. The Expert Team observed that the road was passing through the central catchment area of two major rivers viz. Dwarakeshar and Mundeswari and was constructed over a very high embankment (varying approximately from four metre to seven metre) having a steep and unstable slope. The Team further observed that wide longitudinal cracks, raveling¹⁹⁰ and minor depressions had formed in the road mainly due to the following reasons:

- lack of lateral support from the shoulder,
- lateral movement of the high embankment due to seasonal fluctuation of the water level in the canals, and
- shrinkage due to drying out of the earth due to seasonal moisture changes as the embankment and sub-grade soil is expansive in nature.

The team recommended the following remedial measures to tackle the problem for the stretch 13.60 km to 24.00 km.

- Earth retaining structures in the form of Boulder Sausage Crates and Reinforced Cement Concrete (RCC) retaining wall for arresting the lateral movement of the embankment.
- Provision of Geocell and Natural Geotextile as per Clause 705 and 707 of MoRTH's Specification for Roads & Bridges (5th Revision), for slope protection and erosion control.



Installation of close Bullah¹⁹¹ walling at the sub-bank level (where sub-bank is available) as a short term measures, and

- A layer of Stress Absorbing Membrane Interlayer (SAMI) with modified bitumen or in the form of non-woven geosynthetic to be laid, for arresting reflective cracking¹⁹² over newly laid bituminous layer.

¹⁹⁰ Raveling is the disintegration of road surface, due to the dislodgment of the aggregate materials (gravel, sand, and crushed stone). It reduces skid resistance, roughens the road surface, and exposes the layers underneath to further deterioration.

¹⁹¹ Bullah walling consists of providing and driving wooden piles through the ground to provide more structural strength of the embankment.

¹⁹² Cracks in the base layer, regardless of their cause, can result in stress concentrations and cracking in the surface layer. The surface tends to follow the same pattern as the cracks in the base and are referred as 'reflective cracks'.

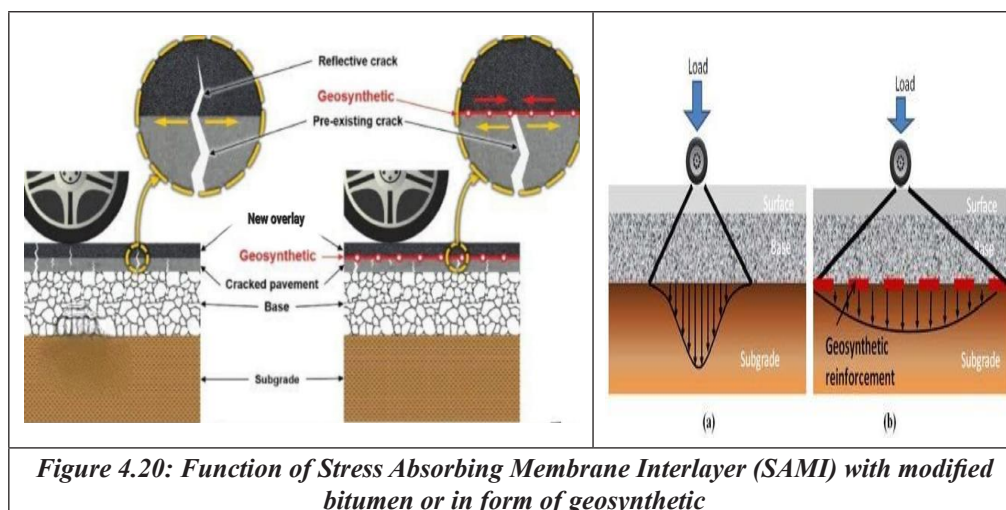


Figure 4.20: Function of Stress Absorbing Membrane Interlayer (SAMI) with modified bitumen or in form of geosynthetic

The Special Project Screening Committee¹⁹³ (SPSC) presided over by the Additional Chief Secretary/Principal Secretary/Secretary, PWD while approving the DPR had also suggested (April 2018) to comply with the recommendations of the Expert Team.

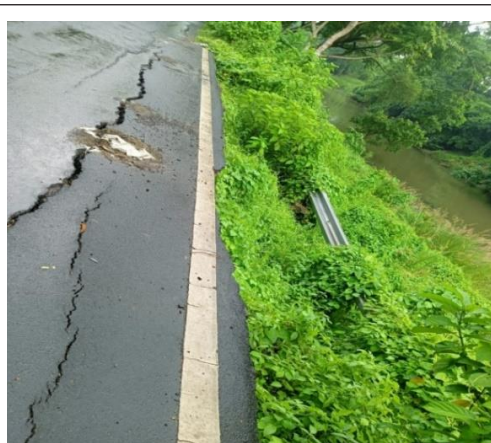
Audit observed (August 2023) that the Department had executed boulder sausage¹⁹⁴ at the toe of the embankment and bullah walling at the edge of shoulder, in 3,717m and 3,210 m stretches respectively, of the road, but work related to Geocell and Geotextiles, for slope protection and soil erosion control, as were suggested by the Expert Team, were not executed.

Laying of SAMI layer, with modified bitumen or in the form of non-woven geo-synthetic to prevent reflective cracking, was also not implemented on the plea (December 2018) that the hard crust has been strengthened by providing additional Wet Mix Macadam (WMM) layer followed by DBM and Bituminous Concrete (BC) layers.

The Divisional records showed that just after seven months (October 2021) of completion of the work, the road was severely damaged in different stretches. The embankment of the road was damaged and hard crust including black top of the road slipped in different stretches due to vulnerability of the embankment. Chainage-wise damage is detailed in **Appendix-4.5**.

¹⁹³ Additional Chief Secretary/Principal Secretary/Secretary, PWD as Chairman, Engineer-in-Chief, PWD as member, Chief Engineer (CE), Hqrs, PWD as member, CE, Planning as member; CE, Electrical as member, CE, Electrical Planning as member; Chief Government Architect as member Convenor, Assistant CE (HQ) (Monitoring) as member and Advisor of Fire Safety Cell as member.

¹⁹⁴ Galvanised Iron wire mattress weaved to make sausage crates of required shape and filling them with boulders of any size and shapes for using in protection work.



**Figure 4.21: Slip faluire at 16.300 kmp
(24.08.2023)**



**Figure 4.22: Slip faluire at 17.500 kmp
(24.08.2023)**

Audit observed that the slope protection work through boulder sausage and bullah walling could not protect the embankment and as a result road pavement was seriously damaged in certain stretches, leading to unfruitful expenditure of ₹ 7.17 crore. Photographs of Jagatpur-Dharampota Road taken during the joint field visit (August 2023) by Audit and officials of PWD reflect the extent of the damage.



**Figure 4.23: Blockage of almost half of the road due to slip faluire at the 17.050 kmp
(24.08.2023)**

The Department prepared (November 2021) an estimate for permanent restoration of the stretches as mentioned in **Appendix-4.5** of the road at an estimated cost of ₹ 12.85 crore, which was not taken up (till May 2025) as the estimate was not yet approved.

The Department in its reply (December 2023 and September 2024) accepted the fact that only boulder sausage work was not capable of withstanding the huge lateral earth pressure. They also stated that the use of geotextiles was not considered necessary as the slopes along the road have significant vegetation and plants, and slope correction provisions through earthwork were included in the DPR. It was also stated that Geocell/Geotextile work would not have

saved the damage as a certain calcium based granular material is present in the soil, which reduces the adhesive property of clay material. Further, the side slopes of the embankment were steep and due to unprecedented velocity of flood water in October 2021 had scoured the canal bed at several locations, leading to damage of the embankment of the road. Moreover, the Department stated that only 917 m of the road stretch was damaged as the base of the embankment was weakened but the remaining 1,145 m damaged portion had been repaired by the agency.

The reply of the Department that application of geotextile was not necessary is not tenable as the existence of plants/vegetation's and earthwork did not prove to be sufficient protection for the embankment of the road. The hydrological data and soil properties of the road and its surrounding areas were known to the Department at the planning stage itself for taking necessary measures. Further, the contention of the Department regarding damage of only 917 m of the road was also not factually correct as relaxation of Defect Liability had been sought (March 2022) by the Executive Engineer, Hooghly Construction Division for the entire stretch of 16.00 kmp to 20.00 kmp along with other stretches as shown in *Appendix-4.5*.

Thus, non-compliance to recommendations of the Expert Team and non-adoption of appropriate remedial measures during construction led to severe damage to the newly constructed road within seven months, resulting in unfruitful expenditure of ₹ 7.17 crore.

4.10 Avoidable expenditure due to excess thickness of non-bituminous layers

Public Works Department, in contravention of Indian Roads Congress Guidelines, executed excess thickness of non-bituminous layers in construction of two roads which resulted in avoidable expenditure of ₹ 2.15 crore.

Indian Roads Congress (IRC) guidelines (37:2012 and 37:2018) include the pavement design catalogue to be used for determination of design pavement thickness for road construction. The guideline stipulates that the thickness of road and specification of each layer of road pavement should be constructed on the basis of strength of sub-base soil, which is expressed in terms of California Bearing Ratio¹⁹⁵ (CBR) and projected traffic volume expressed in million standard axle¹⁹⁶ (msa) during the design life¹⁹⁷ of the road. Further, the Guidelines recommend that combination of traffic and pavement layer composition be

¹⁹⁵ The California Bearing Ratio (CBR) is a penetration test for evaluation of the mechanical strength of natural ground, subgrades, and base courses beneath new carriageway construction.

¹⁹⁶ Million Standard Axle- The design traffic in terms of the cumulative number of standard axles to be carried during the design life of the road.

¹⁹⁷ The design life is defined in terms of the cumulative number of standard axles in msa that can be carried before a major strengthening, rehabilitation or capacity augmentation of the pavement is necessary.

considered using IITPAVE software¹⁹⁸ and the designer should have full freedom in the choice of pavement materials and thickness of different layers using site specific inputs¹⁹⁹ to satisfy the mechanistic-empirical performance models given in these guidelines.

The Superintending Engineer (SE), Western Highway Circle-II, and the SE, South-Western Highway Circle of PW (Roads) Directorate (PWRD), Government of West Bengal, awarded (April 2017) a road work²⁰⁰ for widening and strengthening to a contractor at a tendered cost of ₹ 44.95 crore (later revised to ₹ 59.52 crore due to revision of the estimate²⁰¹) for completion within September 2018. The works were completed in April 2019 and ₹ 59.46 crore was paid to the contractor.

Audit observed (March 2022) that with a design life of 15 years, the design traffic for non-bituminous layers was arrived as 3.5 msa by following IRC 37: 2018. However, the SE Western Highway Circle-II, PWRD in deviation of the IRC guidelines provided 230 mm thick Granular Sub-Base (GSB) instead of required 180 mm on the plea of having a stable GSB for future up-gradation of traffic of up to 10 msa.

Audit, however, analysed the pavement thickness through IITPave software and observed that 180 mm GSB layer is safe for design traffic of 10 msa. Thus, the SE Western Highway Circle-II, PWRD had provided 50 mm (230 mm-180 mm) excess GSB layer in contravention of IRC guidelines which resulted in avoidable extra expenditure of ₹ 2.15 crore.

SE, Western Highway Circle-II, PWRD stated (August 2022) that it was apprehended that due to upgradation of carriageway from 3.5 metre to 10 metre, there might be increase of traffic in future and as the thickness of GSB layer varies with the value of msa, hence, maximum thickness of GSB upto 150 msa traffic *i.e.* 230 mm was provided. Further, SE stated that though initially (May 2016) traffic was 3.5 msa but it increased to 7.16 msa as per a recent (June 2022) traffic census. The reply is not acceptable as per IIT-Pave software, 180 mm thick GSB is safe for traffic of 10 msa.

Thus, the Department, in contravention of Indian Roads Congress Guidelines, executed excess thickness of non-bituminous layers, which resulted in expenditure of ₹ 2.15 crore.

¹⁹⁸ It is a software used for analysis of a pavement for selection of pavement materials and layer thickness by computation of horizontal tensile strain (E_t) at the bottom of the bituminous layer and vertical compressive strain on the top of the subgrade (E_v). In this software few iterations may be required by changing the layer thicknesses until the strains computed by IITPAVE are less than the allowable strains derived from respective equations.

¹⁹⁹ msa, CBR and temperature of the pavement.

²⁰⁰ Widening and strengthening of Simlapal-Khatra Road from 0.00 km to 26.24 km from single lane carriageway to 2-lane carriageway.

²⁰¹ Due to construction of bituminous layers with DBM and BC with VG-40 bitumen instead of BM and PC & SC with VG-30 bitumen, provision of mastic asphalt wearing course at market portion, 340 mtr long protective works with boulder sausage crates etc.

4.11 Avoidable expenditure in road works

The Public Works Department executed strengthening works of two roads with excess thickness of WMM layer without justification, resulting in avoidable expenditure of ₹ 1.58 crore.

As per para 5 of Indian Road Congress (IRC) 37-2018, a flexible pavement consists of three layers above the subgrade *i.e.* sub-base, base and bituminous layers. According to para 2(f) of Public Works Departmental Memorandum dated June 2017²⁰², ‘non-bituminous layers’ *i.e.* sub-base and base course of a road project should be designed for a life of 15 years with the help of latest IRC codal provisions.

During 2021-23, Audit observed that in two Divisions²⁰³ under Public Works Department, Government of West Bengal, while taking up road projects, excess layers of WMM had been laid, resulting in avoidable expenditure of ₹ 1.58 crore as detailed below:

- A. Superintending Engineer, Northern Circle, Public Works Department (PWD), Malda awarded (February 2021) a road work²⁰⁴ at a tendered cost of ₹ 14.09 crore (7.70 *per cent* below the estimated amount²⁰⁵), scheduled to be completed by February 2022 in Uttar Dinajpur District. The work was completed in March 2022, at a cost of ₹ 14.08 crore.

The California Bearing Ratio²⁰⁶ (CBR) of the sub-grade and the traffic for 15 years design life of the road were considered as five *per cent* and 5.08 msa²⁰⁷ respectively. According to IRC 37-2018 for CBR of five *per cent*, 450²⁰⁸ mm non-bituminous course is sufficient for the traffic upto 50 msa. However, the work was executed with 200 mm WMM over the existing thickness of 350²⁰⁹ mm non-bituminous course. Thus, the total thickness of non-bituminous courses was 550 mm.

Further, the pavement thickness of 450 mm non-bituminous layers was safe according to the IIT PAVE software²¹⁰. Thus, the Division could have laid 100 mm WMM instead of 200 mm in accordance with the above IRC provision. Hence, division had laid 100 mm in excess of required WMM as shown in **Chart-4.1**.

²⁰² No. IM-03/16/696-R/PL dated 15.06.2017.

²⁰³ Uttar Dinajpur Division, PWD and Burdwan South Highway Division.

²⁰⁴ Widening and Strengthening work of Kishanganj-Dinajpur Road (MDR) from Ch. 3.20 km to 12.20 km under Uttar Dinajpur Division, PWD.

²⁰⁵ Estimated cost put to tender ₹ 15.26 crore.

²⁰⁶ The California Bearing Ratio (CBR) is a penetration test for evaluation of the mechanical strength of natural ground, subgrades and base courses beneath new carriageway construction.

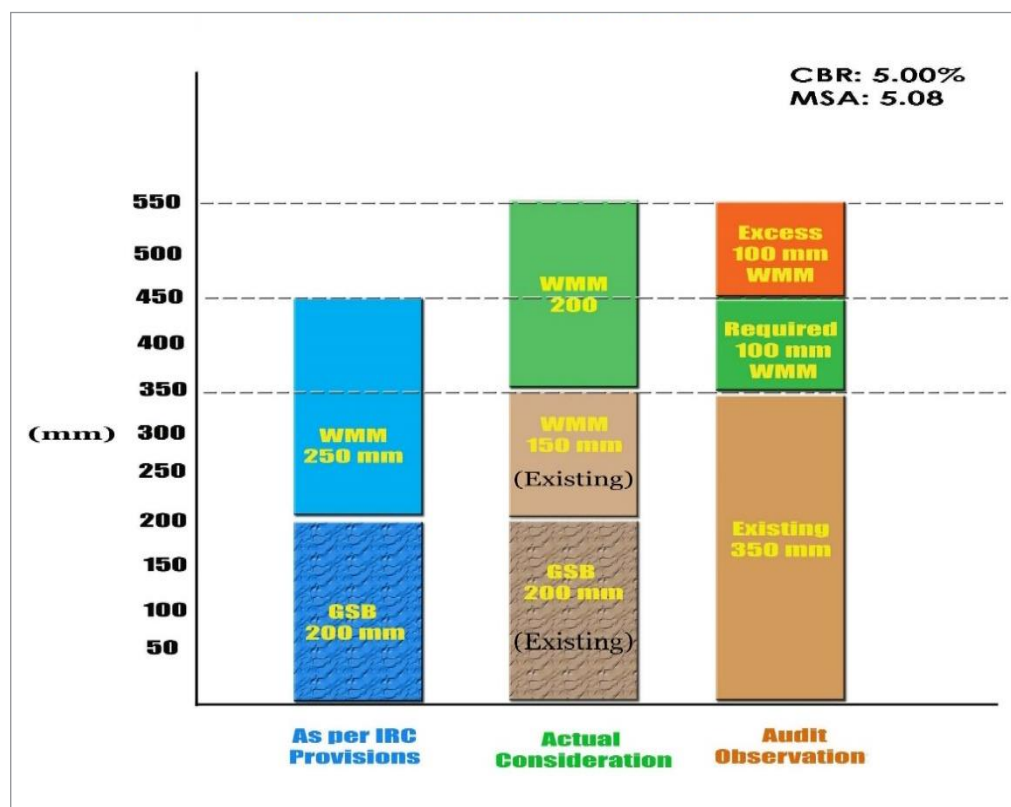
²⁰⁷ Million Standard Axle.

²⁰⁸ 200 Granular Sub-base (GSB) + 250 mm WMM.

²⁰⁹ 200 Granular Sub-base (GSB) + 150 mm WMM.

²¹⁰ It is a software used for analysis of a pavement for selection of pavement materials and layer thickness by computation of horizontal tensile strain (E_t) at the bottom of the bituminous layer and vertical compressive strain on the top of the subgrade (E_v). In this software few iterations may be required by changing the layer thicknesses until the strains computed by IIT PAVE are less than the allowable strains derived from respective equations.

Chart 4.1 : Thickness of Granular Layers



The Department stated (November 2022) that in the widening portion of the road, excess non-bituminous layer was laid to keep uniformity with the non-widened portion of the road. The Department further stated that in the non-widened portion of the road, excess non-bituminous layer was laid due to damage of the existing non-bituminous layer, and in some areas to solve the problem of water logging.

Considering the reply of the Department, the Audit excluded the excess layer in the widening portion, allowed for additional 40 mm of WMM due to picking up in the existing road and also allowed for additional layer on the areas due to water logging problem.

Despite this, there was an avoidable expenditure of ₹ 73.09 lakh as shown in **Appendix-4.6**, due to non-compliance with the IRC guidelines.

- B.** Superintending Engineer, Western Highway Circle-I, Public Work (Roads) Directorate, Purba Bardhaman awarded (February 2023) a road strengthening work²¹¹ at a tendered cost of ₹ 13.46 crore (2.20 per cent below the estimated amount²¹²), scheduled to be completed by August 2023 in Purba Bardhaman district. The work was completed in September 2023, at a cost of ₹ 13.43 crore.

According to the IIT Pave software, 535 mm of non-bituminous layers were required for the road. Accordingly, the Department laid 175 mm of

²¹¹ Raina – Jamalpur Road from 0.00 km to 10.00 km, Strengthening work under Burdwan South Highway Division in the district of Burdwan.

²¹² Estimated amount put to tender ₹ 13.76 crore.

WMM layer considering the existing non-bituminous layers of thickness 360 mm.

Audit observed that the existing non-bituminous layers was 585 mm (including 445 mm of WMM). Thus, considering the thickness of 585 mm, laying of 175 mm WMM was not necessary.

The Department stated (December 2023) that the existing WMM layer was only considered as granular layer and the rest of the existing distressed slag/jhamma/WBM/sand layer is considered as sub-grade modification layer.

The reply of the Department is not tenable as layers of 500 mm sand and non-bituminous layers of 550 mm (300 mm GSB and 250 mm WMM) were laid (August 2018) in 5,500²¹³ m of road stretch where re-sectioning work was performed. Accordingly, the Department should have gone for a fresh layer of 75 mm WMM as per codal provision²¹⁴ in this stretch of the road. Further, for the remaining stretch of 1,844.60 m²¹⁵, Audit observed that existing WMM layer was 445 mm²¹⁶. Thus, to achieve the desired thickness of 535 mm of non-bituminous layers, the Department should have laid 130 mm WMM layer (considering 40 mm for the profile corrective course due to picking up of existing bituminous layer as per para 501.8.3.4 of Ministry of Road Transport and Highways Specifications for Road and Bridge Works). The details of the layers executed *vis-à-vis* as per IRC specification is shown in **Table 4.6** below:

Table 4.6-Layers executed *vis-à-vis* as per IRC specification

As per IRC Provisions	Department executed	Audit Proposed	
		For re-sectioning area: 5,500 m	Rest portion 1,844.60 (7,344.60-5,500.00) m
- Non-bituminous layer: 535 mm - Bituminous layer: 155 mm	Non-bituminous 360 mm (Existing)	Existing non-bituminous 550 mm (300 mm GSB and 250 mm WMM)	Existing WMM 445 mm
	WMM 175 mm	WMM 75 mm (as Profile corrective course)	WMM 130 mm {(535-445=90) + 40 as Profile Corrective Course}
	DBM 115 mm BC 40 mm	DBM 115 mm BC 40 mm	DBM 115 mm BC 40 mm

Thus, the Department incurred an avoidable expenditure of ₹ 84.91 lakh (as shown in **Appendix-4.7**) by laying excess thickness of 45 mm WMM, due to non-compliance with the IRC guidelines.

²¹³ From 1.00 km to 3.00 km and 4.50 km to 8.00 km.

²¹⁴ As per para 406.1 of MoRTH, the thickness of single compacted WMM layer shall not be less than 75 mm.

²¹⁵ 7,344.60 m -5,500.00 m.

²¹⁶ (150 mm + 295 mm WMM).

4.12 Unfruitful expenditure due to improper planning

Poor planning by Public Works Department in construction of an Auditorium resulted in unfruitful expenditure of ₹ 11.89 crore.

As per rule 35 of the West Bengal Financial Rules regarding standards of financial propriety, every public officer is expected to exercise the same vigilance in respect of expenditure incurred from public moneys as a person of ordinary prudence would exercise in respect of expenditure of his own money.

Public Works Department (PWD) took up the work of ‘**Construction of an Auditorium and Children’s Park at Mahisadal (Itamogra Gram Panchayat-II), Purba Medinipur**’ based on a request (December 2013) of the Itamogra Gram Panchayat-II. The work was administratively approved (February 2014) at an estimated cost of ₹ 8.51 crore. Superintending Engineer, (PWD), South Western Circle, Paschim Medinipur awarded (March 2015) Phase-I²¹⁷ (Construction of Auditorium only) of the work to a contractor at a tendered cost of ₹ 5.01 crore, for completion by March 2016. However, the contract was rescinded (March 2018) and the security deposit of ₹ 33.14 lakh was forfeited due to non-completion of the work by the contractor within the stipulated time. At the time of termination of the contract, the value of work done was ₹ 3.31 crore and this amount was paid to the contractor. To complete the balance work, a new contract was finalised (March 2018) at a tendered cost of ₹ 2.18 crore. Subsequently, two more tenders were awarded for certain other works related to the construction of the Auditorium and these works were completed in May 2020. Thus, total expenditure incurred on the Auditorium was ₹ 8.34 crore as described below in **Table 4.7**.

Table 4.7: Details of expenditure incurred on construction of the Auditorium (₹ in crore)

Agency	Nature of work	Duration of work	Value of work done
Uptech Machinery	Construction of Auditorium	March 2015 to March 2018	3.31
DEEP	Balance work of Auditorium	March 2018 to October 2019	2.18
Sankar Furniture	Supplying and fitting, fixing of auditorium chair	March 2018 to May 2020	0.46
DEEP	Internal Balance work, Plinth Protection and Surface Drain and Service Road including construction of Sub-station building	March 2019 to December 2019	2.39
Total			8.34

Meanwhile, administrative approval of ₹ 3.14 crore for taking up electrical works for the project was accorded (December 2016) by PWD. Purba Medinipur Electrical Division (PWD) incurred total expenditure of ₹ 3.02 crore²¹⁸ on various electrical installation works for the Auditorium.

²¹⁷ Phase II consists of construction of Children’s Park.

²¹⁸ ₹ 1.94 crore (2019-20) + ₹ 0.80 crore (2020-21) + ₹ 0.29 crore (2021-22).



Figure 4.24: Outside view of Auditorium after renovation work



Figure 4.25: Interior of Auditorium

Soon after completion of the Civil and Electrical works, due to severe storm ‘*Amphan*’ (May 2020), urgent restoration work (September 2020) along with other balance works²¹⁹, at a cost of ₹ 0.53 crore²²⁰ were also undertaken for the Auditorium. Thus, a total expenditure of ₹ 11.89 crore²²¹ on the project was incurred by the Department as of November 2020.

Audit observed (August 2023) that despite completion of the Auditorium work in May 2020, the work on the Children’s Park, front boundary wall and gate of the Auditorium were not taken up. Further, even after lapse of four and a half years from the date of completion (November 2020) of the restoration work of the Auditorium, it was not handed over by PWD to any authority for operation and maintenance. As a result, regular maintenance activities of Auditorium complex like sweeping, electricity bill payment, deployment of security guards *etc.*, were not carried out. Further, the auditorium was utilised by the District Magistrate (DM), Purba Medinipore on two occasions²²² only in four and half years since its completion.



Figure 4.26: Temporary boundary wall of Auditorium, made of old tin sheets and bamboos, in dilapidated condition

²¹⁹ Construction of Service road and Aluminum Composite Panel (ACP) work.

²²⁰ ₹ 0.11 crore (urgent repairing work) + ₹ 0.42 crore (Balance work).

²²¹ ₹ 8.34 crore (Construction of Auditorium), ₹ 3.02 crore (Electrical installation) and ₹ 0.53 crore for restoration and balance work.

²²² On 21.02.2023 and 04.05.2023.

Audit observed following instances of poor planning on the part of the Department in implementation of the project as detailed below:

- The Department took up the project without deciding which authority it would be handed over to for operation and maintenance. Even after completion of the project, the Department could not finalize the authority for handing over the asset & for operation and maintenance, despite this matter being raised (November 2021) by the Division after completion of the restoration work.
- Due to low lying land, structural drawings had to be changed and it forced the Department to take up supplementary items of sand filling, earth cutting, concreting, shuttering and reinforcement *etc.* Moreover, excess expenditure was incurred in few other works like construction of sub-station, bulk power supply *etc.* Thus, due to escalation in cost of the project, the Department could not take up the work of Children's Park, front boundary wall and gate of the Auditorium.

Accepting the audit observation, the Department stated (January 2024) that regular maintenance of auditorium complex could not be carried out due to want of funds and these are expected to be carried out by the concerned authority after handing over.

The fact remains that the auditorium has been kept idle for more than four and half years, since November 2020 without any maintenance, raising the risk of degradation of the asset due to normal wear and tear.

Thus, the Department unable to hand over the Auditorium to an authority for operation and maintenance due to poor planning, which led to unfruitful expenditure of ₹ 11.89 crore.

TRANSPORT AND PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENTS

4.13 Unfruitful expenditure due to imprudent decision

Unjustified decision of the Transport Department to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding for the development of Malda Airport, and renovation works at an unviable location resulted in unfruitful expenditure of ₹ 15.27 crore.

Malda District is a gateway between North and South Bengal and also connects the State with the North-East of India.

Airports Authority of India (AAI), Government of India (GoI) had a non-operational airport at Malda. The Government of West Bengal (GoWB) requested (September-October 2015) AAI to grant permission for the development and use of Malda Airport. AAI agreed to grant this permission at a nominal cost of ₹ 1/- for an initial period of 30 years. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Transport Department, GoWB and AAI was executed (June 2016). As per the MoU, the GoWB was inter-alia responsible for the following:

- developing the existing runway, boundary wall *etc.*, for operation of smaller size aircraft, and helicopter services.

- bearing the cost of diversion of roads, HT/LT²²³ power lines and other structures obstructing the development of the airport and its safety.

Although the onus of development and operation of Malda Airport lay with the Transport Department²²⁴, GoWB, the work of “*Upgradation²²⁵ of Malda Airport in the District of Malda (WB)*” was taken up (May 2017) by the Public Works Department at an estimated cost of ₹ 16.80 crore. The cost for the development of the airport was to be met from the budget of the PWD. The administrative approval for the work was accorded by the Joint Secretary, PWD, despite the fact that neither the existing runway was under the jurisdiction of PWD nor was the work entrusted to it by the Transport Department.

PWD also engaged (August 2016) a consultant²²⁶ to undertake technical study including preparation of a Detailed Project Report (DPR) at a cost of ₹ 57.50 lakh. The work of upgradation of the existing runway commenced in September 2017 and was completed in March 2023 at an expenditure of ₹ 15.27 crore. In response to a specific query, the Executive Engineer, Malda Division, PWD stated (March 2024) that although the runway of Malda airport was not under the jurisdiction of PWD, it constructed the runway as the administrative approval was accorded by PWD and the balance work for operationalization of the airport would be executed by the Transport Department.

However, even after incurring ₹15.27 crore, the Airport could not be operationalised.

Audit observed the following deficiencies in the implementation of the project:

- The prospect of development of a functional airport at the existing site at Malda was always unlikely as informed by AAI (March 2010) due to the presence of high-rise buildings, high tension wires and a railway track restricting the effective length of the runway to approximately 1,000 feet (which was inadequate for use by even small aircraft). As per the Ministry of Civil Aviation notification²²⁷ dated 30 June 2008, it was the responsibility of the State Government to take action against any building, tower, chimney that were constructed/erected, in violation of the provisions of this notification.
- AAI had made it clear that air service from the existing site at Malda would not be possible due to electrified railway track within 1.0 km. PWD had informed (December 2017) the Transport Department that the Sealdah-

²²³ HT (High Tension) lines carry higher voltages, typically 11 kV and above, and are used for power transmission over longer distances. LT (Low Tension) lines carry lower voltages, usually up to 1.1 kV, and are used for local distribution to homes and buildings.

²²⁴ As the MoU was signed by the Transport Department.

²²⁵ Upgradation of the existing runway, boundary walls etc.

²²⁶ M/s RITES Ltd (a GoI enterprise).

²²⁷ S.O 1589 E, dated 30 June 2008.

Malda-New Jalpaiguri railway track was passing just behind (within 1.0 km) the existing runway and sought suitable advice in this matter. However, the Transport Department did not respond in this regard.

- The District Magistrate (Malda) also informed (May 2010) the Transport Department that in order to operationalize the existing airport the following measures would be required:
 - ❖ The height of 14 high-rise buildings would have to be reduced by a minimum of 0.355 m to a maximum of 8.110 m.
 - ❖ The height of a High-Tension electric tower would need to be reduced by 6.873 m and that of a telephone tower by 9.812 m.
 - ❖ Ghorapir electric sub-station which provided power to three districts would have to be shifted which would cause total disruption of power supply in these three districts.
- The Chairman, English Bazar Municipality, Malda informed (June 2011) the Minister-in-charge (Transport), GoWB that an alternative site was being looked for, for the establishment of the new airport. He also apprised that a combined team²²⁸ had identified an alternative site (Naldubi) for the development of a new Airport. This site was found to be the most suitable due to its proximity to the National Highways, proposed bypass and Export Centre. The AAI also accepted (September 2011) the proposal for establishing a new airport at Naldubi in Malda.

Joint physical verification of the site conducted along with officials of PWD confirmed (March 2024) the presence of electrified railway tracks adjacent to the boundary wall and the upgraded runway, constructed at a cost of ₹ 15.27 crore was defunct.



Figure 4.27: Runway lying defunct



Figure 4.28: Electrified railway track just behind the boundary wall.

Despite being aware of the impediments at the existing site, and the fact that an alternative site had been identified for the airport, the Transport Department entered into the MoU for development and use of the existing Malda Airport. Further, the Transport Department did not take any initiative to shift the railway track/electric substation and other obstructions. PWD also went ahead with upgradation work despite being aware of the constraints in operationalising of the airport.

²²⁸ Comprising Regional Executive Director (AAI), General Manager (AAI), District Magistrate, Maida, the Chairman, English Bazar Municipality and other Officers.

Therefore, the objective of development of a functional airport in the district of Malda could not be achieved even after eight years rendering the expenditure of ₹ 15.27 crore unfruitful. Further, the chances of operating this airport in the near future were also remote as shifting of an operational railway track and power sub-station was not feasible in the near future. The Department has not furnished any reply (March 2025).

KOLKATA

The 17 March, 2026



(MANISH KUMAR)

**Principal Accountant General
(Audit-II)
West Bengal**

Countersigned

NEW DELHI

The 19 March, 2026



(K. SANJAY MURTHY)

Comptroller and Auditor General of India

