

## Nitin Gadkari inaugurates Bihar's lifeline bridge

Union minister lays foundation stones for 15 national highway projects worth Rs 13,585 crore in the state



The Mahatma Gandhi Setu on the Ganga between Patna and Hajipur.  
The Telegraph

---

Union road transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari on Tuesday inaugurated the longest steel bridge in the country, 5.6km-long Mahatma Gandhi Setu (bridge) over the Ganga between Patna and Hajipur, rebuilt at a cost of Rs 1,742 crore on National Highway-19.

The Union minister dedicated to the people and laid the foundation stones for 15 national highway projects worth Rs 13,585 crore in Bihar on the occasion, including a 94km long two-lane road project between Chapra and Gopalganj on National Highway-85. He also announced that the Centre will build greenfield highways worth Rs 1 lakh crore over the next couple of years.

“A dream has been fulfilled today. The Mahatma Gandhi Setu is the lifeline of Bihar, connecting the southern parts of the state to its northern parts. The completion of the superstructure replacement project will help reduce the time taken to traverse the bridge from two to three hours to five to 10 minutes. I also once got stuck in a traffic jam on this bridge and suffered,” Gadkari said.

He pointed out that 67,000 tonnes of steel has been used in the superstructure of the longest steel bridge of the country. Around a lakh vehicles pass through it everyday. Afcons Infrastructure Limited completed the project in five years, starting in June 2017.

Chief minister Nitish Kumar, Union ministers Giriraj Singh, Pashupati Kumar Paras, Ashwini Kumar Choubey, Nityanand Rai, Lok Sabha member from Patna Sahib, Ravi Shankar Prasad, and several members of the Bihar cabinet were present on the occasion.

“We are going to build greenfield highways at a cost of Rs 1 lakh crore in Bihar over the next few years. It will include several projects, including an 118km-long Patna-Ara-Buxar expressway worth Rs 9000 crore connecting the state to the Purvanchal Expressway of Uttar Pradesh, Rs 5788 crore four-lane Munger-Bhagalpur-Mirza Chowki corridor, and a 4km-long, six-lane bridge over the Ganga at Digha in Patna. The road network in the state will match that of the US by 2024,” Gadkari said.

He said that 18 bridges over the Ganga are being constructed in Bihar with the help of the Centre.

The Union road transport minister also appealed to Nitish Kumar to develop cities, industrial parks and clusters along the new roads to ensure speedy development of the state. “We build roads while others purchase lands along them and earn money,” he added.

The original Mahatma Gandhi Setu’s construction started in 1972 when there was just one bridge, Rajendra Pul, to cross the Ganga in Bihar at Mokama. Its western lane was inaugurated in 1982 and the eastern lane in 1987. It had the distinction of being the longest bridge of the country for over three decades.

The 9.15km-long Bhupen Hazarika Bridge built over the Brahmaputra River in Assam in 2017 and the 6.2km long Dibang River Bridge constructed in 2018 in Arunachal Pradesh relegated it to the third spot.

“Soon after its completion, the Mahatma Gandhi Setu started becoming weak. Our government also tried to repair and strengthen it. However, a committee formed to find a permanent solution to the problem, recommended in 2014 the replacement of the upper concrete structure with a steel structure. The work began in June 2017 and is complete now,” chief minister Kumar said while speaking on the occasion.

Kumar also advocated the need for a maintenance policy with all infrastructure projects to ensure their smooth functioning.