

Road travel to Manali from Mandi to be safer, hassle-free

75% work of Pandoh bypass to Takoli stretch on Kiratpur-Manali highway completed

DIPENDER MANTA
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

MANDI, FEBRUARY 26

With a host of cross-section tunnels, four-laning of Pandoh bypass to Takoli on Kiratpur-Manali highway will provide all-weather and safe connectivity between Mandi and Kullu. This will reduce travel time from Mandi to Manali by more than 60 minutes.

According to official sources, the much-awaited Pandoh bypass to Takoli section of the Kiratpur-Manali Highway is likely to be dedicated to nation by March 2024. After nearly five years, nation's one of the most-favoured tourist destinations Manali is slated to get smooth connectivity.

Of the total 34-km length of Pandoh bypass to Takoli, 23.7 km has been handed over to the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), while 10.3 km (approx) is under construction.

"The project includes construction of 10 tunnels, one elevated viaduct, three major bridges, 10 minor bridges and double-laning of more than 13 km highway with slope protection, culverts, retaining walls, drainage and many other features," said a project officer.

"The upgraded infrastruc-



A view of the Kiratpur-Manali four-lane road from Pandoh to Takoli. PHOTO: JAI KUMAR

ture will make road travel safer and more reliable, apart from reducing travel time from Mandi to Manali by more than an hour," he added.

Project manager Ranjit Kumar Singh said that "an average of 6,000 vehicles ply on this stretch every day. These include the vehicles of armed forces heading to border areas like Leh. The number is expected to rise significantly once the new all-weather connectivity is available."

"Till six years back, this was one of the most dangerous sections of the NH-21 between Chandigarh and Manali. Pandoh, 15 km from Mandi, to Aut was a

frequent rock-fall area risking vehicles and often cutting off the highway. To ensure safety of motorists in this section, which became a high-risk zone, 10 tunnels were planned. Over 75 per cent of the project work has been completed. We have handed over five tunnels, an 842.5 m viaduct, eight minor bridges, and 9.3 km of highway to the NHAI," he said.

"We were executing this project with running traffic on a highway and there was always a fear of landslides and accidents. We had to deal with open highway excavation, limited right of way and

poor geology. The right of way was insufficient to accommodate high hill cutting of 55-60 m height in poor geological strata. So, we adopted V-Cut excavation from the centre so that the muck didn't hinder traffic and the sides of the slope were excavated at the end," he explained.

"The project was very complex. It consisted of several mini projects like construction of roads, bridges and tunnels, besides other minor structures. These are the largest cross-sectional tunnels in the entire Himalayan region," he said.