



India's Inland Water Transport

For Prelims: Maritime India Vision 2030, Jal Vikas Marg Project (JVMP), Arth Ganga, Zero Carbon Emission.

For Mains: India's Inland Water Transport.

Why in News?

Government intends to increase the share of Inland Water Transport (IWT) to 5% as per [Maritime India Vision \(MIV\)-2030](#).

What is the IWT?

▪ About:

- Inland water transport refers to the transportation of people, goods, and materials via waterways such as **rivers, canals, lakes, and other navigable bodies of water** that are located within a country's boundaries.
- IWT is the **most economical mode of transportation**, especially for bulk cargo like coal, iron ore, cement, food grains and fertilizer. Presently, it remains **underutilized at a share of 2% in India's modal mix**.

▪ Socio-Economic Benefits of IWT:

- Cheaper operating cost and relatively lesser fuel consumption
- Less polluting mode of transportation
- Lesser requirement of land relative to other modes of transportation
- More environment friendly mode of transportation
- Moreover, waterways can be **used for recreational purposes such as boating and fishing**.

What is the Scope and Challenges of Inland Waterways in India?

▪ About:

- India has an extensive network of inland waterways, including rivers, canals, and backwaters, covering **over 20,000 kilometers in length**. Inland water transport has enormous potential in India as a mode of transportation for both passengers and cargo.
- Priority development of [National Waterway-1](#) was undertaken through the [Jal Vikas Marg Project \(JVMP\)](#), which includes [Arth Ganga](#), and they will give an economic boost of Rs 1,000 crore over the next five years.
- The inland waterways can play a crucial role in realising Prime Minister (PM) vision of making India a [zero-carbon emission country by 2070](#).

▪ Challenges:

- **No Navigability throughout the Year:**
 - **Some rivers are seasonal** and do not offer navigability through the year. Around 20 out of the 111 identified national waterways have reportedly been found unviable.
- **Intensive Capital and Maintenance Dredging:**

- All the identified waterways require intensive capital and maintenance dredging, which could be resisted by the local community on environmental grounds, including displacement fears, thereby posing implementation challenges.
- **Other Uses of water:**
 - Water also has important competing uses, viz. need for living as well as for irrigation, power generation etc. It would not be possible for the local government/others to overlook these needs.
- **Exclusive Jurisdiction of the Central Government:**
 - The exclusive jurisdiction of the Central Government is only in regard to shipping and navigation on inland waterways declared to be 'national waterways' by an act of Parliament.
 - Utilisation/sailing of vessels, in other waterways, is within the ambit of the concurrent list or is in the jurisdiction of the respective state governments.

What is Maritime India Vision 2030?

▪ About:

- It is a **ten-year blueprint for the maritime sector** which was released by the Prime Minister at the **Maritime India Summit in November 2020**.
- It will supersede the **Sagarmala initiative and aims to boost waterways**, give a fillip to the shipbuilding industry and encourage cruise tourism in India.

▪ Policy Initiatives and Development Projects:

- **Maritime Development Fund:** A Rs. 25,000-crore fund, which will provide low cost, long-tenure financing to the sector with the Centre contributing Rs. 2,500 crores over seven years.
- **Port Regulatory Authority:** A pan-India port authority will be set up under the new Indian Ports Act (to replace the old Indian Ports Act 1908) for enabling oversight across major and non-major ports, enhance institutional coverage for ports and provide for structured growth of the ports sector to boost investor confidence.
- **Eastern Waterways Connectivity Transport Grid project:** It will aim to develop regional connectivity with Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar.
- **Riverine Development Fund:** Calls for extending low cost, long-term financing for inland vessels with the support of a Riverine Development Fund (RDF) and for extending the coverage of the tonnage tax scheme (applicable to ocean-going ships and dredgers) to inland vessels also to enhance the availability of such vessels.
- **Rationalisation of Port Charges:** It will make them more competitive, besides doing away with all hidden charges levied by ship liners to bring in more transparency.
- **Promotion of Water Transport:** For decongestion of urban areas, and developing waterways as an alternative means of urban transport.

What are the Related Government Initiatives?

- [Eastern and western Dedicated Freight Corridors \(DFCs\)](#)
- [Sagarmala Project](#)
- [Jal Marg Vikas Project](#)
- [PM Gati Shakti](#)
- [Inland Vessels Bill, 2021](#)

Way Forward

- With India's burgeoning population and increasing traffic, the development of inland waterways **will not only reduce travel time and ensure a seamless journey for people and goods**, be cost-effective, and bring down pollution levels, we can **holistically design a policy that factors in safety, infrastructure support, inter-state coordination and integrate with other transportation modes**.
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UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. Enumerate the problems and prospects of inland water transport in India. (2016)

[Source: PIB](#)

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