

Recommendation of Divisional Forest Officer, South **Wayanad Division**

The Executive engineer, Kerala Public Works Department- Roads Division, Kozhikode has applied for forest clearance for the Construction of Twin tunnel (2+2 lane) with four lane approaches (from existing roads) for providing direct connectivity between Anakkampoyil- Kalladi- Meppady in Kozhikkode and Wayanad Districts of Kerala state.

From the list of fauna submitted by the agency which did EIA of the site, there are 63 species of birds, 12 species of mammal, 28 species of butterflies, 3 species of amphibians and 7 species of reptiles. Among the 12 mammals recorded, one species, Asiatic elephant, is 'endangered' and three species (Sambar deer, Bonnet macaque and Nilgiri langur) figure in the vulnerable category of IUCN; seven species are of 'low risk-least concern' category.

The landslide prone area of Puthumala is very close to the proposed area, where the flood of 2018 taken the lives of many people and caused lots of damages. Therefore the possibility of future landslides due to the implementation of this project cannot be ruled out. However, the Environmental Clearance aspect shall be assessed by the competent authority.

The abundance of wild fauna invites problems like animals getting trapped in the tunnel once it is constructed. This necessitates a rescue plan for the trapped animals and the service of 24*7 Rapid Response Team at the cost of the User Agency.

The proposed forest area to be diverted is mostly characterised by semi evergreen forest having rocky patches.

As far as the disturbance to forest area is concerned, the chances by an underground tunnel is less compared to an over ground road. The fragmentation of forests that can happen due to a four lane over surface road is prevented by this underground tunnel road project and shall act as a life line for evacuating people from Wayanad in case of any calamity in future. Because, over surface Ghat roads are prone to congestion and traffic halts due to landslides.

The user agency should find out proper arrangements for the disposal of collected mud without affecting nearby forest area. Since there may be chances of ground water sources to be affected by the tunnelling process, respective authority should ensure that ground water tables are not negatively affected by the project. User agency should ensure that springs at high elevation areas are not getting disturbed.

User agency has reported that they have studied about four alternatives and found the proposed tunnel as the best option. On perusal of the project proposal submitted by the user agency, it is found that the proposed alignment ensures shortest connectivity with a distance of 3.875 Km through the forest area of South Wayanad Division compared to other three alternatives.

Compensatory Afforestation land should be provided by the user agency and for each 1 Ha diversion, it is recommended that user agency should bear the cost for planting 1000 seedlings. It is recommended that the revenue from sale of rocks as a result of tunnelling through the forest areas of South Wayanad Division may be used for forest and wildlife conservation as in the case of sand and boulder mining from river banks.

The proposal for forest clearance is recommended considering the merits and minimal disturbance to forest and wildlife. This recommendation is only regarding the forest aspects. Competent authorities should look into the environmental part related to the project prior to giving permission for

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