

Major 'centre of excellence' for railway sector to come up in Oman soon

BYA E JAMES | JANUARY 12, 2015



With Oman gearing up to award the first contract for 207 km-long Sohar-Buraimi route, the centre will play an important role. Photo: Times

Muscat: A major centre of excellence to cater to the emerging requirements of professionals in railway sector will be formed in the country soon.

The new centre, which is being formed by Oman Railway Company, is aimed at ensuring high standards among professional colleges and vocational training institutes for training professionals for the railway sector.

"We will start the centre soon. It is a framework to manage and govern the progress and development of skills. We will be able to utilise the existing infrastructure like professional colleges and vocation training institutes," Eng Abdulrahman Al Hatmi, chief executive officer of Oman Railway Company, told Times of Oman, on the sidelines of GCC Rail and Metro 2015 conference.

"We are trying to get international expertise."

The new centre will also look into quality assurance and licences for working in the railway field.

With Oman gearing up to award the first engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) contract for 207 km-long Sohar-Buraimi railway project by the middle of this year, the Centre of Excellence will play an important role in strengthening availability of professionals with specialised skills, with the help of training institutes.

Pan-GCC railway network

It is also significant in view of the fact that the GCC countries are investing as much as \$250 billion for the pan-GCC railway network, which drives demand for specialised professionals in the region.

Eng Al Hatmi said the Centre of Excellence would be more focusing on skilled workforce required for the building

railway line, rather than those required for operation and maintenance. GCC states are also contemplating to establish a common training academy for moulding railway professionals.

The total manpower requirement for the railway project in the country is not yet known. Abu Timam GrantThornton is helping the Oman Railway Company in determining the human resources requirement and to establish operational framework and organisational structure.

Talking about the plans to appoint an operator for running the railway, Oman Railway Company chief said there are three options – either Oman Rail can run it, or go for some sort of partnership with a private firm or give it completely to a private agency. "We have now almost finalised the model, which is going through approval process."

However, he declined to reveal the model the company has selected.

Responding to another question on private sector involvement in procuring rolling stocks, he said there are three options — either to buy it, take it from private sector on lease or the operator can buy it. "We have offers from private sector (within the country) to buy the rolling stock and lease it to us," added Eng Al Hatmi. "The private sector has a critical role to play and it cannot be done by the government alone."

Eng Al Hatmi also noted that the Sohar-Buraimi route will be for both freight and passenger traffic. The national railway project will start construction phase by the middle of this year, with the government's plans to award the first segment.

The entire project will include laying of 2,135 kms of track, construction of 35 kms of tunnels and 40 km of bridges, and building of 50 terminals and 8 marshalling yards. In total, this will require 12,000 km of track, 10 million concrete sleepers and 40 million fasters.