

# Three New Linear Intrusions in Goa will Fragment Western Ghats

([www.conservationindia.org/articles/three-new-linear-intrusions-in-go-a-will-fragment-western-ghats](http://www.conservationindia.org/articles/three-new-linear-intrusions-in-go-a-will-fragment-western-ghats))

## 1: Additional 400 kV Transmission Line

**Project:** New 400 kV line from Karnataka to Goa “to provide n+1+1 redundancy for Goa and meet additional demand.”

**Is the project urgently needed?:** Goa today has adequate power. For another 5 years at least. According to a note on the GED’s website, many of today’s problems are in the power distribution infrastructure already installed in Goa. But, as elsewhere, while power demand is slowly on the rise, the demand from different sectors remains unclear and has not been put forth to citizens.

Nevertheless, there are a number of options available to meet this incremental power demand in Goa. These include (a) demand side management to reduce the demand by passive cooling; (b) renewable power generation locally through solar – Goa has finally come out with a solar power policy (which is lacking in its on-ground implementation); (c) natural gas-based power generation within Goa (on the Gokak-Vasco gas pipeline).

**Problem with Tamnar alignment:** The entire Goa-Karnataka border has WLS & NPs on both sides. Western Ghats is ESA under EPA, 1986. WLS and NPs are protected under Wildlife Protection Act and FCA, 1980.

**Alternatives to the current design:** In the various meetings of the relevant Western Region & Southern Region committees, the best option proposed is to create a 400 kV line from Kolhapur-Mapusa, which would (a) reduce the PA diversion; and (b) enhance the utilization of the existing 765/400 kV DC Narendra-Kolhapur line.

**Siting of the sub-station:** The sub-station can be sited anywhere – it does not need a forest to be cut down. For example, it can be sited within an industrial estate. In fact, the meetings above disclosed that the existing sub-station at Xeldem has enough area to take care of the new bays that are required, and that this area can be provided at cost to the transmission line vendor.

**Compensatory afforestation:** Present HTL alignment (Goa and Karnataka) requires felling of 1,05,000 forest trees across an area of 323.596 ha

Of this, 146.505 ha in Goa and 177.091 ha in Karnataka. (Additional 2670 trees have been illegally felled for the Sangod substation). Compensatory afforestation proposal is to plant trees not in Goa but in Karnataka. The plots assigned in Karnataka are already forested, so it is not clear what afforestation can take place. In any case, Goa loses forest cover.

**Complaint:** Goa can reduce or meet its power demand to a significant extent through a decentralised progressive energy policy but no efforts have been made. Further, a technically and environmentally superior alternative already exists (Kolhapur-Mapusa). Instead, the project proponents have deliberately chosen a new alignment that will cut through the most bio-diverse part of Goa -- a National Park, a Wild-Life Sanctuary, plus forest diversions outside the PAs for transmission lines -- and locates the sub-station in a property, surrounded by forests and which was recently cleared of 2670 forest trees.

## 2: Vasco-Hospet Railway Double-Tracking

**Project:** Doubling the existing railway line to increase capacity for goods traffic

**Is the project needed?:** The significant traffic to Goa by rail is goods traffic. There is not much requirement for passenger travel, and for various reasons. Within goods traffic, the ADB report states that iron ore and coal comprise 50% of the commodities transported. Both benefit Karnataka. No direct benefit to Goa.

However, the doubling proposal was conceived prior to the Supreme Court's 2014 order banning export of ore from Karnataka. Further, if coal is maintained at present levels (or there is a Court order, as a PIL for zero coal import and handling at MPT is pending before the High Court), there is no need for doubling the rail track at all.

**Problem:** The double track will severely damage and fragment the National Park, Wildlife Sanctuary and the Dudhsagar waterfalls. The so-called doubling is actually tantamount to a new railway line as the alignment -- despite claims made by the railway -- takes a different route, and in effect, further fragments the WLS / NP (see map attached). Topographical changes to the sanctuary habitat will involve removal of 1.8 million cubic metres of soil. Chief Wildlife Warden, Environment Minister and Chief Minister (late Manohar Parrikar) all opposed the double tracking, on grounds of profound damage to the area and almost zero utility for the state of Goa.

**Alternatives to the current design:**

The present line, constructed in 1900, is the only line permitted. No new track can be permitted through a National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary. Interestingly, ADB has provided funding of the double track only from Hospet till Castle Rock, well aware of the environmental impact if taken any further.

**Alternative within the existing design:**

A strictly parallel track is not possible, given the terrain.

**Forest destruction and compensatory afforestation: Total forest diversion for project:138.39 ha, in 3 segments (one outside the WLS)**

The first proposal, from Castle Rock to Kulem, involves diversion of 120.875 ha (of which 113.857 ha fall in the MNP&BMWLS). Number of trees for felling is 19,820.

The second proposal, from Kulem to Margao, involves diversion proposal of 15.6077 ha (of which 14.4185 ha falls within the MNP&BMWLS). The proposal involves destruction of 2668 trees.

The third proposal is a small segment of 1.9089 ha and is not within the PA. It involves removal of private forest. 394 trees will be felled for this segment of the line (Kulem to Margao).

The total number of trees in this segment alone works out to 22,882, bulk of which are located within the NP/WLS.

Reforestation (compensatory afforestation) is to be done on lands in Karnataka. Investigations reveal the lands offered by the Karnataka government are already having natural cover.

**Complaint:** Goa has no pressing need or utility for the doubling of the railway line and citizens have repeatedly asked their elected representatives about what is the public benefit of these projects. Goa government (including the Chief Wildlife Warden) firmly opposed the proposal in a written note in 2013. Certainly, a new alignment that will cut through the most bio-diverse part of Goa -- a National Park, a Wild-Life Sanctuary and declared ESA of the Western Ghats under EPA 1986 -- is wholly indefensible from all angles.

### 3: Widening Goa-Belgaum NH748/NH4A

**Project:** Doubling the national highway 748/4A from Panaji (Goa) to Belgavi (Karnataka) to increase capacity for goods (coal) traffic

**Is the project needed:** There are 3 routes used for traffic between Goa and Karnataka. The Anmod segment is not preferred by travellers since it is the longest. The Travel and Tourism Association of Goa and more than 150 business holders have asked about the rationale of these projects, as they will affect tourism.

**Problem:** The entire Goa-Karnataka border has WLS & NPs on both sides. The proposed widening is actually tantamount to a new road as the existing road cannot be expanded due to difficult terrain. 60% of the alignment is new and is to be constructed on viaducts in untouched WLS territory. It will enhance speed of vehicles -- a prospect which is hardly to be encouraged on a road through a WLS/NP.

**Alternatives to the current design:** There is no apparent traffic requirement for a wider road. The highway expansion is not taking place in Anshi-Dandeli Tiger Reserve given that the National Highway authority has admitted that this is Critical Wildlife Habitat as per the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972. Strangely, the same definition has not been applied for Mollem NP and Bhagwan Mahaveer WLS on the Goa side.

**Alternative within the existing design:** No need at all. Restrict to existing road width and ensure transport respects the need to slow down while passing through the existing road through the WLS as this is wildlife habitat.

**Forest destruction and compensatory afforestation: Total forest diversion: 32.085 ha of which 31.015 ha falls in Mollem National Park and Bhagwan Mahaveer Wildlife Sanctuary**

The Goa PWD's proposal for expansion/road widening of NH4A (84 to 97 km) for diversion of 32.085 ha (of which 31.015 ha falls in the National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary – requires the felling of 12,238 trees (of which 12,097 fall within the NP/WLS). Number of trees is underestimated. Compensatory afforestation is proposed in lands in Karnataka, which appear to be already having natural cover.

**Complaint:** The proposal is misnamed “road widening”, but involves a new alignment on viaducts in untouched sanctuary habitat. This is not acceptable as it leads to further destruction, disturbance and fragmentation of the sanctuary.