



## EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

**GENERAL STUDIES 3: ECONOMY**

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**TOPIC: INFRASTRUCTURE: RAILWAYS**

### THE HIDDEN COST OF GREENWASHING THE INDIAN RAILWAYS

#### RITES Ltd. Wins Contracts for Repurposing Locomotives

- **Contracts for Export:**  
RITES Ltd., the consultancy wing of Indian Railways, has secured two contracts for repurposing six broad-gauge diesel-electric locomotives. These locomotives will undergo conversion from Indian Broad Gauge (1,676 mm) to Cape Gauge (1,067 mm) to meet the specifications of African railways.
- **A Landmark Export:**  
This marks the first instance of exporting repurposed, second-hand locomotives after gauge conversion. This engineering feat underscores Indian Railways' capability in locomotive adaptation for diverse international requirements.
- **Highlighting Wastage:**  
The need to repurpose operational locomotives reflects wastage caused by policy-driven redundancy. Indian Railways' rapid electrification policies have sidelined hundreds of functional diesel locomotives, raising questions about resource optimization.

#### Diesel Locomotives Made Redundant

- **Rising Numbers of Idling Locomotives:**  
By 2023, 585 diesel locomotives were lying idle due to railway electrification; this number has now risen to approximately 760. Over 60% of these locomotives still have a remaining service life of more than 15 years, indicating premature redundancy.
- **Policy-Driven Redundancy:**  
The accelerated drive toward 100% railway electrification, part of the government's Mission Electrification initiative, is the key reason behind this redundancy.

#### What Is Greenwashing?

- **Definition:**  
Greenwashing refers to misleading or exaggerated claims about environmental benefits to present an organization, product, or service as eco-friendly.
- **Impact on Genuine Sustainability:**  
Greenwashing can mislead consumers and stakeholders, diverting attention from substantial environmental challenges. It undermines meaningful sustainability efforts by prioritizing optics over genuine action.



## Justifications for Electrification

- **Saving Foreign Exchange:**  
Indian Railways' diesel consumption contributed only 3.24% of total transport-related diesel use in 2014, decreasing to around 2% by 2021-22. While electrification reduces diesel imports, the overall impact on national diesel consumption remains negligible compared to major sectors like trucking and agriculture.
- **Environmental Claims:**  
Around 50% of India's electricity is generated from coal, and Indian Railways is one of the largest transporters of coal. Despite being labeled as a "Green Railway," the reliance on coal-fired power undermines the environmental benefits of electrification. A genuine shift toward 80% non-fossil fuel electricity generation is required for railway electrification to achieve real green credentials.

## Implications of 100% Electrification

- **Asset Mismanagement:**  
Hundreds of operational diesel locomotives are prematurely sidelined, resulting in massive asset wastage. If these stabled locomotives were lined end-to-end, they would stretch approximately 16 kilometers.
- **Strategic Retention vs. Redundancy:**  
Indian Railways plans to retain 2,500 diesel locomotives for disaster management and strategic purposes, raising questions about why a portion of the fleet is still considered essential.
- **Contradiction in Coal Dependency:**  
Railways' financial sustainability remains heavily dependent on coal transportation, which contradicts the claims of environmental benefits associated with electrification.

## Critique of Electrification Strategy

- **Policy Concerns:**  
The rush to achieve 100% electrification seems to prioritize showcasing ambitious targets over implementing sound, pragmatic policies.
- **Economic and Environmental Impacts:**  
The sidelining of serviceable diesel locomotives leads to resource mismanagement and raises concerns about fiscal responsibility. Without a significant increase in renewable energy in India's electricity mix, the environmental claims of railway electrification remain largely unsustainable.
- **Need for Strategic Reevaluation:**  
Until renewable energy sources dominate power generation, the environmental benefits of electrification will not outweigh the economic and operational challenges posed by redundant diesel assets.



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## Conclusion

- Indian Railways' electrification drive raises critical concerns about asset management, environmental claims, and economic efficiency. Genuine sustainability can only be achieved by addressing coal dependency and optimizing the use of existing resources like diesel locomotives.

**Source:** <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-hidden-cost-of-greenwashing-the-indian-railways/article68992823.ece>

