Comparative Study of Central and J&K State Policies on Public–Private Partnership Toll Infrastructure Development

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Abstract

This study presents a comparative analysis of central government and erstwhile Jammu & Kashmir (J\&K) state-specific Public–Private Partnership (PPP) toll infrastructure development policies. The study was to test the variations in the investor confidence, the project conduct schedules, responsiveness to local predicaments, public acceptability, and the toll affordability. Data was obtained through a mixed-method approach using 100 respondents, which included government officials, private concessionaires, toll operators, road users, and community members. Other secondary data was obtained through government policy documents, reports on projects, and industry. These results indicate that the core PPP policies, especially those that have been in place since 2019, have been successful in enhancing investor confidence and the efficacy of project completion schedules through standardized Model Concession Agreements, the enhanced institutional backing, and the uniformity of the risk allocation processes. However, these policies were found to be less responsive to the region's unique socio-economicandgeographical challenges. On the other hand, the state-specific policies in J&K recorded a better acceptance among the people, toll affordability, and flexibility towards the local circumstances, although a lack of proper coordination i.. investor interest, as well as delays on projects were often witnessed.

This research gathers that the two methods are not enough on their own to address development needs of the complex matters of J\&K. It is proposed that such a policy framework is best characterised by what can be broadly termed as a hybrid policy framework, which can be efficiently and investor-friendly (i.e. in line with possible policies at the centre), as well as flexible and local-sensitive (i.e. in line with possible policies at J&K). The study is skewed in terms of the sample size it has used, the scope of the research, and the amount of information it covers, which is just in J&K. Other areas should be covered, and likewise, the scope of the research and the amount of information it has to show. The current research will add value to the pertinent debate on the development of equity, reasonable and

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sustainable PPP toll infrastructure policies in geographically sensitive areas**.**

Keywords: Public–Private Partnership (PPP), Toll Infrastructure, Jammu & Kashmir, Central Policies, Investor Confidence, Public Acceptance.

Introduction

Infrastructure development is a vital step toward creating an economy growth, social inclusion and regional connectivity within a country. The transport infrastructure that is made up of roads, highways, bridges, and others is the lifeline or backbone of an economies in a nation in that it allows the easy movement of goods and services, the time taken when doing such movements is lowered as well as the transportation contributes to the ease of access to markets and services which are considered fundamental. In India, the government has increasingly relied on Public–Private Partnerships (PPP) to overcome financial and managerial constraints in infrastructure development. PPPs allow the private sector to put forward one portion of the cost, risk and responsibility of establishing infrastructure as well as the maintenance and at the same time assure that the public interests are equally taken care of through the government regulation. Toll-based infrastructure development as an alternative source ofRR mobility is one of the alternatives that has generated an aspect of resource mobilization to accomplish sustainable maintenance of road infrastructure projects among the various models of PPP.

The Government of India has come up with different policy frameworks to encourage PPP initiatives in road transport sector and highway sector. These frameworks, guided by the National Highways Act and the Model Concession Agreements (MCA), have been instrumental in standardizing project structures, risk allocation, and revenue-sharing mechanisms. Toll collection as recovery measure of investment has also been part of the norms inherited in such projects. The core policy framework is to strike a balance, on the one hand, between the necessity to roll out more investment privately and on the other hand to keep prices low enough and the easy way out to the users. Over the years, initiatives such as the National Highway Development Programme (NHDP), the Bharatmala Pariyojana, and schemes managed by the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) have transformed India's road infrastructure through extensive PPP participation.

The erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), now reorganized into a Union Territory (UT), has faced unique challenges in infrastructure development. It has mountainous topography, geopolitical sensitivities, and a relatively weaker industrial base, among other factors that have generally discouraged massive scale of investment privately. However, PPP models which primarily operate through tolls have also been employed in the state itinerary with the objective of addressing infrastructure deficits and ramping up the speed of interconnecting with the rest of the nation. Historically, the J&K state government formulated its own policies and regulations on toll infrastructure development, which were often distinct from central policies due to local administrative priorities and the special constitutional status the region enjoyed under Article 370 (prior to its abrogation in 2019). State-dependent policies were used to answer internal issues like prices, fair tolling provisions, local jobs created by the projects and security needs, which were not the same as the uniformed process of the central government.

An analysis of the similarities and differences between the policies of central and J&K states regarding toll based PPP infrastructure development is important in a number of ways. To begin with, it yields information on the implications various policy approaches have on the

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effectiveness and efficiency of infrastructure development in various socio-economic and geographical settings. Second, it sheds light on the effect of policies on the willingness of the private players to invest in a difficult area like J&K. Third, the research reveals the best practices and establishes gaps, which can help in making policy decisions at the central and Union Territory levels in the future. The nature of the similarities and differences in policy goals, risk-sharing schemes, regulatory frameworks, and welfare outcomes should be understood to come up with a comprehensible and embracing framework of infrastructure development.

Also, the aspect of J&K being a state with diverse constitutional provisions to Union Territory with a direct central government has commenced bigger shifts in the alignment of policies. Central policies have become more direct in J&K, and PPP structures are underway that involve tying up the toll-based schemes in national schemes. This change provides a possibility to evaluate the efficiency of centralized methods in the management of the development intricacies peculiar to the region. It also begs the question whether local socio-economic realities are sufficiently incorporated in such policies, as well as, whether national standards are appropriate in areas with local peculiarities.

This comparative analysis endeavours to delve into these problems through a comparison o. Characteristics of central government policies and policies of the erstwhile J&K state regarding PPP toll infrastructure development. It looks at the features like policy objectives, institutional structures, contract provisions, financial arrangements, toll collection arrangements, and ways in which the citizenry holds it publicly accountable. The paper will critically assess the similarities as well as the differences between these policies, endeavouring to bring some depth of knowledge to what, better yet, a finer formulation of policy frameworks means in terms of determining the success and sustainability of PPP programmes in the development of infrastructure. It is eventually anticipated that the results of this research will enlighten the policymakers, individuals or firms in the private sector, and other stakeholders on the best methods of undertaking equitable and efficient toll-based PPP projects not only in J&K but also in other regions with similar developmental issues.

Literature Review

Public–Private Partnerships (PPP) have emerged as a key mechanism for addressing infrastructure gaps in developing economies. PPP models allow governments to leverage private sector investment, technical expertise, and operational efficiency in exchange for long-term revenue streams or availability payments (Grimsey & Lewis, 2004). A number of papers have evaluated the formation of PPP structure in India and the level of road infrastructural development related to it. The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has played a pivotal role in implementing PPP projects under models such as Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT), Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM), and Engineering Procurement Construction (EPC) with toll collection being a central component (Raghuram & Gopalan, 2017).

The impact of toll-based development on cost recovery and financial viability has received much interest due to the study of this approach to infrastructure development. According to Sharma and Bindal (2016), toll collection mechanisms ensure consistent revenue streams, but they can create challenges in affordability and public acceptance. Public resistance to toll charges has often necessitated government subsidies or policy interventions, particularly in economically weaker regions (Sainath & Banerjee, 2018). Studies by Jha and Tiwari (2020) highlight that PPP policies at the central

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level emphasize standardized concession agreements and uniform toll structures, which help attract private investment but may overlook regional disparities.

Based on region specific literature, it is found that the existence of constraints on the development of infrastructure in Jammu and Kashmir is special. The difficult terrain, low traffic volumes, political instability, and higher security concerns often reduce the commercial viability of PPP projects (Rather, 2019). Additionally, the erstwhile state government had historically maintained a set of policies that diverged from the central government in areas such as toll exemptions, land acquisition procedures, and local employment requirements (Dar & Lone, 2018). According to Bhatt (2020), these localized policies were necessary to accommodate socio-economic realities but often resulted in inconsistent investor confidence and delayed project implementation.

The abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019 led to the extension of central laws and policies directly to J&K (Mishra & Khan, 2021). Such a technical change in the structure of governance has rendered it requisite to examine the comparative efficacy of the previous state level policies to the comfort of the fully operational central structures. Few studies (e.g., Raina, 2022) have examined whether centralized PPP policies adequately address the challenges of low traffic density, socio-political sensitivities, and public resistance to toll charges in the region. Such literature gap necessitates the need to conduct a narrowed down analysis on the influence of the central and J&K centric policies in affecting PPP toll infrastructure development.

Research Gap:

Despite the fact that substantial literature is available on PPP frameworks at the national level, not much focus has been given on the comparative applicability of the same in a difficult region such as J&K. Central policies are generally described in each study with minimal emphasis on the way in which they may fit or fail to comply with the requisites of the state. Further, the empirical data on the question of whether the move to direct implementation of central policy after 2019 has raised the levels of investor confidence, project completion rates, and governmental satisfaction with jobs performance in J&K is scant. To fill these gaps, the paper determines a comparative review of central toll infrastructure policies and J&K specific PPP toll infrastructure policy and its outcome(s) developmentally.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses that have been formulated on the basis of the reviewed literature are as follows:

H1: The policies regarding the Central PPP tolls infrastructure is not only more standardised, but also investor friendly as the former J&K state-specific policy used to be.

H2: The rate of project completion and investor participation in J&K has been enhanced by the execution of central PPP policies that followed the year 2019.

H3: The PPP toll policies of J&K state with specific PPP toll policies were responsive to the local socio-economic and geographic challenges as compared to the national policies.

H4: The degree of distinction between the projects carried out under central policies and projects carried out under the previous policies of J&K state, with regard to the issue of public acceptance and user satisfaction is also significant.

H5: Equity-based toll patterns through central policies can be a problem of affordability to the local people in J&K in the context of toll measures in the state as per state policies.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design using a mixed-

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method approach to comprehensively compare central government and erstwhile J&K state Public–Private Partnership (PPP) toll infrastructure development policies. The fact that has been used to acquire reliable and multidimensional facts is the primary and secondary data. The methodology is designed to measure the policy goals, implementation processes, the outcome of the projects, and attitude of the people towards it.

Sampling

In analyzing the research, the researchers apply the purposive sampling and stratified random sampling methods to sample respondents who are highly exposed to the PPP toll infrastructure initiatives. For primary data collection, three main respondent categories were targeted: (i) government officials and policymakers involved in PPP projects at the central and state/UT levels, (ii) concessionaires, toll operators, and private sector investors engaged in such projects, and (iii) road users and local community members impacted by toll-based infrastructure. It was decided that a sample size of around 100 respondents will be selected which will include 30 officials and policy experts, 20 representatives of the private sector and community members who are road users or community members 50 respondents. In order to incorporate a wide range of views among different stakeholder groups, the distribution of the samples was balanced.

Data Collection

Secondary data was collected extensively from official government reports, policy documents, Model Concession Agreements (MCAs), guidelines from the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), J&K government archives, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways notifications, and performance audit reports from the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG). Other data was obtained through toll revenue collections, reports on the completion of projects as well as research researches published on PPP toll infrastructure.

The collection of primary data was done by use of semi-structured interviews and structured questionnaires. The questionnaires were meant to be given to the road users and the local residents, whereas the interviewees were supposed to be policymakers, project officials and the representatives of the private sector. The questions used in the questionnaires were closed as well as open-ended questions and the measured responses were subjected to five point Likert scale of measuring variables e.g. user satisfaction, and perceived affordability and effectiveness of the toll projects. Telephonic and virtual interviews were used whenever convenience could be granted to ease the geographical and logistical inconvenience faced in J&K hindering face to face data collection.

Data Analysis

This analysis of the data was done both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative data from questionnaires and toll revenue records were analysed using statistical tools such as t-tests, chi-square tests, and descriptive statistics (mean, median, and percentage analysis) to compare the outcomes and user satisfaction levels of projects under central and J&K state-specific policies. It was performed on SPSS software, which was used to determine precision and reliability in statistical analysis. Thematic content analysis was used to examine qualitative data on interviews with open-ended responses and they identified commonalities that were noticed, variations in the perceptions of stakeholders and policy implications. Triangulation of the findings by qualitative and quantitative analyses was used to strengthen the validity and reliability of the findings.

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Data Analysis

Descriptive Analysis of Demographic Characteristics

A total of **100 respondents** participated in the study, comprising government officials, private sector concessionaires, toll operators, road users, and community members impacted by toll-based PPP projects. The demographic profile is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 100)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	72	72%
	Female	28	28%
Age	20–30 years	18	18%
	31–40 years	35	35%
	41–50 years	28	28%
	51 years & above	19	19%
Occupation	Government Officials	30	30%
	Private Concessionaires/Operators	20	20%
	Road Users	30	30%
	Local Community Members	20	20%
Education Level	Graduate	45	45%
	Postgraduate	38	38%
	Below Graduate	17	17%
Region of Residence	Urban	56	56%
	Rural	44	44%

The demographic profile indicates that there is a diverse and even sample with different categories so that various stakeholder views are taken into account. The male respondents (72%) slightly outnumbered females (28%), which may reflect the gender representation typical in infrastructure-related professions and road user categories. Age distribution shows that the largest group (35%) falls in the 31–40 years category, followed closely by 41–50 years (28%), indicating a strong presence of mid-career professionals and mature respondents with direct experience in PPP projects. Younger respondents (20–30 years) comprised 18%, providing the perspectives of emerging professionals and users, while older respondents (51 years and above) accounted for 19%, bringing in experience-based insights.

Occupational representation was well-balanced, with government officials (30%) and road users (30%) forming the largest segments, followed by private concessionaires/operators (20%) and local community members (20%). This balance enabled the study to get opinions of the people who design and implement the policies, the people running the projects and the end-users who are the effect of toll charges. The level of education indicates that 45 percent were graduates and 38 percent postgraduate indicating an informed group of respondents, who would understand the niceties of each policy. Finally, a mix of urban (56%) and rural (44%) respondents ensures that both metropolitan and rural perspectives on toll affordability and access are reflected.

2. Analysis Based on Objectives and Hypotheses

Table 2: Investor Confidence & Participation

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Policy Framework	Mean Score (1–5)	Standard Deviation
Central Policies	4.2	0.62
J&K State Policies	3.4	0.77

t-value:3.25,**p-value:**0.001(significant)
Central PPP policies performed much better in investor-confidence and investment participation levels than the state-specific policies of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. This finding supports H1, demonstrating that the central framework's standardized Model Concession Agreements (MCAs), clear risk-sharing mechanisms, and uniform legal framework instil greater trust among private investors. On the contrary, J&K-specific policies, although acceptable at region level, were put under a perception of inconsistency and policy uncertainty hence, the confidence of investors was down. This discrepancy denotes why, the private sector actors were more ready to invest the capital in the central projects than in the state-only directed ones.

Objective 2: Project completion and investor participation post-2019 (H2)
Table 3: Project Completion Timeliness

Policy Framework	Mean Score (1–5)	Standard Deviation
Central Policies (post-2019)	4.0	0.69
J&K State Policies (pre-2019)	3.2	0.88

t-value: 2.97, **p-value:** 0.003 (significant)

As seen in the analysis, the finalisation of projects had a very positive result in the light of central policies after the year 2019. This confirms H2 in that direct central control, greater funding assistance, and quicker route of approval has increased updating in the pace of execution. There was, on the other part, a delay in J&K state projects through an increased period of approval, slowdown of land purchase and an amplification of security issues that hindered development. Central policies' standardized procedures and greater institutional capacity have streamlined project delivery timelines in J&K.

Objective 3: Responsiveness to local challenges (H3)
Table 4: Responsiveness to Local Challenges

Policy Framework	Mean Score (1–5)
Central Policies	3.1

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J&K State Policies	4.3

t-value: -3.85, **p-value:** 0.000 (highly significant)

The results demonstrate that policies designed by the state of J&K responded to local challenges to a much greater degree. This confirms H3, since it was better that localized policies should be more align to region sensitive socio-economic conditions, terrain difficulty, and security issues in the region. Such policies tended to be flexible with regard to toll exemptions to locals, focused on employment in the community and the risks mitigation strategies and were more adaptive to local needs. Central policies, however, are based on one nationwide model that does not take into consideration the regional difference as it might result in the lack of local realization.

Objective 4: Public acceptance and satisfaction (H4)

Table 5: Public Acceptance & Satisfaction

Policy Framework	**Mean Score (1–5)**
Central Policies	**3.4**
J&K State Policies	**3.9**

t-value: -2.11, **p-value:** 0.037 (significant)

H4 was supported because there was better acceptance and satisfaction of policies stipulated by the state of J&K as opposed to national-level policies. The policies of the states that were flexible such as lower toll rates on the locals and exemption of some category enhanced the goodwill of the community. When this is compared to the case of the center with more uniform tolls and enforcing it more strictly, the local users have come under increased opposition as they tend to view the tolls as excessive. The observation implies that the perception of equity among the people is a key determinant to the success of toll projects and should be considered when new policies are developed.

Objective 5: Toll affordability (H5)

Table 6: Toll Affordability for Users

Policy Framework	**Mean Score (1–5)**
Central Policies	3.2
J&K State Policies	3.8

t-value: -2.64, **p-value:** 0.010 (significant)

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The affordability of tolls was deemed to be higher when the state-specific J&K policies were absent, which corroborates to H5. The reduction in cost burden on the users due to the lenient manner in which the state handles the cost through lowering prices and exemptions on those who often commute within the state. There is the toll of Central policies where the standard toll structure may not be proportionate to the local income in J&K and there are affordability issues because of this. This discrepancy shows how difficult it is to balance not only the financial sustainability of investors but also equity of the local users.

As is indicated by the analysis, the central and J&K state have statistically significant and clear differences within their PPP toll infrastructure development policies.

•Central policies: Having strengths in attracting investors, getting things accomplished in time, and upholding financial discipline.

•J&K state policies: More efficient in treating local socio-economic issues, keeping the people satisfied and implementability of the toll being cheap.

The results indicate that neither of the methodologies is sufficient. The combination of the high efficiency and investor confidence of central frameworks with the local adaptability and the local community-oriented nature of the J&K-specific policies in a hybrid policy framework would be optimal in the regards of ensuring sustainable PPP toll infrastructure development in the region.

Conclusion

The study comprehensively compared central and J&K state-specific Public–Private Partnership (PPP) toll infrastructure development policies based on multiple indicators such as investor confidence, project completion timelines, responsiveness to local challenges, public acceptance, and toll affordability. The findings reveal clear differences between the two frameworks. The central policies were more effective on the aspects that involved attracting investors and their projects executed on timely basis largely because of their uniform structure, robust regulatory patterns and stable risk allocation models. These policies were however less accommodative as far as the peculiar socio-economic and geographical factors that are faced in the J&K region are concerned.

Conversely, the previous J&K state policies were higher ranked in the criteria of the acceptance among people, affordability of the toll, and the responsiveness toward the local realities. Such policies included exemptions worked out on a localized basis, community jobs, and adaptive action in regard to the security and terrain matters. Though these policies encouraged both inclusivity, they were usually affected by a lack of steady investor confidence and project latecomers. According to the analysis, it is imperative to seek a middle ground between efficiency and local adaptability. The way towards making PPP toll infrastructure projects more sustainable and acceptable in the region can be to merge the socio-economic sensitivity of J&K state-specific policies with the investor-friendly characteristics of the central policies in a hybrid-type of model.

Discussion

The results of this study align with previous literature on PPP frameworks in developing economies, which emphasizes the need for standardized policy frameworks to attract private investment (Raghuram & Gopalan, 2017) but also highlights the risks of ignoring local contexts (Rather, 2019). This paper has shown centralized-policy albeit being enforced to success in terms of financial and operational performance might not necessarily serve the sensitive states/areas

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like J&K that bear distinct socio-political and geographical realities. This finding attests to the value of community involvement and social-economic issues in policy formulation in infrastructure. Increased user satisfaction based on societal acceptance of the J&K policies (in its earlier state) indicates that the creativity of exemptions at the local level and community-based actions is successful. The trade-off however was poor investor involvement and delay in carrying out projects.

Since the move to have direct implementation of central policies after 2019, when J&K was reorganized into Union Territory, there is a significant increase in trust among investors and percentages completion of projects. Nevertheless, the fact that there has been continued local opposition to toll fee and affording issues points to the need of implementing adaptive steps. By remaining to impose the same tolling regimes and rights on concession agreements, central policies are likely to worsen state socio-economic inequality and civic resistance.

Limitations

The research had various limitations that ought to be considered as the research is to be interpreted. First, the respondents were only 100 in number and thus though representative of various stakeholders, may not be reflective of the views of all stakeholders within the Indian state of J\&K entirely. The sample was rather small and would have enhanced reliability and generalizability of the findings. Second, there was also a challenge of data availability in terms of its accessibility because some important data was not accessible like the toll revenue data and other details of project costs since they were considered to be confidential and inaccessible even through governmental operation. Third, the timeline of the study was limited, and it concentrated on the differences between the policies and projects carried out prior to and after 2019. Such a short time is not necessarily enough in correctly assessing the effectiveness of central policies in the region on the long term. Also, the answers that road users and community members provided were the answers that were driven by their perception and personal experiences; therefore there was a possibility of introducing subjective bias in the answers, thus affected the satisfaction ratings. Lastly, research design was geographic, and that it focused on J\&K as the only state in India where an experiment could be done; no comparative data on other states in India with a similar problem was considered, namely the North-Eastern states. These two constrained areas taught down the depth of context and benchmarking of findings to other similar regions.

Future Research Directions

Extensive room exists to develop the research further in the light of the findings made in this research. There is need to do longitudinal research to check the long term viability and usefulness of central PPP policies in J&K in terms of assessing user affordability and investor retention capability over a period. It is also possible to employ a comparative regional design in future by incorporating one or more geographically sensitive/challenging areas in India such as the North-Eastern states which would provide broader reflections of how the central policy can be applicable across different context. Moreover, a more complete picture of how different policy frameworks are financially viable can be given with more finely grained economic modelling of the toll revenues, cost overruns, and return on investment. They can also investigate how to develop community-focused policy models that would combine features of localized toll exemptions, revenue-sharing systems, and community benefits so as not to undermine the confidence of investors. Services of the technology-driven solutions, like toll-

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based PPP solutions such as FASTag based electronic toll or AI powered traffic monitoring systems and dynamic prices, can also be explored to boost effectiveness and popularization of toll-based PPP projects. Lastly, further studies can investigate socio-political aspects of centralized PPP policies, evaluating how they affected the trust of people, local job market, and proliferation of economy in J\&K.

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