

# Reviewing Challenges of Public-Private Partnership on Plazas in Jammu and Kashmir

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**Abstract:** Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) have emerged as a significant model of infrastructure development in India, particularly in the road transport sector. In the context of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), PPP-led toll plaza projects are perceived to contribute to improved road infrastructure, enhanced safety measures, and better maintenance services, collectively supporting regional connectivity and economic growth. These partnerships enable cost-sharing, promote private-sector innovation, and aim to ensure efficient service delivery to road users. However, the socio-political dynamics of J&K present unique challenges that influence the acceptance and operational success of toll projects. Concerns over high toll rates often lead to public dissatisfaction, protests, and demands for exemptions, especially among local commuters. Land acquisition issues, limited stakeholder awareness, and procedural delays further hinder smooth project execution. Additionally, ensuring transparency in revenue generation, maintaining user trust, and balancing profit motives with public welfare remain critical policy concerns. Thus, while PPPs hold strong potential to transform transportation infrastructure in the region, their success depends on a context-sensitive approach that emphasizes inclusive stakeholder engagement, equitable pricing mechanisms, and strengthened governance frameworks. The study highlights the need for strategic reforms to enhance accountability, public satisfaction, and long-term sustainability of PPP toll plaza initiatives in J&K.

**Keywords:** Public-Private Partnership (PPP), Toll Plazas, Revenue Generation, Cost Sharing, Stakeholder Satisfaction, Jammu & Kashmir.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) have increasingly become a preferred approach for infrastructure development in India, aiming to bridge resource gaps, accelerate project completion, and improve service standards across sectors. The road transport sector, in particular, has adopted PPP models extensively to enhance connectivity, reduce travel time, and support economic growth. Toll plazas established under PPP frameworks represent a key component of this strategy, as they ensure ongoing revenue generation for maintenance while reducing financial burden on the government.

In the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), PPP-led toll road projects play a crucial role in strengthening mobility across challenging geographical terrains and supporting regional development initiatives. Improved highway infrastructure is essential not only for trade and tourism but also for security logistics, given the region's strategic importance. The private sector's involvement has contributed to better road quality, systematic fee collection, and modern management practices.

However, PPP implementation in J&K is accompanied by unique socio-political complexities. High toll charges, local economic disparities, and limited public awareness often trigger dissatisfaction and demand for policy exemptions. Land acquisition hurdles, administrative delays, and concerns about transparency further affect project sustainability.

Therefore, it becomes essential to assess the success and limitations of PPP-led toll plazas through the lens of stakeholder expectations, governance efficiency, and regional realities.

## II.LITERATURE REVIEW

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) have gained significant attention among researchers, policymakers, and industry professionals as a strategic mechanism for infrastructure development, especially in countries where government financial resources are constrained. Scholars argue that PPPs help mobilize private capital, introduce managerial efficiency, and reduce the fiscal burden on public agencies while promoting innovation and accountability in service delivery. In the road transport sector, PPP-based toll road projects are widely recognized as effective for generating long-term revenue, ensuring timely maintenance, and distributing project risks between public and private partners.

Various studies highlight that appropriate revenue models—such as Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) frameworks—enable sustainable financing by linking cost recovery with user charges. Additionally, cost-sharing mechanisms and risk-allocation agreements play a crucial role in maintaining financial viability, stakeholder confidence, and operational success. Efficient PPP governance is also associated with enhanced transparency, better contract management, and quicker project completion due to reduced bureaucratic delays.

However, research also emphasizes that PPP performance is highly context-dependent. Regions with socio-political instability, geographical constraints, or limited public acceptance face unique challenges. Conflict-prone or remote areas like Jammu and Kashmir encounter issues such as land acquisition disputes, local resistance to toll pricing, and heightened security considerations, which can disrupt project timelines and affect user satisfaction. Therefore, existing literature suggests that successful PPP outcomes require localized strategies, inclusive decision-making processes, and policy frameworks that balance profitability with public welfare.

Challenges of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Toll Plazas in Jammu & Kashmir: Public-Private

Partnership (PPP) models have become an essential tool for infrastructure development in India, allowing the government to leverage private sector efficiency, financing, and innovation. The road transport sector, in particular, has witnessed significant adoption of PPPs through toll-based revenue recovery frameworks. In Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), toll plazas established under PPP structures aim to strengthen road connectivity, support tourism, and improve economic linkages between the region and the rest of the country. However, PPP toll plaza operations in J&K face a series of administrative, socio-political, geographical, and economic challenges that hinder their effectiveness and acceptance. These complexities distinguish J&K from other regions of India due to its security sensitivities, difficult terrain, and public perception surrounding cost-and-benefit to road users.

This section critically examines the predominant challenges affecting PPP toll plaza implementation in J&K, discussing their policy implications and long-term effects on infrastructure sustainability.

### 1. Service Quality Gap: Poorly Maintained Highways and Ongoing Construction

One of the most widely reported challenges concerns the mismatch between toll fees collected and the level of road service offered. The NH-44 corridor, particularly the Pathankot–Udhampur and Jammu–Qazigund stretches, has been under prolonged construction and widening processes for years. Frequent road diversions, uneven surfaces, potholes, and traffic bottlenecks result in driver inconvenience, reduced safety, and increased vehicle wear.

The High Court of J&K has intervened multiple times, stating that collecting full toll charges while providing sub-standard road infrastructure is unjustifiable. Commuters argue that toll payments should guarantee not only quicker travel but also a minimum acceptable road quality. The continued disparity between expectations and reality has generated dissatisfaction, protests, and resistance to toll-fee systems. This challenge undermines the core principle behind PPP tolling—that users pay only for reliable service improvement.

#### Implication:

Persistent infrastructure deficiencies weaken public confidence, lead to repeated legal disputes, and discourage future private investment in regional road projects.

#### 2. Toll Plaza Placement, Density, and Regulatory Compliance Issues

Placement of toll booths in J&K has also become a contested topic. National highway policy mandates that the minimum distance between two toll plazas must not be less than 60 kilometres, to prevent excessive user charges in short intervals. However, cases such as the Bann and Sarore toll plazas—approximately 47 km apart—have raised concerns about non-compliance.

Excessive clustering of toll plazas on high-traffic routes (pilgrimage, tourism, logistics) creates not only a financial burden but also psychological resistance against toll collection, as users feel targeted for revenue extraction rather than service provision.

Additionally, poor site planning causes unnecessary delays, queuing problems, and capacity constraints at toll plazas. Placement in steep, hilly sections or near residential pockets increases congestion and environmental disturbance.

#### Implication:

Violations of spacing guidelines contribute to perceptions of over-tolling, triggering legal challenges and eroding the legitimacy of PPP toll agreements.

#### 3. Governance, Transparency, and Public Trust Deficit

Strong trust and accountability mechanisms are vital in PPP projects because of the long-term financial commitments involved. In J&K, stakeholders frequently express concern over:

- Lack of transparency in toll revenue collection and utilization
- Ambiguity in concession agreements
- Insufficient disclosure of maintenance benchmarks
- Weak monitoring of private partner performance
- Cost overruns and traffic volume uncertainties

Such governance gaps are further amplified by the region's complex socio-political environment, intermittent internet restrictions, and logistical difficulties in independent oversight.

Citizens often question whether toll money is adequately reinvested in upkeep, emergency services, and user facilities. Without clear communication on tariff revision logic and contractual safeguards, suspicion and resentment deepen over time.

#### Implication:

Poor governance practices create distrust and delegitimize public-private collaborations, increasing oversight burdens for the state.

#### 4. Congestion, Delays, and Inefficiencies in Toll Operations

Toll plazas in J&K, particularly those located on NH-44 and pilgrimage routes, frequently experience heavy vehicle clustering due to:

- a) Slow manual processing of fees
- b) Limited adoption of FASTag and e-payment systems
- c) High commercial traffic volume
- d) Unpredictable road closures
- e) Narrow approach lanes
- f) High season fluctuations in tourist/pilgrimage movement

Queue lengths increase during peak hours or adverse weather conditions, causing fuel wastage, delays, and commuter frustration. Ironically, toll roads intended to facilitate quicker mobility end up becoming new congestion points.

Improper traffic management not only affects user convenience but also reduces the very benefits that justify toll financing.

#### Implication:

Operational inefficiencies negatively influence user perception, increase transportation costs, and discourage voluntary compliance.

#### 5. Equity and Fairness Concerns for Local Communities

J&K's toll roads are heavily used by:

- Local commuters
- Daily wage workers
- Pilgrims visiting religious destinations
- Tourists
- Security personnel and essential services

Higher toll fees combined with the increased cost of living create a disproportionate burden on local populations who depend on frequent travel for livelihood and basic needs. Unlike freight carriers or tourists, locals do not gain additional commercial mileage value from improved highways.

Seasonal toll exemptions for specific events or populations have been discussed but inconsistently applied. As perceptions of unfairness intensify, local communities often frame tolling as economic exploitation rather than infrastructure development.

Implication:

Lack of targeted subsidization and regional sensitivity contributes to social resentment and organized resistance to toll plazas.

#### 6. Terrain, Weather, and Environmental Risk Factors

- J&K's geographical structure significantly influences infrastructure development:
- Rugged mountains and unstable slopes
- Intensive snowfall and freezing temperatures
- Fog and poor visibility
- Frequent landslides, avalanches, and road collapses

These high-risk environmental events lead to repeated closures, heightened maintenance needs, and revenue uncertainty for private partners. Construction delays become long and costly due to logistical challenges in transporting machinery, materials, and labor. PPP developers, driven by viability concerns, might become reluctant to invest adequately in maintenance once operational risk exceeds expected profits.

Implication:

High environmental unpredictability demands stronger contingency planning and regulatory obligations to ensure uninterrupted service quality.

#### 7. Security and Conflict-Related Vulnerabilities

- Being a sensitive border region, J&K often experiences:
- Security checks and military movement
- Public protests or unrest
- Terrorism-related disruptions
- Sudden curfews and road blockades

Such events severely affect traffic flow and toll revenue patterns. PPP concessionaires face risks uncommon in other Indian states—yet toll pricing rarely reflects this differential risk context.

Special permissions and enhanced coordination with law enforcement may be necessary to secure toll infrastructure. However, these added responsibilities do not automatically guarantee commercial stability.

Implication:

Investors encounter elevated risk exposure, potentially demanding higher returns or government guarantees, thereby straining PPP financial models.

#### Critical Reflection and Policy Implications

The key challenges across PPP toll projects in J&K indicate significant tensions between:

- Revenue extraction vs. service delivery
- Public welfare vs. private profit
- Policy design vs. implementation reality
- Centralized norms vs. regional needs

Addressing these requires:

1. Transparent PPP contract disclosure
  - Revenue reports, cost estimates, risk-sharing details
2. User-focused toll pricing reforms
  - Dynamic tolling based on road condition and operational efficiency
  - Local user discount passes
3. Performance-linked concession incentives
  - Maintenance standards tied to renewal of operational rights
4. Adoption of Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS)
  - Fully enforced FASTag lanes
  - Automated traffic monitoring and grievance response systems
5. Improved highway construction planning

- Faster dispute resolution in land acquisition
  - Realistic scheduling considering weather risks
6. Greater stakeholder participation
- Involving local communities in tolling policy decisions

### III. CONCLUSION

Public-Private Partnership (PPP) toll plaza projects in Jammu and Kashmir represent a critical strategy for addressing infrastructure gaps and promoting long-term connectivity in a region marked by geographical complexity and socio-political sensitivities. The model was introduced with the primary objective of enhancing road safety, reducing travel time, and facilitating economic development by leveraging private sector finance and operational efficiency. However, the ground realities in J&K reveal a wide spectrum of challenges that hinder the success and acceptance of PPP-led tolling initiatives.

A major concern arises from the persistent mismatch between toll services promised and the actual road conditions delivered. Ongoing construction along key stretches such as National Highway 44, deteriorated road infrastructure, and frequent diversions undermine the value users expect in return for toll payments. This has led to increasing public dissatisfaction, often expressed through protests, social media activism, and litigation. Governance lapses—such as inadequate monitoring, lack of transparency in revenue utilization, and limited performance accountability of concessionaires—further deepen distrust among road users and local stakeholders.

Additionally, the unique risk environment in J&K intensifies the operational uncertainties associated with PPP projects. Security challenges, land acquisition delays, seasonal disruptions due to harsh terrain, and high maintenance demands elevate both financial risk and inefficiencies. The placement of toll booths in proximity, non-compliance with spacing norms, and perceived inequity in toll pricing heighten the burden on local commuters, making the system appear more exploitative than developmental. These combined factors contribute to a negative perception of tolling, where users believe they are paying more while receiving inadequate service benefits.

For PPP toll plazas to succeed in J&K, stakeholders must adopt a region-specific strategy rather than a uniform national model. Emphasis should be placed on policy reforms that ensure transparent contract management, performance-based revenue models, and fair distribution of financial responsibilities. Introducing differential pricing for local users, enhancing dispute resolution efficiency, and integrating real-time digital monitoring systems, such as fully functional FASTag lanes, can alleviate user concerns and improve operational performance. Strengthening community participation through consultations and grievance platforms will also foster a greater sense of trust and shared responsibility.

Overall, PPP tolling remains a viable pathway for infrastructure modernization in Jammu and Kashmir, but its sustainability is dependent on balancing commercial interests with public welfare. Ensuring service quality, regulatory accountability, and equitable toll policies is essential for turning public opposition into public support. As the region continues to undergo political and economic transition, carefully designed PPP models can play a transformative role—provided they uphold transparency, efficiency, and inclusivity at every stage of development.

In conclusion, the future success of PPP toll plazas in J&K lies in reconciling infrastructure ambitions with the lived realities of road users. A collaborative governance framework that respects regional constraints while promoting innovation and efficiency will be key to unlocking the promised benefits of PPP initiatives and fostering sustainable connectivity, economic growth, and improved mobility across the Union Territory.

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