Planning of Tourism Infrastructure at Major Tourist Destinations - A Case Study on Kanwar Mela in Haridwar Town

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Abstract: Planning and implementing appropriate tourism infrastructure at any major tourist destination are difficult tasks. Success in this effort can be very much useful as increase in numbers of tourists to any tourist destination leads to more economic activities and employment generation. The author has experience in planning and implementing tourism infrastructure projects at major tourist destinations in India and highlighted the efforts done in one such project. The paper includes the planning and design process adopted to provide tourism infrastructure for pilgrims and tourists during Kanwar Mela in Haridwar town. The lessons learnt in the effort can be useful in planning of projects for providing tourism infrastructure at major tourist destinations.

Index Terms: Kanwar Mela, Kanwar Path, Haridwar, Pilgrims, Upper Ganga Canal, Rest Shelter, Toilet Complex, Bathing facility

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT:

Kanwar Mela known as the Kanwar Teerth Yatra begins on the first day of the month of Savan of the Hindu calendar. In the Mela, Kanwaris or Kanwar pilgrims travel in millions to collect holy water of the Ganga river and carry it to their villages or to other Shiva temples. In Haridwar, Kanwar pilgrims collect water from Hari Ki Pauri and then walk along a pathway of about 40 km length. The pathway known as Kanwar Patri or path is the route of movement of the Kanwar pilgrims located on the side of Upper Ganga canal. Apart from the month of Savan in summer season, Kanwar pilgrims also visit Haridwar Town in winter during Shiv Ratri festival. As per recent data, about 2 crore and 65 thousand pilgrims and tourists visited Haridwar during Kanwar Mela in summer season last year within period of about 13 days. Out of these, about 2 crores devotees walked along Kanwar path. The total number of pilgrims in winter season last year was about 1 crore within a period of 10 days.

The condition of the Kanwar Path, which is used by majority of Kanwar pilgrims, was not good. Road pavement on several stretches of the route was damaged. Also, the route is not continuous throughout due to crossing of major roads and a railway track. There was no toilet, bathing facility and rest shelter on the side of the route. There was no provision of street light. During Kanwar Mela, Government and voluntary organisations provide temporary facilities for drinking water, sanitation, food, etc. to the pilgrims along the Kanwar Path, which were not adequate. Therefore, a project was developed and implemented for providing safe passage route and improve the facilities for Kanwar pilgrims, who undertake pilgrimage by foot along the Kanwar path. The project aimed to address the needs and invest for creation of good hygienic facilities to Kanwar devotees and to make the Kanwar path attractive to other tourists, who visit Haridwar. As the Kanwar path is located on the bank of Upper Ganga canal, there was high scope to make it attractive to tourists.

2. EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR TOURISTS AND PILGRIMS:

There was very little facility available on the route or Kanwar path taken by the Kanwar pilgrims, except some drinking water fountains and bore-wells with hand-pumps. During Kanwar Mela period, some temporary facilities are provided by district administration, voluntary organizations, charitable trusts and individuals. Government departments provide support for crowd control, law and order, minor repair and maintenance of the Kanwar path and temporary lighting along Kanwar path. Some charitable organizations distribute food to the pilgrims at no cost. Major deficiencies observed in Kanwar Path were:

i) Damaged Kanwar Path in initial stretch of about 5.5 Km from near Shankaracharya Chowk in Haridwar town to Jathwara Bridge. This stretch of Kanwar path was inconvenient for use. Aesthetic view of this stretch was not good.

ii) Discontinuity in Kanwar path due to a railway track near Jwalapur. Because of the railway track, Kanwar pilgrims are diverted from Singhdwar Bridge to travel across Jwalapur town and join back the Kanwar Path near Jathwara Bridge.

iii) Lack of toilet, bathing, drinking water, rest shelter and other facilities in Kanwar path.

3. PLANNING AND DESIGN CONCEPTS OF PROPOSED TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE:

The main objectives of the project were as below:

i) To provide adequate facilities to Kanwar pilgrims and tourists visiting Kanwar path.

ii) To make Kanwar path attractive for visit by tourists.

iii) To provide opportunity to the local community for trade and participate in tourism related activities during Kanwar Mela.
The methodology followed in preparation of detailed project report for a tourist destination, was used in planning and design exercise of the project. A tourism destination needs to have six elements and they are:

i) Attractions: These gives initial motivation for the tourist to visit a destination. The destinations can be a nature park, cultural or historical sites or could be community attractions, etc.

ii) Amenities: These include basic infrastructure such as public transport, accommodation, visitors information, recreation facilities, guides, operators and catering and shopping facilities.

iii) Accessibility: The destination should be accessible to a large population base via road, air services, rail or cruise ships. Also, visitors should also be able to travel with relative ease within the destination.

iv) Image: A unique character or image is crucial in attracting visitors to the destination. Various means such as marketing and branding and travel media can be used to promote the destinations image. The image of the destination includes uniqueness, sights, scenes, environmental quality, safety, service levels and the friendliness of people.

v) Availability of Human Resources: Tourism is labour intensive and interaction with local communities is an important aspect of the tourism experience. A well-trained tourism workforce and citizens who are equipped and aware of the benefits and responsibilities associated with tourism growth are essential.

vi) Price: It is an important aspect of competition between tourist destinations. Price factors relate to the cost of transport to and from the destination, cost of accommodation, attractions, food and other tourist services.

The necessary tourist destination elements as mentioned above are considered during design of the proposed tourism infrastructure. The objective of the design concept of the project was to create an environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive cultural tourism development of the Kanwar Path by providing or improving basic infrastructure, services, safety and enhancing the experience of the visits by tourists. Tourism infrastructure demand and supply analysis were carried out. The route or the Kanwar path lacked necessary infrastructure and services such as drinking water, toilets, food stands, permanent paving, bathing facilities, lighting, seating, medical services, pause points and rest shelters. The project proposed to provide the necessary infrastructure. The design of the proposed infrastructure included the following considerations:

i) Religious and historical context of Kanwar Mela.

ii) Adding value to Ganga River Front.

iii) Appropriate space organisation at project site.

iv) Landscaping in project area

Each of the above design considerations are explained below.

a) Religious, Historical and Cultural Context of the Project

Kanwar Yatra is named after the word ‘kanvar’, which is a single pole (usually made of bamboo) with two roughly equal loads fastened or dangling from opposite ends. The kanvar is carried by balancing the middle of the pole on one or both shoulders. After taking water from the River Ganga (or other nearby river that wind up in Ganga river) the pilgrims, known as Kanvarias or Shiv Bhaktas (disciples of Shiva), carry covered water pots in kanvars slung across their shoulders and travel barefooted in saffron robes for long distances over 100 km usually in groups made of family, friends and or neighbours, and return to their own local or other more prestigious and larger Shiva Temples to pour Gangajal on Lord Shiva (Shiv Linga). The pilgrims require stands to place their kanvars, resting places to sit and rest in the shade, basic facilities and a religious ambience contributing to the overall experience of the journey. The annual Kanwar Yatra has the potential to be a big draw for pilgrim tourism, if adequate facilities and infrastructure are provided. This in turn will increase both domestic and international tourism and economic activities in the area, provide permanent and temporary jobs and improve livelihood opportunities for the local population. However, this should not disrupt the religious landscape of Haridwar town, which is the primary reason for which the space is considered sacred.

b) Adding Value to Ganga River Front:

The River Ganga has significant sacred and ecological importance to India. It is India’s holiest river and religious symbol that extends beyond its physical boundaries. Since the Kanwar Yatra revolves around collecting sacred water from the Ganga, the river is central to providing a rich and cultural experience to tourists. Hence, infrastructure elements included in the project need to increase the aesthetic, cultural and environmental value of the river front.

c) Space Organisation for Proposed Infrastructure:

The design concept considered for organization of proposed infrastructure at site includes the following:

i) Rest Areas: Rest areas are necessary to provide breaks to Kanwar Pilgrims during the long journey. They should be spacious enough to accommodate a large number of pilgrims. They should have a sturdy paving material, tree shade or possibility of installing temporary shading devices and should have provision of stands to place the kanvars carried by the pilgrims. Landscaping or planting of trees is needed to create a suitable sacred and ecological ambience for the yatra.

ii) Seating: Seating is important as it allows for rest and stimulates social interactions. Seating arrangements may be covered temporarily till the landscape matures with time and provides adequate shade. Seating can also be combined with platforms, kiosks and other features to facilitate enjoyment of the water front.

III) Providing Shopping Facilities to Tourists and Local Community: Provision for installation of fixed, semi fixed and mobile
shops on the side of Kanwar path, is included in the project.
iv) Toilets: Environmentally friendly and economically sustainable toilets complex that can serve high volumes of users, are to be constructed. Drinking water fountains should also be installed adjacent to the toilet complex. During Kanwar Mela, mobile toilets can also be installed to serve large numbers of pilgrims.
v) Bathing Facility: Simple and private bathing areas should be integrated into the toilet area. There should be separate women and men section in the bathing facility with adjacent changing areas. Additional water points should be made available for feet and hand washing.
vi) Recreation Facility: Open spaces should be designed and kept clear to allow for an array of informal activities. Spaces used during Kanwar Mela should also be able to cater to recreational purposes during normal period. Recreational options can include cricket, football, dance and music performances, fitness zones, yoga areas and spaces for lectures and speeches. These should all be encouraged to add to the cultural significance of the Kanwar Yatra.
vii) Medical Stations: During Kanwar Mela, easily accessible medical stations need to be conveniently placed, which should be adequately equipped to handle a large number of medical patients. After the Mela, these stations can act as food stall or used for any other purpose.
viii) Movement Access to the City: Connections from the town to the Kanwar path along the upper Ganga canal must be clear, logical and free of physical and psychological barriers. They need to have tourism signages directing and informing all types of visitors. Pedestrian access from the road should be wide and can be lined with food stalls and other services. Parking facility of vehicles should be easy to access, but not adjacent to pedestrian entrances as it can lead to noise pollution and can be an unsightly feature.
ix) Selection of Materials for Pavement of Kanwar Path: The choice of materials for pavement of Kanwar Path is extremely important for the cultural relevance, longevity, and comfort of travel for both the pilgrims and the tourists. Sandstone is most attractive and durable, but it is costly. Concrete is a popular choice as an inexpensive alternative to natural stone. Realistically, a mix of the two materials would balance the cost effectiveness.
x) Lighting: Lighting is essential for real and perceived safety along the pedestrian route. Lighting needs to be evenly distributed, avoiding overly dark or bright areas, using environmentally friendly solutions. Lighting can also highlight 'points of Interest' and key facilities. It needs to be ensured that the luminaires direct light downwards.
xii) Signages: Signages will provide informational linkages for visitors and local population at key locations of Kanwar path and thereby will create intellectual interest. They should educate the visitor at the perceivable and conceptual level, disseminating information regarding the significance of the pilgrim route and concerns related to its degradation.
xii) Hand Railing: Hand railing needs to be provided on the river side of the pathway for the safety of the pilgrims and for the health of the river and riverfront ecology. It should be simple, minimal and made from steel contributing to the cultural distinctness of context.
xiii) Maintenance: Maintenance of the Kanwar path is a pre-requisite for its sustainability. Paving must be intact and free from missing or cracked areas, bulbs for lighting must be checked regularly to avoid any dark areas along the path. Toilets, bathing areas and drinking fountains must be maintained at a high standard for a long lasting and quality user experience.

d) Landscaping in Project Area:

A variety of tree species should be planted on the sides of Kanwar path to give shades to pilgrims and tourists, decrease airborne pollutants, moderate microclimates and for an increase in environmental and landscape quality. Native and indigenous species with religious significance should be selected to create the required ambience. Certain species of trees are still revered and worshipped for their mythical and medicinal properties. Preservation or planting of tree species with socio-religious significance will add to the relevance and public ownership of the area, while aiding spiritual rituals and offering shade.

4. SUMMARY OF PROPOSED TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE WORKS

For finalizing the scope and locations of works to be taken up in the project, consultations were done with different stakeholders such as Government and Non Government organizations, traders associations, population in nearby localities and Kanwar devotees. The major works proposed in the project included the following:
i) Development of a 5.5 Km long pedestrian route or pathway for movement of pilgrims and tourists from near Mayapur Regulator within Haridwar town to Jathwara Bridge. In this stretch of Kanwar path, there is no vehicle movement. Therefore, this stretch is proposed to be developed only for pedestrian.
ii) Landscaping, sitting arrangement, murals, solid waste collection bins, etc. on the proposed pedestrian pathway of 5.5 Km. On the sides of this stretch, there will be parks and gardens, cultural activity areas with local handcraft bazaars, social activity areas for ceremonies like marriages, utility areas for permanent public convenience such as toilets, baths, small neighborhood shops, etc.
iii) Old heritage structures on the side of pathway will be restored.
iv) Providing lighting or illumination arrangement on the proposed pedestrian pathway of 5.5 Km length.
v) Providing safety hand railings on the pedestrian pathway on Upper Ganga canal side.
vi) At one location on the side of proposed pedestrian pathway before Lohe Ka Pul (Steel Bridge) on railway track near Jwalapur, a multi facility complex will be constructed, which will include a toilet complex, drinking water fountains, separate bathing facility and toilets for men and women, rest shelter, covered area for preparation and distribution of food, shelter for placement of kanwars, police control room, solid waste bins, compound wall with entrance gate, landscaping, etc.
vii) Construction of a foot over bridge over Railway track near Jwalapur to facilitate safe movement of Kanwar pilgrims.
viii) Installation of tourism signages on Kanwar path from Har Ki Pauri in Haridwar town to Mangalour Cross ahead of Roorkee town. Total length of the stretch of Kanwar path to be covered for the signage works is 40 Km.

5. LESSONS LEARNT IN THE PROJECT:

The following are the lessons learnt:

i) The essential tourism infrastructure for any tourist destination needs to include good approach road to the destination, basic infrastructure such as resting places, drinking water and toilet facilities and safety measures such as road and mobile phone connectivity to nearest police control rooms and health facilities.

ii) Obtaining land for construction of tourism infrastructure near a tourist destination is a major problem to be dealt with.

iii) Majority of tourists and pilgrims visit or use Kanwar Path for two small periods of about 15 days each in every year. Hence, questions were raised about justification on construction of permanent tourist infrastructure facilities. There were apprehensions that the facilities once constructed will remain unused for 11 months in a year.

iv) Requirement of tourism infrastructure during the periods of Kanwar Mela is very high. It is not possible to provide large numbers of permanent facilities for these periods. It is necessary that arrangements are made to provide high quality mobile toilets and bathing facilities during the period. Mobile toilets generally arranged are of low quality and tourists are generally reluctant to use them. Basic tourist facilities provided at any tourist destination must of high quality with use of modern technologies so that tourists find it convenient to use them.

v) Routine maintenance of the tourism infrastructure created in the project is an issue. Appropriate Government organisation will have to take responsibilities to operate and maintain the infrastructure created. Alternatively, the infrastructure can be given to private operators for operation and maintenance in PPP mode.

Disclaimer: The findings and conclusions presented in the paper are personal opinion of the author.