



## Paradigm of Transport in Touristic Puducherry: A Perspicuous Probe

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**Abstract:** The enchanting beauty of the union territory Puducherry, a vintage hamlet facing Bay of Bengal lies in its French touches that charm visitors, remnants of it having once been the largest French colony in India, is home to beautiful beaches, stately churches, spiritual centers, tree-lined boulevards, statues that dot the seaside promenade, French-inspired architecture, mouth watering culinary delights that are a blend of French and Tamil influences and street names that are more often ‘rue’ than road. Pondicherry is well connected to the rest of the nation and can be easily reached by the commonly preferred modes of travel namely road, rail and air. This research paper analyses and presents each of these modes in detail and their availability in facilitating the tourists’ inflow.

**Keywords:** Puducherry, Access, Tourists, Transport

### **Roadways:**

Puducherry is easily accessible from other important cities of the neighbouring states by road making it an ideal mode of travel for tourists. The nearest major city is Chennai – the capital of Tamil Nadu. There are 2 possible ways to approach Puducherry from Chennai by road. One is by using National Highway 45 and the other via the East Coast Road (ECR). Puducherry is approximately 160 kilometers away from Chennai. Frequent buses ply on a daily basis, both to and from Puducherry.

The official bus carrier of Puducherry is the Puducherry Road Transport Corporation (PRTC). Owing to huge demand and need, the Government of Puducherry has proposed to form Puducherry Urban Transport Agency (PUTA) to introduce more public transport buses. By 2020, it is expected that 100 more buses will be made available to the public to facilitate ease of travel.<sup>1</sup>

The following Table illustrates the road connectivity to Puducherry from various other locations operated by PRTC.

| S. No | Route No. | Time  | To                | State             |
|-------|-----------|-------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1.    | 502       | 17.30 | Mahe              | U.T of Puducherry |
| 2.    | 502       | 17.30 | Calicut           | Kerala            |
| 3.    | 506       | 18.25 | Nagercoil         | Tamil Nadu        |
| 4.    | 506       | 18.25 | Tirunelveli       | Tamil Nadu        |
| 5.    | 509       | 17.00 | Kumuli            | Kerala            |
| 6.    | 509       | 17.00 | Cumbum            | Tamil Nadu        |
| 7.    | 509       | 17.00 | Theni             | Tamil Nadu        |
| 8.    | 505A      | 12.15 | Bengaluru         | Karnataka         |
| 9.    | 505B      | 23.00 | Bengaluru         | Karnataka         |
| 10.   | 503A      | 09.00 | Tirupathi         | Andhra Pradesh    |
| 11.   | 504A      | 09.30 | Velankanni        | Tamil Nadu        |
| 12.   | 504B      | 23.30 | Karaikal          | U.T of Puducherry |
| 13.   | 504       | 05.20 | Nagapattinam      | Tamil Nadu        |
| 14.   | 501A (PP) | 05.40 | Chennai (Bypass ) | Tamil Nadu        |
| 15.   | 511B      | 04.00 | Chennai (ECR)     | Tamil Nadu        |
| 16.   | 511F      | 04.30 | Chennai (ECR)     | Tamil Nadu        |

Table 1. PRTC Time-Table<sup>2</sup>

Table 1 reveals that the PRTC is active in providing several reliable transportation services, connecting people of different states with Puducherry. The interstate connectivity is also strong in the sense that the places that are connected through PRTC are places of repute, regions that are commercially viable. This signifies that there is a regular and voluminous movement of people from other locales to Puducherry indicating great potential for domestic tourism at Puducherry. However, there are still many more popular places in other States that require connectivity with Puducherry. It is possible to ensure such connectivity with the existing road infrastructure. Table 2 illustrates the particulars about the roads available in Puducherry.

| S.No | Road Classification | Total length of road in kms | No.of bridges |
|------|---------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| 1.   | National Highways   | 41.628                      | 7             |
| 2.   | State Highways      | 36.277                      | 13            |
| 3.   | District Roads      | 179.401                     | 18            |
| 4.   | Rural Roads         | 183.038                     | 3             |

Table 2. Details of roads and bridges in Puducherry<sup>3</sup>

The director of PRTC has recently drafted a proposal for purchasing 2 air-conditioned Volvo buses to be solely utilized for tourism promotional activities in Puducherry. However, during the meeting, the Secretary for Tourism suggested that instead of going in for a high-end AC Volvo bus, a more economically priced AC bus would serve the purpose just as well.<sup>4</sup>

An interesting aspect of Puducherry is that the roads of the white town or the French quarters by the sea side continue to be named after French personalities or popular people during the 18<sup>th</sup> century French colonization. This Franco-Tamil

bilingual name board in Fig. 1 clearly depicts the undiluted confluence of French and Tamil as well as the close bond between the two vastly differing cultures.



Fig 1. Bilingual street names<sup>5</sup>

Commendably, the newly appointed Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry, Kiran Bedi has laid stress on a clean and green territory; she has outlined an ambitious proposal to green the highways to a length of 65.5 kms in Puducherry.<sup>6</sup> These praiseworthy initiatives will sequel a picturesque, progressive Puducherry in the years to follow.

### Railways

The railway station in Puducherry located at the south end of the town is well equipped with all necessary amenities to effectively cater to the travel requirements of people choosing its services. A special and significant event noted for posterity in the pages of history was the momentous arrival one morning of the universally acclaimed spiritual personality Mirra Alfassa or 'The Mother', the founder of Auroville at the Puducherry railway station on 29 March 1914. It is an undeniable fact that Alfassa's arrival permanently altered the destiny of the destination; it shot into limelight after the setting up of Auroville put it firmly on the map of the tourist world. On 29 March 2016, the 102<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of Mother Mirra Alfassa's visit was celebrated at a special function held at the Puducherry railway station by The World Peace Trust of Pondicherry and the Bangavani Trust of NabadwipDham West Bengal.<sup>7</sup> Puducherry has a smoothly functioning, well-connected railway network with various places in India, facilitating and encouraging domestic tourism by offering a comfortable and cost effective mode of travel. Table 3.3 gives the details of important places linked to Puducherry.



Fig 2. A view of the façade of the Puducherry Railway station<sup>8</sup>

The Tourist Information office is an efficiently run, important facility that caters to the information requirements of tourists and assists them in making travel

plans to suit their convenience. In Puducherry, the railway station has an information office that readily assists tourists who seek help by providing the required information and offering suggestions. This office is manned by a single person who often finds it difficult to handle a large number of tourists and has limited resources. As of now mere manual information is available from this office.<sup>9</sup> It is suggested that provision be made for modern facilities such as computers with internet facility, telefax and a telephone connection to enable the quick provision of a wider range of services.



Fig 3. Information office at the Railway station<sup>10</sup>

Statistics show that at least 50% of arriving tourists seek various information on popular sightseeing places, places of spiritual interest to visit, comfortable hotels to reside, good restaurants to dine, guided tours, transport facilities and the like. Most domestic tourists prefer to patronage rail services for the many conveniences it offers.

| S.No | Train No.  | From        | To                | Arrival | Departure | Days        |
|------|------------|-------------|-------------------|---------|-----------|-------------|
| 1.   | 16116 EXP  | Puducherry  | Chennai<br>Egmore | ***     | 05.35     | Daily       |
| 2.   | 56861 PASS | Villupuram  | Puducherry        | 07.25   | ***       | Daily       |
| 3.   | 16856 EXP  | Mangalore   | Puducherry        | 10.00   | ***       | Saturday    |
| 4.   | 56862 PASS | Puducherry  | Villupuram        | ***     | 08.10     | Daily       |
| 5.   | 12867 PASS | Howrah      | Puducherry        | 08.50   | ***       | Tuesday     |
| 6.   | 22403 EXP  | Puducherry  | Delhi             | ***     | 09.05     | Wednesday   |
| 7.   | 12255 EXP  | Bengaluru   | Puducherry        | 07.50   | ***       | Saturday    |
| 8.   | 56037 PASS | Chennai     | Puducherry        | 11.05   | ***       | Daily       |
| 9.   | 56041 PASS | Tirupathi   | Puducherry        | 14.15   | ***       | Daily       |
| 10.  | 12898 EXP  | Bhubaneswar | Puducherry        | 13.20   | ***       | Wednesday   |
| 11.  | 12868 EXP  | Puducherry  | Howrah            | ***     | 12.30     | Wednesday   |
| 12.  | 56042 PASS | Puducherry  | Tirupathi         | ***     | 13.25     | Daily       |
| 13.  | 56863 PASS | Villupuram  | Puducherry        | 15.10   | ***       | Daily       |
| 14.  | 56038 PASS | Puducherry  | Chennai<br>Egmore | ***     | 15.15     | Daily       |
| 15.  | 56864 PASS | Puducherry  | Villupuram        | ***     | 16.00     | Daily       |
| 16.  | 16855 EXP  | Puducherry  | Mangalore         | ***     | 16.35     | Thursday    |
| 17.  | 56865 PASS | Villupuram  | Puducherry        | 18.25   | ***       | Daily       |
| 18.  | 12897 EXP  | Puducherry  | Bhubaneswar       | ***     | 18.30     | Wednesday   |
| 19.  | 22404 EXP  | Delhi       | Puducherry        | 18.45   | ***       | Tuesday     |
| 20.  | 56866 PASS | Puducherry  | Villupuram        | ***     | 19.35     | Daily       |
| 21.  | 16115 EXP  | Chennai     | Puducherry        | ***     | 22.30     | Daily       |
| 22.  | 12256 EXP  | Puducherry  | Bengaluru         | ***     | 21.00     | Saturday    |
| 23.  | 11005 EXP  | Puducherry  | Dadar             | 08.05   | ***       | Tue,Wed,Sun |

Table 3. Train Time-Table (Puducherry bound trains)<sup>11</sup>

Rail transport is an important facility that connects people travelling from one destination to another. Presently, Puducherry is connected with a few cities in India. As part of future expansion plans, Southern Railways proposes to connect Puducherry with Kakinada – a city in Andhra Pradesh, by making arrangements for a direct train to link the two places. The existing Circar Express that connects Chennai and Kakinada Port railway station (close to Yanam) will be extended up to Puducherry after the track doubling work at the Chennai-Villupuram section is completed.<sup>12</sup>

### **Airways**

The airport at Pondicherry was inaugurated in the year 1989<sup>13</sup> and is located 7 kilometers away from the city.<sup>14</sup> Several acres of land were acquired for the development of the airport and a sum of Rs.2.70 crores was paid by way of compensation to landowners for property acquisition.<sup>15</sup> For many years before the setting up of the airport, Puducherry managed its tourism and travel activities without air travel facilities or an airport causing much inconvenience to travellers.

However, with steady growth in the economy and owing to the increasing travel patterns of the business and leisure segment, the need for an airport was strongly felt. The commencement of the airport operations began in the year 2012. Sadly, the airport was devastated by the severe tropical cyclonic storm ‘Thane’ which caused extensive damage compelling the airport to suspend its operations for a few months. The estimated cost incurred to fix the miscellaneous damages at the airport due to the impact of the cyclone worked up to around Rs.6,60,129.35/-.<sup>16</sup>



Fig 4. The Poignant Puducherry airport<sup>17</sup>

Puducherry Airports Authority has taken up several proactive steps to maintain the standards of the airport in offering high quality commercial services by soliciting the counsel of private consultants who are specialists in areas like landscaping, facilities at terminals, setting up of eateries and food counters such as snack bars, hiring of air-conditioned cars, and for other operational tasks.

Puducherry airport has a total length of 1500 meters and width of 30 meters; to ensure high quality of the runway surface it has been given an asphalt finish. It has the potential to cater to 300 passengers at a time. The first operational flight offering all convenient travelling facilities was by SpiceJet plying between Bangalore and Puducherry, Flight operations commenced on January 17, 2013. Owing to ‘unviable passenger’ traffic, the airlines decided to withdraw its services from January 31, 2014. The Government of Puducherry held discussions on February 3, 2014 with the

management of SpiceJet and requested them to resume their services. However, SpiceJet demanded a 30 percent seat assurance in order for it to be commercially viable for them to resume their services.<sup>18</sup>

Enjoying the status of a prime tourist destination, Puducherry was initially greatly hampered by the absence of air connectivity, a significant portion of travellers being foreign tourists for whom air travel would be most convenient. The Tourism Minister of Puducherry opined that,

***“The growth of tourism and economic activity in and around Puducherry, is greatly affected by the lack of connectivity. The State government has been taking all possible steps to quickly commence commercial operations at the airport”***

Though several attempts were made to ensure prompt and reliable air travel services, yet another factor that resulted in a lull in the inflow of tourists was the non-operation of Alliance Air from Bangalore to Puducherry. Alliance Air decided to stop its operations owing to ‘payment issues’. Alliance Air had been active from April 2014 and chartered flights 6 days a week. Subsequently, the Government of Puducherry requested the Aviation Ministry to commence its operations as Puducherry was fast approaching the peak tourism season. Any delay in the provision of adequate air travel facilities would greatly impact the inflow of tourists to the popular destination. The prime reason for the pause in operations was the demand for the settlement of Rs. 2 crores by Alliance Air as viability gap fund. Based on this demand, Government of Puducherry had earlier released Rs. 1 crore but held back the balance payment due to disputes over the viability gap fund.

In fact, the study reveals that there had been no formal agreement between the Government and the airlines and hence no basis for the Government to hold back the dues to the carrier. After facing a crisis during February 2014 when SpiceJet stopped its operations, the Government of Puducherry geared up to tackle the situation by launching a tourism promotional scheme called Viability Gap Funding scheme. As per this scheme, the Government proposed Rs.1000 as an offer for an aggregate of 200 seats sold on a daily basis. Despite the generous offer, the airlines completely cut back its flight operations and diverted its route to the Bengaluru – Mysuru sector.<sup>19</sup>

The Government of Puducherry sought to have discussions with Air Pegasus that was shuttling between Bengaluru and Thiruvananthapuram, it requested them to include Puducherry en route. The Government of Puducherry also approached PawanHans helicopters to open up flight services between Puducherry-Karaikal-Puducherry and Chennai-Karaikal-Chennai segment.<sup>20</sup> Last year, Sri. V. Narayanasamy who is the present Chief Minister of Puducherry conveyed the news that the Government of Puducherry and the Ministry of Civil Aviation, Union Government had jointly signed a MoU with regard to reviving the airport project and sought to make it operational by January 2017. The Ministry has assured that a 70-seater aircraft would soon be operated from Puducherry to Bengaluru via Tiruchi to maximize the occupancy. The Ministry had also suggested the commencement of flight services from Puducherry to other important cities like Tirupati, Coimbatore, Kochi, and Hyderabad in the near future.<sup>21</sup>

While the above section throws light on the various modes of transportation to the destination, emphasis should also be duly given to the Public transport system (PT) in the destination. PT in a destination refers to the vehicles that the common public and tourists alike use to move around within a destination; to go from one area to another by bus, auto, train, ferry and so on excluding the chartered buses that are contracted for city tours.<sup>22</sup> Puducherry has several PT systems that are primarily used by the locals for their cost-effectiveness, it is yet to gain popularity amongst tourists.

The above modes of transport notwithstanding, a mention must also be made of the feasibility of the development and operation of transport via waterways, by navigation of the canals along with the rivers Godavari and Krishna. Though Puducherry is yet to have a water transport system, the Government has proposed to launch a ferry service system that connects Chennai-Puducherry-Karaikal. This initiative is being suggested with the assistance of the Shipping Ministry under its unique flagship program 'Sagarmala'.<sup>23</sup> The Puducherry Government's effort in including Puducherry as a tourism center under 'Swadesh Darshan Scheme' offered by Ministry of Tourism, Government of India is laudable.

### **Conclusion**

Addressing the importance of tourism infrastructure and the challenges of connecting destinations with tourists, this study reveals the significant roles of railways and roadways in fostering tourism in Puducherry and emphasizes the scope for airways and waterways for facilitating better connectivity to further boost the rapidly growing tourism sector, touted to be one of the major drivers of economic growth.

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