

Report: Indian Roads Congress Annual Session 2025 at Bhubaneswar

The Indian Roads Congress (IRC), India's principal authority on road engineering and a National Committee of the World Road Association (PIARC), convened its Annual Session from 7th to 10th November, 2025 at Bhubaneswar (Capital of Odisha State). The gathering reaffirmed IRC's central role in shaping the country's road policy, standards, research agenda and professional practice by bringing together Government leaders, researchers, industry experts and practitioners to review progress, adopt new guidance and set priorities for the year ahead.

Purpose and Scope of the Session

The IRC Annual Session, held each year in November-December, serves as the platform for a comprehensive set of activities: approval and refinement of IRC Codes of Practice, specifications, guidelines and manuals; election of the Council for the coming year; review of national road research initiatives; and decisions on administrative and policy matters. The session also provides an intensive technical forum where current challenges, innovations and best practices in road, bridge and tunnel engineering are debated and disseminated to stakeholders across the sector.

This year's programme was deliberately broad and practical in focus. The theme of this session—"Key Advancements in Highway Technology and Policy"—reflects the evolving mandate of the IRC. It targeted three interlinked aims: updating technical standards in line with evolving international practice, exchanging research findings and field experiences that improve delivery and safety and strengthening partnerships between government, academia and industry to accelerate technology adoption.

Attendance and Representation

Attendance reflected the cross-sectoral nature of road infrastructure work. Delegates included senior officials from federal and state road agencies, elected members of the IRC, faculty from engineering and research institutions, scientists from highway laboratories and related research bodies and senior representatives from construction and consulting firms. In addition, manufacturers, suppliers of materials and equipment and specialists in testing and investigation were present. This mix ensured technical sessions and policy deliberations were grounded in real-world experience and practical constraints.

Inaugural Session and Key Addresses

The Annual Session was inaugurated* by the Hon'ble Minister of Road Transport & Highways, Government of India. The inauguration was attended by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Odisha and the Hon'ble Minister for Law, Works and Excise of Odisha, together with the President and other office bearers of the IRC, senior Odisha government officials and Shri D. Sarangi**, Vice President of PIARC. Shri Sarangi delivered a concise, structured address that clarified PIARC's objectives and activities, highlighted the long-standing collaboration between PIARC and the IRC and described recent efforts to strengthen international cooperation. His remarks underscored the value of global knowledge exchange for improving national standards and operational practice.

Governance and Administrative Work

The session included two meetings of the IRC Council, where members discussed governance matters, strategic priorities and the year's administrative decisions. The

Highway Research Board convened to review ongoing research projects, prioritize new work items, and recommend ways to better translate laboratory findings into field practice. A Business Meeting addressed membership, finance and the calendar of IRC publications. Elections were conducted to select the Council for the forthcoming year, ensuring continuity while introducing fresh leadership perspectives where appropriate.

Technical Programme and Knowledge Exchange

A major feature of the programme was the extensive technical content. Organisers scheduled 19 technical sessions*** covering topics spanning pavement design and materials, bridge and tunnel engineering, construction methods, maintenance strategies, traffic and safety management, non-motorised transport integration, asset management and the use of digital technologies for planning and operations. Presenters included departmental officers, consultants, contractors, academics and scientists, as well as equipment and materials manufacturers. Each session combined formal presentations with interactive discussions, enabling lively exchange between researchers, field engineers and suppliers.

The technical sessions were effective at disseminating newly approved or draft IRC documents, presenting recent national research findings and introducing relevant international developments that influence design and construction practice. Sessions on materials and machinery showcased innovations that promise faster construction cycles and improved durability, while discussions on maintenance highlighted cost-effective interventions to prolong asset life and reduce whole-life costs. Bridge and tunnel sessions emphasised safety, inspection protocols and lifecycle approaches suited to India's varied geotechnical and climatic conditions. Importantly, the sessions also solicited user feedback, helping IRC committees refine guidelines and identify areas for further research.

Exhibition and Industry Engagement

Complementing the technical programme was a large and well-curated technical exhibition#. Manufacturers, product developers, state government departments and industry associations displayed technologies, construction equipment, testing instruments and new material formulations. The exhibition created an accessible setting for practical demonstrations and business discussions, which facilitated rapid knowledge transfer between suppliers and end users.

PIARC\$ maintained a prominent presence in the exhibition with a dedicated stall that attracted significant attention. Visitors engaged with PIARC stall representatives on topics ranging from international best practices to opportunities for collaborative projects and knowledge sharing. The stall functioned as an effective gateway for participants seeking to deepen their engagement with global road engineering networks.

Outcomes and Forward Agenda

The Annual Session concluded with several tangible outcomes. IRC approved updates and new documents that will guide design, construction and maintenance practice across India. Council decisions established priorities for the coming year, emphasizing enhanced research-to-practice pathways, the integration of digital tools for asset management, and the acceleration of greener, more resilient construction methods. The Highway Research Board identified priority studies aimed at improving

pavement performance under heavy axle loads and at advancing low-carbon material usage.

Equally important were the informal outcomes: strengthened networks among government agencies, academia and industry; clearer channels for manufacturers to pilot new products; and a renewed commitment from participants to adopt and promote the standards and guidance emerging from IRC deliberations.

Conclusion

The IRC Annual Session in Bhubaneswar was a substantive and productive event that reinforced the IRC's leadership in shaping India's road sector. By combining governance decisions, rigorous technical exchange, research review and industry demonstrations, the session advanced both policy and practice. The involvement of PIARC added an international dimension that will help align Indian practice with global trends. The knowledge exchanged and the documents approved during the session will support safer, more durable and more sustainable road infrastructure across the country in the coming years.

* Photograph of dais during inaugural function and photograph of Hon'ble Minister, Road Transport & Highways, Govt. of India, delivering his address during the inaugural session

** Photograph of Shri D Sarangi delivering his address

*** Photograph of one Technical Session with good attendance

Photograph of Technical Exhibition Stall

\$ Photograph of PIARC stall