

● **FASTER INTERNET**

Land along highways, rail tracks may be reserved for telecom infra

Some officials suggest telecom towers be turned into smart poles. These poles not only have streetlighting, but also base transceiver stations, Wi-Fi hotspots and CCTVs, among others

RISHI RANJAN KALA
New Delhi, June 13

THE GOVERNMENT IS working on a proposal that allows having dedicated land for telecom infrastructure like optical fibre cable ducts and towers along national highways and rail tracks, in a bid to increase broadband penetration and internet speed.

A committee of secretaries (CoS), headed by telecom secretary Aruna Sundararajan, has been working on a policy proposal under which the Centre wants to create dedicated land pockets along new national highways and rail tracks for setting up such telecom infrastructure, sources said.

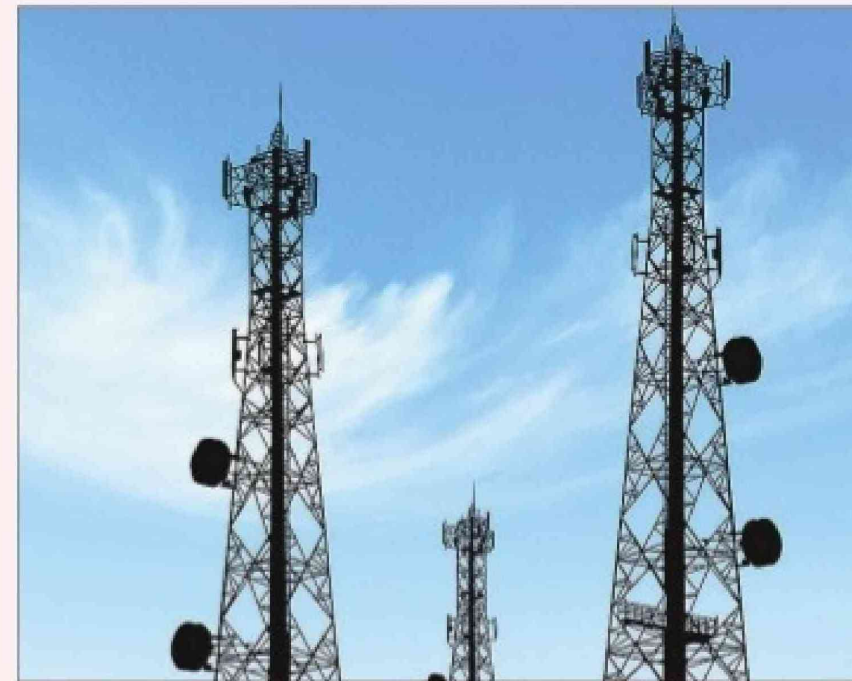
The CoS, set up in January 2018, also includes secretaries from road transport and highways, power and petroleum as well as member (engineering), railways.

“CoS has been working over this for sometime. Road trans-

port and highways has agreed to provide land along highways under construction, which will be allocated through bidding to private players by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT). The successful entity will provide space to telecom players to lay their optical fibres and set up towers. A certain amount from revenues will be earmarked for recovering the cost of land and for maintenance purposes,” a senior government official said.

Talks are on with railways for a similar arrangement along rail tracks, the official said, adding that generally mobile networks are not strong along railway lines or highways and such a plan could help sort this out. Also this will open avenues for various services like ordering food on trains or car recovery and maintenance services along national highways.

Another official said,



“There are plans to spread this to state highways, but that’s for the future. At present, the government wants to run this project on central government land and analyse its feasibility. Some pilot projects may also be launched to check if has potential.”

Some officials also suggested telecom towers be turned into smart poles. These poles not only have street lighting, but also base transceiver stations (BTS), Wi-Fi hotspot (in case it is in city limits), CCTVs, etc, he added.

“Not all towers have to be smart poles. Although they are

costlier than normal towers, they can be put along highways running through population clusters. They can provide a host of services not just for traffic police and government agencies, but also for citizens like Wi-Fi access,” the official noted.

Recently, Trai in its recommendations to the DoT for the new national telecom policy (2018), suggested making provisions in the Indian Telegraph Right of Way Rules, 2016 for establishment of common service ducts, utility corridors in all new city and highway road projects for telecom infrastructure.