

29 October 2025

Roads

Back in the game; KNR, Dilip, PNC, Ashoka to be beneficiaries

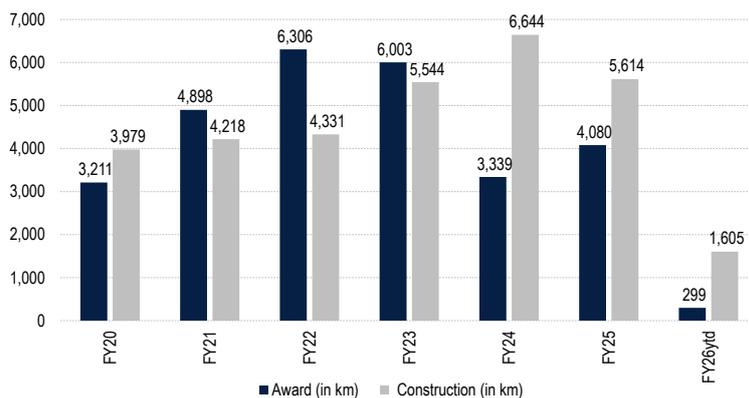
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From FY24, NHAI road awardings have significantly dipped with a negligible ~299km in ytd FY26. Limited awarding led to keen competition and a drop in road orders leading to weak revenue growth and compressed EBITDA margins for listed road contractors. However, we expect matters to turn around with NHAI tightening bidding norms and focusing on a PPP model. In Jul, NHAI released a list of 124 highways spanning ~6,400km worth ~Rs3.5trn to be awarded in FY26 with tenders for 46 projects already floated. Our analysis of these 46 tenders on LA status, approvals and various clearances indicates that 23 (~Rs408bn) are at an advanced stage with PPPAC/CCEA approvals, major land acquisitions (>75% notified u/s 3G) and maximum EC/forest/wildlife clearances in place. We expect the awardings to be rolled out in three months and set the ball rolling for the next wave of NHAI awarding. Leading road developers such as PNC, KNR, Ashoka Buildcon and Dilip Buildcon are expected to benefit given proven track records especially in PPP projects, fortified net worth and cash position with the recent rounds of asset monetisation.

Road contract awardings have decreased from FY24, after having peaked in FY23. More specifically, awardings in FY26 ytd have come down significantly to just of 299km.

Fig 1 – Deceleration in road awardings



Source: Anand Rathi Research

Muted road awardings in the last couple of years are attributed to the shift in the NHAI's focus on asset monetisation, debt repayment, cost overruns, land acquisition issues, delays due to general and state elections, etc.

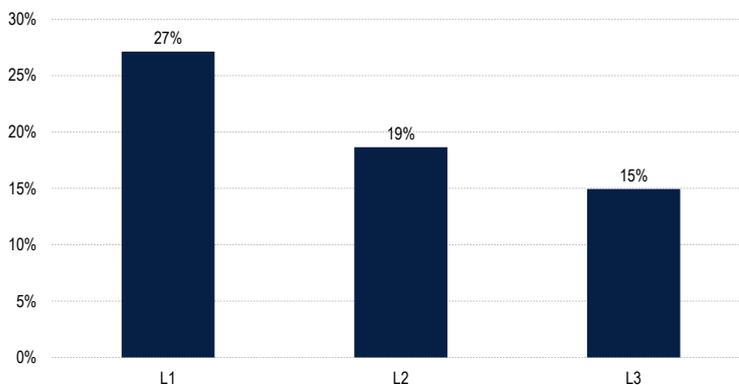
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Muted awardings and easing of bidding norms by the NHAI led to the entry of others heightening competition. The keen competition could be seen from the fact only two projects were awarded at a premium (of 25 EPC projects awarded in FY26 ytd. More specifically, 10 projects were awarded at a discount of 35% or more, with with highest discount being 69%. Also, the average L3 discount at 15% indicates deep entrenched competition and discount bidding.

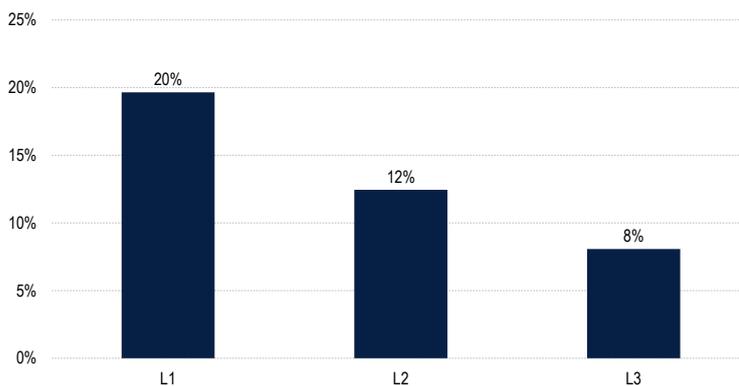
Fig 2 – EPC projects – discount bidding



Source: Anand Rathi Research

Similarly, analysis of 11 HAM projects awarded in FY26Ytd show that all the projects were awarded at discount with L1 discount hovering ~20%. The aggressiveness was more visible in EPC projects as ticket sizes in EPC were relatively smaller (19 out of 25 EPC being below ~Rs5bn).

Fig 3 – Discount bidding in HAM projects as well



Source: Anand Rathi Research

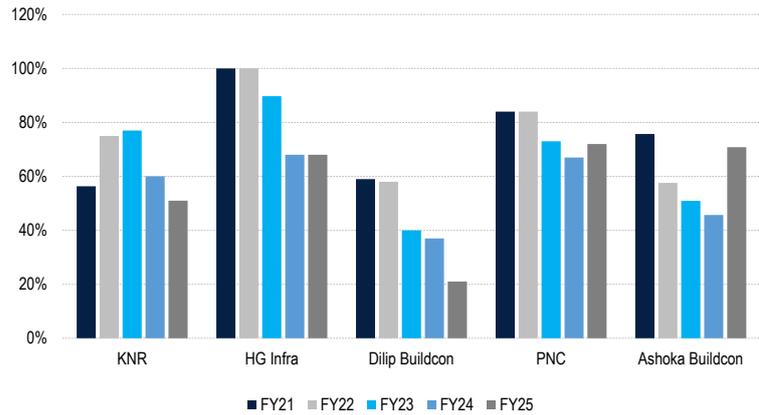
The slowdown in weak road awarding and vigorous road bidding was also visible in performances of listed entities. Eg, the companies we cover were awarded only five projects (of ~Rs46bn) by the NHAI since FY24. KNR and Dilip Buildcon saw their shares of road orders falling below ~25% due to their overdependence on NHAI projects.

Fig 4 – Weak orders from the NHAI

Inflows (Rs bn) (FY24 to FY26 ytd)	NHAI	Roads	Overall	Roads, as % of overall
KNR	11.5	16.5	67.9	24.2%
PNC	-	76.0	128.6	59.1%
Dilip	5.5	16.8	110.0	15.3%
HG Infra	14.7	71.6	151.5	47.2%
Ashoka	13.9	74.6	144.7	51.6%
Total	45.6	255.5	602.6	42.4%

Source: Company * Excludes MoRTH

Proportions of road OBs to entire OBs have declined as companies sought to diversify to solar, BESS, MDO and other segments. Companies such as Ashoka Buildcon and PNC saw a lesser impact as they secured road projects from state governments, local authorities and overseas clients.

Fig 5 – Roads, as % to overall OBs, has come down

Source: Company, Anand Rathi Research

This also cut into listed companies' revenue growth with single-digit revenue CAGRs for KNR, PNC and Dilip Buildcon. Ashoka and HG did better due to execution in railways, irrigation, water, BESS and solar projects.

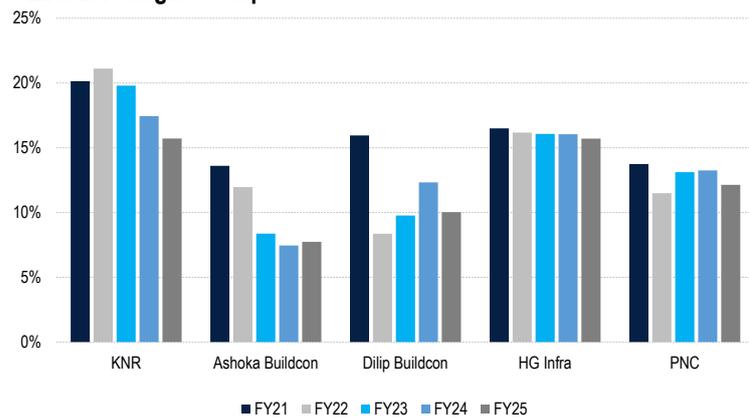
Fig 6 – Weak revenue growth for NHAI road-dependent players

Revenue (Rs bn)	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	CAGR, %
KNR	26.6	32.1	36.4	39.6	32.3	5.0
PNC	49.2	61.3	69.9	74.0	50.6	0.7
Dilip Buildcon	92.1	90.1	101.2	105.4	90.0	-0.6
HG Infra	25.3	36.2	44.2	51.2	60.5	24.3
Ashoka Buildcon	38.2	46.4	63.7	77.3	70.6	16.6

Source: Company

The impact of muted road awardings and vigorous competition reflected in EBITDA margins of listed companies as well with EBITDA margin compression for all the companies we cover. Ashoka and Dilip Buildcon bore the maximum impact, an almost 600bp compression in margins from FY21 to FY25.

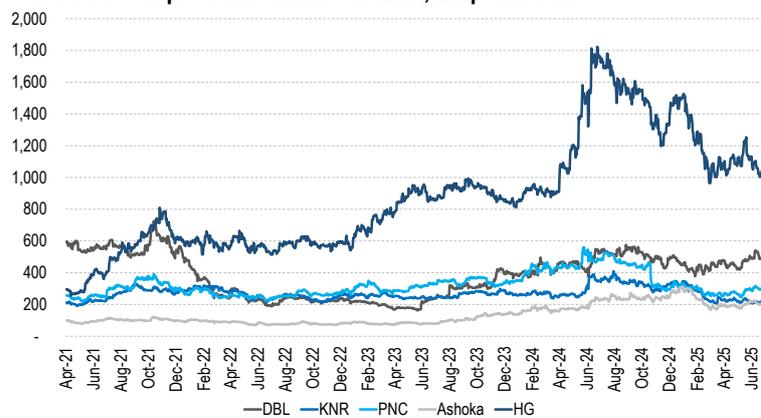
Fig 7 – EBITDA margins compress



Source: Company

The impact was also seen in share-price movements, with NHAI-dependent players like KNR and Dilip seeing stock-price CAGRs of respectively (~4%) and 1% from Apr'21 to Jun'25. PNC, being road heavy, was also impacted by a price return CAGR of a meagre ~4%. HG Infra and Ashoka, with sustained inflows due to diversification to Railways, BESS and solar, saw prices grow respectively 19% and 36%.

Fig 8 – Muted stock price movement for KNR, Dilip and PNC



Source: BSE

However, we expect the situation to improve for the sector with higher growth and better margins

The NHAI has tightened bidding

Seeing the keener competition and ingress of others, the NHAI tightened technical and financial norms in both EPC and PPP spaces to curb relentless bidding. Key changes the NHAI has brought about are

- Higher net-worth required
- Additional performance security
- Revised land acquisition and clearance requirements
- Emphasis on PPP projects.

Fig 9 – Tightening norms by the NHAI

Changes	Comments
Net worth required increased from 15% to 20% of BPC (Annexure B)	Increase in net worth required shall disqualify new entrants with thin capital, and helps reduce aggressive bidding
Available net worth to be reduced for PPP projects at hand (incl. L1) (Annexure B)	Companies with disproportionate PPP projects in comparison to net worth shall be ineligible to bid. The move will discourage the number of bidders and encourage efficient capital use.
Increase in APS required beyond 10% discounted bid (Annexure C)	The change reiterates NHAI commitment to deter aggressive bidding
Removal of APS cap of 3% of BPC (Annexure C)	
Revised land acquisition and other clearances required (Annexure D)	The synchronised land acquisition and clearance requirements have been introduced to avoid delays in tendering and awardings, construction and contractual disputes.
Emphasis on PPP projects and changes in model concession agreements	Emphasis on large PPP projects is to attract private investors and serious contractors with necessary PQs. The NHAI is in the process of amending the BOT model concession agreement w.r.t. land acquisition, termination payments, etc. Further, the government plans to modify the current cap of 40% VGF to attract BOT feasibility.

Source: NHAI, MoRTH

NHAI awarding should go up

In Jul'25, the NHAI released a list of 124 highways spanning ~6,300km to be awarded in FY26 (Annexure F). Our study of NHAI tenders identified 46 of the above 124 highway tenders to be floated (Annexure G). We analysed each tender with respect to updated land acquisitions status, PPPAC/CCEA approvals and other clearances.

Based on our analysis of these 46 tenders, **we expect 23 advanced-stage tenders of ~Rs408bn to be awarded in three months (Annexure A)**. Our optimism is driven by the following:

- Land acquisition status at an advanced stage. All four BOT and two EPC projects have at least 80% LA, whereas 12 of 17 HAM have at least 80% LA
- All BOT and 13 HAM projects are PPPAC-approved. The other four HAMs don't require such approval.
- Projects currently under CCEA/SFC to get the nod in the next 30-45 days.
- Only one of the five clearances (EC/wildlife/forest/railway/waterway) are awaited; the rest are either received or not required. Awaited clearance, if any, is at the final stage as all initial studies, site visits and public hearings have been completed.

These awardings of 23 tenders represent green-shoots after two years of muted awardings and will set the ball rolling for a new wave of awardings of 124 highways, coupled with disciplined bidding, systematic land acquisitions, in-hand clearances and serious contractors.

KNR, PNC, Dilip Buildcon are major beneficiaries

This coming wave is expected to benefit leading road developers based on their core competency, eligibility and risk-taking capacity. Those like KNR, HG Infra and Ashoka Buildcon are expected to gain from HAM and EPC awarding, whereas contractors such as PNC, Dilip Buildcon, GR Infra and Adani will benefit from large BOT projects.

The commentaries below reflect our view on the companies we cover.

KNR (Mkt. cap Rs53bn, Hold, 22% potential). Leading beneficiary

Being highly sensitive to roads, expected to win NHAI projects of ~Rs30bn-40bn this fiscal will have a positive impact on growth and margins. Besides, back-to-back EPC arrangements with BOT players such as Adani, Patel, Cube, etc., will stand it in good stead. We believe the present valuation is based on an implied 14.6x Sep'27 construction earnings, which has yet to be built into the NHAI awardings, given its strong governance, coming monetisation of four HAM assets and net cash balance sheet.

Dilip Buildcon (Rs78bn, Hold, 35%). Front-runner

On a winning spree with five contracts of ~Rs62bn post Q1 and recent asset monetisation, D Buildcon is a front runner in the coming NHAI awardings given its history of winning ~10% of overall HAM awardings. It has already won the Paramakudi-Ramanathapuram HAM, the second to be awarded of the 124-highway list. Expected NHAI win of ~Rs40-60bn this fiscal will trigger margin and market price rises. We have factored in a ~110bp expansion in EBITDA margins over FY25-28 and a TP of ~Rs648, based

9x Sep'27 construction earnings, monetised HAM assets and its MDO business.

PNC (Rs72bn, Buy, 33%). Niche BOT beneficiary

During the muted NHAI awarding phase, the company stood out by winning highways and elevated projects from state authorities, and maintained its road OB. Its ~Rs26bn cash gives it a strong financial position. This, coupled with experience in PPP (esp. BOT), puts it in a formidable position to win coming big-ticket BOT awardings. Management aims at Rs70bn+ road orders this fiscal from the NHAI and other awarders. We have factored in a ~9.3% EPC revenue CAGR over FY25-28 and a TP of ~Rs372, based on 10x Sep'27 construction earnings, 1x monetisation value of PPP assets and 1.25x of existing investments in PPP.

Ashoka Buildcon (Rs54bn, Hold, 7%). Moderate impact

The increase in road awardings will improve its margins to ~9.3-9.5% from FY25's ~7.7%. The ongoing monetisation of 16 HAM and BOT will enable company to provide an exit to SBI Macquarie, repay significant debt and still be left with adequate capital to win awards. It aims at road orders of Rs50bn+ from the NHAI, The MoRTH and other state authorities with selective bidding for BOT. Our TP of Rs204 is based on a sum-of-parts valuation where the EPC business is valued on 8x Sep'27 earnings.

HG Infra (Rs60bn, Buy, 46%). Limited beneficiary from roads

The company has lately shifted its focus toward BESS, solar and ISTS projects. Roads now are 66% of its OB and we expect the company to restrict its bidding to NHAI projects as it strategizes to restrict roads to 30-40% of its OB. Hence, it will have limited benefit from increased road awardings, though it has a stronghold in other sectors like renewables and the Railways.

Annexure

Annexure A – Advanced stage tenders

Fig 10 – Advanced stage tenders of ~Rs418bn to be awarded in three months

Project	Length (kms)	BPC (Rs bn)	PPCAC appraisal	Final Approval status	Type	LA status (3G)	Comments
Zirakpur Bypass	19.2	13.3	Y	Y	HAM	98%	
Badvel Nellore	108.1	28.4	Y	Y	BOT	100%	NWDL submission pending
Vakalapudi Light House to Annavaram	40.6	10.4	NA	Y	HAM	100%	
Jodhpur elevated road	8.0	9.4	NA	Y	HAM	100%	
Old Pune to Boramani Naka	10.0	8.2	NA	Y	HAM	100%	Elevated flyover
Nashik Phata to Alandi	17.0	42.6	Y	Y	BOT	92%	
Alandi to Khed	13.0	31.8	Y	Y	BOT	96%	
Marakkam Puducherry	46.0	11.8	Y	Y	HAM	59%	
Bhubaneshwar Ring Road Pkg 1	40.7	17.2	Y	Y	HAM	93%	
Bhubaneshwar Ring Road Pkg 2	30.3	14.0	Y	Y	HAM	92%	
Bhubaneshwar Ring Road Pkg 3	40.3	11.9	Y	Y	HAM	94%	
STRR NH948A Pkg 1	79.0	26.4	Y	CCEA approval soon	HAM	97%	
STRR NH948A Pkg 2	65.3	27.8	Y	CCEA approval soon	HAM	95%	
Bangalore Chennai Expwy (Phase IV)	8.1	9.9	NA	Submitted to CCEA	HAM	97%	Elevated corridor
Sherpur Kanhuli	10.0	3.6	NA	Y	EPC	85%	Waterway clearance reqd
Areraj - Bettiah - Shahebganj	78.9	38.2	Y	Y	HAM	53%	MoEF clearance awaited for 1 pkg
Gudebellur to Mahabubnagar	80.0	19.6	Y	CCEA approval soon	HAM	97%	
Thiruvarur Bypass	14.9	6.3	NA	SFC approval soon	EPC	92%	Railway permission soon
Jagtial Karimnagar	58.9	19.8	Y	CCEA approval soon	BOT	91%	Railway permission soon
Armoor Jagtial	63.3	13.5	Y	CCEA approval soon	HAM	67%	
Jagtial Mancherial	68.3	15.7	Y	CCEA approval soon	HAM	68%	
Bodeli Pkg IV	47.5	14.4	Y	CCEA approval soon	HAM	100%	Forest permission soon
Bodeli Pkg VI	60.2	13.8	Y	CCEA approval soon	HAM	40%	
Total	1007.7	408.0					

Source: NHAI, PPPAC, Anand Rath Research *NA – Not applicable

Annexure B – Revised net worth criteria

Fig 11 – Available net worth criteria

Particulars	Change in provision	Implications
Limit on single/individual project size	Required net worth has been increased from 15% to 20% of BPC	Companies require 33% more net worth to bid for same project value.
	Available net worth should be equal to or more than required net worth (as above)	Addition of this clause further restricts companies to bid maximum value of HAM projects cumulatively which is arrived below
Limit on cumulative/multiple project size	Available net worth = A – (B * 20 %)	•5x of the net worth further reduced by balance PPP projects costs at hand.
	Where A = net worth , B = balance value of PPP works	•PPP projects can be HAM, BOT, BOOT, including where company is L1.

Source: NHAI, MoRTH, Anand Rath Research

Annexure C – APS requirements

Fig 12 – APS requirements

Particulars	Previous circular	Circular of 30 th Apr'25
Discount of 0-10%	Nil	Nil
Discount of 11-20%	Nil	0.1% of BPC for every 1% of BPC below 11% and up to 20%
Discount below 20%	20%×[80%×Authority costs-BPC]	0.2% for every 1% of BPC below 21%, in addition to 1% calculated above
Capping	3% of BPC	No cap

Source: NHAI, Anand Rathi Research

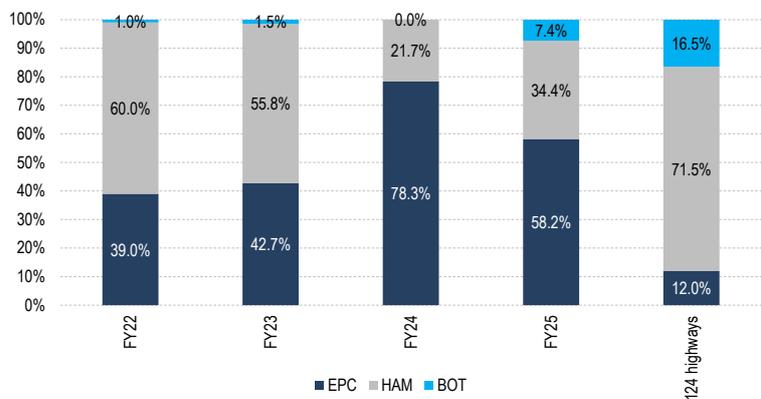
Annexure D - Revised land acquisition and clearances requirements

To avoid delays in awardings, construction and contractual disputes, the NHAI came out with synchronised land acquisition requirements. The revised requirements require wildlife and environment clearances to be in place before receipt of bids and ~90% of the RpW length should have been notified u/s 3D before receipts of bids. Further, receipt of forest clearance and 90% of the land notified u/s 3G are prerequisites before giving LoA.

Annexure E - Focus back on PPP projects with BOT making a comeback

- In the previous awarding cycle under the Bharatmala Pariyojana (BMP), emphasis shifted toward commitment-heavy EPC projects (~55.8%) and HAM (~42.6%). BOT contributed a meagre (~1.6%). This led to a surge in debt by the NHAI and stiffer competition.
- To attract private investors and serious contractors with necessary PQs, the NHAI is in the process of amending the BOT model concession agreements, w.r.t. land acquisition, termination payments, etc. Further, government plans to modify the current cap of 40% VGF would attract BOT feasibility.
- Shifting the intent toward BOT can also be reflected in the proposed list of 124 highways where the share of BOT is proposed at ~17%.

Fig 13 – Sharper focus on PPP especially BOT (in km)



Source: Anand Rathi Research

Annexure F – Proposed 124 highways of NHAI

In Jul'25, the NHAI released a list of 124 highways (spanning ~6,300km) with capital costs of ~Rs3.5trn, to be awarded in FY26. The list includes all

projects of at least Rs5bn. The following table details the break-up of the 124 highways. UP, Bihar and Maharashtra together account for 40% of the projects by value.

Fig 14 – 124 highways proposed to be awarded in FY26.

Particulars	Projects	Length (km)	Rs bn
BOT	13	1,052	639
HAM	81	4,519	2,434
EPC	31	766	397

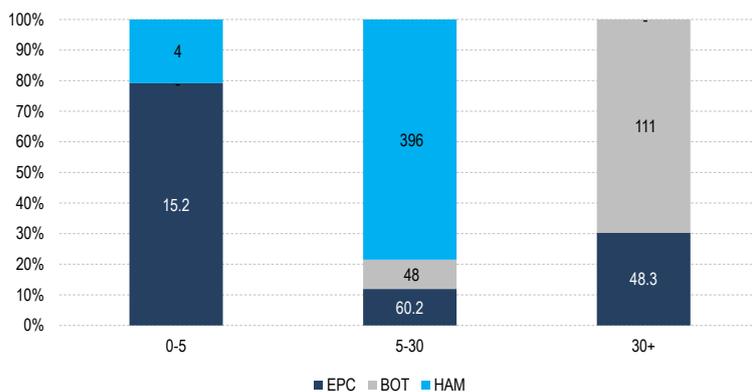
Source: NHAI, Anand Rathi Research

Annexure G – Analysis of 46 issued tenders

Till now, of the superset of 124 highways, the NHAI has floated 46 tenders, five BOT (226km), 30 HAM (1,498km) and 11 EPC (332km) with BPC of ~Rs683bn

- ~66% of the tenders have been opened since Jul’25 showing intense tendering (~24% in Oct)
- A sizewise analysis indicated EPC dominated the Rs0-5bn size, and HAM in the Rs5bn-30bn category. BOT projects are large projects dominating the Rs30bn+ tenders.
- In terms of awarding, only two projects (Nepali Farm Dehradun, Paramakudi-Ramanathapuram) have been awarded. Two others await opening.

Fig 15 – HAM dominates Rs5bn-30bn size, BOT dominates Rs30bn+

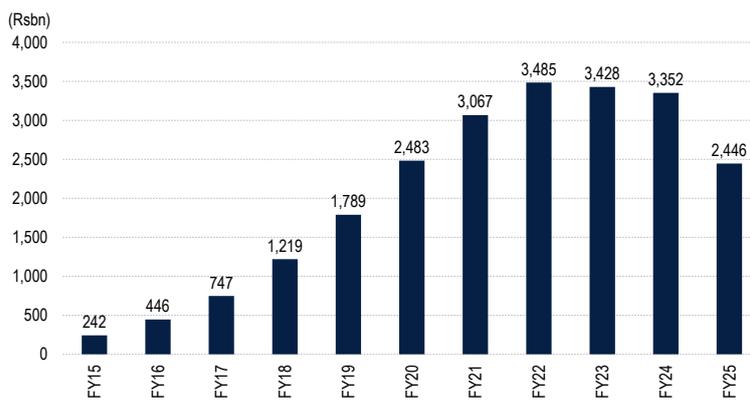


Source: NHAI, Anand Rathi Research

Annexure H: Increase in debt till FY22 due to increased EPC commitments

Current NHAI debt dropped to FY20’s ~Rs2.5trn after FY22’s peak of ~Rs3.5trn due to MoRTH’s focus on repaying debt and reduced awardings.

Fig 16 – NHAI debt movement



Source: NHAI, Anand Rathi Research

Appendix

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