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## **Highway to Nashik runs into tree trouble**

Yogesh Naik | TNN

Shahapur: The quadrupling of the Mumbai-Nashik highway has hit a block with the forest department objecting to the project.

About 96 km of the highway—from Vadape to Gonda—passes through the forests of Shahapur in Thane and the project involves the cutting of 10,200 trees.

The application to the state forest department has met with several questions. According to the Forest Conservation Act, if a proposed road passes through forested areas, the Union ministry of environment and forests would have to clear the project.

The 160-km project is being implemented by a consortium, led by Gammon India, on behalf of the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) on a build-operate-and-transfer basis.

Abhijit Rajan, the Gammon India managing director, was not available for comment.

S J Harsule, deputy engineer of the highway authority, said, "We are meant to complete the project by December 2008. But if the forest department does not give its permission, it will be delayed. Senior NHAI officers are following up with the forest department headquarters in Nagpur for speedy clearance."

### **Forest dept seeks damages for trees**

**Shahapur: Deputy conservator of forests, Shahapur, Anwar Ahmed said, "The Mumbai-Nashik highway quadrupling project passes through 93 hectares of forest land. I have sent the file to the forest department headquarters in Nagpur, which has raised several questions.**

Apart from a clearance from the Thane collectorate, the forest headquarters wants adequate afforestation measures taken to compensate for the trees that will be cut."

The forest authorities in Shahapur have asked for Rs 9 lakh per hectare as compensation and Rs 1 crore towards afforestation. Assistant conservator of forests, Shahapur, V Lokhande, said most trees will fall when Gammon constructs a 7 km bypass cutting across Kasara ghat on the Mumbai-Nashik road.

Earlier, the state government had wanted to take up the quadrupling of the highway since it wished to develop the Golden Triangle between Mumbai, Pune and Nashik. But subsequently, NHAI took up the project.

"Mumbai and Pune are two developing cities. Since there is insufficient land in the two metros, the hinterland needs to be developed. The two cities are already well connected. The Mumbai-Nashik expressway will be completed in three to four years," said a principal secretary in Mantralaya.

The forest department had raised similar objections to the Mumbai-Pune expressway and this had delayed work on the ghat section for nearly two years.