

Kelani Valley (KV Line) Railway Line: Lost Railway lines in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The 19th Century was destined to be an era which evoked a profound socio-economic transformation in Sri Lanka. The expansion of plantation agriculture, development of road ways inside the island and later railway lines were the most important developments experienced by Sri Lanka following the establishment of the British colonial rule. Ceylon Government Railway, known as CGR has a remarkable history of 163 years. The historical moment was in 1858 by cutting of the first sod to start the railway lines by Sir Henry Ward, Governor of Sri Lanka. And the first train was operated from Colombo Terminus to Ambepussa on December 27, 1864. The train was driven by first Director General of railway Mr. G.L.Molesworth and H.R.M. and the duke of Brabant was the distinguished guest. After that, the railway system was established by connecting major cities covering all the provinces in Sri Lanka. This railway network contributed to the country's economic growth and met the social aspirations of the Sri Lankan people and further it provided an invaluable service to public transport. The Kelani Valley Railway, known as the KV Line, which was originally built as a 2 ft 6 in (762 mm) in narrow-gauge line Colombo to Yatiyantota via Avissawella. During the narrow-gauge era, the line had its own fleet of narrow-gauge locomotives, where steam locomotives of Class K were used. Narrow gauge railways were used in three sections of Sri Lanka where sharp curves were available due to geography of the region. The main difference of narrow gauge was the width of the track for narrow gauge the standard was 02 feet 06 inches while for broad gauge it was 05 feet 06 inches. The Kelani valley is very famous for rubber and local products like tea, coconut, cardamoms, paddy, betel leaf, kurakkan, cinnamon, rubber and areca nuts etc. The planters were seeking an efficient way to transport the goods to the sea port (Fort) without any delays for exports. Accordingly, they managed to bring authorities attention to construct railway lines to transport the goods to the capital. Finally the initial survey was carried to construct the kelani valley railway line in March 1896. The construction of Kelani valley railway line was started on 22nd March 1900. It was originally built from Colombo to Yatiyantota via Awissawella. After a series of deliberations and resolutions the sanction was given by secretary to the state on April 28th 1898. The railway service between Maradana to Avissawella was commenced for passenger traffic on September 15th 1902 and for good traffic on September 17th 1902. Avissawella to Yatiyantota track was opened to good traffic on September 14th and for passengers on 28th in the year of 1903. In later 1930's the railway service faced troubles. Some of railway lines were closed down because of financial losses caused by the First World War. In addition to that the railway service faced difficulties due to improper administration. Similarly, people switched to road transport from

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