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Civic body plans new ro-ro service

KOCHI: If you decide to travel by road, it takes a minimum 45 minutes to reach mainland Ernakulam from Fort Kochi or Mattancherry in west Kochi. But the ferry service, operating between these points, can take you to the city in 20 minutes.

With travelling through pothole-ridden and congested roads from west Kochi becoming a tiresome affair, there is public clamour to modernize and augment existing ferry services by introducing more roll-on roll-out (ro-ro) services that can transport both vehicles and passengers.

Currently, the state water transport department (SWTD) operates boat services connecting Ernakulam, Mattancherry, Fort Kochi and Vypeen islands. "When there is heavy traffic to the city, it takes over an hour to reach mainland from Fort Kochi by road. The SWTD do not operate modern and high-speed vessels. Since the boat service is becoming more popular, the Kochi corporation or the water transport authority should introduce more ro-ro services, which can carry both

commuters and vehicles including cars and two-wheelers. This will considerably reduce the number of vehicles on the roads," said Fort Kochi councillor Antony Kureethara. He also said the corporation should operate it on a service basis and not with a profit motive.

The Cochin Port Trust is the only agency operating a ro-ro service, between Bolgatty and Willingdon Island to carry container trucks, in the backwaters now.

The corporation, meanwhile, operates a jankar service that can transport both vehicles and passengers between Fort Kochi and Vypeen islands. The service, run by private agencies, is not regular and a major issue in the area.

To improve connectivity, the corporation is now planning to introduce a ro-ro service between Fort Kochi and Vypeen islands. "We plan to introduce the ro-ro service connecting these two points as part of Mission Kochi 15-08-15 programme," said town planning committee chairman K J Sohan.

The corporation will soon start the tender process. The local body is planning to begin the service before March 2015. While the jankar can carry 12-15 vehicles such as cars and small trucks and about 50 two-wheelers, the ro-ro can carry up to 100 vehicles. "We will need to invest Rs 3 crore for a ro-ro boat," said an official.

Corporation officials are hoping to get the project funded by

the German government-owned development bank, KFW, which has shown interest in developing the city's water transport system as part of Kochi Metro.