

Mumbai's Pedestrian Paradox

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According to the recent [and the only] comprehensive transport survey (CTS) 2005-08 of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA), over 52 per cent of Mumbaikars make their average daily trips by walking. Another 25 per cent use the local trains, whereas 12 per cent average daily trips are made through public transport buses. And in sharp contrast to these figures, the share of private vehicles' (read cars) in percentage average trips per day is barely 3 per cent. Mumbai thus clearly seems to be having an edge over the other Indian motorized cities.

This jubilation, however, is short lived because a close look at Mumbai's street realities and its transport planning process exposes the manner in which the concept of walkability is being systematically eroded from the city's collective conscience. "Historically, Mumbai is known for its well-paved footpaths. For instance, south Mumbai's Fort area, developed way back in 1880s by British, is now a main business district of the city. It has a reasonably good network of footpaths and our recent study shows that over 70 per cent of the people from the nearby four local train stations – Church Gate, Marine Lines, CST and Masjid Bunder --- come walking to Fort. People who take taxis do so not because they cannot walk the distance, but because they are in a hurry to reach their destination. But such is not the case with other areas of Mumbai, especially the suburbs where footpaths are non-existent and pedestrians are a cursed lot," says Pankaj Joshi, an architect and executive director of Mumbai-based Urban Design Research

Institute, an independent organisation working on urban planning issues. ¹

Whereas MMRDA is going full force in implementing various infrastructure projects in Mumbai, such as Metro rail, monorail, sea links, expressways, flyovers, etc, providing basic pedestrian infrastructure such as footpaths is not on its agenda. No wonder then that the new business districts of the city have no provision for walking. "Business districts like Powai, Bandra-Kurla Complex, Andheri East, Mindspace in Malad, etc. have been developed only for people who come in their fast moving cars. There is no provision for pedestrians. Even though footpaths have been provided in some places, these do not connect or integrate with the other parts of the city. Hence they do not enhance walkability," says Joshi. ²

Urban planners and architects claim that the state government is working against its own data, which shows that almost 55 per cent average daily trips per day are made by walking. "In its right sense, any planning agency should cash upon this fact and strengthen the pedestrian infrastructure. But MMDRA seems to be having some other designs. It wants more and more people to use their private cars, for which it is building sea links, flyovers and wide roads. In the name of pedestrianisation, it has now started constructing skywalks that resemble ugly caterpillars and do not solve the problem," says Ashok Datar, a transport expert working with the Mumbai-based NGO, Mumbai Environmental Social Network. Datar has been researching on Mumbai's transportation issues for the last 20 years.³ He feels skywalks

may be required in some areas, but these should not be replicated all over.

Skywalks

Skywalk is an elevated walk way dedicated to the pedestrians. It connects the railway station/high concentration commercial area with the destination points where concentration of pedestrians prevails. The purpose of skywalks is efficient dispersal of commuters from station/congested area to strategic locations viz. bus stops, taxi stands, shopping areas, off roads etc. and vice versa. Keeping these facts in mind, MMRDA has planned 50 skywalks in the entire Mumbai Metropolitan Region at a total estimated cost of Rs 600 crore. In Mumbai, these skywalks dot city's entire skyline. For instance, skywalks are proposed in Parel, Kurla, Goregaon, Vile Parle, Andheri (E), Andheri (W), Kandivali, Grant Road, CST to Church Gate, Dadar, Chembur, Ghatkopar, Mulund, Malad, Santa Cruz, Dahisar, etc. Name any area, and there is a skywalk planned. ⁴

One such pilot skywalk is already operational since June last year between Bandra (E) station and Kalanagar (Bandra-Kurla Complex). It is 1,300 metres long and 4 metres wide. It has been planned so that people from Bandra station can walk to their workplaces in Bandra-Kurla Complex.⁵ However, reality is different. "This skywalk has been constructed for a peak hour capacity of 5,500 commuters. But the usage is less than 100 people in peak hour. MMRDA has spent about Rs 13 crore for constructing this elevated walkway, but clearly there is a mismatch between pedestrian needs and what the state is offering," says Datar. He alleges that without doing a

¹ Pankaj Joshi 2009, executive director, Urban Design Research Institute, Mumbai, March 30, personal communication.

² Pankaj Joshi 2009, executive director, Urban Design Research Institute, Mumbai, March 30, personal communication.

³ Ashok Datar 2009, Mumbai Environmental Social Network, Mumbai, March 30, personal communication.

⁴ <http://www.mmrdamumbai.org/skywalk.htm>

⁵ <http://www.mmrdamumbai.org/skywalk.htm>

comprehensive study of the usage of existing skywalk, MMRDA is creating more 'caterpillars' across Mumbai.⁶

Sudhir Badami, Mumbai-based transport consultant feels that mindless sprouting of skywalks shows government's escapism from wanting to get footpaths in order. "Skywalks may be necessary in some area, but they should not be made a norm," he says. Badami, who studied at IIT Mumbai during 1970s and lives at Babulnath Narg in south Mumbai, says that during earlier times, footpaths in Mumbai were in a much better condition. "I used to walk back home from Grant Road station. But now I am forced to take a taxi because the footpath is in a mess and almost non-existent."

Architects and planners are criticizing the way skywalks are being constructed. "India is a democracy and everyone has a right to have space on the road. Why should roads be left only for private cars and pedestrians be pushed on to the skywalks? Pedestrians must be provided space on the road itself. This is non-negotiable," says Faizan Jawed, an architect-cum-activist who has recently passed out of Rizvi College of Architecture, Mumbai. Jawed is also running a campaign demanding dedicated cycle tracks in the city. "I strongly believe that cars cannot solve the transportation and congestion problem. They are not part of the solution, but they are the problem. We need to redefine the quality of life. We must pressurize our government to provide us good footpaths and dedicated cycle tracks. And if it refuses to listen, we will vote it out," Jawed adds.⁷

A campaign has already been launched by NGOs against the proposed skywalk from CST to Church Gate in south Mumbai. MMRDA has recently decided to extend this skywalk to Mantralaya and Colaba, and this had raised many eyebrows. "These areas have good footpaths that are encroachment free. Many pedestrians use them. People also walk through Oval Maidan and Cross Maidan to reach their respective stations. Why should pedestrians be made to climb up skywalks?" questions Neera Punj, convener of CitiSpace, a civil society group working towards protection of open spaces in Mumbai.⁸ Colaba and Fort area of Mumbai have over 150 heritage structures that would get ruined by these skywalks, she claims. CitiSpace has already shot off a letter to state chief minister demanding scrapping of CST-Church Gate- Mantralaya-Colaba skywalk.⁹ Punj alleges that state government is ready to push only those transportation projects that cost crores and involve a private limited company.

Walkability is not rocket science

Urban planners claim that Mumbai can easily be turned into a pedestrian-friendly city provided the planning authorities desire so. And pedestrianisation will also be cost-effective when compared to other transport projects such as Rs 800 crore Bandra-Worli sea link or Rs 125 crore per kilometer Metro rail (Rs 600 crore per km for underground sections of the Metro rail project. The total cost of Metro rail project is pegged at about Rs 20,000 crore).¹⁰ "We need to reclaim our footpaths by launching a strong campaign. Footpaths are non-negotiable.

We need to set our priorities right and in case of Mumbai, MMRDA data shows that utmost priority is pedestrian footpaths, followed by local trains and buses. Private cars must be discouraged," says Joshi.

UDRI has recently launched a year-long project to study pedestrianisation in Mumbai and how the city can be made more walkable. The initial findings of this study expose how the system itself discourages pedestrians. "The classic example is two traffic signals in front of CST station, one of the busiest train stations in Mumbai. Both these traffic signals are programmed in such a way that pedestrians can never cross the road. The divider between the road is so narrow that barely one person can stand on it. There are many more traffic signals like these which discourage pedestrian movement in the city," says Kirti, an architect with UDRI.

Joshi feels that there is a need for city-wide study whereby bottlenecks for pedestrians can be identified and then by taking simple measures such as reprogramming signals or increasing the duration of red light, Mumbai can be made more walkable.

Activists allege that authorities/corporation is careless while constructing footpaths. Footpaths are more of a design problem. "There are areas where footpaths are over two feet high. How does the civic body expect old people to climb these up? Also in most places footpaths are broken and non-continuous, which means a pedestrian has to keep climbing up and down. This is irksome and people prefer walking on the road

than on the footpath," says Punj. In many colonies residents are spending their own money and maintaining footpaths.

Punj shares a personal experience to show authorities' callous attitude towards pavements, which are considered poor person's 'transport' option. "The footpath in front of our society used to have hundreds of hawkers selling anything from undergarments to fruit juices to pornographic CDs. It was impossible to even see the pavement let alone walk on it. In 2001, our resident association decided to adopt the pavement, protect it and maintain it. But it was such a difficult task. For one year, I was made to run from pillar to post, from corporation office to traffic police office.

But finally we adopted the pavement and have removed the hawkers. Our association spends Rs 40,000 per month only in the upkeep and protection of the pavement," says Punj who lives in Lotus Court near Church Gate station in South Mumbai. But not all associations are rich enough to spend that kind of money in maintaining pavements. "Why should residents pay, when they are already paying their taxes? Mumbaikars in any case pay the highest taxes in the country," lashes out Punj.

Residents of Mumbai have paranoia with footpaths, which they feel, attract hawkers or homeless. In some areas, residents themselves put big plants in all sides of the pavement, only to avoid some homeless people sleep on the footpaths. The footpath from Link Road in Andheri to Juhu has been encroached by pavement dwellers.

⁶ Ashok Datar 2009, Mumbai Environmental Social Network, Mumbai, March 30, personal communication.

⁷ Faizan Jawed 2009, architect, Rizvi College of Architecture, Mumbai, March 29, personal communication.

⁸ Neera Punj 2009, convener, CitiSpace, Mumbai, March 30, personal communication.

⁹ <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/heritage-activists-launch-protest-against-skywalk/430157/>

¹⁰ http://www.mmrdamumbai.org/projects_metro_rail.html

Even the divider between the road has not been spared and is used by homeless people to sleep in the right.

In some areas such as Lokhandwala in Andheri West, footpaths are barely a metre wide. The bus-stops that BEST has constructed have also caused much destruction of pavements as these encroach upon them, leaving little or so space for pedestrians. “Today pavements in Mumbai have both legal and illegal encroachments. Legal by way of police chowkies and milk booth centres; and illegal in terms of hawkers. Both need to be dealt with strictly,” says Punj. Since 1998, Punj’s NGO is fighting a legal battle in the Supreme Court of India demanding hawking and non-hawking zones to be specified across Mumbai, and pavements be made hawking free.

In spite of various directions from the apex court, Mumbai corporation has failed to address the problem. Almost all pavements around the local train stations are encroached by hawkers. The famous, Fashion Street in South Mumbai or the market of Link Road in Bandra shows the extent to which hawkers have taken over footpaths.

There are other problems as well. Joshi claims that with so many flyovers coming up in the city, no thought has been given to pedestrian walkways. Take the case of recently inaugurated flyover at Western Expressway near Thakur Village in Kandivali East. “No provision has been made for pedestrians. And now as an after thought, skywalks are being proposed. This is not the way a city’s transportation system ought to be developed. Planning is ad-hoc and

most solutions are knee-jerk that further aggravate the problem,” says Joshi.

Datar is worried about how Mumbai will look in the coming few years. “Imagine flyovers, skywalks, sea links, Metro, monorail criss-crossing Mumbai. The city will soon turn into an ugly layered city with pedestrians enmeshed between its various layers,” he fears.

Experts claim some soft measures can be taken to make some high pedestrian areas more walkable. For instance, traffic movement can be stopped during peak hours, allowing free movement of people on foot. In some Western countries, tall physical structures are erected to make certain areas inaccessible to cars. Bora Bazar area in south Mumbai can be made pedestrian-only zone during the day time, whereas traffic can be allowed during early morning and night time when delivery vans come. A simple step like painting zebra crossings can also go a long way in easing pedestrian problems in Mumbai.

Joshi says it is high time we redefine ‘development and growth’. “When 2.4 km long JJ flyover was proposed [from Palton Road to central Mumbai], local people were happy that development was coming to their area, a predominantly Muslim area. But speak to them now and they will narrate you stories of how this flyover has made their life hell. It has aggravated the problem of air and noise pollution. There is no privacy and the entire area has turned into a ghetto,” says Joshi. Similar situation will arise in case of other elevated infrastructure projects like skywalks, Metro etc.

When undesirables come together

There are research organisations and architects who are working towards making the undesirables of Mumbai city, such as pedestrians and hawkers, become part of the larger fabric of the city. One such organisation is Juhu-based architecture college, Kamla Raheja Vidyaniidhi Institute for Architecture (KRVA). Along with P K Das & Associates, an architecture firm, and the residents of Juhu, it has conducted an in-depth study (dated 2008) titled ‘Re-imagining the public realm: the case of Juhu-draft plan’. Commonly known as Vision Juhu, the aim of this study is to integrate various public spaces in Juhu and make the area more pedestrian friendly. “Our study area had a mix population ranging from film personalities like Amitabh Bacchan, Shabana Azmi to two gaothans, fishing villages and slums. We needed a common thread that binds this entire area together and realized that Irla nala that flows through this area provides a good platform. Also after the July 26, 2005 flood, people have awakened to the importance of these nalas that were actually natural waterways,” narrates Benita Menezes, lecturer at the design cell of the institute.¹¹

So as part of the study, KRVA has proposed 6 metres area on both sides of this nala to be protected and developed in such a way that water permeability is enhanced and the developed area is used to relocate the undesirables, such as hawkers. This developed area will have pedestrian walkways and would be connected with other open areas of Juhu, this allowing free pedestrian movement. “The idea behind this is not to turn this area into a ghetto but to develop it in such

a way that it has a life of its own and is self-sustaining. We have also prepared a plan of how the three proposed Metro stations need to be realigned to ensure pedestrianisation of large parts of Juhu. We are not opposing other infrastructure projects in the city, but all we are trying to do is to tie the loose ends by networking of public open spaces,” explains Menezes.

Take the case of proposed Metro line from Colaba-Bandra-Charkop. Three Metro stations fall within Juhu area and at present all these three stations directly open on the main roads. “Can you imagine the chaos on roads when commuters from these Metro stations directly come out on the roads? We have proposed realignment of these stations and reclamation of a strip of land from airports authority. If that is done, then burst points for Metro stations would be at green open spaces. And from there people can easily deflect in various directions using footpaths or the developed sidewalks of Irla nala,” says Menezes (see map).

Like Irla nala, there are many more nalas/small rivers in Mumbai, such as Oshiwara river, Dahisar river, Poisar river etc, that can be developed along the same lines. But Menezes claims that one big plan for the city will not work. We need multi-scalar approach in which neighbourhoods prepare their own micro-plans, as they are aware of local resources and problems, and see how best their area can become walkable, she says.

However, stage is getting set for Mumbaikars to demand rights of pedestrians. Last year, a group of Mumbaikars headed by Krishnaraj Rao

¹¹ Benita Menezes 2009, lecturer, KRVA, Mumbai, March 31, personal communication.



WON'T TAKE AUTOS, CABS ON AUGUST 12

REVENGE OF THE COMMUTER

Tired of being fleeced by auto and taxi drivers, three Mumbai residents call for a one-day strike



Jaidav Rupani, Rachna Brar and Abhilash Krishnan

Virat A Singh and Anesh Phadnis
mirrorfeedback@indiatimes.com

Have you ever been refused a ride by an autowallah or a cabbie? Did that leave you fuming? If your answer is 'yes' to both these questions, here is your chance to get back at them.

Three advertising profession-

als - Abhilash Krishnan, Rachna Brar and Jaidav Rupani - have launched a campaign against greedy cabbies and autowallahs who refuse fares for short distances and tamper with meters to fleece commuters. The centerpiece of this campaign will be the August 12 commuters' strike, when anyone who has ever been wronged by an auto or a taxi driver must shun them.

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Can't ignore this protest, say heads of auto, taxi unions



MUMBAI TAXIMEN ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT **A L QUADROS**

What lessons did you and the cabbies learn from Thursday's public boycott? I would like to make it clear that we cannot ignore this boycott, which is a result of public anger. If people are angry to such an extent, they must have been provoked beyond patience. Nobody boycotts anything for fun's sake. We need to take this issue seriously. I have already thought of a few ideas that I will discuss with drivers. We are more than keen to retain our customers.

Government too has promised a crackdown on errant cabbies... Obviously, campaign like the one on Thursday will put pressure on the government. I repeat, I completely accept that some taxi drivers refuse fares, people are getting affected. But state should also take steps to improve cabbies' condition.

How badly was the business affected? Not really. It was business as usual.

AUTORICKSHAW DRIVERS' UNION CHIEF **THAMPI KURIEN**

What lessons did you and the autowallahs learn from Thursday's public boycott? I agree people are angry, and autorickshaw drivers refuse fares, but citizens should see it from our point of view also. There are reasons for refusing fare. Fatigue, low fuel... people should understand. Commuters jump queues, some of them are abusive at times. We need better understanding from all sides.

How badly was the business affected? It had no impact.

What about the government

crackdown on errant drivers? Look, I completely agree with the three youngsters who insisted Thursday's boycott, though I don't agree with the way they chose to protest. If they are so concerned about people, let them get like-minded youngsters to ensure queues are followed at points in the city. Nobody refuses fare for fun.

How badly was the business affected? It had no impact.

formed Sahasi Padyatri (brave pedestrian), an informal group of residents demanding obstruction free and safe footpaths in the city. In March last year, activists of this group launched a stayagraha and went around the suburbs of Mumbai and painted lanes on the road and declared them pedestrian-only lanes.

"We organized many such events in Bandra, Borivali, Chembur, Matunga, Mumbai Central and Vile Parle. In Vile Parle alone we organized 20 such events at the same point. We expected motorized people to get angry and fight with us, but surprisingly their response was extremely positive. People in the cars told us that we were doing the right thing. I think people saw the point we were trying to make," says Rao.¹² He feels that the authorities have

started thinking about the pedestrians and are constructing foot over-bridges, but a lot more needs to be done.

Elsewhere, architects are demanding that the comprehensive transport survey 2005-08 be made public. "We have tried our level best, even through right to information (RTI) application, but we cannot lay our hands on the comprehensive transport survey. I feel that MMRDA fears that if this study is made public, then people will question the very basis of sanctioning various costly transportation projects. Without a comprehensive assessment, such projects should not be cleared... Regarding pedestrians, if we provide proper footpaths, then there is no need to construct even a single skywalk in the city," assures Joshi.

¹² Krishnaraj Rao 2009, Mumbai, April 1, personal communication.

Share an auto at Santa Cruz, Bandra stations from today

Somit Sen | TMN

Mumbai: The daily arguments with auto drivers who refuse to ply short distances may come to an end in certain parts of the city with four shuttle services starting outside Bandra (E) and Santa Cruz (E) stations on Thursday morning. While three will be launched in Bandra, one will be in Santa Cruz that will ferry passengers to Air India Colony.

Next week, 19 more shuttle services will be introduced outside stations between Vile Parle and Dahisar and the RTO has also given the nod for 21 routes between Kuria and Mulund/Mankhurd in the eastern suburbs. The services on the eastern services will begin in phases from September 21.

TOI had first reported on the RTO's plan to introduce auto shuttles outside every station in the western and eastern suburbs. The shuttle services, under which several people can share an auto for a fixed and short route, will not only reduce cases of "refusals to ply", but will also provide a cheaper mode of transport.

State transport minister Radhakrishna Vikhe-Patil, who will inaugurate the system in

Shuttling About

- Bandra station (E) to New English School *(1.20): **6
- Bandra station (E) to Government Colony/collector office (1.10): 5.50
- Bandra station (E) to G N colony (1.10 on meter): 5.50
- Santa Cruz station (E) to Air

- India staff quarters (1.90): Rs 10
- Vile Parle station (W) to Juhu beach (1.70): 9
- Andheri station (W) to Four Bungalows (1.50): 7.50
- Andheri station (W) to Lokhandwala Complex (2.10): 11
- Andheri station (E) to J B Nagar (1.50): 7.50
- Andheri station (E) to Sahar Cargo (2.40): 13
- Andheri station (E) to SEEPZ (2.30): 12.50
- Jogeshwari station (W) to Adarsh Nagar (1.70): 9
- Goregaon station (W) to Bangur Nagar (1.50): 7.50
- Goregaon station (E) to Gokuldham (2.10): 11

- Malad station (E) to Patharwadi (1.40): 7
- Malad station (W) to Mitth Chowkie (1.40): 7
- Kandivli station (W) to Charkop (1.50): 7.50
- Kandivli station (W) to Mahavir Nagar (1.40): 7
- Kandivli station (E) to Mahindra Company Gate (1.30): 6.50
- Borivli station (W) to LIC Colony (1.30): 6.50
- Borivli station (W) to Sai Baba Nagar (1.30): 6.50
- Borivli station (W) to Yogi Nagar/Eksar village (1.30): 6.50
- Borivli station (W) to IC colony BEST stop number 240 (1.60): 8.50
- Dahisar station (E) to check naka (1.30): 6.50

*on meter
**Rs per passenger



Bandra, said, "The share-an auto service will assure passengers of a cheap travel. Complaints about drivers charging more would also go down," he said. "The auto stands will be monitored by both RTO and the traffic police who will ensure that drivers comply with Maharashtra Motor Vehicle Rules.

Thursday's function will be attended by state minorities minister Arif Naseem Khan, minister of state Gulabrao De-

okar and two local MLAs. Sources said the organisers have also invited MP Priya Dutt.

State transport commissioner Dilip Jadhav is glad that sharing auto services are starting in the suburbs. "We hope that it will bring down cases of refusals to ply," he said.

Regional Transport Officer (eastern suburbs) Vikas Pandkar confirmed that 21 new routes were approved for eastern suburbs, including from

outside Kuria, Chembur, Vidyavihar, Ghatkopar, Vikhroli, Bhandup and Mulund stations. "We will start it in Kuria on September 21," he said.

Pandkar added, "We are also ensuring that those visiting Ganesh pandals are not inconvenienced by errant drivers. At the Sahyadri Krida Mandals in Tlak Nagar, a special RTO assistance booth has been set up for the first time."