

# Observer Research Foundation Mumbai



10<sup>th</sup> March, 2014

Shri Sunil Prabhu  
Hon. Mayor of Mumbai  
Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai  
Mumbai – 400001



**Sub: Views regarding the coast road project of MCGM**

Dear Mr. Prabhu,

Along with this letter please find attached a detailed letter I have shared with Mr. Sitaram Kunte regarding the coast road. I shared these views with him at a recent public meeting regarding the budget. I am presenting the same views to you with a kind request to please acknowledge the receipt of the same and share your response as well to the points raised.

I hope you will see the merit in the points raised and decide to abandon the coast road project while pursuing the number of people friendly projects I have listed in my detailed letter. This would be in the larger interest of each citizen of Mumbai.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Rishi Aggarwal  
Research Fellow

*(Views expressed in personal capacity)*

# Observer Research Foundation Mumbai



March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014

*Personal copy  
for  
RECORD*

Mr. Sitaram Kunte Municipal Commissioner Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai Mumbai – 400001	Mr. Rajiv Jalota Addl. Municipal Commissioner Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai Mumbai – 400001
Mr. Banthia Ex- Chief Secretary Government of Maharashtra Via email	Mr. Sharad Kale General Secretary Y B Chavan Pratishthan Gen. Jaganath Bhonsale Marg, Nariman Point Mumbai - 400021



Dear Mr. Kunte, Mr. Jalota, Mr. Banthia and Mr. Kale

**Sub: Putting on record views shared regarding Coast Road during public meet  
to discuss MCGM Budget 2014-15**

Pursuant to the appreciable efforts in public engagement regarding the MCGM budget 2014-15 on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2014, I am happy to put to record the important point I made during the Q&A session. The views here are strictly in personal capacity. The Q&A session was very short and quick and so I will use this occasion to elaborate and introduce additional points which will take this letter closer to a comprehensive critique of the coast road with the freedom to present further arguments in the future.

Reiterating, I feel – and this view is shared by a large number of city residents – that the coast road proposal is not in the best interests of the city and the municipal corporation should desist from going ahead with the project. The project would be a very wrong

prioritisation of the large amount of funds available through the route of fungible FSI. I gather from what you said that Rs. 3500 crores has been collected by the municipal corporation through the sale of fungible FSI in two years.

Following are some of the points that can be argued in favour of not building the coast road and using the funds available to make a genuine and long lasting improvement to the quality of life of all 12 million Mumbaikars. The enthusiasm displayed by the municipal corporation for the coast road has to be contrasted and seen in perspective of the gross neglect it shows to much more important interventions some of which I have mentioned below.

Very importantly it has to be borne in mind that the coast road will bring no benefit in the near foreseeable future to the citizens of Mumbai, whereas all the initiatives mentioned below (and there are more) can improve quality of life drastically in 2-4 years.

1. First things first, if the coast road is being planned to ease traffic congestion in Mumbai then there couldn't be anything more unhelpful than this. There is a well accepted adage in urban planning that solving traffic congestion by building more roads and bridges is like loosening the belt to fight obesity. In the late 90's flyovers were built with enthusiasm in Mumbai. Western Express Highway itself saw a slew of them. The slogan then was Bandra to Borivil in 30 mins. The journey can take almost 90 mins in peak hours today. The Bandra Worli Sealink was projected to be used by 75000 cars every day, the actual usage today is about half of that. There is no real improvement in travel times. Thus building the coast road will not help ease congestion in Mumbai.

The enthusiasm towards the coast road is caught in a time warp of the last century and America and Europe of the 1950's. If you got to New York or London or Singapore or Hong Kong the focus is on the highest quality mass transit systems, walking and TOD not 'rings and radials'

It is more desirable that MCGM work on improving the efficiency of existing roads where a lot of capacity is getting wasted.

2. The Coast Road report prepared and submitted on December 2011 is the most shabbily written report I have ever read. It does not substantiate most of the claims it makes, is ridden with assumptions and does not even have a study on how many people will benefit from the project. Between improving the public bus service and the pedestrian environment a full 10 million of Mumbai's residents will be impacted. My reading is that the coast road will benefit 2,00,000 people or at the most half a million. This is a highly inequitable proposition.

The demographics of the city are no longer north south then why focus so much on it?

3. Is the coast road a Government of Maharashtra project or a Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai project? From the report and other inferences it seems that the Government of Maharashtra is driving this project and so MMRDA should spend the money. MCGM money should be used for bringing genuine relief to the people of Mumbai by enlisting the projects mentioned below.
4. In 2005 the World Bank as part of its funding for MUTP II had also suggested the formation of Traffic Management Units (TMU) at the level of each of the 24 wards in Mumbai. These TMUs would be staffed with quality transport professionals who would dynamically study traffic congestion in the ward, its short term and long term transport requirements and accordingly help the administration to respond rapidly. Today millions suffer easily solvable traffic problems in each ward because there is no investment in an institutional framework to bring relief. Funds are available only for coast road and bridges kind of projects – not intelligent transport management.
5. Why should MCGM not consider making a Walking Friendly Mumbai a highlight in its budget? Pedestrian friendly streets, which are safe and a joy to walk are one of the easiest ways in which the municipal corporation can impact the quality of life for all the 12 million residents of Mumbai. As per the Comprehensive Transport Survey 2008, there are 15 million walking trips in Mumbai of which 40 per cent of trips have only a walking

component. In the past three years sufficient submissions have been made to MCGM and you regarding pedestrian facilities.

At ORF Mumbai we kept a very well attended seminar on **Making Mumbai a Pedestrian Friendly City**. It was very well attended and a senior engineer from the municipal corporation also attended the whole day's proceedings. Subsequently the proceedings were circulated in a CD to all important government officials and the CMs office sent a letter appreciating the contents and the effort.

As Walking Project I met you in September 2012 with Ms. Romi Roy of DDA, Delhi to impress upon you the need to develop street design guidelines along the lines of similar guidelines in Delhi. In January, 2013 as Walking Project I followed the idea again with the additional idea of developing model walking streets in all the 24 wards of Mumbai. A proposal for E Moses Road has also been submitted but all of these ideas are languishing.

You were part of the campaign by Mumbai Mirror through three months starting from March 2013 where their correspondent Chaitanya Marpakwar accompanied you to visit numerous roads and streets where the pedestrian environment needs improvement. Even these streets could be considered for improvement but there is just no mention of improving the pedestrian environment in Mumbai. Mid-day is currently carrying out a campaign and all newspapers regularly highlight the plight of pedestrians.

The municipal corporation should have some compassion for the elderly, infirm and disabled many of whom have to navigate the poor walking environment in Mumbai. Hundreds of thousands of school children walk to school in most unsafe walking conditions. While the railways are outside the jurisdiction of MCGM, the area immediately outside the railway stations sees millions of commuters suffer bad walking conditions as also poor integration of other modes of transport. Is making a difference to these lives not more important than the coast road? The funds available with the MCGM currently can provide Mumbai with the kind of walking environment it has never seen till now and all of this can happen in two years.

In the absence of street design guidelines footpaths currently being developed lack much in quality and design and lead to sub-optimal use of public funds. There is enormous need for training of municipal staff to sensitise them. In Mumbai we have high quality urban design and civil engineering talent, there are a number of young people who are looking at professional engagement to use their talent. MCGM should be using its funds for utilising this talent.

6. Almost 4 million people use the BEST bus services every day. With the right investments this figure can be increased to 5-6 million commuters every day. Why the funds available from fungible FSI should not be used for the purpose of more and better buses for BEST, which in turn will attract people who are single car drivers today to shift to buses?

I have in the past two years been suggesting that the funds being suggested for the coast road would be utilised for purchasing 2000 new high quality air-conditioned buses, which must then be run at a high frequency on all the trunk routes of Mumbai. Combined with a high quality last mile connectivity through a superlative walking environment and good taxi and auto rickshaw facilities few residents in Mumbai would need to own a car for their mobility needs. Around the world in some of the best cities this is becoming the norm – high quality mass transit, great walking environment and a strong discouragement for private motorised transport.

Why should the municipal corporation not take joy in providing high quality bus shelters, improve the facilities at depots, use information technology to save time of commuters? Today even the LED indicators on the buses do not function properly causing harassment and inconvenience to millions of commuters daily, besides the BEST staff who have to make do with temporary arrangement. A number of buses can be seen spewing noxious fumes leaving one to wonder whether standards are being met. All world class cities are outdoing each other in improving these aspects. Freeways and coast roads are a relic from the 60's.

7. At this point it is pertinent to understand the fiscal implications of facilitating private motorised transport by projects like the coast road. India bears a heavy import bill on

account of importing petroleum on which all motorised vehicles run. It stands in national interest that the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai prioritise the expenditure from funds like fungible FSI in public transport and Non-Motorised Transport.

8. In early 2013, the High Powered Committee set up by the Bombay High Court to solve the traffic and transport problems of Mumbai - of which MCGM was an integral part and represented by the then AMC Mr. Aseem Gupta - submitted its report to the Court suggesting almost 51 well thought through suggestions for improving the traffic problems of Mumbai. These suggestions were arrived at through a rigorous discussion between all the top authorities and experts involved with traffic in Mumbai. This report does not mention the coast road as one of the solutions to alleviate Mumbai's traffic problems. In fact there are so many worthwhile solutions in the report, which do not find any attention in the budget. I would consider this contempt of the court and the work of the committee.
9. Another point which has been raised in the context of the coast road is that it will provide open spaces in a space starved city. I think this is misleading. The open spaces and parks are needed in the neighbourhoods where people reside, not aggregated in one part of the city, which have to then be accessed by commuting long distances. There is a lot which can be done to enhance the public realm all across Mumbai and that would qualify as a better provision of open spaces.

At Haji Ali if the coast road comes ahead of the existing road then what one can visualise in the mind doesn't seem pleasing at all. Similar will be the case at Bandstand and Carter Road promenades. The undulating nature of the coast, which gives surprises and vistas at each turn will be destroyed and we will have almost a geometrical straight line in its process.

In the construction phase for a period of up to five year citizens will have access to neither the existing coast nor the proposed one.

10. While on the issue of open spaces the destructive impact of the coast road on the mangroves in Versova-Lokhandwala belt and beyond has not been adequately highlighted by the corporation. Making the coast road on stilts above the mangroves is an absurd idea
11. It is intriguing why the municipal corporation should not look with immediate urgency at removing potholes at 100 top junctions in the city? There are so many stretches in the non-island city where the condition of the road may be perfectly fine but traffic slows down due to the very bad conditions at junctions. Bad condition of these junctions slows down traffic enormously leading to traffic incompletely clearing in a signal cycle and backing up of traffic. Municipal Corporation should undertake improvement of these junctions as high priority even before the coast road.
12. From a hard infrastructure point of you I would like to submit the following points for your consideration, which will bring immediate relief to traffic congestion in the affected areas.
  - a. In December 2012 there was news in the papers that BMC was very keen to build two tunnels under the Juhu Aerodrome and this will genuinely bring a lot of relief to the traffic situation in the whole area. With the amount of funds available in the corporation now (from the people of Mumbai) this project should have been started in 2013 and should have approached completion by 2016. But apparently there is no work order regarding the same.
  - b. A news report in July 2012 had informed that the corporation had set aside Rs. 300 crores to buy around 2000 buildings along LBS road for the purpose of road widening. It is almost two years now and there is no progress on that front. LBS road is an important arterial road of Mumbai and lakhs of people find themselves affected due to the traffic because the road has such uneven width. Those using this road will never even get to use the coast road which is being planned on the western side. All citizens of Mumbai have contributed to the fungible FSI fund but only a few will benefit. Why is the corporation no bringing immediate relief to solving traffic congestion on LBS Road?



- c. S V Road on the western side is a similar story. Traffic crawls at 4-5 kmph at stretches on this road. Developing these roads to their full potential should be the first priority of the municipal corporation.
- d. The municipal corporation needs to be spending on upgrading the infrastructure in places like Churchgate subway and other such subways which are currently in a shabby and unhygienic condition even as they are used by hundreds of thousands of people.

13. The feature of time line has to be stressed on. The coast road in my opinion is a pie in the sky – maybe it will be achieved but by the time it does get through ten years will easily pass through keeping in mind the trend of past big ticket infrastructure projects. Most of the other interventions mentioned above can start bringing a difference as of 2015.

14. I am copying below a few lines from an article about US President Obama's transportation plan which highlights trends in transport planning thinking in the US – the emphasis in bold is mine. I am also copying a print of the article for your perusal.

*Obama's new transportation bill would invest \$600 million over four years in the TIGER program, and more broadly prioritize spending on projects with the most potential to improve environmental efficiency, create jobs, or link transportation to housing. **Similarly, road spending would be doled out on a "fix-it-first" basis, focusing on repairing existing roads rather than building new ones.** Obama would also spend a combined \$91 billion over the four years on mass transit and inter-city passenger rail. That's a roughly 30 percent share. Environmentalists and smart-growth advocates are praising the proposal.*

*After decades of spending much more on roads than mass transit, we have a transportation infrastructure that's totally at odds with what we actually need. **It encourages driving and thus increases auto emissions, which worsen local air quality and climate change. It's out of sync with trends in demographics and public preferences, which are leaning toward walkable urbanism and transit use, especially with an aging population.** It's also predicated on the availability of cheap oil, and thus is increasingly unaffordable as surging global demand boosts gasoline prices.*

Considering so many points above I would go to the extent of saying that it would almost be unethical to not give any attention to so many projects which can bring immediate benefit to the life of citizens of Mumbai. Keeping these points in mind the coast road project would be kept in abeyance.

I would be happy to receive a formal response to the points I have raised and we can also extend the discussion to a wider public discussion on the matter. I request you to consider keeping a public discussion on the points raised. This is an important matter of use of public funds and transparency and accountability is of utmost importance.

Sincerely,

Rishi Aggarwal

Research Fellow and member Mumbai Transport Forum

*(views expressed are in personal capacity)*

**Copies of letter to:**

1. Chief Ministers Office
2. Chief Secretary, Government of Maharashtra
3. Mayor of Mumbai
4. Elected representatives of Mumbai
5. Hon. High Court of Mumbai and High Powered Committee members
6. Mr. Srinivasan –Additional Municipal Commissioner (in charge Roads)
7. Members of MCGM Think Tank (with a request to make their position on the coast road clear and on record)
8. Bombay First
9. Other civil society organisations
10. Media