

LYARI EXPRESSWAY

Concerns and Proposals of the Urban Resource Centre

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines the Lyari Expressway Project which is being constructed to divert the heavy traffic load from the inner city areas of Karachi. Technical validity of the project; transparency; consultation with the stakeholders; capacity of concerned civil agencies to exercise and manage the project; implications on existing settlements that fall in the right of way; relationship of the project with the larger city planning issues and aesthetic and social repercussions are addressed in this paper. Concerns and proposals raised by Urban Resource Centre – a research based non-governmental organization are presented in a bid to study the validity of the project in comparison to other planned options available for the purpose.

INTRODUCTION

The Northern Bypass¹ was proposed by the Karachi Master Plan 1975-85[1]. If the bypass had been built, all port related traffic, which now passes through the city, would have been re-directed through it to the Super Highway. Since this traffic consists mainly of heavy diesel vehicles, their bypassing the city would have helped in

removing congestion and pollution in Karachi. However, the bypass, for a variety of reasons, was never built and over the years the volume of port related traffic has steadily increased, congesting and polluting the city further.

In 1989 a group of public spirited citizens proposed the Lyari Expressway² as an alternative to the Northern Bypass. The Expressway was to be an elevated one built over the Lyari River from the port to Sohrab Goth. Subsequently, the local government changed its design and it was decided to build the Expressway along the banks of the Lyari River (Map-1).

Many professionals, NGOs and citizens of the Lyari Corridor objected to the building of the Expressway, including the Urban Resource Centre (URC). This paper gives the concerns and proposals of the URC³.

1 - PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS AND TRANSPARENCY

Since 1992, Lyari Expressway has been on the cards. Controversy has raged around it.

¹ Northern Bypass was proposed in the Karachi Development Plan (1973-85) as a semi ring road and an alternate route from the port to the Super Highway. Detailed static's and corresponding plans have been prepared for the bypass which are aimed to divert the heavy traffic from the city roads. If built, the bypass shall help de-congest inner city areas; align a new development corridor for the much needed ware housing and storage spaces; help maintain urban roads by taking their heavy loads away; revitalize the inner city areas and procure spaces for transit terminals. The bypass awaits implementations up till now.

² Lyari is one of the oldest settlements in Karachi. It is located in the south-western zone along the banks of Lyari River. It evolved as a worker's settlement but slowly gave rise to mixed land use. Over the period of time the area has densified due to its proximity with the port. Warehousing has become a dominant activity in the area. In the intensifying development, most of the area has been covered with built structures, leaving only the river and its immediate banks as extended open spaces. The proposed Lyari Expressway shall change this characteristic of the area in a sizable manner.

³ Urban Resource Centre (URC), set up in 1989, is a non-governmental organisation aimed to study and analyse development plan/proposals for Karachi. It prepares alternates in consultation with the communities and interest groups and compiles and catalogues information related to the city of Karachi. During the past several years, URC has addressed many development projects and plans related to Karachi in water supply, sewerage, transportation, housing and physical development sectors.

Professionals and NGOs have pointed out that heavy traffic should not move through the city but should bypass it, because it will cause immense pollution. They have pointed out that the Defence Society has refused to let the Southern Bypass be constructed through it. They have also pointed out that since heavy traffic started moving through Khyaban-e-Roomi and Sunset Boulevard, the lives of the people living on this corridor have been adversely affected and the green areas on the roundabouts which were full of people previously are now deserted. They have also pointed out that in many cities, expressways that passed through the city and carried heavy traffic, have now been restricted to light traffic only or have had major environmental mitigation measures applied to them⁴. As such, the opponents of the Expressway have supported the building of the Northern Bypass (Map-2).

Given the controversy, public consultations on the project should have been held before finalising it. Such consultations are even more important in the case of Karachi where many projects of the past have turned out to be disasters. In most cases, citizens and professionals gave reasons as to why these projects would fail and asked for public consultations. Such consultations never took place. A list of some of these projects is given below.

- **METROVILLES⁵**: It was pointed out that the plots in these housing schemes would never reach the target group and that the better-off would make use of the subsidies in-built in them. After building two and a half metrovilles, the Metroville Project was abandoned. The dissenting professionals were proved right [2].
- **LINES AREA REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT**: Professionals pointed out that the Lines Area Redevelopment Project would turn the area into a large slum which would neither benefit the city nor the people of the area. Alternatives were offered but the authorities did not consider them.

The Lines Area today is the largest planned slum in Karachi both physically and sociologically[3].

- **GREATER KARACHI SEWAGE PLAN**: This has been funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). As a result of this, the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board (KWSB) is in debt to a tune of Rs 42 billion which the city of Karachi will ultimately pay. However, Karachi's sewage problems have still not improved and its treatment plants function to only about 20 percent of their capacity [4].
- **BALDIA SEWAGE SCHEME**: Funded by the ADB, it has been a major failure which the ADB itself has admitted. As a result, Rs. 600 million have literally gone down the drain. Alternatives to the Scheme offered by the Orangi Pilot Project-Research and Training Institute (OPP-RTI) were rejected. However, the same proposals were successfully implemented in Orangi; a success later admitted by the ADB in its reports⁶.
- **KARACHI DEVELOPMENT PLAN**: A team for the evaluation of the Karachi Development Plan was appointed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). It pointed out that the Plan was not implementable and gave many reasons for it. Its recommendations were not considered. The Plan which cost Rs. 430 million was never implemented and the expensive hardware purchased for it is now lying wasted [5].
- **KARACHI MASS TRANSIT PROJECT (KMTP)**: Citizens and professionals raised objections to the Karachi Mass Transit Project. As a result, the Project was modified to reduce the number of proposed mass transit corridors from seven to three, since it was pointed out that the Circular Railway ran parallel to some of the corridors and if it was revived, the corridors were not necessary. Also, as a result of citizen's intervention, the width of the transit way along a part of M.A. Jinnah Road was reduced which

⁴ Riyadh, Boston and Bangkok are major examples of such cities.

⁵ A series of low cost housing projects on the outskirts of Karachi.

⁶ Various sector reports on Urban Environmental Sanitation by Asian Development Bank, Pakistan Country Office-Islamabad have admitted to this fact.

helped in improving the environmental conditions. It is now accepted that the Karachi Circular Railway and its extensions are a viable mass transit option to the KMTP and is cheaper and environmentally more friendly⁷ (Map-3a, 3b).

▪ **THE GULSHAN FLYOVERS:** Citizens pointed out to the then Additional Secretary, Government of Sindh, that by taking the Railway track underground or overhead one flyover could be reduced and the cost of the project would be reduced to a fraction of what had been estimated. If this proposal had been accepted, the larger flyover would not have been constructed, much to the relief of pedestrians, and would have led to a marked improvement in the aesthetic and

environmental quality of the area[6].

In the absence of public consultations, there is no transparency in the project design and implementation process. This is obvious from the following;

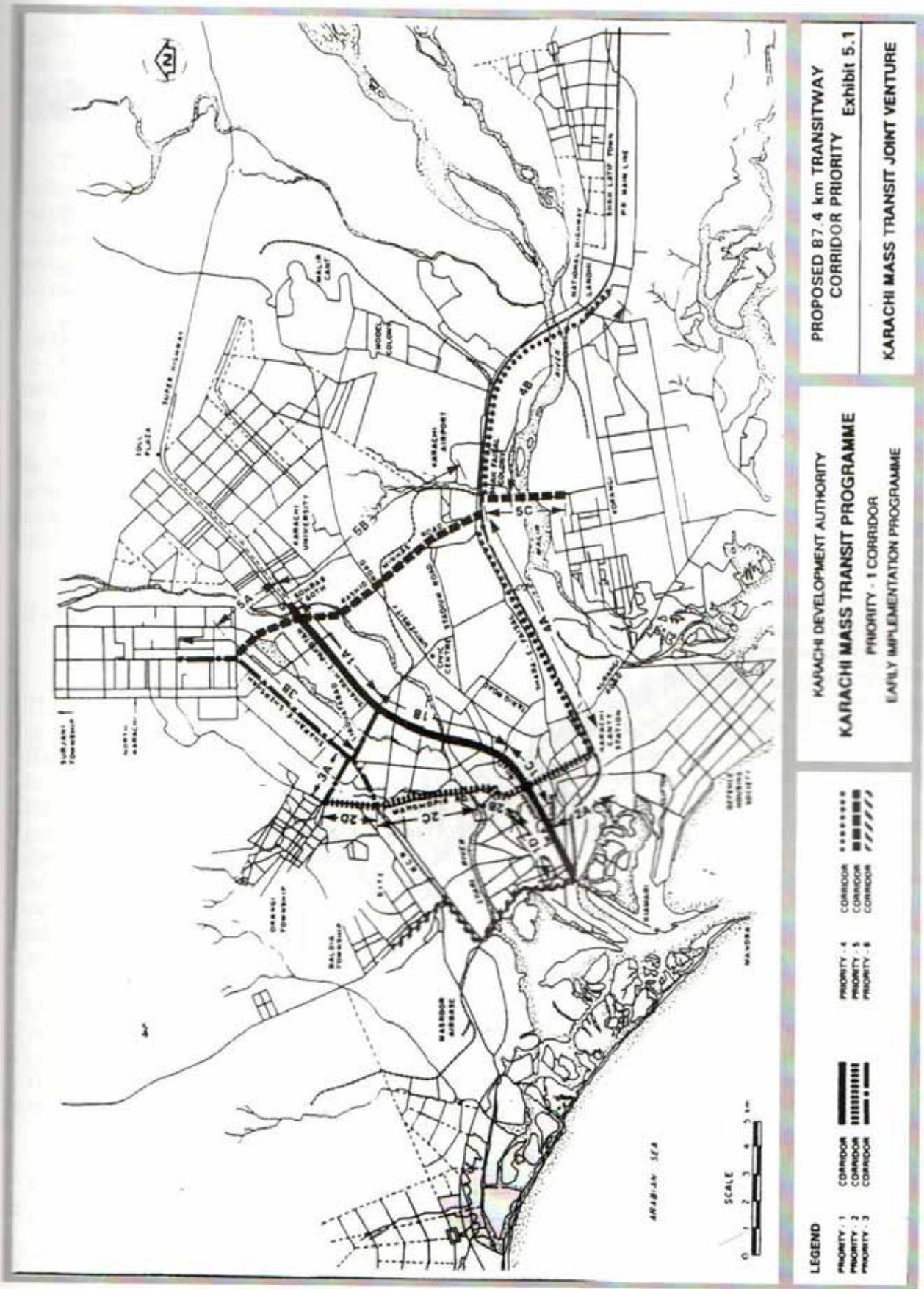
– The plans of the project have not been made available to the effectees and as such many of the populace is unaware of whether they are being effected or not.

– The Expressway planners do not seem to be aware of either of these issues, since the plans have not been finalised and yet demolitions have begun (Figure 1).

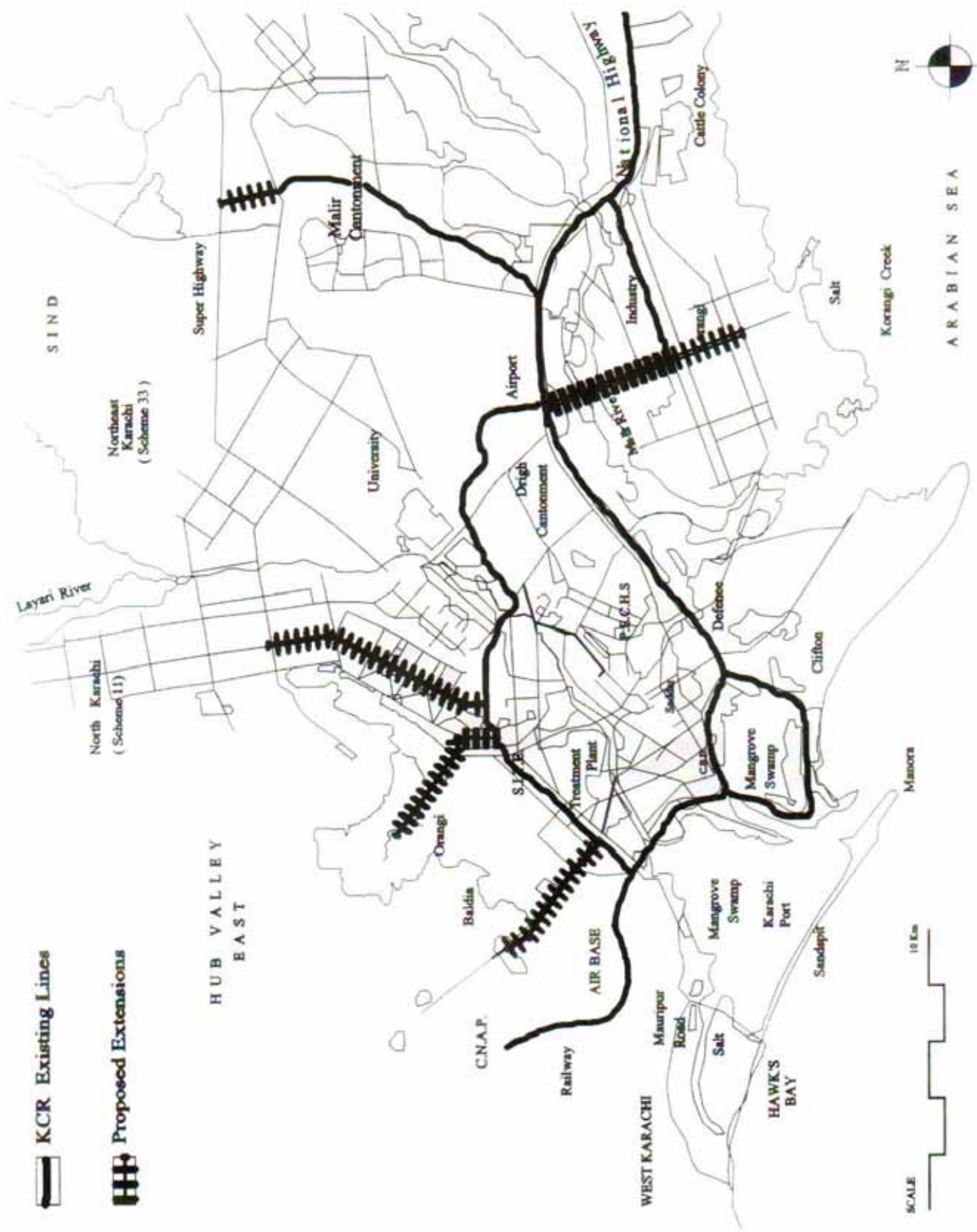


Figure 1: Demolition in Progress

⁷ Karachi Mass Transit Programme (KMTP) was proposed to serve the rising demands of commutation along the major movement corridors. The Corridor-1 originated from Sohrab Goth Junction and culminated at Mereweather Tower. Corridor-2 was planned to start from Orangi and end at Cantonment Railway Station. Total estimated cost for these two corridors was USD 1.150 Billion. In addition the priority three corridor spreads onto 15.4 km, which passes through the localities of North Karachi, Nazimabad and branches to Banaras Chowk, Liaquatabad and Manghopir Road Bridge near SITE Office partly along Karachi Circular Railway. Source: Hasan (2002).



Map-3a: KMTP Original Plan



Map - 3b: Existing Karachi Circular Railway Lines and their Proposed Extensions.

– The President of Pakistan had issued instructions that the affectees should be rehabilitated on the land acquired as a result of the building of the Expressway⁸. Despite this the effectees are being removed to distant locations.

– The Karachi Nazim has claimed that all land reclaimed by the building of the Expressway will be turned into parks and will not be given or sold to developers. He has also announced that it will be earmarked for development projects. This is a contradiction to the presidents order.

At the *Jang* Forum⁹ the officials and consultants in charge of the Expressway project expressed conflicting views as to whether heavy traffic would be permitted on the Expressway or not.

In the absence of transparency, there is confusion among the communities that are being effected; confusion among the planners, concerned NGOs and citizens.

2 - ILLEGALITIES AND UNFULFILLED COMMITMENTS BY THE GOVERNMENT

The Government of Pakistan has committed itself to the global plan of action adopted by the UN Habitat – II, in 1996, which recognises the right to adequate housing, condemns forced evictions and encourages a humane manner of dealing with poor squatter families. The forced eviction and demolition of homes and businesses for the building of the Lyari Expressway is a violation of this commitment and also the violation of the policy adopted by the Musharraf Government for dealing with *katchi abadis*¹⁰[7].

Under Section 12 of the Pakistan Environmental Act, 1997, “No proponent of a project shall commence construction or operation unless he has filed with the federal agency an initial environmental examination”. This section further

binds any proponent of a project to submit an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), when the project is likely to cause an adverse environmental effect, and obtain approval from the concerned federal authority.

In the case of Lyari Expressway the Government is violating its own commitments and its own laws. A government that does this cannot be taken seriously and no one can expect its citizens to follow its laws.

3 - NEED FOR A RESETTLEMENT PLAN

According to Government estimates, about 13,531 housing units and 1,222 commercial units are being demolished with building of the Lyari Expressway (Figure 2). In addition, 58 places of worship and tombs would be effected. 1,348 multi-storey structures, including 31 five-storey buildings also come in the Expressway alignment. Government estimates that the lives of a population of 81,540 will be disrupted. However, according to estimates of the Lyari Nadi Welfare Association (an association of 42 Lyari community groups), the figures are 25,400 houses and 3,600 businesses. These are enormous dislocations of livelihoods, homes and families[8]. The association estimates that over 200,000 families will be effected. Majority of the people who are being effected either work within the corridor in garbage collection and sorting or in the neighbouring settlements as daily-wage labour. The garbage collection and sorting industry serves the recycling factories that are functioning in the settlements located on the Northern banks of the River. This industry is crucial to Karachi as it recycles about 30 percent of Karachi’s solid waste[9].

The Government is offering a plot to these effectees in Baldia, Taiser Town, Surjani Town and Hawksbay. Land required for resettlement is around 600 acres. These alternative sites have no water, roads, sewage, electricity, social amenities or job

⁸ The land that will be reclaimed is estimated to be 1.8 million square yards.

⁹ Occasional forums held by *Jang*, a leading Urdu language newspaper, to discuss various civic problems.

¹⁰ *Katchi Abadi's* is a local term used for informal settlements.



Figure 2: Settlements along Lyari River.

opportunities. In many cases, people who have previously been allotted plots in resettlement schemes, have yet to receive them for reasons that the authorities are unable to give. In Karachi a very large number of people who have been evicted previously from their homes (example, Lines Area) were given *parchis*¹¹ promising them a plot. Even after ten years they have still not received their piece of land. That *parchi* is worthless. Also, experience tells us that it requires Karachi's development authorities anything between five to ten years to fully develop 600 acres.

A resettlement plan guaranteeing homes, jobs and social amenities should have been an integral part of the Lyari Expressway Project. There are many examples of such plans. For instance in Bombay 19,000 families are being evicted as a result of the expansion of railways. According to the Bombay

Resettlement Plan[10].

- State government provides land,
- Railway authorities level and develop the land,
- The municipality provides off-site infrastructure and allots the land to community co-operative,
- The Housing Bank provides house building loans to the co-ops through NGOs,
- Railway expansion starts after this process has taken place.

A proper resettlement plan for Lyari could have been partially self-financed and would have been an opportunity for improving the housing

¹¹ '*Parchi*' is a note issued by a government department as a soft recommendation. In this case, it refers to the recommendation for allotment of a plot of land.

conditions, education, health and economic activities of 25,000 families and businesses instead of their total destruction in this age of recession, unemployment and growing homelessness. Urban planning is not about building roads alone but about improving job opportunities and community cohesiveness. By now, after years of civic strife, Karachi's planners should have learnt this lesson.

4 - LYARI EXPRESSWAY AND ITS ADJACENT AREAS

The building of the Lyari Expressway will not solve the problems of the areas adjacent to the Lyari Corridor. The problems of these areas are in essence the problems of Karachi. These issues are explained below.

A. Between East Avenue in SITE and M.A. Jinnah Road are the settlements of Sher Shah, Chakiwara, Khadda, Lyari, Kharadar, Mithadar, Bohra Pir, Ranchore Lines, Wadhomall Quarters and other old areas of the city.

B. These areas are the most densely populated areas of the city and by far the most environmentally degraded and congested with traffic. The reasons for this are that;

- These areas contain Karachi's old markets and industries. Previously they occupied a small area and the rest of the area was all residential. But these markets have expanded to meet the demands of a growing city and now engulf this entire area.
- This market and industrial activity requires godowns. These have proliferated bringing about major land use changes.
- Godowns are served by trucks and transport and these have clogged the narrow lanes of these old settlements. All cross roads and open spaces have been turned into transport terminals and the pavements cater to the needs of the drivers, loaders and mechanics.
- Due to the absence of space for the growth of

this activity, it is now taking place on the roads and footpaths.

C. The markets and industrial activity in this area consist of the following;

DHAN MANDI: (Wheat Market) The *Mandi*¹² operators do not wish to remain in this area. They have been asking for relocation to places that are easily accessible by rail and road and where they can expand their godowns. Their godowns are now not only on the ground floor but even on floors above and have expanded to around the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) offices. Due to their presence people in the area suffer from asthma and other respiratory diseases. With the absence of space many Dhan Mandi merchants are establishing godowns in *katchi abadis* which will create problems in the future.

CHEMICAL MARKET: Six children died recently because of pollution produced by the chemical market. The market has godowns attached to it which are very hazardous for the area and should be shifted in any case. Residents are constantly in conflict with the chemical market operators and godown owners. They too are seeking godown space in *katchi abadis*.

METAL MARKET: Metal Market has foundries, casting and recycling industries. It occupies a very large area and due to a lack of space it has expanded along the Lyari Corridor.

SOLID WASTE SORTING AND RECYCLING: The solid waste recycling factories are in Sher Shah and the Northern bank of the Lyari River. The sorting activity that supports them has expanded along the Lyari Corridor due to an absence of space for its growth. This activity is crucial for the city of Karachi since it manages to collect and recycle about one-third of Karachi's solid waste. The recyclers and sorters have indicated to the Governor's Task Force for the Improvement of Municipal Services, that they would be willing to shift to landfill sites if they were developed in an appropriate manner that provided them and their labour with land, water, electricity and access roads[11].

¹² *'Mandi'* is a local term used for wholesale markets.

D. Residents of the Lyari settlements have constantly demanded that cargo transport and godowns should be shifted from their areas so that congestion and pollution of the area can be reduced. They have also demanded that the areas vacated by these activities should be taken over by the government and turned into badly needed amenities.

E. The areas of Kharadar, Mithadar, Bohra Pir, Jail Quarters and Wadhomall Quarters, house much of Karachi's built heritage. This built heritage is being pulled down and replaced by godowns and residential accommodation for the people who work in these markets.

F. Over the years the number of people sleeping on the streets and pavements of this vast area has increased alarmingly. Most of them work in the markets and industries that are located here.

G. The suffocation of this huge area by traffic is one of the major problems that the city of Karachi faces. It is also the reason why businesses from Serai Quarters and "down town" are shifting to Clifton and Shahrah-e-Faisal, turning the historic core of Karachi into a dilapidated and environmentally degraded area.

The building of the Lyari Expressway will not solve any of the problems and concerns mentioned above. On the contrary, it is possible that much of the land reclaimed from the building of the expressway will be used for the activities that the expressway is dislocating. This is because the market is stronger than the desires of the planners or the power of the state. This is an aspect that needs to be looked into.

5 - AESTHETICS AND SOCIAL REPERCUSSIONS

The design of the consultants for the Expressway indicates that the expressway will be built on an earth embankment of approximately eight feet in height which will run along the Lyari Corridor. At

12 points along the Corridor this embankment will rise to a height of about 27 feet so that it may "fly over" the existing bridges. Four of these points will be interchanges. Thus, we will have a high roller coaster on either side of the River, often way above the level of the river bank. It is necessary to seek the advice of the architectural and planning professionals in this regard and to involve other interest groups in the discussion. From the looks of it, the Lyari Expressway will consist of two massive fortifications along the two banks of the river, physically dividing the city into North and South Lyari. This existing division between comparatively better off and poorer sections of the city will be reinforced. In addition, with this plan the Lyari Expressway will be no Lahore Canal Bank¹³ as its promoters have claimed it will be.

6 - PRIORITIES

If the Government is desirous of saving the people living in the Lyari bed from a flood disaster, there are other ways of doing it. These alternatives should be discussed. If on the other hand, the government wishes to reduce traffic congestion, there are a number of projects whose impact would be far more beneficial than that of the Lyari Expressway. These projects include the building of a road from Tin Hatti to the Jail roundabout reducing pressure on Guru Mandir; the completion of the Preedy Street and Korangi Road extensions; the building of inter-city and intra-city transport terminals, workshops and depots (a lot of spade work has been done already on these by the Governor's Task Force on Municipal Services) and the building of the Circular Railway and its extensions.

The Northern Bypass and the Lyari Expressway both begin and end at approximately the same locations and serve at least for port related traffic, the same functions. Therefore, one can ask that after the building of the Northern bypass, what exactly is the need for such an elaborate Expressway?

¹³ Lahore Canal Bank Road is a fast moving double track carriage way developed on either side of the main canal. The surrounding environment of this highway is grossly pleasant due to the precedented plantation and greenery along the corridor.

7 - POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES TO THE PRESENT PLAN

Considering what has been said above, the alternative to the present plan should be to;

i. Build landfill sites and negotiate the shifting of the recycling industry and garbage sorting yards from the trans-Lyari area to the landfill sites along with the families that work in them. They will require water, electricity, land and roads. Plans for this have already been developed for the Governor's Task Force on Municipal Services and consultations have been held with the garbage recyclers and sorters.

ii. Build the Northern Bypass and negotiate the shifting of the Dhan Mandi, Chemical Market, Metal foundries and the labour working in them. Much of the homeless labour can be housed through schemes on the *Khuda-ki-Basti*¹⁴ model.

iii. Occupy all land vacated by the transfer of these activities and turn it into amenities for the trans-Lyari settlements.

iv. Dredge the river and build embankments on either side. The land reclaimed by this should be converted into parks. If a road is still thought

necessary, it should be developed as a simple bank road. Karachi and specially the trans-Lyari area, needs open areas and spaces for recreation.

v. Institute a conservation plan for the old quarters of Karachi. This will be possible only if congestion and environmentally degrading activity can be shifted from it.

If it is problematic to develop infrastructure along the Northern Bypass, then the development of the Southern Bypass¹⁵ should be reconsidered and the various markets and their related activities should be shifted to it. However, if the Northern Bypass is built without formally planned development, informal developments along it are bound to develop. Indications are that this is already happening.

CONCLUSIONS

Work of the Lyari Expressway should be suspended and a discussion on the issues raised in this paper should be initiated. If as a result, it is decided to build the Expressway then a proper rehabilitation plan which improves the living and economic conditions of the effectees in particular and Karachi in general, should be developed and implemented with their participation, before the commencement of physical work on the Expressway. ■

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¹⁴'Khuda Ki Basti' (God's Settlement) was a settlement evolved on the concept of incremental housing scheme. This approach provides housing option to Urban poor at an affordable cost and management conditions. Procedure of the housing provision is kept transparent, simple and compatible to the needs of the poor. Three projects have been launched at Gulshan-e-Shahbaz near Hyderabad, Gharo at National Highway and Taisar Town Karachi.

¹⁵Southern Bypass was proposed as an alternate route to pass through the areas of Clifton and Defence Housing Authority. This route, which was initially planned as grade separated, aimed to connect the port to the National Highway. However due, to the resistance and influence exercised by the area residents of the posh locations, the bypass could not be developed as initially proposed.

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