

# Loss of 2800 trees looks horrifying, but the net environmental impact of the project will be positive

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**M**umbai Metro Rail Corporation chief Ashwini Bhide believes small sacrifices will have to be made to secure the city's long-term future. She is referring to the trees vs the under-construction Colaba-Seepz Metro debate that has ranged her against a very vocal greens brigade worried about the loss of the city's green cover. Bhide believes Mumbai's suburban railway system, built over 100 years ago, is the best example of the immense benefits of mega mass transit projects and how they eventually cancel out any short-term drawbacks. "The suburban network is still fulfilling the city's needs. It must have changed the land use when it was built, but look at the enormous benefits it has brought. Similarly, not only Metro III but all other Metro projects will have an enormous impact on the quality of life in Mumbai for centuries to come," she says.

In an exclusive interview to Mumbai Mirror, Bhide reveals that Aarey was not an

automatic choice for Metro-III yard and that both Kalina and Kanjurmarg options were looked at, but were found to be unsuitable for various reasons, including dimensions of the land available and litigation.

Bhide quotes figures to argue that though the loss of 2800 trees to Metro-III looks horrifying at this stage, the net environment impact of the project will be positive. "Imagine the congestion on city roads and the pollution it would cause ten years from now if we don't build Metro today.

Metro-III will carry 17 lakh passengers every day. Imagine the environmental damage if these people were to use private vehicles, taxis, rickshaw or ride buses."

Metro-III, according to her, will reduce fuel consumption by 3.5 lakh liters per day and reduce emission of green-house gases by 99 lakh kg per year. "However, if we were to retain those 2800 trees, they will help to absorb only 0.6 lakh kg green-house gases a year," she says.



SATISH MALAVADE

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# 'Metro will reduce 6.5 lakh vehicle trips per day'

SATISH MALAVADE

### Under attack from activists over chopping of hundreds of trees, Mumbai Metro chief insists the long-term benefits will override the short-term losses

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#### How many trees are going to be cut in Aarey Colony for the car depot and along the entire Metro III corridor?

At the outset, I would like to make it clear that we are not cutting trees for the sake of it. The proposal to cut each tree has been carefully scrutinised and only when we concluded that there was no option but to cut the tree did we decide to do so.

In Aarey, according to the initial proposal, the plan was to cut around 2,300 trees. After the realignment of design of car depot, we will be able to save some more trees but work is on to identify trees which need to be cut.

Along the corridor, our initial survey has shown that we will need to cut 4,003 trees. However, by tweaking designs of stations, this number was reduced to 3,800. After further consideration, we decided that 1,000-odd trees need not to be cut, so we approached the tree authority with a proposal to cut 2,800 trees. The tree authority gave permission to cut 1,050 trees and asked us to replant the rest.

And for every tree being cut, three trees are going to be planted. For Delhi Metro also nearly 50,000 trees were cut, but 1.5 lakh trees were planted in lieu of that. So, instead of destroying green cover of the city, Delhi Metro increased it.

#### However, environmentalists are not happy with the choice of spots where you are going to replant trees.

Yes, I heard some complaints about the land being marshy. Out of the nearly 43 hectares land, where we are going to be doing replantation and compensatory plantation, 30 hectares is in Aarey. Only one small plot of land in Wadala is near the creek and part of it is marshy.

Also, we are not planting trees randomly, BMC's garden department is being consulted at every stage. At the concerned spot in Wadala, we will be planting trees which grow in such an environment.



Ashwini Bhide says Aarey was the only spot that met all the criterion to house the car depot

**“ Around 17 lakh passengers are expected to use the Metro every day. Imagine the pressure on roads if those people were to use their private vehicle, taxi, rickshaw or bus**

- Ashwini Bhide

#### Why is MMRC insisting on Aarey and not considering the options of Kalina and Kanjur?

Both options of Kalina and Kanjur were scrutinised by an expert committee, which came to the conclusion that both options were not feasible.

A car depot is a resting place of trains where maintenance work can be carried out at night. We need 55 tracks where 8 car trains can be rested and maintained. For that, you can't have an elongated plot, you need a rectangular plot.

To have a car depot, you need a plot that meets three criterion - size, area and proximity to terminal location and only Aarey was fulfilling all these criterion.

The Kalina plot was simply not available to us. The Mumbai University has already prepared a master plan for this land. And the

Kanjur plot is 10 kilometres away from the termination point. This means trains have to travel 20 kilometres empty every day, which would only add to losses of the metro. Besides, this Kanjur plot is on marshy land. We would have been spending a lot just to stabilise this plot, which was not feasible.

And most importantly, the land is under litigation and some private persons have staked claim over that land. The state tried to get the stay vacated but till date the stay has not been vacated.

#### Your recent statement that Britishers also cut trees for suburban railway network created a controversy

This statement needs to be seen in perspective. If mega infrastructure projects are going to come, then the existing land use is going to

change. The suburban railway network, which was constructed over a hundred years ago, must have changed the land use when it was built, but look at the enormous benefits it has brought. Similarly, not only Metro III but all other metro projects in the future are going to have an enormous impact on the city for centuries to come.

Around 17 lakh passengers are expected to use the Metro every day. Imagine the pressure on the roads if those people were to use their private vehicle, taxi, rickshaw or bus to commute.

The metro railway will reduce 6.5 lakh vehicle trips per day. It will reduce fuel consumption by 3.5 lakh litres and will avoid emission of CO2 and other green house gases by 99 lakh kg per year. If we are to retain those 2,800 trees, they will help absorb only around 0.6 lakh kg emission of green house gases.

#### Environmentalists are also objecting to commercial exploitation of car depot land.

There is no plan to use the land for car depot commercially. However, we are going to use 3.5 acres of land next to the car depot, which is outside Aarey, for commercial purposes, which will help us raise funds.

#### What precautions are you taking to avoid traffic snarls along the corridor during construction?

Since this is an underground corridor, there will be traffic disruption only at the points where station work will be on, so there will be no traffic disruption along the entire length of the corridor.



Activists protest against the proposed car depot at Aarey