

There were many issues, but Metro III project is on track

Delays and controversy have dogged Metro III, one of the largest infrastructure projects in Mumbai. But **Ashwini Bhide**, Managing Director (MD) of Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation Ltd (MMRC) that is executing the project, says it's on schedule and will change Mumbai's travel experience. In an exclusive interview to **Neeta Kolhatkar**, Bhide says what's required is the cooperation of the people. Excerpts from the interview:

Is the project on time or has tree-felling row delayed Metro III?

The project is progressing on schedule and although there was a stay from the court on the issue of cutting trees, that phase is now over. We did lose out on some crucial work during dry weather. Now we are back on track and making up for lost time. We will stick to the deadline.

When the project began in 2015, we undertook conscious efforts to contact the residents and consider their views. We took pains to understand their problems — Ashwini Bhide

The tunnel boring machines are at site and work is soon to begin.

Do you think the controversy involving cutting of trees could have been avoided?

Since a project of this magnitude was never taken up before, there were bound to be issues with residents of Mumbai. People would take matters close to their heart to the courts. I do not think this was avoidable, rather it was part and parcel of the project and made us conscious of the problem.

Usually, when projects like Metro III are taken up, opinions and suggestions of residents and affected parties are taken into consideration. Could this have been done better?

Yes, their opinions and suggestions were taken. The project was planned way back in 2011. At that time a lot of public notices were issued and hearings were conducted. When the project began in 2015, we undertook conscious efforts to contact the residents and consider their views. When the issue of planting of new trees was taken up, suggestions were invited. In Girgaum, the people met the contractors and suggested changes in the traffic pattern. They asked us to reduce parking slots so that more space was available. The contractors have employed local youths as traffic marshals to control movement of vehicles. It does take time to get everyone on board.

Is an arborist (tree expert) on the project? The name given to the court, Simon Leong, told us he isn't part of the project. We have been told MMRC has not given any new name to the court.

Yes, everyone is on board. An arborist from GS is just one expert who is there... However, the main work of cutting, transplanting and planting new trees is the responsibility of the contractors and we have ensured that all contractors hire from a proper agency. Leong from Singapore is a general consultant and was here for some time back. He lent his expertise.

