



MUMBAI METRO

A better ride for commuters

The new lines will take care of the ills that plagued the first project

Rouhan Sharma

BETTER late than never? Maybe not, if you take the case of Mumbai's Metro Line 1. The cynosure of all eyes back in the day when it was first conceived, the project saw time and cost overruns, resulting in a courtroom battle that continues to this day between its public and private partners, namely, the Reliance Infrastructure-run Mumbai Metro One Private Limited (MMOPL) and the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA).

That's not to say the city's first metro line hasn't proved to be a boon for more than 15 crore people who have used it since operations began. In fact, RInfra says ridership has risen almost 18% over the last year to the current average of 3.5 lakh on weekdays.

So, what went wrong? Well, India's first ever Metro project under the public private partnership (PPP) model fell over its own feet in the eagerness to get things started. An impractical offer by MMRDA for clearing all Right of Way (RoW) issues along the route

THE LAY OF THE LAND

Metro Corridor	From-To	Length (km)	Status
1	Versova-Andheri-Ghatkopar	11.40	Operational
2A	Dahisar-W to DN Nagar	18.50	Work to begin soon
2B	DN Nagar to Mandale	23.6	Approved by Authority
3	Colaba-Bandra-SEEPZ	33.5	Work to begin soon
4	Wadala-Ghatkopar-Mulund-Thane-Kasarvadavali	32.3	Approved by Authority
5	Bhiwandi-Kalyan	23.1	DPR in progress
6	SEEPZ-Kanjurmarg	10.5	DPR completed in 2011
7	Andheri-E to Dahisar-E	16.5	Under implementation
8	Sewri-Prabhadevi	3.5	DPR completed in 2010
Total Length		172.9 km	

in approximately six months was inexplicably accepted by RInfra. The land meant for the depot, too, ran into problems. This meant the cost of the project escalating from an estimated ₹2,356 crore to ₹4,026 crore.

"The fellows who committed such things, to give us RoW and to get the underground utilities along the route removed in six months, they didn't have a clue how this was to be done," rues Sumit Banerjee, who was heading Reliance's infrastructure business at the time the Metro line was being constructed. Fortunately, the eight Metro projects under construction/plan-

ning in Mumbai reflect the learning of that early lesson.

First, the government seems to have abandoned the PPP model, with projects being tendered under the EPC mode now. Second, there is an emphasis on clearing all RoW issues prior to the tender process. "We have got all our land requirements in place as well as the RoW permissions. The civil engineering tenders have been awarded. We will start work by October," says Ashwini Bhide, MD, Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation (MMRC), referring to Metro line 3, expected to be ready by 2020, albeit in phases.

However, the land required for



Ashwini Bhide, MD, MMRC

the depot is a potential roadblock with environmentalists agitating for the site to be shifted. But Bhide is adamant. "Shifting the depot is ruled out. Besides the cost implications, the land to which they are proposing to shift is beset with legal hurdles," she says.

It is now up to the engineers to deliver on time. The Indian arm of the French engineering group Egis is one of four consultants for this line and Ashish Tandon, MD, Egis India says the challenge is mainly a technological one. "This will be the first fully underground, driver-less system, constructed beneath various monuments and sensitive structures

in the challenging soil conditions of Mumbai," he says.

Simultaneously, a number of other Metro lines envisaged earlier have taken off and are in the initial stages of approval, planning and/or construction. For Metro-2A and Metro-VII, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had laid the foundation stones last October. Now, the civil contracts for corridor 2A (Dahisar-W to DN Nagar) have been recently awarded and work is expected to begin shortly on the 18.5-km-long stretch.

The other Metro line under implementation is the 16.5-km line VII (Andheri E to Dahisar E) on which certain stretches have been barricaded, an indication that construction is likely to begin sooner rather than later.

With so much happening, working hours have been devised in shifts by the civic authorities to minimise disruptions to daily commute schedules. Additional traffic lanes are being provided as well as more traffic wardens to regulate traffic. In short, the city is readying itself for a hectic phase of construction activity over the next few years.