



**ASHWINI BHIDE**, Managing Director, Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation Ltd, tells **Vidyottama Sharma** that Metro network will take Mumbai's commuters to different nooks and corners of the city, reducing traffic substantially



'We will give full last-mile connectivity in five years'

**Why go for the second phase of Monorail when the first has failed miserably?**

That entire 20km corridor - Chembur to Mahalakshmi - is one corridor. Only for the sake of operational convenience, it was called Phase 1 and Phase 2. Work had started on the entire corridor but Monorail passes through a very congested area and crosses the railway line at two locations. That takes lot of time. So the first phase of 8km from Chembur to Wadala was completed as that was relatively an easier stretch. Since it could be started without any problem, that area was operationalized in the first instance.

Monorail appears to not do well but unless and until the entire corridor is opened, the real benefits of monorail cannot be reaped. The Chembur to Wadala area is not yet fully developed. Wadala has a lot of construction activity and different projects have come up there, but it is still not populated. In any infrastructure project, this is always a debate: whether you do an infrastructure project in a fully developed city, or you do a project in such a way that it will lead to development? We could complete the first corridor so fast because the area was not much developed. We could

get right of way (ROW) easily. But if you see the next stretch, it passes through a very, very congested area and is also undergoing redevelopment. So naturally, it is taking some time there. The moment the second phase of monorail, the extension up to Mahalakshmi, is done the corridor will be fully utilised

In terms of connectivity, the area should be such that one part is residential, and the other is a business district. That relation is not there between Chembur and Wadala today. It will change once we connect Chembur to Mahalakshmi. Sections on the monorail route are not connected to any suburban station. But once it is fully functional, that will be done. And let me tell you, this is the only Monorail corridor Mumbai will have. It is not required in any other area. The rest of the area will be connected by Metro.

**Both Mono and Metro are nearly the same thing. Then why have Monorail on this route?**

Because it is a very congested area. If you see the route, the kind of curves and turns on it, you will realise you can-

not have a Metro there. Its structure is different. Monorail corridor runs on a single beam. It can negotiate those many curves and turns, even the slopes, which Metro cannot. Even a bus cannot serve this purpose because it has to negotiate with the congestion on the road. That is why buses cannot have the optimum speed which otherwise they are designed for. Monorail, on the other hand, has a dedicated right of way. It can carry commuters on such curves and bends.

So monorail's optimum benefits will be reaped once its entire connectivity up to Mahalakshmi is established. All the houses, institutions, almost 70 to 80 redevelopment projects, and the developing mill land would get connectivity through monorail. Some delay has occurred in the second phase. The main challenge was crossing the railway because such a project has never hap-

pened before. So railways also had many apprehensions. But I think MMRDA has resolved most of the issues and it is in the process of expediting it.

**Aren't you being ambitious by expecting majority of the passengers to shift to Metro. With the quality of public transport that we have, questionable inter-modal connectivity, and even for vanity issue, wouldn't people continue to travel by their private vehicles?**

No, because we already have so many people on our public transport. Today the suburban railway carries almost 65 lakh passengers per day. And people prefer to travel on that in spite of overcrowding and congestion, not because they cannot afford a car but because it is difficult. Mumbai is a linear city and if you provide a very rea-

sonably competent kind of public transport network, people shift to that. We are saying that Metro will be a very ultra-modern kind of transport, with all modern features. For example, today people coming to BKC, a major employment centre, specially because of the diamond bourse, get choked up at the entry itself. When we provide the Metro station bang close to the Bharat Diamond Bourse or the major installations in BKC, people will come.

That is our experience of Line 1. Versova-Andheri-Ghatkopar travel used to take 70 minutes. Now it takes 17 to 20 minutes. So as far as Mumbai goes, that stigma for the use of public transport does not exist. People are used to using public transport.

And another advantage of Metro is that as against the two to five km of suburban systems, the distance between two Metro stations is maximum two kilometres. At a suburban station, you have to take another mode of transport, but it will not be so in Metro. Also, while the original master plan of 2004 that divided the corridors into three phases, and decreed that each phase was to be taken up after the earlier phase was completed, the state government has now taken up almost all the phases simultaneously. It has its own challenges, but on completion, the entire network will be available to people.

Mumbai's share of commuting by public transport, almost 86% of the total transport, plummeted by 10 to 12 % in the past few years because of congestion. Also, remember that while suburban rail gives the longitudinal connectiv-

ity, Metro will give lateral connectivity. The 200km of Metro network, over and above the 400km route of suburban network, will take you to different nooks and corners of the city. That will reduce traffic substantially.

Multi-modal connectivity - for the last mile connectivity is a far cry in Mumbai. People do not take trains because their private vehicle gives door to door connectivity, which public transport doesn't.

If you have to go beyond two commuting points, then probably you would prefer your own vehicle. But in the next five years if this whole Metro connectivity is ensured, then probably you can just switch over from one corridor to another corridor to reach your desired destination. The congestion on roads will reduce because you will not need another mode of transport for last mile connectivity.

**Anything else that is being planned?**

Another important aspect being taken care of by MMRDA is integrated ticketing. They have already initiated the process of Common Mobility Card (CMC). We are also designing our own AFC (Automatic Fare Collection) on the lines of MMRDA's CMC. And now Railways and BEST are also on board. The earlier attempt did not take off well as they weren't willing then but now everybody knows that unless and until we get connected to other mode of transport, our own business will be affected. So by the time this Metro network is up and running, Common Mobility as a concept will also have been established.