

Now is the time to pedestrianize Mumbai

JUHU VISION PLAN

- An example of how the Open Mumbai project can be achieved is the Juhu Vision Plan, a pilot project that seeks to integrate the beach in the area with its playgrounds and walking and cycling tracks
- It proposes connecting open spaces to institutions and amenities; realigning and integrating the Metro with public spaces; and creating a 10km-long tree-lined, flood-free walkway along Irla Nullah
- While the other proposals are pending, work on a walkway along Irla Nullah between Juhu PVR and the Millennium Club is underway with the MPLAD funds provided by Javed Akhtar. Once over, it will create a continuous walking track about 2km long
- If the plan is fully implemented, it will give Juhu open spaces of the size of nearly three Oval Maidans

Cycling & walking tracks around the city are not an impossibility, as an old plan shows. But for them to become reality, citizens must take the initiative. They must push the BMC, which will soon take suggestions on the development plan, to make Mumbai pedestrian-friendly

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Lengthy walking tracks may appear unattainable in a space-starved city like Mumbai, but they are not. A plan presented to the municipality around two years ago shows that 500km of continuous walking and cycling space could be laid here stretching from the city's southern end to the far tips of the eastern and western suburbs. But for these to become reality, what is required is resoluteness on the part of the state and the public. Architect-activist P K Das and his team together prepared the pedestrian-friendly Open Mumbai plan that seeks to make walking a mode of transport instead of the exercise form that it currently is. The proposal says that a remarkable 43%, or 208.2 sq km, of Mumbai includes green zones like gardens, playgrounds, encroached

open spaces, no-development zones, lakes, wetlands and beaches. It suggests developing much of this as public spaces. To give the city new and unobstructed walkways—and to link neighbourhoods in the process—the plan urges connecting natural assets like open spaces, beaches, nullahs and rivers. By linking waterways alone with walking paths, it says, the city would get around 150 sq km of open spaces. An additional 16km would be yielded by connecting beaches, 37km by linking planned nullahs and 28km by linking the four rivers. The proposal was submitted to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation in 2012 and has been taken up for discussion during the preparation of the 2014-34 development plan. Das concedes that its implementation may not be

straight-forward. Difficulties may arise with each structure found between any two open spaces. "Hiccups like these will come up when a plan of such a magnitude is executed. But problems can be sorted and the plan can be tweaked by the BMC to suit the conditions on the ground," says Das.

Complex the plan may be, but it is not unrealistic. Its achievability can be seen in the Juhu Vision Plan, which seeks to integrate the area's beach with playgrounds and walking and cycling tracks. Work on a 2km walkway alongside Irla Nullah is underway

with MPLAD funds from Javed Akhtar and is expected to be over by this year's end. "The walkway will stretch from Juhu PVR to the Millennium Club. The Juhu example is a simple, humble and pragmatic way of dealing with the lack of walking space," says Das. "It can be replicated by people in their own localities if they take up the issue with the civic body while the development plan is under revision." Activists and experts note that now is perhaps the best time for Mumbaiers to push

the authorities towards making the city pedestrian-friendly. The municipal corporation, while drafting the amendments in the city's development plan, has agreed to create 151 micro-planning units comprising citizens. These units—each covering 3-5 sq km—will be asked in meetings after the general elections to give inputs on what develop-

ment they think is needed, and not needed, in their regions. "Micro-planning units have been created to provide citizens a forum to express their requirements, so that they can be budgeted for in the development plan. Locals should deliberate on the plan and take it forward," says Aravind Unni, an urban planner with the voluntary development organisation Yuva.

FOLLOWING THE FINE LINES

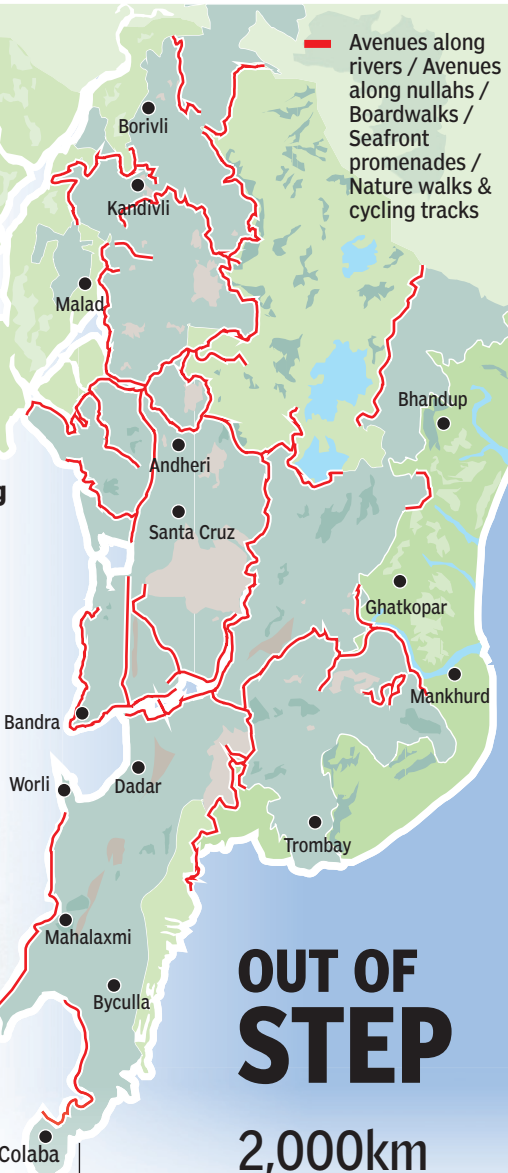
The city has 208 sq km of green zones and yet no place for walkers or cyclists. The Open Mumbai plan seeks to provide the city 500km of walking and cycling space by linking its natural assets such as waterfronts, mangroves, nullahs and open spaces

Among the suggestions in the plan is a 10km-long tree-lined walkway along Irla Nullah. Of this 2km should be ready by this year's end

Juhu Vision Metro Route

S V Road

Linking Road



OUT OF STEP

2,000km
Length of footpath network (not continuous)

₹600-800cr
BMC's annual expenditure on maintaining and building footpaths

5,000
Complaints related to footpaths received in a year by BMC

Govt plans that got off to a bad start

CYCLING TRACKS & RENT-A-BIKE AT BKC

Two years ago, the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) laid a 13km-long cycling track in Bandra-Kurla Complex at a cost of Rs 6.5 crore. Rarely used by cyclists, the track fell into disrepair and soon enough became a de facto parking space for motorists. To resuscitate the original project, the MMRDA weighed another plan last year. It considered building nine bicycle stands in three blocks of the BKC and engaging a private company to provide cycles on rent. The idea was that people could pedal to the railway station, drop the cycle there and take a train to their final destination. The project is still to take off



THE PROBLEM

Transportation experts note that cycling tracks built in isolation are less likely to work, especially among cyclists. Few people are going to drive down to the BKC with their bikes, cycle there on designated tracks and then return in the car with their bikes

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

The MMRDA needs to plan better. It should fix the broken tracks, make available cycles at the earliest and provide place for their parking. Incentivizing the use of bicycles in the business district may also help

WALKER'S PLAZA AT CRAWFORD MARKET

Over four years ago, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) came up with a tentative plan to construct a walker's plaza around Crawford Market. It considered building an underpass around the heritage market, so that traffic could go underground and an exclusive pedestrian space could be freed right from Abdul Rehman Street to Kalbadevi. According to some media reports, the civic authorities even asked the Urban Mass Transit Company to study the possibilities. It expected the plan to be a big hit because of the junction's proximity to two markets and rows of hawkers. People, officials were quoted as saying, would 'like to stroll there'



Rizwan Mithawala

THE PROBLEM

The project never went very far. Partly because of lack of will on the part of the authorities and partly because the cost of moving the underground utilities was calculated to be prohibitive

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

The BMC must rethink the plan. If required, it should be implemented in a less challenging and congested area