

## Key Linkages

*Projects like the Bandra-Worli sea link will make far-flung suburbs much more accessible, but timely completion would make a world of difference, says Archana Sinha*

The much-awaited Bandra- Worli Sealink, slated to open a four-lane carriage way by the month-end, is expected make travelling easier for more than one lakh commuters who will take less than 10 minutes to reach Worli from Bandra, instead of 45 minutes. According to a senior officer of Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC), responsible for commissioning the project, more than 35 traffic signals between Mahim and Worli will be avoided now. The project envisages construction of an eight-lane sea link freeway from South Mumbai to the suburbs, and is expected to boost real estate development in these extended localities, since it will reduce commuting time considerably.

Commenting on the completion of this mega project, Mayur Shah, MD, Marathon Group says, "Real estate development is closely related to infrastructural development. This, combined with the Metro I project and the flyover being constructed to connect the Sion highway to Lalbaug, will help improve the connectivity tremendously, giving a real boost to residential, retail and commercial developments." Shah adds, "Similarly the Trans-harbour link will bring the entire 1000 sq. km. of Panvel within 20 minutes of South Mumbai, making Panvel very accessible and a viable residential option." Dharmesh Jain, CMD, Nirmal Lifestyle, observes, "Government has taken up several projects like mono-rail, Bandra-Worli Sea-link, east-west connection and sky walks, and these will change the way Mumbai lives." **Milan Kothary**, MD, GVA Intercapitalis, corroborates the view, saying, "This will ensure speedy travel in the trafficlogged city. The convenience of travelling to the South may lead to a demand for residential premises on the Northern side."

Jimmy Mogal, vice-president, corporate communications, Hindustan Construction Company, which executed the most technically challenging section of the sea link says, "Since BEST buses will be allowed, it will be easy for everyone to have a pleasant journey to South Mumbai. Saving of fuel and time will encourage people to look for homes in the suburbs where property is available at cheaper rates."

However the bridge took too long to complete and work did not start for the first four years after commissioning, as many public interest litigations were filed by environmentalists, and fishing communities in adjoining areas. Even after the work commenced, there were several delays, thanks to these protests.

What can be done to avoid such delays in future? Mayur Shah says, "Every developmental project will have issues related to environment, CRZ or people living in the area. Yet it cannot be avoided as it is essential for the growth of a city and improvement of living conditions. The government must engage experts to study projects before awarding contracts, and work out an environmentally sustainable development solution. Development must not be abandoned, but a consensus has to be built. All other countries have these issues but they are resolved in a way that larger interests of people are incorporated in the final execution of the plan. It needs a comprehensive policy and a strong political will."

**Milan Kothary** suggests, "Government must decide the priorities and policy reforms through a convergent thinking process of all the concerned agencies and publish the pros and cons of a given project and explain why it is in the interest of the general public. Additionally it must put up a bar-chart of project activities and benchmarking for timely completion."

Jimmy Mogal adds, "Ours is a democratic country and extremely pluralistic, hence everybody's views are important. Those must be carefully considered before awarding the contract so that once projects begin, they are completed with no obstructions. We hope the new government with all its mega plans for infrastructure is able to come up with better thought-out plans."

T.C. Benjamin, principal secretary, urban development, Maharashtra government says, "Such delays have cost the government heavily, so we are now engaging experienced architects, town-planners and other experts to study the feasibility of our skywalk, monorail,

metro, and the airport projects, and work out an implementable plan before we start the work."

The Indian Merchants' Chamber has submitted a 100-day action-plan to the new government in which infrastructure is mentioned as a key driver of economy. Hopefully the government will act on the suggestions and speed up the process of making Mumbai a vibrant city that offers quality lifestyles to all sections of society, including those who make the far-flung suburbs their home.

### Quick BYTES

Real estate and infrastructure development are closely interlinked

