



A metro rail is being mooted as the solution to congestion on the roads as well as pollution in Kochi. However there are doubts arising as to the utility of a metro- especially in Kochi, to be able to solve traffic issues, ridership and congestion during construction phase being the most important concerns. In this article, these issues have been analysed and suggestions made which might enable this project to meet its objectives. A metro since it covers only central routes in the city, very few commuters are expected to be able to travel their entire journey on the metro. This would mean they may need alternative feeder systems. However the average distance travelled by a commuter in Kochi each day is only approximately 7 km. If only part of such journeys can be covered on the overhead metro, it may prove comparatively more tedious to passengers vis-a-vis travelling the entire distance in a direct bus. The competition which may arise between the 700 odd private buses in Kochi and the Metro might also prove detrimental to the interests of these bus operators who have been serving Kochi for long, especially since the route covered by the metro is the principal route covered by the buses as well. Instead, buses need operate from and connect different metro stations thus connecting those areas in the city and suburbs which are not connected by Metro. An entire overhaul of the existing transportation structure in the city may need to be called forth in order to ensure that all other systems prove as complementary feeder systems to the metro rather than become its competitors. Further, cross roads joining the main roads in Kochi are generally narrow which are not capable of hosting increased number of private transport. Extensive provisions may have to be made for parking facilities at metro stations or better yet, the people should be encouraged or even incentivised to use more healthy and eco-friendly travelling such as non-motorised means of transport like cycling and walking. The necessary infrastructure for such an eco system shall be built in along with the Metro construction. The metro is ideally expected to help commuters save time but there may be concerns as to whether this might happen since the less frequency of trains in initial phases, along with the time spent in making use of feeder systems may result in more time being taken as compared to using the already existing modes. Awareness about the timings and increased frequency during peak hours may help alleviate the situation. Essentially for the metro to be able to reduce congestion, people travelling by cars and buses today should travel by the metro. Cars which carry only 15 percent of passengers use 38 percent of road space, while buses which carry 73 percent constitute only 40 percent. The metro rail would in fact reduce this even more but only if the people use it. But as it is, even in Delhi, recent reports show that the number of vehicles on the road is still increasing everyday at a rate of 1,2003. Suitable measures and policies may need to be put in place to restrict the number of private cars entering the roads. Business establishments on MG Road remarked that the traffic regulations imposed during the construction of the North ROB itself had already reduced their sales by more than 30% and that the congestion which would be induced by the actual Metro construction especially on the narrow MG Road might further plunge their businesses. All the avenue trees on MG Road would also have to be cut thus changing the entire landscape and climate of the area. While branches of retail chains feel they may be able to weather the storm since they may relocate for the time being or hold out with the sales generated by branches elsewhere, the smaller shops appeared concerned about the arrival of the Metro. Their interests need also be taken into account by ensuring that time bound work is done with minimum congestion caused on the roads. The existing built up area in on both sides of MG Road shall be carefully studied before plans are initiated to integrate it with the Metro. The contention that the metro would reduce pollution is also highly debatable since the direct and indirect impacts of producing adequate energy to run the Metro might prove detrimental to the interests of both the people and our Environment, particularly in the wake of severe power crunch in recent times in the State of Kerala. It may not be feasible to press for more dams which will deplete our natural resources more. Alternative energy resources shall be incorporated into the system wherever it is possible. Further studies show that the population of almost all Southern States of India including Kerala are facing the issue of stabilizing populations and especially in Kochi, the growth rate is now in the negative. In terms of future growth prospects too, Cochin has reached its saturation point with high density in the small city area. In the light of these realities, the proposed metro alignment shall be revisited. Another concern of the project is that none of the waterways have been incorporated into the action plan. It has been reported that while nations like Germany transport 30 percent of their cargo through waterways cheaply and effectively, India, which has a greater potential in terms of waterways, uses its channels to transport only 3 percent of its cargo. Interface between the metro and waterways at points such as High Court and the Boat Jetty may in fact encourage the population to make effective use of both since a huge majority of the working population on MG Road and such commute daily

from the islands such as Mattancherry, Fort Kochi, Vypeen etc. Therefore, in order to ensure that the Kochi Metro does not turn out to be a very expensive infrastructure project which may not solve the problems of a city like Kochi, it is essential that the objectives of proposing such a massive project are kept in mind by both the Government and the people while making use of the same. 1.

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6. An affordable and viable urban transport system for the people of Cochin- A proposal- K J Sohan, pg 26

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