

# A DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR KARACHI 2047

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Karachi's new master plan must take into consideration a whole world of local and global, social, economic and technological change to address the myriad and complex issues plaguing the city.

Karachi has had many master plans and, from what one gathers, another one is being constructed. None of the previous development plans have been implemented or even completed on the drawing boards. Their authors claim that this is because the city changes faster than the plan's implementation.

And this is true, because much of Karachi has developed in an ad-hoc manner, except for its formally developed areas, which mainly consist of elite and upper-class residential and commercial settlements and are planned based on European theory and practice. This is not only in terms of physical planning, but also of a societal vision on how people should live, relate to each other, educate their children and manage their health.

Well, this has not worked out too well, as social and demographic conditions changed, but by-laws, zoning regulations and anti-poor bias in planning and policy remained the same as were gifted to us by our colonial masters.

As a result, 60 percent of Karachi households live and work in informal settlements, which try to copy the formal sector design but with much higher densities, smaller lots of plots, narrower streets and up to six to 10 persons per room. In addition, these settlements have no parks, schools and specially planned health spaces.

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To plan a city like Karachi, it is important to understand how it is functioning at the time of planning and, luckily, there are a lot of studies that can help us in doing this. Much of these studies were prepared for the previous master plan on various aspects of the city. In the previous two to three decades, academic institutions and NGOs have also added to this knowledge. This article uses the knowledge that has been developed by these studies and the media to identify the needs of Karachi's citizens and the manner in which they can be catered to by creating a vision for the city, as well as suggests a process for implementing that vision.

## IMPROVING THE EXISTING CITY

As said earlier, informal settlements contain over 60 percent of Karachi households. It is not possible that, by 2047, new additions to the city will be larger than what exists today. Therefore, the main task of any plan will be to retrofit and improve the existing settlements, and their social and physical infrastructure.

Retrofitting houses will require cross-ventilation, insulation and the prevention of stagnant water within the house, as these are major causes of disease. Settlement retrofitting will also require the creation of open public spaces, schools, a community centre and sports areas. This can be provided by removing

existing houses on a small scale and replacing them by ground plus three apartments for those houses that will be affected.

Easily accessible health facilities that are linked to a major hospital are also required, along with mobile clinics. The Union of International Architects, in its 2023 congress, also pointed out that one of the most problematic issues in healthcare is the difficult-to-reach location of health facilities, even in the developed world.

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## **TRANSPORT ISSUES**

Both physical and social planners agree that the major problem that the city faces today is transportation. Dr Noman Ahmed, dean of NED University, has pointed out that the cost of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) plan, including the circular railway for Karachi, is Rs 520.6 billion, while Pakistan's entire GDP is Rs 84,657.9 billion. This is irrational, and it will mean taking large loans for construction, maintaining and operating the system.

Meanwhile, Dr Saeed-ud-din Ahmed, another academic, has pointed out in a presentation that more than one-third of the population of Karachi travels by three-wheeler Qingqui, for which the government provides no subsidy for the purchase of vehicles or maintenance. Garbage and cargo are also picked up by subsidy-free three-wheelers; he feels that this is a three-wheeler subsidy-free revolution that should be explored for a possible solution.

Every strategic plan also has a vision for the city, which lays the priorities that the development of the city is to follow. The previous plan's vision was to turn Karachi into a world-class city, meaning that it would resemble a first world city like Dubai, with high-rise buildings, malls and light rail or BRT transportation built through direct foreign investment.

This sounds good, but cities that have followed this formula have not been able to solve their transport problems, because of an increase in automobiles. In 2018, Karachi's vehicular transport increased to 903 vehicles per day, Delhi's to 1,440 per day and Bangkok's to 1,750 per day. This is because of easy bank loans for the purchase of vehicles and the pressure from a powerful road and petroleum nexus. Karachi will have to deal with this powerful nexus.

According to a study done by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in 2004, the majority of travel trips in Karachi are on foot and some of them are of very large distances. People make these trips mostly on the roads where the footpaths either do not exist or are in a bad state of repair, or are encroached upon by billboards, ad-hoc trees, and disorganised spaces for hawkers. Therefore, it is safe to say that the vision for Karachi should be for a pedestrian and commuter-friendly city.

Women especially feel unsafe making pedestrian trips after dark, because of the absence of properly defined pavements and street lights. Some of the walking trips are already very long and, with safe, well-lit pavements and benches for waiting and clean toilets, they can be increased both in number and length.

This is especially true of inner-city areas and streets leading to Sharae Faisal and Nazimabad Avenue. This will not only reduce the cost in commuting but also create safe spaces for walking, which the younger generation of women in Karachi demand in most surveys. Transport affects the lives of Karachi residents in many ways. Karachi Urban Resource Centre surveys show that women often have to give up the possibility of a good job just because of the non-availability of affordable transportation. They also often have to forgo the possibility of higher education because of the cost of commuting.

Because of the cost of education, parents have to decide as to which child should be given and which child should be denied education. These issues create conflict between families and lead to social instability. All this while over 700 Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) school buildings, most of which lie vacant, with paid teachers but no students. The revival of these and similar abandoned institutions should be seriously considered.

### **THE PARKING DILEMMA**

As mentioned earlier, congestion and traffic on the roads affects everybody in Karachi. Car and motorcycle parking is also a major issue, and so is the parking and terminals for public transport, especially along the existing Green Line corridor, and it will be the same for other corridors as well. Parking for public sector BRT and circular railway stations must be provided so as to facilitate the change of transport modes and commuters.

Providing space for parking today is taken care of by private entrepreneurs and the KMC to occupy and manage any space that is available for parking against a reasonable cost for a day of around Rs 1,000 a month. Can this be integrated into some sort of system?

It has been noticed that, parallel to some very busy streets, there are streets and areas that are not congested at all, and through traffic re-organisation, a lot more space can be created for parking. It has been suggested that a spatial re-organisation of the city needs to be done, especially where problems are most intense, and parking in the basement under the roads should be created.

Our city is full of flyovers and underpasses — wherever there is traffic congestion, we build an underpass or a flyover to solve that problem. According to traffic engineers, that is the most expensive and least effective of solutions. What is required is a proper traffic management plan. Manhattan has more vehicles than Karachi, but it does not have so many traffic jams or underpasses and flyovers — it has a lot more management.



Bumper-to-bumper traffic on M.A. Jinnah Road: simply building more underpasses and flyovers is not the solution to Karachi's traffic congestion problem | AFP

### **KARACHI'S STREET ECONOMY**

Karachi also has a well-organised street economy. It is estimated that there are 150,000 hawkers in the city, who individually earn Rs 4,000 per day or Rs 219 billion per year as retailers. This does not include the supply and manufacturing chains, which are perhaps larger and make more than what the retailers earn.

These hawkers are often removed from the pavements by the Karachi administration with the help of the police and rangers and without any compensation or space for relocation, thus causing immense losses to the hawkers, middlemen and manufacturers. This is a huge loss to Karachi's economy as a whole, and especially to Karachi's informal economy.

It is necessary to provide these hawkers with secure spaces that they can rent from the state. These spaces should be provided in an aesthetic manner and should not obstruct pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Studies and designs have shown that this is possible.

Meanwhile, informally built settlements should not be bulldozed without alternative housing being built for their residents at a location where they can conduct their businesses and have access to social facilities. A cut-off date should be set for this through negotiations between the hawkers' associations and Karachi's administration. In planning new settlements, space for the working-class population should be allocated and the methodology to acquire it should be formulated.

It should be mentioned here that the organisations linked to the hawkers' supply chain import tea from Sri Lanka and Kenya, dry fruits from Afghanistan, and exotic animals and birds from Singapore and Latin America, and eggs from all over Pakistan.

Bachat [Thrift] bazaars have been established all over Karachi, with the increasing participation of women, which should be promoted. There are also a number of book bazaars all over Karachi, which are very popular and, in the absence of space, they are forced to use pavements to function, which the administration makes difficult. Such bazaars are very popular with Karachi's middle class intellectuals and affordable for students and teachers.

### **SUPPORTING THE INFORMAL ECONOMY**

The informal economy manufacturing chain requires cheap energy and training in manufacturing items. It caters to the low income and lower-middle income communities today but, tomorrow, it will have to cater to changes in technology, especially for students of colleges and universities. This informal supply chain makes items cheap enough for students to purchase, without which the teaching of many technical subjects would not be possible.

A very important part of this huge manufacturing and retailing enterprise is the manner in which it is funded. The loans required for commencing non-technical businesses are between Rs 100,000 to Rs 150,000, which does not include payment for a space on the pavement, which varies depending on the location of the space.

The rest of the finance required can be had from lenders in the market, at an interest of eight to 10 percent per month or from other persons employed in the same field or from shops before whom the retailer establishes a stall. Shopkeepers feel that with hawkers on the pavements before them, they increase their business.

Without this informal loan system, much of the jobs and finances of Karachi would not be generated. For giving and taking, only an oral agreement is often required, provided it is done in the presence of someone respected. It is also not uncommon to negotiate a loan by mortgaging some belongings, such as a motorbike.

Small kiriyana [grocery] shops in the neighbourhood also provide loans to their clients, which are repaid at the end of every month. Without such credit facilities, running a household in Karachi would be very difficult.

Attempts at establishing micro-credit companies have not been successful because of the formalities involved at a high rate of interest. In addition, cultural familiarity with the established system is also a major reason for the failure of the more formal systems.

### **THE SEARCH FOR A ROOF**

According to surveys by the Karachi Urban Resource Centre (URC), most people in Karachi feel that, if they are poor, it is because they do not own a roof over their heads.

For acquiring a house, there are also well-established processes. You can buy a plot informally at the periphery of the city, where land is cheap, and make a shack. However, land has become so expensive that an increasing number of people cannot afford this option, so they are forced to rent rather than purchase on the periphery, where there are no physical and social amenities.

There are also travel and time costs related to living on the periphery, such as travel to workplaces or to schools for children. The other option is to buy or rent in a multi-storey katchi abadi [informal

settlement] apartment block, nearer to the city centre. This is an expensive option since rents are high, but one saves on time and travel costs. Such apartments can be purchased on pagri [goodwill money] and in instalments.

All low-income areas in the city have doctors but surveys suggest that they are “quacks.” Government clinics and hospitals are in inappropriate locations and medicines and doctors are very expensive. As a result, there is an increasing reliance on alternative medicine, which is relatively much cheaper. Would an investment in promoting alternative medicine institutions help the Karachi of the future? There is also an absence of ambulances, because of which many lives that could be saved are lost.

Narrow lanes and high rise and congested apartments also create a ‘heat island’ effect, due to which a number of senior citizens die every year. Research is required on how to reduce heat on the external walls and roofs of the homes and to make this solution affordable to the people.

Apart from the homes, the settlements themselves also need retrofitting, in the form of planting of trees, paving the streets with materials that do not absorb too much heat, and creating spaces for men and women to gather and sit in pleasant locations. Paving the wider roads into jogging tracks or linking them up with the nearest transport routes is a possibility.

### **A NEW GENERATION’S ASPIRATIONS**

However, the most important change that has taken place in Karachi since the preparation of the last master plan is that a new generation has grown up, and it is very different from the previous generation, especially the women.

URC conversations and surveys tell us that the extended family has or is in the process of breaking down. Census data tells us that both women and men get married at a much later age and that they do not wish to live with their parents. Increasingly, they want to marry of their free will and interaction between men and women is becoming much easier than before. This is changing the demographic make-up of the city.

There are far more women students and teachers (right down from primary school to university) than men. The number of women workers in factories and independent entrepreneurs has increased substantially. Surveys by Dawood University students show that in parks, even in katchi abadis, women want space for playing cricket, yoga classes and exercise machines.

There is a great demand for specially designed women’s toilets in public places. And women want space for walking in a safe environment. All this is bringing about a large change in the aspirations of the young people and desperately needs to be catered to. For example, space for women in public transport will need to be increased.





Stalls set up on Mir Karam Ali Talpur Road in front of Empress Market in Saddar: it is estimated that there are 150,000 hawkers in Karachi, who individually earn Rs 4,000 per day | White Star

### **THE BATTLE OVER LAND**

The seafront and beaches of Karachi are being consumed by real estate developers and the military authorities for their enormous housing estates. They need to be protected and so do the islands off the coast.

The recent proposal for handing over 6,000 acres of land along the coast to the Defence Housing Authority (DHA) should be resisted. Any proposed development should be publicly exhibited so that the people of Karachi can give an opinion on the subject.

The Kirthar National Park to the north and west of Karachi is of a significant ecological asset of the Karachi region and its flora and fauna should not be allowed to be destroyed through the development of insensitive tourism. For this, a regional development plan for the city and its environs needs to be prepared and implemented. This is not an easy undertaking, since much of the Karachi environs have already been or are being developed without such a plan.

Water, sewage, solid waste management and power are all issues that have been discussed in great detail, both by the media and the state agencies, and proposals for their solutions have been put up for them from time to time. The impediments to their implementation and the excessive costs to Karachi households should be identified and removed.

## **THE NEED FOR RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS**

The participation of the people of Karachi in planning and delivery should be guaranteed on the basis of the work carried out by the [Orangi Pilot Project](#), and currently being carried out by the Orangi Technical Training Resource Centre in collaboration with Orangi communities. For solid waste, the potential of an existing, successfully functioning, informal waste management system should be recognised and work with it should be devised.

The design and implementation processes of all these utilities should be modified, taking into consideration climate change factors, especially those related to flooding and coastal land reclamation and development.

In Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's time, an Urban Metropolitan Training Centre was established to carry out research and training of bureaucrats and municipal councils, to relate policy and its implementation to ground realities. There was also a very active Karachi Development Authority (KDA) Masterplan Group of Offices that created the knowledge required for a city master plan, which had to be prepared every 10 years.

Without such institutions of research and development, much of what has been proposed in this article would be difficult, if not impossible, to carry out, especially in an era of climate change and rapidly developing new technologies, such as AI and stem cell applications.

Karachi's rich heritage has been mapped by the NED University Heritage Cell in detail. Its problems are well known by the Sindh Culture Department. These include social, political, technical, legal and administrative problems. The Sindh Conservation Act has sufficient flexibility in it and its technical committee has the knowledge to deal with these issues. However, this cannot be done without the support of the Sindh Culture Department, the creation of an autonomous heritage cell within the department, and the support of local people and organisations.

Much of the heritage properties are on prime land, and thus the pressure from the real estate lobby for purchasing and demolishing them and constructing commercial buildings on them is considerable, and is often backed by bureaucrats and politicians.

However, for an effective heritage programme, you need conservationists and technicians, and for that, you need both relevant academic and technical institutions, which we do not have. The creation of such institutions, their nurturing and their relationship with the field, is desperately required.

## **SELF AND THE CITY**

However, perhaps the most important thing for the future of Karachi is to create a sense of belonging of the people to the city. A museum of Karachi city, its origin and its development is required, which can be visited by students and citizens to create such a sense of belonging.

In addition, new plans and reasons for their being proposed should be exhibited to the citizens, so that they can understand and give their opinions regarding the future of their city and of the neighbourhoods in which they live.

For instance, why has the sea at Clifton beach been pushed back for more than a half kilometre? What impact will this have on the coast and on the citizens of Karachi and how will the land being acquired in the process be used? Why has construction on the Bahria Icon tower and on the Red Line BRT stopped?



What is the Kirthar National Park? And should 6,000 acres of land along the coast be handed over through the Defence Housing Authority for the development of a housing colony?

Such questions and a search for their answers will keep the citizens, especially those belonging to Generation Z, involved, not only with the development plans of the city, but also with its politics. After all, they are the future, not only of the city but also of Pakistan.

But for such discussions and assemblies, both physical and institutional spaces are required and the development plan of Karachi should see to it that such spaces are created.

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