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19 reasons why Shahra-e-Faisal shouldn't be destroyed by an elevated expressway: IAP

Staff Report

KARACHI: The Institute of Architects Pakistan (IAP) has listed 19 reasons and concerns about the proposed Elevated Expressway (EE) that the CDGK plans to build over the M.T. Khan Road / Shahrah-e-Faisal corridor, according to a press release Tuesday. On Feb 24, the CDGK is holding a briefing on the project at the AKU at 10:30 a.m., the IAP's Amina Nasim Jan told Daily Times.

According to the press release, the architects and planners are not against development; in fact their business thrives with the development in the country but Shahrah-e-Faisal which has been there since before Partition was never designed to support an elevated expressway.

The project proposes to construct a 24km long, 4 lane expressway which will stretch from Jinnah Bridge at Keamari to Quaidabad in Malir. Vehicles will be required to pay a toll. There will be six entry and exit points; Quaidabad, Star Gate, Karsaz, Shahrah-e-Quaideen, Hotel Metropole, and Jinnah Bridge. The EE will be high enough to clear the existing overpasses and will have toll plazas at intermediate levels at the six entry/ exit nodes. There have been very limited public hearings on this project.

Several prominent members of the architectural and engineering communities have expressed their reservations but their concerns have been brushed aside in the rush to initiate this project in the name of development and foreign investment.

The IAP believes that there are several reasons why this project is conceptually flawed and unfeasible: The EE is being developed to ease the current and projected load on Shahrah-e-Faisal. The project does not take into account the alternative route and the relief that will be provided by the Lyari Expressway nor does it consider any different corridors to divert traffic off of Shahrah-e-Faisal.

The EE is proposed to be a high-speed link for freight and passenger traffic between the airport, Karachi Harbour and the Port Qasim. Realistically, there is very limited traffic between the airport and the two ports. Instead there is much greater freight traffic between the ports and the rest of the country, adequately serviced by the Northern Bypass.

It is also not correct to refer to the EE as the Southern Bypass as has been suggested because it bypasses nothing and ploughs through the densest and most valuable real estate in Karachi. The EE also does not service any of the industrial estates of Karachi. There is no direct access to the EE from Korangi, SITE and North Karachi except through residential neighbourhoods. These areas are much better served by the Northern Bypass and the National Highway.

The project proposes to place a limited access high-speed expressway over the alignment of Shahrah-e-Faisal and M.T. Khan Road. This would mean that the expressway would have the same constraints and limitations as Shahrah-e-Faisal and M.T. Khan Road and will hardly allow expressway speeds. For example, the expressway will travel over the Bridge at PIDC, squeeze between Hotel Pearl

Continental and Hotel Sheraton; curve around Hotel Metropole and past Hotel Avari.

By adding the EE, the volume of traffic that can be handled by the Shahrah-e-Faisal corridor may be doubled but the roads leading into Shahrah-e-Faisal and away from it will remain the same. This will create major congestion on roads feeding Shahrah-e-Faisal. An EE is an expensive and inefficient response to the city's traffic problems. When the volume exceeds the capacity of the EE, it will not be possible to widen it. Therefore, this project will have much shorter productive life span than an on-grade highway.

The EE is being proposed as a 4 lane highway with two lanes traveling in either direction (The 6-lanes claimed in CDGK publications includes entry and exit lanes). There is no provision for a shoulder or emergency lane. A breakdown or accident on the expressway will result in traffic jams of monumental proportions, with no escape for vehicles and no access for fire tenders or ambulances except from the six exit points.

The placement of the six entry and exit points is not rationally based on the requirements of the city's traffic but rather on the limited space available for entry and exit ramps and toll plazas. For example, there is no entry or exit at Jinnah Airport. Airport traffic will exit the EE at Star Gate intersection and merge with Shahrah-e-Faisal traffic till the JIA intersection. There is no interchange at either Rashid Minhas Road or FTC. Residents of Gulshan-e-Iqbal and DHA would have to exit earlier and merge with Shahrah-e-Faisal traffic.

The proposed Master Plan 2020 calls for the development of multiple nuclei, i.e. additional business districts at different locations throughout the city to reduce commuting time and pressure on our roads and other resources. The goal of this proposal is to decrease the dependence on Saddar. This is a commendable proposal in the Master Plan. The EE tends to contradict this goal of the Master Plan as it seeks to concentrate more traffic into Saddar. If this money were applied instead to develop a Central Business District in Port Qasim it would open up jobs there and reduce traffic to Saddar.

Lastly, the increase in the number of cars on the roads in Karachi is not a valid justification for the construction of new highways. The city should not be fascinated by the notion of having an elevated expressway as if such a thing is an achievement that heralds Karachi's elevation to a 'mega city'. Elevated expressways are usually the failure of urban planning because they indicate that a city has failed to manage its traffic problems through less dense, less expensive, on-grade solutions.

The construction of the EE will ruin one of the most attractive boulevards in Karachi. Trees along Shahrah-e-Faisal will be lost. It will effectively place a roof over the existing roadway, cutting off sunlight and breezes. Anyone wanting to imagine the ambience of the resulting roadway need only stand under the NIPA flyover or the Liaquatabad Flyover and imagine it extending for 24km.

The increased traffic load on the Shahrah-e-Faisal corridor and the construction of the EE will greatly increase the levels of emissions. The expressway perched above Shahrah-e-Faisal will trap pollution and prevent it from dispersing.

The EE passes through the heart of Karachi's thriving commercial, business and tourist districts. Much of its length is over Shahrah-e-Faisal which was recently

designated as a corridor for high rise commercial development. After its completion, traffic on the EE will whiz past the third and fourth floor of these buildings. The high walls of these building will create a canyon-like effect which will trap pollution and amplify noise. The EE will obscure the facades of every building that it will cross, greatly hinder people's access and will depreciate real estate values.

The price tag for the EE has grown from the initial US\$225 million through \$250 million to \$350 million (Rs 21b). Figures much higher than these have been quoted by independent sources. The feasibility of this project depends on the recovery of the cost through tolls.

The EE project is expected to cost \$350 million or Rs 21 billion. The developer is expected to recover their investment by collecting tolls from all vehicles over the first 20 years of its life. This means that the operator will need to collect Rs 1,050,000,000 per year or more than Rs 2,876,000 per day. If the average toll per vehicle per trip is set at Rs 20 that would amount to 143,835 cars per day using the expressway. Divided between the six entry/exit points, that amounts to almost 24,000 cars per exit per day or one car every 3.6 seconds. It would seem unlikely that the CDGK's financial claims about this project will be realized. In which case the foreign developer of the project will claim the CDGK's sovereign guarantee.

The construction of the EE will cause severe hardship to the residents of Karachi particularly to the businesses located on Shahrah-e-Faisal. The construction time of 30 months appears to be too optimistic considering the usual pace of construction in Pakistan (foreign developer notwithstanding). The CDGK has not shared any plans with the citizens of Karachi on how it plans to achieve these diversion plans during the construction period and which adjacent neighbourhoods will be affected.

Shahrah-e-Faisal is the main access route to the airport and is heavily used for the movement of VVIP's. How will this access be maintained during construction? What diversionary routes will be used for VVIP traffic at added security risks? There have been no public hearing held to discuss this with residents and businesses along the Shahrah-e-Faisal / M.T. Khan Road corridor.

The EE is not the only solution to the traffic problems of Shahrah-e-Faisal. After its completion, The Lyari Expressway will handle a large volume of traffic currently accessing Shahrah-e-Faisal from the north. The IAP proposes two alternatives: develop an on-grade highway along the Malir River bed and; develop the under-construction road through the Korangi Industrial Area into an expressway. Both proposals can be connected laterally across the Malir River to Shahrah-e-Faisal which will provide a natural detour during VVIP movement. This will allow citizens living south of Shahrah-e-Faisal to use this expressway instead. Both proposals can be connected to Karachi Harbour through limited access corridors through DHA.