

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE 2041 MASTER PLAN FOR DELHI

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Coinciding with the 75th year of India's independence, Delhi, the capital city of India, has published the Draft Delhi 2041 Master Plan (MPD 2041) for public consultation. The MPD 2041 sets the direction of growth for the city in the next twenty years and is especially relevant to take an informed view on the future of the second largest urban agglomeration in the world after Tokyo. The MPD 2041 document mentions the base year population of 20.6 million, which is forecasted to multiply 1.5 times to 30 million by 2041.

It appears that the MPD 2041 is built on a trend-based population growth forecast model rather than setting the plan based on a strategy-driven growth forecast. It is interesting to remark that some references suggest that Delhi Urban Agglomeration's population is currently around 30 million. A holistic view of the urban agglomeration could have presented a better view while drafting the growth agenda for such a large city (Region).

Looking at the document's structure, it seems the MPD 2041 tries to align with the national-level sustainable urban development policies. With a vision to foster a sustainable, liveable, and vibrant Delhi, MPD 2041 seems to identify the issues at the core but still needs details on implementation strategies for the visions and priorities set out in the document.

Standing on the three pillars of economic viability, environmental protection, and social equity, the plan considers the city's cultural, social, and economic differences, including the unauthorised colonies, high

land prices, power consumption, water scarcity, and mobility hindrances. The goals for 2041 are to become environmentally sustainable, future-ready, and a dynamic place for economic, creative, and cultural development.

The utopian vision

The vision document incorporates all the essential characteristics of a resilient city. It is public centric and based on inclusivity, equity, and sustainability, emphasising ease of mobility. The document has holistically covered the existing, upcoming, and anticipated drivers of urban regeneration and development. How far the authorities could implement these strategies would be interesting to note.

The MPD 2041 also focuses on delineating "The Green Development Area", a combination of a Green Belt (a planning strategy inspired by London) to create a regional environmental buffer and Low-density residential areas in urban villages. The primary objective in this zone is to foster city-level hubs for green living and recreation. The efforts taken as part of the 'green development' such as supporting urban farming, reducing pollution, and rejuvenating natural assets also promote the city's goals for environmental sustainability. Since the Green Belt is likely to create a regional environmental buffer, the plan highly encourages the production of food and other natural produce to meet the horticultural needs of the city. The belt may also act as a regional level pollution sink. As

per the 2041 master plan, quite a few polluting industries are no longer permitted to operate within Delhi, and the belt is likely to act as the boundary. With Delhi's long history of expansion through unauthorised colonies that get regularised in the subsequent plans, protection of Green Development Areas with such a practice could be a challenge. It is interesting to note that the planning authority has exempted several areas from 'Green Development' norms, including the unauthorised colonies.

Another highlight of the MPD 2041 is reclaiming the public spaces and focus on resurgence and preservation of the city's rich, tangible and intangible, heritage. It envisioned the national capital to emerge as a 24*7 economy by pushing night-time economies and an active nightlife. Delineating the cultural precincts, adaptive reuse and improving public space network by creating green corridors, heritage and cultural circuits will create a safe and vibrant public realm. These will include streets in cultural precincts, CBD, and heritage assets, which are to be prioritised as they are currently vibrant during the late hours. These areas have active transport connectivity with MRTS to always facilitate movement through public transport. However, to make this happen, the planners and policymakers need to ensure gender inclusivity to make Delhi safe for the most vulnerable.

Enhancing the mobility network across the city by introducing concepts like Transit Oriented Development (TOD), augmenting shared mobility, disincentivising private vehicle usage through congestion pricing and dynamic pricing range, prioritising pedestrians and cyclists, redefining the ring rail, and parking demand management are the key highlights of mobility segment of the plan. The plan laid out a target to achieve an 80:20 modal split favouring public and shared transport by 2041. Authorities will require increasing the modal share of public and shared vehicles by 1% every year while ensuring an equal reduction in the private vehicular trip to achieve the said milestone. With tremendous incentives to purchase personal electric vehicles with low operating costs, how the shift from private to public transport would be ensured is something to think thoroughly.

The plan's time-bound stated approach to the long-envisaged demand for establishing a Unified Metropolitan Transport Authority (UMTA) is another promising aspect. With the complexities of Delhi governance, the decision-makers need to ensure that

UMTA should be established in the world second-largest city at the earliest with no political challenges.

The aligning vision of creating a separate Mobility Data Repository (MDR) with standardised datasets and real-time information will improve the landscape of shared and integrated mobility and establish thriving conditions for new mobility paradigm like Mobility as a Service (MaaS). However, in the absence of comprehensive data privacy laws and concerns around data security, how far the transport service operators would share the data will be thought-provoking.

Bus services are the most preferred and accessible transport system as per the document. The emphasis on developing the same around the MRTS corridors to enhance connectivity with last-mile services is notable. Although the document outlines the minimum facilities and consequent ideal distances like Public Bicycle Sharing (PBS), Pedestrian spill plaza within 100m of alighting point and IPT stand, On-demand services up to 300m of alighting point; it fails to discuss the unorganised transport sector of the city.

The plan also advised adopting Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL), a globally accepted index and one widely used by Transport for London (TfL) to evaluate the public transport outreach and spatially distinguish high-accessibility areas from low. The identification of active travel areas and mandatory requirements for all new developments/projects within land-pooling sectors, TOD and Regeneration Schemes to include Walk Plans for layout approval will improve the pedestrian and cycling infrastructure of the city. The plan should have mandated a Traffic Impact Study to cover such aspects for any development project comprehensively.

The missing links and achievability

At first glance, the Delhi Plan for 2041 hints towards major up-gradation in terms of incentives across all sectors compared to the previous plans; however, once paying attention to the details, it becomes an amalgamation of heavily influencing incentives from around the world. The similarities with the London Plan are significantly too obvious to rule out the possibility; however, the plan faced a significant setback from its own conventional methods in the inclusion and

exclusion of the local context as per convenience across different sectors.

The misplaced attention cannot address the current issue of gender safety in Delhi, presenting a problem on numerous fronts, from mobility to public spaces and even economic opportunities. For instance, the Masterplan focuses on the tangible aspects of the economy and infrastructure; yet fails to shed light on if and how the city addresses gender safety. The plan relies on the new vibrant nightlife to improve safety. The minor design elements such as street lighting and installation of security cameras are part of the proposal; however, there is no proof of them being enough to avoid crimes. All that the plan does is hope that vibrant street life and adopting the eyes-on-the-street concept will be enough to make the most vulnerable sections safe.

Further, the street design regulations for the development of all new road projects are given, including speed limits, kerb heights, corner radii, street parking prohibition, minimum footpath widths, wider footpath space for higher pedestrian volumes and additional space for greenery and vendors, and adequate low-mast Street Lighting with appropriate lux for pedestrians and cyclists. And yet, the existing road infrastructure is deemed to be improved wherever possible. In the absence of clear demarcation of required changes, the existing roads will probably stay the same, with no improvement for other modes of transport except motor vehicles. Emphasis on road safety is another incomplete aspect. Concepts like improved safety for all users and zero crash vision could have been included. Correspondingly, the plan identified several strategic links for transport corridors and listed their benefits. These links shall be treated as transit-priority corridors and pursued through inter-state agreements; however, there is no obvious information on the timeline or implementation.

Further, multi-modal integration for metro and bus systems as well as urban freight and rail is primarily explained, along with minimum radius to be catered by intermediate modes and walking and cycling as first and last-mile options. Although there is a dedicated section for shifting to shared mobility, the plan stays ambiguous on implementing projects for disincentivising private transport instead of promoting private electric vehicles with incentivising electric mobility. It lists down possible approaches, including identified zones for congestion pricing and parking

management; however, miss the basic requirements of conducting mandatory transport impact assessment and informed decision making using an integrated land use transport model.

In the master plan, one of the critical strategies for reducing pollution is 'Adoption of mix-use and TOD for reducing the average trip lengths and bringing jobs and homes closer to transit networks'. However, when looked closely at the existing segregation of income strata on all sides of the river, the residential locations are highly influenced by the city's land value and rental pricing for a significant chunk of the population. In such a scenario, bringing work closer to home may still not prove effective because TOD is likely to affect the land value directly. While the plan mentions providing EWS housing along the TOD, there still remains a considerable proportion of lower- and middle-class populations who may move further away to where housing stays affordable. Linking and enhancing the link between mobility and shelter, thus, becomes vital. The MPD 2041 seems to be prepared without even assessing the impact of future land use using a strategic land use - transport modelling approach.

Following the same thread, the MPD draft has comprehensively laid out strategies to redevelop, enhance and preserve the green-blue assets in the city. Understanding the unique environmental landscape DDA has included green-blue infrastructure development to mitigate the increasing environmental degradation challenges faced by the national capital in the past few years. The concept refers to urban planning practice, where water bodies and land are interdependent and grow with the help of each other while offering environmental and social benefits, which are currently missing in Delhi. Notably, the environmental strategies are not treated in isolation with other segments; instead, they align with transport, heritage and industries to address overall environmental issues. However, there still exists a few voids.

One strategy to rejuvenate river Yamuna floodplains includes creating greenways along the drains' buffer and sensitively converting those into public waterfronts along water bodies previously neglected. DDA has previously attempted to create a task force to check waste dumping in Yamuna River, but the plan never really touched the ground. Though the section mentions that 'The Comprehensive River Development Plan prepared and anchored by DDA shall be a multi-

agency initiative that shall guide protection of the floodplain with only restricted development', lack of clarity on the time frame and coordination approach may result in the fate of previous initiatives when it comes to implementation by 2041. Considering coordination and implementation challenges faced due to multiple stakeholders, DDA needs to brainstorm how they plan to create synergy among agencies like Delhi Jal Board, Flood and Irrigation Department, and municipal corporations as stakeholders in the project.

Similarly, the aim of greening the city and increasing per capita green space in numbers sounds promising; the in-depth issue of open space segregation within the city, ranging from public space distribution to semi-private green islands in the affluent neighbourhoods, is untouched. Protection and enhancement of green-blue assets are a priority of the plan. We recommend agencies seek new mechanisms to undertake the initiatives. The plan merely mentions forming a dedicated green fund but again cannot provide more insight into the funding planning mechanisms and allocation.

Further, to expand on the night-time activities and become a 24-hour-city, the inspiration comes from across the globe. In aiming for a 24*7 economy, the proposals for diversifying economic opportunities are inclined towards technology, cyber hubs, and data analytics - activities where most of the risks around the most vulnerable sections are reported. Though the plan does a tremendous job of acknowledging the presence of informal, unorganised economic sector and stating norms supporting the vending zones, street improvements, inclusion of vending spaces in plot layouts, provision of infrastructure and public conveniences such as separate toilets for men and women, changing rooms, childcare facilities, and solid waste disposal arrangements. It is advisable to consider the impact of the thriving multi-functional Business Promotion Districts (BPDs) on the unorganised sector and how they can benefit through the shift towards cleaner technology instead threatened by competition. Declaration of a no-vending zone or limited available FAR and land – to be demarcated in Active Travel Plans - for vendors can directly impact their day-to-day small business and livelihood. The same shall be affected in case of eviction or relocation to meet the new norms with no thought to the local economic networks.

Strategy for stakeholder involvement and implantation is limited. DDA should hold a presentation on block

levels and ensure proper dissemination of the vision plan, especially in low-income and marginalised groups. Moreover, the stakeholder inclusion process should be an essential part of all sector-specific targets.

The reality check

The MPD 2041 is trying to do many things across varying sectors. Indeed, the city is trying to touch upon some core aspects that need attention, such as water and air pollution, the mobility patterns, the role of rental housing, shelter for the poor, and diversifying on the economic fronts. Nevertheless, from one angle, it looks as if the plan only talks about doing many things. The implementation factor demands tremendous attention. The plan details several urban design standards, residential norms, and mobility percentages; it lacks a clear set of phasing plans, funding plans, and institutional frameworks. They highlight a list of projects under each initiative as tentative proposals, which can be followed through under specific Area Action Plans; however, the clarity of them being pre-requisites for related development projects remains missing.

The capacity building of institutions for such ambitious initiatives should have been mentioned separately since they expect several organisations to be in place for overlooking different sectors. Further, correlation with NCR development plan should be more clearly elaborated. Delhi is at the core of the region and has various direct and indirect influences on regional development. There is no denying that Delhi's thriving economic nature and size are the core of NCR production, consumption, and waste generation chain. A major setback that will gain momentum only in the latter stages of implementation is the concentration of the banned industries right outside the delineated MPD boundary.

While the set guidelines protect the city centre from direct adverse effects of these industries, the diverted line of waste and air pollution to the surrounding areas, which may be worst off in dealing with such side effects, will suffer in numerous ways. In such scenarios, keeping the industries out of city limits is undoubtedly a significant step in combating climate change; however, it is imperative to decide and plan upon relocating such sites in areas away from human settlements. Simultaneously, as already seen with London, the Green Belt can prove to be an excellent

barrier for the city from the outer region. Nevertheless, the same can become a hindrance in the long run when the land available for development shrinks and the city will need to expand even further.

The current plan of action is to set up a monitoring framework and review the progress of various policies every five years. Three monitoring committees, namely Environmental Sustainability Committee (ES-COM), Built Environment Committee (BE-COM) and City Vitality Committee (CV-COM), are proposed to have representatives from concerned departments and chaired by an officer from DDA.

The plan also highlights the Implementation support that the DDA shall provide. The MPD 2041 goal resonates with best practices and applications of the global urban landscape. However, all the aforementioned aspects are building visionary plans with no stated time limit for setting up the agencies, operating variables or numerable results. Such aspects are only superficially touched. The suggested approaches are all projected as doable in theory; however, in light of the country's constantly changing institutional and financial dynamics, each adopted incentive needs to be a concrete strategy to be implemented thoroughly.

The master plan is well aligned with sector-specific visions and is ambitious; however, the national capital's institutional complexity and complex governance system might provide some resistance to achieving the laid vision.

List of Abbreviations

APRH	Affordable Public Rental Housing
BE-COM	Built Environment Committee
BPD	Business Promotion District
CBD	Central Business Districts
CV-COM	City Vitality Committee
DDA	Delhi Development Authority
DU	Dwelling Units
ES-COM	Environmental Sustainability Committee
EWS	Economically Weaker Section
FAR	Floor Area Ratio
IPT	Intermediate Public Transport
JJ clusters	Jhuggi Jhopri clusters
MRTS	Mass Rapid Transit System
MPD	Master Plan for Delhi
MaaS	Mobility as a Service
MDR	Mobility Data Repository
MMTH	Multi-Modal Transit Hubs
PBS	Public Bicycle Sharing
PTAL	Public Transport Accessibility Level
TOD	Transit-Oriented Development
TfL	Transport for London
UMTA	Unified Metropolitan Transport Authority

DISCLAIMER:

The reviewed document is the Draft Master Plan of Delhi (MPD 2041). The Delhi Development Authority, the planning and development authority for Delhi, made the document public in June 2021 for public consultation. This commentary is based on the knowledge and data available to the authors as of August 2021. The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and represent the thoughts at a particular time. While every effort has been made to verify the data and information in this report, any omissions, misinterpretations and recommendations are attributed solely to the authors and not to the organisation they represent.

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