

EASY RIDER

Perhaps *The Best Thing To Look Forward To In 2015 Will Be The First Operational Line Of Metro Rail.* The New Transit System —With Its Smart Interiors And Easy Accessibility— Will Change The Way Chennai Travels

Ayyappan.V@timesgroup.com

A Paramanathan, 53, a finance sector employee, has endured the decline of the city's creaky bus transport network for decades as he commuted from home to his place of work and back. Although the distance from Vadapalani to Egmore is barely 8km, travel time has lengthened to an hour and a half and the ride has become increasingly uncomfortable.

On most days, as the 17E wends its way through peak hour traffic, Paramanathan is leaning against a pole to balance himself or seated in a corner with barely any leg room. Either way, conditions are sweaty with vehicular fumes and dust adding to the sense of claustrophobia.

"It is a daily ordeal. I board at Vadapalani terminus but it gets crowded at the next stop itself and it becomes tough to breathe as the ventilation isn't good. I wish I could take my car, but driving in slow traffic is a bigger problem," said Paramanathan.

But hope is at hand. In less than a year, Paramanathan will walk into a swanky metro station at Vadapalani and board an airconditioned coach that will take him to Egmore in 30 minutes or less.

The journey will be in a soundproof environment (see graphic) which will insulate him from the ambient noise of a bustling city. WiFi onboard will enable him to begin working if he wishes to send out mails or reply to office communication on his tablet. What's more, the frequency of service would be every three minutes, which will ensure coaches are not too crowded, and the fare would be in the range of Rs 20-30, a marginal increase over the cost of the deluxe bus ticket.

Metro rail which will start on the Alandur-Shenoy Nagar-Egmore stretch this year, is expected to change the way the city commutes. To start with, it would redefine perceptions of public transport. Suburban trains, MRTS services and MTC buses, all currently use rolling stock that wear a decrepit look and remain packed during rush hour on account of low frequency.

The metro, with its smart cards, elegant signage and postmodern interiors, is expected to appeal to an upwardly mobile set as much as it would to the working class. It would also make Chennai an easier and cheaper city for tourists to navigate, considering that they wouldn't need to negotiate the language barrier with abrasive auto drivers and bus conductors.

The line may also shape the way people view one of India's oldest metropolises. While MRTS brought up the scruffy side as it snaked over slums along Buckingham Canal, metro rail's elevated line is going to open up a new vista. Commuters will see a more organized zoning of commercial and residential neighbourhoods along 100 Feet road and enjoy an aerial survey of well laid out blocks inside Anna Nagar.

The first line from Alandur to Koyambedu which is likely to open by March will connect neighbourhoods at Virugambakkam, Vadapalani, Valasaravakkam where a sizeable number travel to industrial areas at Sipcot in Guindy or Pallavaram. The Anna Nagar stretch would make it easier for shoppers and students down Koyambedu, Shenoy Nagar and Egmore by end of the year.

Planners say it would change the way

Metro to usher in a new COMMUTE CULTURE

Infographic: P Rajkumar \ Pic: B A Raju

FAST FORWARD

FROM SHABBY AND CROWDED MODES OF TRANSPORT, WE MOVE TO DUST-FREE AND POLLUTION-FREE TRAVEL CONDITIONS

THE BIG PICTURE

PROJECT COST ₹ 20,000 CR

LINES TO BE OPENED/READY IN 2015

- Koyambedu-Alandur to be opened by March 2015
- Koyambedu-Shenoy Nagar to be opened by July 2015
- Shenoy Nagar-Egmore to be completed by Dec 2015

KOYAMBEDU-ALANDUR (1st Line)

11km Distance from Koyambedu to Alandur
1 to 2 km Distance between stations
9 Trains to be operated
₹8 to ₹10 to be the minimum fare

FREQUENCY OF TRAINS | One train every 4 minutes during peak hour, 1/10 min during non-peak hours

NUMBER OF COMMUTERS EXPECTED AT EACH STATION

➤ KOYAMBEDU	7,500
➤ CMBT	5,550
➤ ARUMBAKAM	11,000
➤ VADAPALANI	22,000
➤ ASHOK NAGAR	16,000
➤ EKATTUTHANGAL	10,000
➤ ALANDUR	15,000

6 Unlike the city's dilapidated bus terminals and unkempt suburban train stations, metro rail stops will be clean and be equipped with elevators and escalators. This will make commuting efficient and add to the comfort factor

1 Those who do not follow Tamil will not have a problem commuting as Metro Rail will have multi-lingual (Tamil and English) announcements at stations and facilities

8 Unlike suburban trains and buses, commuters can also speak to the driver from anywhere in the train at the press of a button

7 Passengers will find their daily commute much less taxing because metro trains will be silent and fast, unlike buses on which passengers have to jostle, push or travel on footboards

2 Travel will be much safer. Unlike suburban trains and buses, which are prone to crime, metro coaches will be under security camera surveillance

3 Instead of being crammed into a stuffy MTC bus or share auto, commuters in the city will for the first time travel in airconditioned comfort in metro rail coaches

4 Coaches will be soundproof to shut out the noise of the city's chaotic roads. Metro trains may play light or soothing music

5 Locating a metro station will be easy, with neighbourhoods in the vicinity to get smart signage pointing passengers to the nearest stations. Most bus stops have rundown shelters, and many have no signs indicating which buses halt there

people live, work and shop in the areas along the alignment. About 500metres around each station have been identified for development as that would be the average distance an officegoer covers on his way to a station. Shopping malls are being planned at Ashok Nagar and Alandur stations along with

parking space. At other stops, developers may soon zero in on areas for residential properties to be built.

In New York, when elevated trains started to run three storeys above the avenues in the 1870s, it changed the way people viewed their city and lived their life. By 1880 most

of Manhattan was 10 minutes from any elevated rail station, says history page of New York Transit Museum. That may well happen to the new Chennai.

"Now that approvals have come, lines are going to be planned in such a way that the entire city is covered by the mass rapid

transit system. The city should have had more than 300km of metro rail line by now. But it will be designed in such a way that all corners of the city are covered. The idea is to make travelling easier using public transport," said R Ramanathan, director, Chennai metro rail.

