

Metro Rail: promises galore and so are questions

CMRL Managing Director says that issues will be addressed by multi-modal integration study that is currently on

Ajai Sreevatsan

CHENNAI: With the city well into its north-east monsoon spell, preparations are afoot at a feverish pace to commence work on the underground section of the Chennai Metro Rail project.

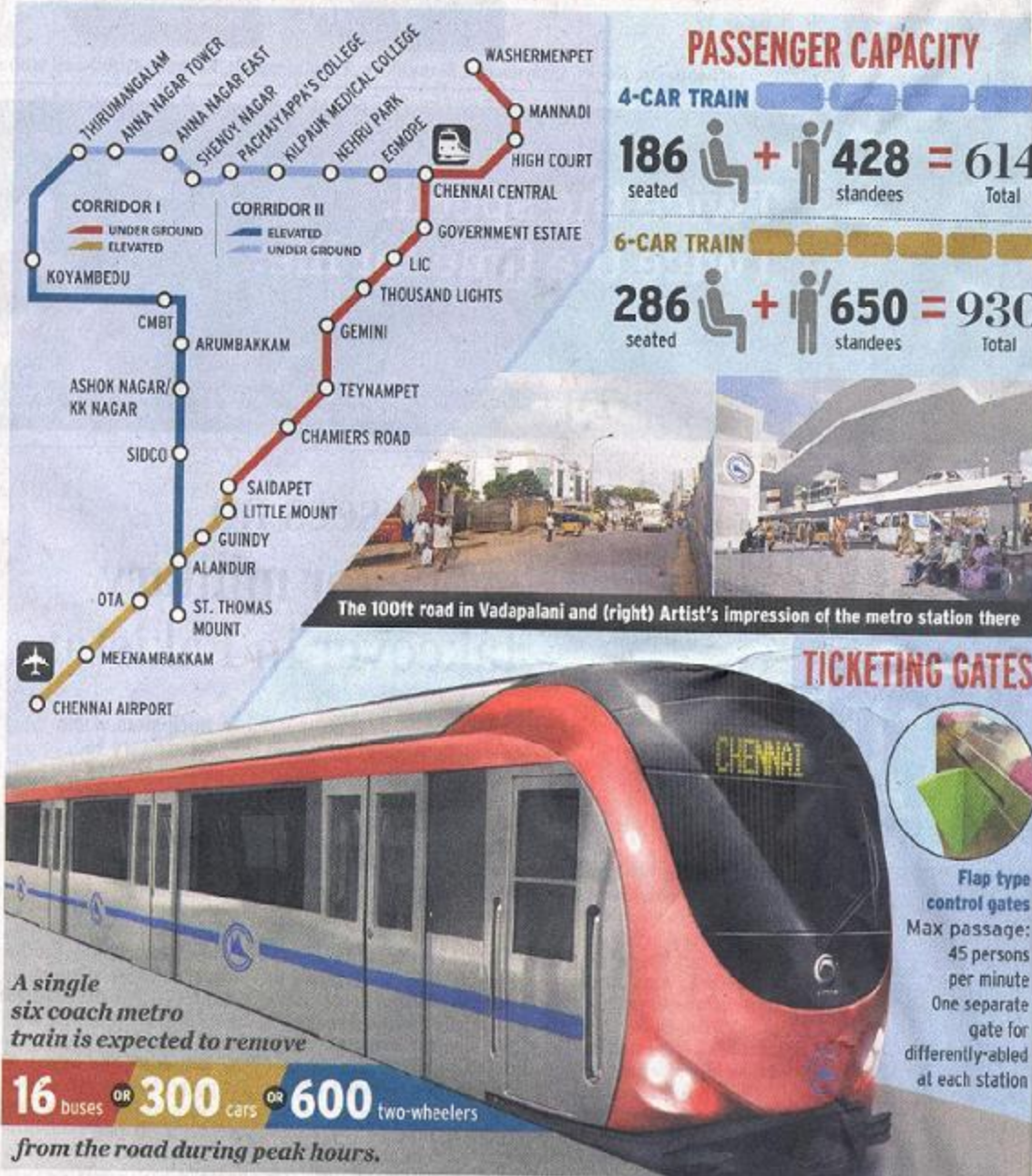
Full-scale construction is expected to start along the Poonamallee High Road by January, immediately after the monsoon comes to a close. Diaphragm walls, reaching to a depth of 22-23 metre below the ground level, have already started coming up at six locations - Washermenpet, May Day Park, Egmore, Nehru Park, Kilpauk and Shenoy Nagar.

All underground tunnelling and station construction work would begin only after construction of the diaphragm walls, which would prevent the soil on either side from collapsing. A senior official of Chennai Metro Rail Limited said that a team from CMRL carried out inspections of the Tunnel Boring Machines (TBMs) in China last month. Eleven such machines are expected to arrive at the Chennai port next month.

Traffic management plan

Additional Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Sanjay Arora said that a comprehensive traffic management plan prepared for Poonamallee High Road and Anna Nagar would be put in place by January. "We are working on a plan for the Anna Salai stretch. Each location where an underground station is coming up has been treated as a 'segment'."

Of the 36 Metro stations, 20 would be underground



takes now by bus. The travel

of those 'segments' would have its own unique traffic plan that will be implemented in a staggered fashion as the construction progresses. Projections show that the average vehicular speed on arterial roads would drop by 6 kmph when underground tunnelling work begins. "Temporary footpath space or ramps would be provided for pedestrians," Mr. Arora added. Though the city would have to live with traffic flow problems over the next two years, once the metro rail network is in place, it is expected to reduce journey time by 50-75 per cent, the CMRL official said. A passenger will be able to travel from Chennai Central station to Anna Nagar in just 14 minutes as against the 30-40 minutes that it

forgetown to the airport in Meenambakkam would come down by as much as half. It would take 44 minutes by the Metro to cover the distance of about 22 km whereas it takes anywhere between 75-90 minutes by bus at present.

But even as the promise of a world-class public transportation system is being keenly awaited by the city's residents, there are several issues that have been left unaddressed till now which might determine the eventual success or failure of Metro Rail.

Experts say that the issue of pedestrian access has lacked enough attention despite CMRL's projections showing that 16,000 persons would come out on to Anna Salai each hour from po-

posed stations such as the one near LIC building by 2016.

CMRL Managing Director K. Rajaraman said that these aspects would be addressed by a multi-modal integration study that is currently on. "It would be submitted early next year to the Chennai Unified Metropolitan Transport Authority (CUMTA), which would be in a position to give appropriate directions to various agencies," he said. There are also proposals to introduce feeder bus services along 23 routes from and to the stations.

'Tunnel effect?'

Another facet highlighted even by the detailed project

report prepared for the tioned bus-

is that in many sections of the elevated corridor, just 2-3 metres would be exposed to open air - creating a "tunnel effect", darkening the entire arterial road below.

The report goes on to say that international experience shows such areas are highly prone to anti-social activity, crime and overall deterioration in urban environment (Example: Jackson Heights and Brooklyn stations in New York).

The proposed Metro fare structure (Rs.8-28) is also likely to change in light of the State government announcing a hike in bus fares. The Metro fares are to be arrived at as a multiple of that charged by Metropolitan Transport Corporation (MTC) for its air-condi-

tioned bus-

now is fluid. We will take a call based on energy costs," Mr. Rajaraman said. Stressing that the city cannot rely on the Metro alone to improve traffic conditions, N.S. Srinivasan, former director, National Transportation Planning and Research Centre, said: "The modal share of public transport may go up once the Metro Rail becomes operational, but the absolute number of private vehicles would still be a problem. Most arterial roads would still be congested."

Chennai's future as a sustainable urban area looks bleak unless some major interventions are made on the urban planning front, he adds.

He added that a study is required to determine

DEADLINES

December, 2011 - 11 Tunnel Boring Machines are being shipped from China to Chennai port for carrying out underground station work.



January, 2012 - Tunnelling expected to start for the 14.25 km long underground section.

March 2012 - Track laying will begin on elevated corridors.

December 2012 - Air-conditioned Metro rakes would arrive from France. Trials would commence on an 800-metre test track inside the upcoming depot at Koyambedu.



November 2013 - The 10.7 km elevated stretch from Koyambedu to St. Thomas Mount will be commissioned.

December 2014 - Trains would start shuttling through the 10 km elevated segment of Corridor-I from Saidapet to Airport

December 2015 - The entire 45-km Metro network, comprising two corridors, would become operational.

Infographic: Prathap Ravishanker

when I see ongoing metro rail work in other parts of the city. Back in 2004, Tiruvottiyur-Airport was the first Metro corridor that was proposed. It was dropped in favour of a monorail net-

work by the AIADMK government initially and the Tiruvottiyur link was overlooked by the next government because of additional costs. Now, we have neither monorail nor metro rail."

What they say

K. Rajaraman, CMRL Managing Director

About 70 per cent of the work on Stage-1 (Ashok Nagar-Koyambedu-St. Thomas Mount elevated section) is complete. Operational trials are expected to start by 2013. Chennai's Metro system would be equivalent to those in existence in other parts of the world.

There are also plans to integrate metro rail with the proposed monorail network at Vadapalani and Kathipara, perhaps through skywalks. Certainly, both rail corridors will have to work together. CUMTA will ensure that this happens. That is the forum where all



K. Rajaraman

these issues of inter-linking and coordination will be raised.

K.P. Subramanian, former professor, Anna University

The metro rail network is being built through arterial roads which are already serviced reasonably well by existing modes of public transport. Since it is a cost-intensive project, efforts have to be made to bring in as many passengers as possible to the stations through feeder services.

The catchment area can be greatly increased if Bus Rapid Transit (BRTS) is projected out of Metro hubs. BRTS would cost only around Rs.10 crore



K.P. Subramanian

option that has to be seriously considered by the government.

M. Charles, suburban EMU commuter

Chennai deserves a better train network. The Metro and Monorail should live up to the expectations of commuters, who now have no choice other than the crowded EMU trains. I have been travelling on the Beach-Tambaram EMU for 30 years to get to my workplace in Ennore. While I am happy with the frequency on the stretch, the Chennai Central-Gummidiipoondi segment needs more services. That is my connecting train. More checks should also



M. Charles

be conducted to keep compartments free of hawkers.