Metro phase I: A hard, but gratifying journey

CMRL Officials Recall Hurdles Passed

Chennai: In 2011, even as skirmishes broke out at the land acquisition site, officials of Chennai Metro Rail Ltd officials were asked to stop construction of the elevated corridor above Kothapara grade separator. Police feared concrete blocks could fall on the passing convey of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visiting the city. It was not the only challenge they had faced and overcame.

On Sunday, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the 10-km line from Washermanpet to ACMS, the 28-km long phase I will be completely operational. The completion of the construction of the road and the elevated corridor over Kothapara grade separator is yet to be completed.

Police were also warned that someone might hurl an explosive at the convoy from the site above Kothapara separator. But we continued them that we cannot stop work and took full responsibility of safety," said Ramanathan, then head of the construction department.

A FULL CIRCLE

The metro phase I can now be completed with the inauguration of its last leg today

2009 | Elevated corridor construction begins at Vadapalani
2011 | Underground corridor construction begins at Nungambakkam
June 2015 | 1st line - Nungambakkam to Alamelu (12km) opened
Sept 2016 | Little Mount to Airport (14km) and Airport

To St Thomas Mount (12km) opened
May 2017 | Nungambakkam to Railway (6.5km) opened
May 2018 | Central Metro Line to Nungambakkam (7.5km) opened
May 2018 | ACMS to Airport (5km)

To ACMS to Airport (5km)

To ACMS to Airport (5km)

Today | Washermanpet to ACMS (10km) opened

To build a network of interconnected stations that does not leave any station isolated, the officials continued to keep the tunnelling machines running, as it could lead to the soil collapsing. "Nowhere in the world is there an underground line between elevated stations. Here, between Memensambakkam and Airport, the line goes under the road for a few metres. Things were always under construction as it was an aircraft flying zone. Even work to build the roof of the airport station could be executed only two to three days a week," he said.

The biggest challenge came in the way of land. Officials were forced to spend much of their time settling disputes over land.

"On the day 28-km of the phase I was inaugurated, it is a gratifying journey. But not the least bit easy," he said.

Today, the line is the backbone of the city. In the near future, it will be expanded to cover more areas. The officials have already started preparing for the next phase of construction.

With this, the phase I of the Chennai Metro is complete. The phase II is expected to be completed by 2023. The officials are looking forward to the day when the entire network will be operational.

Syed Muhee Hode, chairman of CMRL, when the project was signed in 2007, recalled working out of a 600-sq-ft office with a team of three in Tambaram and visiting several localities to satisfy angry landowners. "It was a tedious job. We organized meetings in localities like Vadapalani and Alamelu, showed videos of the future stations and talked to the people," he said.

"Through a bit late, the phase I is now complete. However, it will be effective only if the network is built like a spider web, connecting all parts, and a commuter can hop on to one or two trains to reach any destination.

The last leg of the phase I may become part of the spider web when it connects suburban areas with the city's core, a few years down the line."