After residents of T Nagar and other parts of the city strongly opposed Chennai Metro Rail Ltd's plan to build the Panagal Park and Natesan Park as part of the phase-3 project, Metro Rail confirmed that the parks will not be tampered with.

This comes two days after close to 3,000 people signed an online petition to save Panagal Park. The petition pointed out that the city had previously witnessed three of its parks being destroyed in the facilitate phase-1 Metro Rail construction. “Despite opposition from residents, park users, and concerned bodies, Nehru Park, Thiru Vi Ka Park and Chetpet RDF park were completely devoured by phase-1 project. We won’t let two other beautiful parks share the same fate,” summarised the petition.

Panagal Park is home to 50 indigenous trees. “Martin Louis Park, which is spread over eight acres, is home to over 300 trees. Of this, close to 80 trees include indigenous ones like Mahagoma, Panangiya, Hina, Nandkini, Nasral and Vivot and also the Brazilian Ironwood and the Babubhai tree. “For the sake of advancement, an 80-year-old heritage park cannot be destroyed. Its importance goes way above the needs of a railway and cannot be compromised,” said Vennadeswaran, a resident who signed the petition.

In a recently released Detailed Comprehensives Project Report for phase-2, both parks were mentioned as other structures that will be affected by construction activity. According to the field surveys done in 2016, 2017, and 2018 by the project consultant, corridors under which both parks come has the maximum number of affected structures of a staggering 474. Including 18 parks, 37 other structures like police stations, school hospitals, bus stops and temples will be affected once construction starts by early 2021.

Metro Rail officials said that a few changes have been made in the design pertaining to these parks so that the green lungs of the city face the least damage. They said that the site of the stations has been reduced to minimise the amount of private land to be taken over. “Dimensions of the station has been reduced from 230x380 to 230x120,” they added.

Also, two stations which are to be constructed near these parks are going to be built underground. Only for the construction of entry-exit points, we will be using little space around the parks. Otherwise, both parks will not be harmed in any manner,” said a senior official.

Though Metro Rail said they will be spending Rs. 86 crores to plant 12,000 saplings for every tree axe, a little over 3,000 trees will be taken down for phase-2 construction.