



Balbharati Paud Phata road brief

We would like to contest the decision by the PMC to go ahead with the Bal Bharati-Paud Phata Road, a road that has been proposed twice by the PMC in the past and struck down both times on environmental grounds - once by the Maharashtra State Government in 1987 and then by Bombay High Court in 2016.

The proposed Bal Bharati Paud Phata Road is 30m wide and 2.1 km long. It was planned as an alternative route to decongest traffic on Law College Road (Chiplunkar Road). Aligned through the hill slope, around 1.2 km of the road is through a lush forest behind Law College.

In January 2016, the Bombay High Court had asked the PMC to take a fresh decision about the road, with approval of the Expert Committee - *“Unless a proper study is made by the Committee of Experts, it cannot be held that the destruction of the forest for the construction of the proposed road is in public interest and is for a public good.”*. In short, the Court scrapped the road which had been proposed by GB Resolution in 1996 and said that if PMC wanted to put in in DP, it must first conduct a traffic study to see if the road would be useful and an EIA to measure impact. This should be done under the guidance of an Expert Committee

PMC approved the road in the DP in 2018, overriding more than 30,000 objections by citizens. In 2017, PMC formed an expert Committee and hired two consultants to do the EIA (VKe) and Traffic Survey (Sustainancy). The EIA and Traffic study were ready by June 2021. The 2 independent members of EC, Maj Gen Jatar and Prashant Inamdar, after carefully studying the reports stated in their final review reports that the traffic survey did not make sufficient justification for the road, the environment would be critically and irreversibly impacted including serious groundwater impact – and both rejected the road. Despite this, PMC approved the road and went ahead with preparing DPR.

There is NO record of any review of the EIA and Traffic study by PMC members of the EC.

The 2 independent members were completely side-lined after the June 2021 meeting

EIA and Traffic Studies not made public

This year, the PMC has decided to go ahead with the road, without making public the Environment and Social Impact Study (ESIS) and the Traffic Study done for the proposed road. This lack of transparency has led to a serious erosion of confidence in PMC's decision-making process.

Expert Opinion bypassed

We have obtained documents through RTI that show that both independent members of the Expert Committee, Maj Gen Sudhir Jatar and Mr Prashant Inamdar have categorically rejected the road after studying the ESIS and the Traffic study, stating that **“there are enough indications that the proposed Bal Bharati road would not be an efficient solution to the congestion problem on Law College road and that the proposed road would ruin the environment critically”**. Approval for the road was given by Additional Commissioner Dr Kunal Khemnagar in a handwritten file noting, without informing the Expert Committee independent members, making a farce of the High Court orders.



Contradictions in ESIS

The ESIS is full of contradictions. The report itself states that more than half the alignment is through an ecologically sensitive zone which **"needs to be preserved on a priority basis"**. It also confirms the results of ACWADAM research **showing critical shallow aquifers for groundwater recharge will be damaged by the road.** The document obtained by RTI shows that the ESIS Consultant agrees that this road will be a 'medium term solution' for only 12 - 15 years, after which the peak hour traffic congestion on Law College road will be back to current levels or more. The Consultant makes it clear that the long term solution lies in public transport

Pune will pay an estimated minimum cost of Rs. 260 crores for the 2.1km environmentally destructive road to reduce peak hour congestion on Law College Road only for a decade. Instead of making this road, if the public transport of Pune is strengthened with the required number of buses (~50 buses / lakh population), our calculations suggest that the congestion can come down with a whopping 45-50%. This benefit will not be limited to Law College Road alone, but will also be enjoyed by Senapati Bapat Road, Paud Road - in fact across the city.

Traffic Study contradicts its own data!

The main points to consider

1. What % of traffic on Law College Road will use this road?
2. Is BB-PP Road a long term solution?
3. Has the Consultant analysed the real long term solution?

1. What % of traffic on Law College Road will use this road?

- We believe this is the most important question that must be answered; but the Consultant was not able to provide an answer.
- Yet, an analysis of their data shows that **86-87% traffic will still continue using Law College Road.**
 - Vehicle counts AND O/D survey, both lead to the same conclusion!

2. Is BB-PP Road a long term solution?

- The Consultant himself says that this road will suffice only 12-15 years!
 - But not a single direct bus route from Law College Road to Paud Road, for >20 years!
 - Only 132 schedules a day on Law College Road – we need 10 times as much.
- They have also stressed that improving public transport is the real, long term solution, “but we need this road in the meantime”!
 - Can we ‘undo’ this road, once built?
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3. Has the Consultant analysed the real long term solution?

- They considered multiple combinations of BB-PP Road, Metro, HCMTR as ‘scenarios’.
- One of the scenarios was ‘50% more buses in the area’!
 - With such poor public transport on LC Road, is this even a ‘scenario’?
 - Law College Road needs at least 10 times as many buses as today
 - Or 1000% more buses!

DPR

The Detailed project Report by Envirosafe consultants was ready by Dec 2022 and approved within a month by the Estimate Committee

New changes in the proposal

- The road will be partially elevated to ‘minimise environmental damage’ – without any explanation for how heavy machinery, construction material, pillars etc can be brought to this site without levelling at least 50m width of slope
- A flyover and underpass have been designed at Symbiosis and NCC on SB road to access/exit the proposed BB road. Carriage width of SB road will reduce to 5m **causing 2 new congestion points for commuters going down towards BMCC rd and LCR**
- Signalised intersection at Paud Phata end which will create a new congestion point due to existing signal, Metro station and proposed HCMTR station – all at this spot.
- Cost of project increased from 140 crores to 250 crores.
- Additional increase in cost by 16 crores to change alignment at Paud site to suit a builder who owns Survey 44 – 80 acres of prime real estate on the tekdi which currently doesn’t have an access road.

Major issues with this road

1. Court appointed process not followed. Expert Committee members sidelined and their opinions discarded.
2. EIA and Traffic study contradict their own findings.
3. Traffic study says 57% of traffic on Law College road will shift to BB road – but consultant can’t give explanation for this figure despite repeated questioning by EC members. Data from the study says there will be only 13 to 15% shift – which is not sufficient justification for an environmentally damaging road.
4. Around 2000 trees will be cut and habitat will be fragmented and irreversibly destroyed – as per EIA
5. Groundwater will be impacted up to around 4 km – Deccan, Karvenagar, Erandwane as per ACWADAM as well as EIA hydrogeological study



History of Bal Bharati road

- 1987: The State Government struck down the road—proposed in the Draft Development Plan (DP)—after an agitation by residents.
- 1996: GB resolution by PMC proposed road for the second time.
- 2003: PMC floated tenders for construction of the road.
- 2006: Work started. Nagrik Chetana Manch challenged the GB resolution approving the road, in Bombay High Court (PIL 156 of 2006) and got a stay order on construction.
- 2013: PMC released the new draft DP (2007-2027), which included 3 projects on Vetar Tekdi – Bal Bharati Paud Phata Road, two tunnels and HCMTR.
- January 2016: Bombay High Court order (PIL 156 of 2006) struck down the 1996 GB resolution, reminded the PMC of its constitutional duties in protecting the environment and set out the procedure for the PMC to be guided by the Committee of Experts to take a fresh decision.
- 2016: Following the order of the High Court in PIL 156, PMC reconstituted the Expert Committee with only 2 independent members (Maj Gen Jatar of NCM and Prashant Inamdar) and 4 members from PMC.
- Jan 2018: The State Govt approved the 2007-2027 DP in two phases, despite thousands of letters submitted during the Suggestions and Objections phase, demanding that the hill be left in its natural state and this road scrapped.
- 2018 to 2020: As per the directions of the Court, two consultants were given contracts to conduct EIA and Traffic study. These studies were carried out between 2018 and 2020 with 2 or 3 interactions via email with the 2 independent members of the Expert Committee. The 4 PMC members played no role in these deliberations and never submitted their recommendations.
- July 2021: After due deliberation, the two independent members of the Expert Committee, Maj Gen Jatar and Prashant Inamdar, submitted their final review reports at a meeting with the Additional Commissioner. **Both reports stated the Traffic study did not make a sufficient case for the road and that the EIA itself showed that there would be permanent and significant damage to the environment if the road was built and that the mitigation measures recommended by the EIA were unrealistic considering PMC's past record on this front.** No further meetings were convened by PMC.
- August 2021: PMC floated tenders for Detailed Project Report (DPR) and for pre- and post-tender construction activities for the proposed BB road. Both independent members of Expert Committee were kept completely in the dark and their repeated emails to the Commissioner were ignored. This makes a complete mockery of the High Court order of PIL 156 of 2006.
- Documents obtained via RTI, which include internal correspondence between Road Department and Additional Commissioner, show that the Additional Commissioner has approved the road in a handwritten note while completely bypassing the 2 independent members of the EC.
- DPR prepared by Envirosafe and approved in Dec 2022.
- Press reports in March 2023 said that tenders for BBPP road would be floated soon.
- Massive agitation by citizens culminating in a 5000 strong Save Vetar tekdi rally on 15th April 2023