

MASTER PLAN , CITIZENS' PLAN OR MASTERS' PLAN ?

(The good , not so good and bad of “Draft Bhopal Master Plan 2047”)

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The Town and Country Planning Department of government of Madhya Pradesh needs to be congratulated for bringing out the Draft Bhopal Master Plan 2047 .Simultaneously , the Supreme court of India deserves thanks for enforcing the deadline. Kudos also to the citizens for asserting their rights... Every document has its good points - so does this draft .Besides the fact that the document is finally published there are many positive takeaways- some of which are as under :

- Multiple ways of land mapping (3 D , Topographic surveys , Satellite data , ground matching/ Truthing et al)
- Data sampling is done at multiple levels for better sampling.
- Extended Timeline till 2047- Longer than all previous plans.
- Flexi Approach (Mixed Land Use , Variable / Premium FAR)
- Zoning approach
- Sub city approach
- Provision of **7 Logistics hubs** (To make Bhopal Logistics & Warehousing Hub- Leveraging its location.)
- TOD (Travel Oriented Development)
- TDR (Transferable Development Rights -incl. Heritage / Green TDR.)
- Water channelization / Sponge city .
- PPPP-Public , Private , Peoples' Partnership -for roads &infra
- Aiming for Complete sewage treatment by 2047.
- Financial strategies-specifically for Local Area Programmes.
- Providing land for Rental Housing (As is the case in many developed countries) .
- Rationalization for Hospital land(viz. a 100 bed hospital can now be built in .25 hectare and 300 bed in 1 hectare /2.47 acres against 5 acres earlier)
- Transport : Pedestrianisation (SC had recently termed footpaths as a right), Equivalent car space , allowing joining the basement of adjacent plots for parking etc.

- Consideration for Peri Urban spaces.
- Self sustained neighbourhoods / Complete streets
- 51 km long development corridor.
- EKAI (Education Knowledge and A.I.) city.

This portion more or less outlines the Master Plan drafted by experts and practitioners with pure intent and clean data. It is mostly a top down construct. Ideally, a win –all formula. If one were to pick out the top two game changing ideas they'd be rental housing and growth corridor. To address one of the biggest problems – that of waterlogging- Sponge City with water channelization along the roads seems to be a good idea.(Strangely, waterlogging is not sufficiently underlined as a major problem).

Every document has its grey areas - partly on account of lack of expertise and/or as also due to impure intent . Complementing the above portion of draft is the part involving inputs from stakeholders and citizens . At best it offers limited good ; creates a win – win situation for the constituents - short of win all (in other words, it involves loss-loss for some others). More often than not it is the “not so good” part since it is based on limited data , vested interests and partial knowledge. This is the Citizens' Draft . Apart from the fact that many more citizens / bodies were consulted this time and an even greater number had submitted objections to the previous draft the major points include :

- The nature of Plan altered - focused more on physical/ material/ monetary/ data than design / shape / Plan ...Very little about Policy and nothing about Vision-even as a reference.
- Unprocessed/raw / in sufficiently processed data used for projection viz water usage (In our view both the projected need as also leakage : 549 MLD/120 MGD & 15 pc respectively -are overstated) , Population (Our take is that NRR: Net replacement ratio across the country has come down ; in M.P./ Bhopal too it'll come below 2 during the plan period whereafter the population would reduce hence 45 Lakh projection appears to be on the higher side eventhough it is less than the statistical figure of 50-55 lakhs)

- Fuzzy TOD - no clarity even after so many years.
- Revenue sources unclear -49 K cr. Needed in the period at current prices
- **No clarity on status of structures between 2005 -2026** Unclear status for one time settlement.
- No contextualisation - with previous plan , plans of comparable cities (Indore) , other cities in the state (Ujjain) and bigger area (metropolitan Region)
- Lack of Integration viz. No total size of economy projected.
- Unity Missing viz no details of mega projects
- Western Bypass(without longterm overall cost – benefit analysis-Incl Hydrological studies and wind direction impact).
- Impossible goals projected viz . Jhuggi Mukat .
- Nothing about Outer Bhopal
- Nothing about protecting Skyline .

The fuzziest , foggiest point is the discretionary element in settling the sealing issue of **No clarity on status of structures between 2005 -2026** :unclear status for one time settlement with too much discretionary powers. Lack of explanation about TDR is another aspect... Add to it a sketchy policy framework - almost the entire focus is on plan /execution.

Finally , like all other Master plans, there is the dark portion -it involves the spin given purely by vested interests . It may be termed Masters' Plan .This is a win-loss model. In this case it incorporates the global trend of :Resource colonization (Mega projects , Unlimited /Premium FAR) and Data Mining (Residential CCTV's ; CCTV's on traffic squares ,data with Public bodies) the Masters also received the following :

- Infinite FAR
- Western Bypass
- Smart city.
- Central vista
- Metro Rail
- Selective Implementation of CEPT report (favouring the influential)

- EKAI city-Since BDA is involved.
- Disproportionate raise in land prices for land owned mostly by officers
- Disproportionate increase in FAR for LDH (Low Density Housing)
- TPS scheme (Around Guradighat)
- 7 main roads become wider- from 45 to 60 m-immediately/suddenly outside BMC limits
- No contextualisation -with Previous plans :
- When Master Plans of all adjoining districts have been drafted /or in the process – where would the migrants come from ?

If one had to single out the worst possible suggestion it is of Infinite/ Unlimited FAR - No government can be allowed stuff like- infinite/ eternal etc – it ought to be made conditional. Next worst portion is lack of detail about mega projects which cover over a third of the area and touch half the population viz. Smart city is no longer with the Union govt .-it is in the purview of Bhopal authorities- its future shape should've been proposed . No mention of cut off timelines for Wetland zone , sealing areas too is worrying.

All in all, this is not a new Plan – it is an extrapolation of 2005 plan with cut and paste , additions and deletions. Is it Integrated, Holistic , Transformatory , Converting. ? Not exactly .How much does it address the primary identity : City of lakes and hills ?. Not entirely ... What about primary needs such as fresh air and clean water ? Only partly... Does it have a Unique idea ? - No.. All the new ideas and best practices have been lifted from other cities.

At best it is a Supplementary plan- trying to manage the mess within the BMC limits of past 21 yrs and at worst a reverse plan , ribbon plan , non- plan . That said , is it reason enough to abandon it ? (There are some people still bent upon cancelling the plan). Not by any means - Any document is better than no document. However ,if allowed to be implemented totally as per the draft image of Bhopal 2047 could be somewhat like :

- It may become a poor copy of Delhi-NCR
- Another version of spoilt similar cities: Baroda (As Mr. Buch had predicted way back in 2010)
- Waterlogging may continue - with the excuse that it is a nationwide/ international trend esp. due to climate change.
- Traffic woes may worsen - from bad to worse.
- Identity may be lost or diluted.
- Wetland City status may not be achieved.
- Most livable city tag may not be attained .
- Heat spots may grow.
- Ghost colonies may develop.
- Worse off AQI.
- Deprovement of water quality .
- UNESCO world heritage status may not be achieved
- May not gel with Metropolitan region.

Suggestions to mitigate , ameliorate and make it sustainable could include :

- Incorporate a Vision ;Mandatorily include a Mission .
- Making Bhopal the most Livable city should be marked as the top goal.
- Aim for being among the happiest capitals.
- Clarify the nature of development –material as well as human.
- Make its implementation participatory –ensuring inclusion of RWA's.
- Average AQI has to be around 50 (as against proposed 79)
- Bhopal must be a city of Model Water Management.
- Cap the skyline : No Hilltops should be visible from rooftops.
- Free /Clear the shorelines across all water bodies
- Monitoring body -BDA-should not be doing projects.
- Metropolitan Body should be like SPV (It already is in some ways)
- Aim for Wetland City Status ASAP.
- Get UNESCO City tag.
- It should be a Greater Bhopal- cum -Outer Bhopal project.
- Protect natural resources (keep a min of 51 pc with govt.- esp. Land)
- Protect data (keep a min of 51 % with Citizens)

Endeavour must be to complete Metropolitan vision in the same period -Draft Metropolitan Region Vision and Final Bhopal city Plan should be published simultaneously. Hopefully after all the objections are received - major ones would be addressed in the final draft .The supreme court cover should not be used to rush it down the throats of citizens. It must be ensured that enough provisions are made for monitoring / studies and research. So that even in emergency situations any future alterations would be only on the basis of data and evidence.

Given a choice , if only a few issues / concerns are to be addressed in the final Bhopal plan it should be OK- the remaining could be tackled administratively in the plan period. To name a few, the sealing issue has to be settled (Protestors claim around 1 Lakh affected establishments ; the problematic ones are around 25 K - if even half that number : Between 8-10 k are sealed it'd manage the problem and be a deterrent for the future.) ; focus mostly on Covid era as maximum construction happened in this period -post 2022 could be cut off line; Infinite FAR to be abolished ; Bhoj wetland rules implemented post 2017 ; all Major projects to be made transparent , skyline to be protected etc. A disclaimer is that this is only for the Bhopal Master Plan – since most of its area has already organically grown..For the Metropolitan region plan , a vision is must with much more rigour and vigour - studies to be made mandatory before and monitoring from day one of implementation so that no frivolous litigation would scuttle it citing the lack of data /evidence.

To sum , it is a mix of Master ,Citizens' and ,Masters' plan ...As a penance endeavour for the next 21 years should be to stick to the document in letter and spirit (Mess created was for 21 yrs :2005-26 ; penance too for as long 2026-2047).If the area solely under Metropolitan region - from Peri Urban to Outer Bhopal- develops accordingly , the region could finally become worthy of a world class state capital in 2047.

ADDENDUM

(Further points : The pg. nos. mentioned are those of the Draft document).

- Pg 6552 - Seeking Integrated Industrial areas for 75 yrs is mismatched with plan date of 2047.(that could come in Vision)-Resource /Land colonization/Grabbing.
- Pg 6543 : Area Dev Plans and Town Development schemes to be designed by Metropolitan Region Committee. Metropolitan Region Development Agency(MPRDA) -gives the Impression that overall design would be done by MPRDA ..It was earlier said that they would make Master Plans of incumbent cities too.
- Pg 6611 : **Average AQI :79.7** (Between 50-100 is considered OK for cities) Our take : Misleading :Many areas have far worse Index than permissible –gets hidden under the average ;the areas where maximum population lives and works AQI is not satisfactory.
- Pg 6638 : Balance between **vertical and horizontal mentioned** but no clarity about proportion .
- Pg 6668 : Truck terminals proposed for anticipated 10 k trucks by 2047.
- The range of sectoral roads has been changed from 12-18 to 15-25 m to accommodate more existing structures...Our take :Appears to be a new way of compounding.
- One time settlement scheme of govt. violates equality and fairness-Art. 14 of constitution-Those who did not encroach end up looking like fools/ losers. Our take : The Money for regularization/Premium should be used locally-for the same residential area in consultation with RWA's
- If only the development alongside arteries esp. Link Road No 1 , 2 & 3 – could be controlled , it would be a major mitigation.
- Supportive capacity and Assimilative ability must be assessed-there is no mention of it.
