

Preliminary Report on the Ecological Impact of Elevated Road Project

(Vikaspuri to Meera Bagh)



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The following is a very preliminary report of a study of the ecological impact of a 'transport corridor development' Project in the critically polluted area of NCT of Delhi.

Delhi Greens initiated an ecological impact assessment of the Vikaspuri to Meera Bagh elevated corridor project on request of Mr. Aditya N. Prasad, who is one of the petitioners in a related matter before the National Green Tribunal (NGT), the hearing of which took place on 28 June, 2013.

Below are preliminary observations with respect to the ecological impact of the said project.

The detailed impact assessment will require a period of at least six months.

1. The Vikaspuri-Meera Bagh elevated project will be implemented through the construction of a 3.3 km elevated road from Vikaspuri to Meera Bagh.
2. The preliminary study did not find any Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) which has been carried out for the said project “through proper channel”.
3. It needs to be pointed that the said project is not a standalone project but part of a larger project to make the 20 km stretch between Vikaspuri and Wazirabad to be signal-free. It is therefore required that a comprehensive EIA be carried out of the entire project rather than phase-wise EIA of individual stretches of the road.
4. The project area is a notified “Critically Polluted Area” in India (as notified by the Central Pollution Control Board). It is therefore even more important that a detailed EIA of the entire project be carried out to assess its ecological impact on the fragile and polluted ecosystem so as to prevent further degradation of the area.
5. The National Capital Territory of Delhi today is in a state of sustainability crisis. This requires a detailed cost-benefit analysis of any project wherein the costs and benefits should also include environmental factors. Whilst the said project will decongest the roads, prevent idling of vehicles at red lights thereby leading to a reduction in air pollution, the said project is coming at the cost of approximately 3,000 trees. At the same time, the elevated project may also invite greater usage of this corridor leading to an increase in vehicular load and a simultaneous removal of the pollution abating trees.

6. It needs to be noted that the Central Government has, in exercise of powers conferred to it by sub-section(1) of Section 19 of the Air (Prevention & Control of Pollution) (Union Territories) Act, 1981(14 of 1981), (read with section 6 of that Act and rule 8 of the Air (Prevention & Control of Pollution) (Union Territories) Rules, 1983), declared the whole of the Union territory of Delhi as air pollution control area since 20th February, 1987. Trees are the natural pollution sinks and the removal of over 3,000 trees will definitely lead to a sudden degradation of air quality around the project area. At the same time, this sudden degradation will not be compensated by sapling plantations and will threaten the health of millions of citizens residing in the area.
7. It needs to be noted that there has been 64% increase in vehicular population between 2004-05 and 2011-12. The total number of registered motor vehicles in Delhi has increased from 45,08,026 to 74,38,155 in this period. This has also been the time period which has witnessed the maximum construction of flyover and other roadways projects. Consequently, we conclude that while there is indeed a need for enhancing roadways infrastructure, there is a simultaneous and urgent need to discourage the rapid increase in the number of vehicles plying on Delhi roads on a daily basis.
8. It is also urged that if the project proponent should make public any pre-feasibility report or EIA related study that may have been carried out so far.
9. It is felt that the said project may, for the purpose of carrying out EIA, compensatory afforestation or any other study, not be seen on a 'road expansion' project but a 'construction project' due to the nature of the project.
10. It is felt that the said project can be implemented in a manner to include the existing tree line and since this is the first in the series of projects leading up to the larger project, it should set an example of how improving road infrastructure should necessarily involve protection and inclusion of the adjoining tree cover.