Fixing Karachi

B Y N O M A N A H M E D | 2/6/2020

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| ONCE again, the hapless residents of Karachi have been given a promise. On Feb 3, the federal railways minister agreed to hand over the Karachi Urban Transport Corporation, a federal entity assigned to run the Karachi Circular Railways (KCR), to the provincial administration. It was agreed that institutional and financial impediments would be removed.As things stand, KCR will cost Rs207 billion; some of the funds will come via a Chinese loan. It is a lot of money for a single project in a country where the net annual development outlay is no more than 10 times this figure. Other high-cost Karachi projects include the bus rapid transit (BRT) system estimated at Rs169bn, the Greater Karachi Sewerage Project (Rs36bn), the Greater Karachi Water Supply Scheme (over Rs150bn), and the Malir Expressway (Rs39hn).All these projects need a review. For instance, the BRT will account for less than 10 per cent of passenger trips even when all its lines become operational. There are many important projects that await the attention of the provincial decision-makers and bureaucracy. If and when these projects are implemented, Karachi will be able to function as an efficient and socially equitable metropolis.But for now, most of its roads are unworthy of use. Road repair and maintenance are priorities. Various categories of roads have been damaged. Whether it is Jauhar Chowrangi Road or Korangi Road, the damage is to an extent that even stronger vehicles are affected. Lack of periodic maintenance, poor design and quality of construction, frequent road cutting and adjustments for other infrastructure, overlapping of development schemes and sewage water on the roads have all contributed to the present dilapidated, conditions. Many accidentshave occurred as a result.The road length in the city exceeds 11,000 kilometres. Complete repair and maintenance are necessary for about two-thirds of this. The work can be divided into phases. In the first phase, all major arterial roads should be repaired. In the next phases, repairs can be carried out on the main roads in commercial locations, neighbourhoods and key industrial areas. The recent building of underpasses along Shaheed-i-Millat Road was a useful initiative. Its effectiveness can be further enhanced if adjacent service roads are re-developed to take the load of traffic.We live in fear of various epidemics. Many have a link with waste management in the city. Whether it is affluent neighbourhoods or low-income settlements, the scourge of poor waste collection impacts all equally.Healthcare professionals say that the scaleand intensity of infectious diseases have increased. Karachi produces more than 15,000 tonnes of solid waste each day. The weight and volume of this are growing because of increased consumerism.A tiny fraction of this waste is disposed off in an unscientific manner. The remaining is either left unattended or burnt from time to time, causing more health hazards.Onecanñndgarbageburningonbeachesor in playgrounds. In the vicinity of large public-sector hospitals, medical waste can be spotted in municipal dump sites.There are smart and multipurpose solutions for dealing with solid waste eg industrial enterprises that convert waste into energy. Besides, the city badly needs sanitary landfill sites in each of its six districts.At present, the sites at Jam Chal(ro and Govind Pass function as dumping grounds, with an unbearable stench and swarms of flies. The need for landfill sites remains paramount and must be addressed on a priority basis. Incinerators at public-sectorhospitals must be overhauled and connected to the waste disposal chain of large and medium healthcare facilities.Millions of gallons of untreated sewage per day are discharged into the sea. Development of small andmedium-scale sewerage treatment plants at the discharging ends of city nullahs can safeguard the marine environment. Such plants can help produce recycled water for horticulture and irrigating green public spaces. A water loss reduction project is desperately needed; much of our water infrastructure has completed its designed life and is subject to leakages which nee d to be plugged and theft.Rehabilitation of footpaths all along the major thoroughfares would be a key intervention. Although the anti-encroachment drive that is rigorously pursued in the city was aimed to make the sidewall(s accessible for pedestrian movement, the situation is less than ideal even now. Illegal motorcycle parking, the stacking of shop merchandise and dumping of debris are a common sight along major footpaths. Unless we do not extend the spaces for car and motorcycle parking, little improvement can be expected. The writer is chairman, Department of Architecture & Planning, NED University, Karachi.  |