

## **BMC proposes to fell 2,000 mangroves to construct 6 bridges**

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Since the proposed sites for all bridges fall under CRZ Area and reserved mangroves, a combined proposal of all six bridges and a proposed cycle track from Mahim fort to Bandra fort was tabled before MCZMA. (File)

A total of 2,000 mangrove trees will be felled to make way for six bridges in Andheri and Malad to improve connectivity and ease traffic flow.

The Maharashtra Coastal Zone Regulation Authority (MCZMA), while deferring Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) clearance for five bridges, approved one proposal that will require cutting of at least 48 mangroves trees.

According to the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) report of all six bridges submitted by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) before MCZMA, the construction of all six bridges will be in environmentally sensitive CRZ areas and require felling of 1,966 mangrove trees and 6.35 hectare mangrove forest patch will be impacted due to the project.

In the first week of February, the BMC proposal was tabled before MCZMA's 157th meeting for consideration. As per the minutes of the meeting, while deferring proposals for five bridges, the authority directed the BMC to conduct an alternate site analysis matrix with EIA of each bridge separately. Also, socioeconomic impact of bridges on local fishermen or fishing points in consultation with the community needs to be conducted for each bridge.

In March, 2021, the BMC had appointed a consultant for the environmental impact study for the proposed bridges from Madh to Versova Creek Bridge from Andheri to Malad, Marve to Manori in Malad, Oshiwara River to Malad Creek, bridge on Ramchandra Nullah in Evershine Nagar to Marve Road at Malad, Lagoon Road to Infinity Mall in Malad and a bridge on Marve Road in Dharivali Village.

The MCZMA cleared the way for a proposed bridge on Ramchandra Nullah in Evershine Nagar to Marve Road at Malad with conditions like seeking the approval of the Bombay High Court for mangrove cutting, five times compensatory afforestation and taking the forest department's clearance.

The construction of these bridges is expected to cost more than Rs 1,000 core. Since the proposed sites for all bridges fall under CRZ Area and reserved mangroves, a combined proposal of all six bridges and a proposed cycle track from Mahim fort to Bandra fort was tabled before MCZMA.

Objecting to the BMC's plan, expert members from MCZMA expressed concern over the project impacting dense mangrove area. The panel suggested to the BMC to find alternate alignments for saving mangrove patches. Mangrove forest play a crucial role in coastal ecosystems and help coastal cities like Mumbai fight sea level rise and floods. They act as the first line of defence during storms.

However, the BMC expressed its inability to change the plan citing land constraint as the biggest reason.

"We will comply with the direction from MCZMA. These projects have been pending for many years and are very important for improving connectivity," said an official from BMC.

Apart from this, the coastal authority also deferred the BMC's proposal of constructing a cycle track cum walkway from Mahim Fort to Bandra Fort. While the project is not going through mangroves, the panel said that the BMC should conduct site-specific EIA along with socioeconomic impact on the local fishing community.