

# BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE

## ***Construction of the 22 km Sewri-Nhava Sheva sea link, will open up the hinterland for rapid development***

One of the world's longest trans-oceanic bridges, Sewri -Nhava Sheva link with an **estimated project cost of Rs 6,000 crore** was finally bagged by the Anil Ambani led consortium. Now the task of the consortium is to complete the **22 km, six-lane bridge by 2013** on Design, Build, Own, Operate and Transfer (DBOOT) basis.

However, transport and infrastructure experts believe that it will be a mammoth task to recover the costs, as it will be a massive engineering and financial challenge to complete the project on time. Experts say most infrastructure projects in the city have suffered due to charges escalating beyond the total project cost.

The consortium will recover the costs from revenues and hand it back to the nodal agency, the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (**MSRDC**), in just **nine years and 11 months**. The road transport system is under severe stress and the trans-oceanic bridge will be critical to facilitate more traffic and reduce pressure from the Mumbai-Pune Expressway, Mumbai-Chennai Highway and the Mumbai-Goa Highway and thus decongest the city.

This sea link will be the future of Mumbai Metropolitan Regions, which includes Navi Mumbai and will help gain quick access to the southern half of Navi Mumbai.

### **The real estate landscape of Navi Mumbai:**

The project, once executed is certain to revolutionise the real estate landscape of Navi Mumbai while opening up the hinterland for rapid development.

The Sewri-Nhava Sheva link is one of the vital components of a trinity of projects that are set to impact Navi Mumbai's real estate, experts point out -- the other being the **New International Airport** likely to come up near Panvel and the **massive SEZ** being promoted by the Mukesh Ambani group.

It is this trinity of projects that will change Navi Mumbai from a distant suburb of Mumbai to a bustling mega-polis in its own right, real estate experts believe. "So far Navi Mumbai's appeal has primarily been because of its **relatively cheaper property rates and a better quality of life**. This is resulted in several people moving to Navi Mumbai to stay while continuing to work in Mumbai. Thus, rather than becoming an alternate node of development, it has become another distant suburb of Mumbai," an analyst says.

While things have changed a bit in the last few years, with several companies setting up offices in Navi Mumbai, it is the Sewri-Nhava Sheva Sea Link along with the airport and SEZ that will make a crucial difference. "Even within Navi Mumbai, development so far has been restricted to a few years like Vashi, Nerul, Belapur and Kharghar. The development potential of a vast hinterland still lies untapped. The Sewri Nhava Sheva Sea Link and related infrastructure development will uncork this potential," experts say.

There is however some **skepticism about the timely completion** of the project and whether it can be achieved within budget, given the various challenges. MMRDA chief transporter PRK Murthy says, "The proper inland navigation traffic dispersal on main land and Mumbai will be a major challenge in Nhava-Sheva Sea link project. During construction the movement to JNPT should be properly ensured as it is not an open sea and the presence of marshy land will make the job tough.

Infrastructure expert and President of Salcon Strategic Advisories (India), Prof A G Iyer says, "The challenges for the consortium will be to control **cost-escalation** because of rising prices of inputs like cement and steel."

The world's longest trans-oceanic bridge, the Hangzhou Bay Bridge, was China's most demanding infrastructure project. The 36-kilometre bridge in Zhejiang province went through numerous physical and economic challenges during its four-year construction through private finance. It would be interesting to see how the Nhava-Sheva 22 km sea link will shape within four to five years, says an expert.

Despite the project being a boon for the metropolitan city and the metropolitan regions, the challenges for the country's biggest infrastructure project is huge and only the time will reveal whether it will be completed on time by 2013.

| <b>FOCAL POINT</b>   |
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| The Sewri – Nhava Sheva link promises to reduce the time taken to travel the distance from the present two hours to less than half-an-hour         |
| The southern half of Navi Mumbai has 2,500 hectares of land for housing, which will benefit mostly in terms of commuting time by its construction. |
| The Sea Link project will give quick access to the southern half of Navi Mumbai  |

Source: The Economic Times dated 28/02/2008