

# Commercialization of Traffic Corridors in Karachi - A Case Study of the Crisis of Governance and Accountability in the Policy to Implementation Cycle

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## Abstract

Karachi, a city of 16 million is the economic powerhouse of Pakistan spread over 3,600 sq.km. Varied physical and ecological landscape, a vibrant and educated populace, an important geo-strategic locale, and a rapidly growing services sector are a few of the many attributes that provide the city with the potential of competing proudly with any other large urban center of the world. Very few large cities in the world can boast of possessing such a diverse physical and ecological landscape as Karachi. Karachi also houses a rich architectural heritage. Karachi is also the main commercial and industrial center of Pakistan. In 2007, its per capita output exceeded the countries by 50 % and the provinces by 80%. The city accounts for a third of the total national output in large scale manufacturing, 24% in finance and insurance and 20% in transport, storage and communications. However, despite all the positive indicators, it is unfortunate that due to bad governance that include unplanned and unregulated physical development and the associated pollution threats, both the natural and built environment is equally threatened. Land is no longer considered a social asset to be used for public benefit, rather it has become a commercial commodity – function having the most financial benefit, that too to a select few in society determines the land use. The *Paper* profiles the process of unregulated commercialization of land parcels in Karachi within the backdrop of the policy decision of the *City District Government Karachi (CDGK)* to allow for commercialization of various traffic corridors within the city under the *CDGK Change of Land Use and Master Planning Bye-Laws 2003*, notified on February 12, 2004. This decision had a history to it and did not come out of the blue. As such, the author attempts to place it in the context of the overall gaps in planning and development and the associated consequences with a particular focus on the policy, management and development aspects of urban land use change practices in the city. The various planning interventions are analyzed and it is argued that urban development plans have exercised no real control over the way the city has developed other than identifying some growth corridors. As a consequence, land is acquired and developed through means illegal and through a powerful nexus between private land developers, politicians and bureaucrats. A most potent manifestation of this unfortunate trend is termed as commercialization of land. It basically means converting an existing land use from residential or amenity/recreation to commercial usage. A *Case Study* is made of the commercialization process of Shakra-e-Faisal while tracing the overall trail of commercialization in the city. Some important contributing factors to the crisis that are cross cutting in nature, having political, financial, and administrative implications are highlighted such as growing demand for commercial land parcels, weak city governments, planning and development inadequacies, mal-administration and corruption practices. A comparative analysis is done between the *Karachi Development Plan 1974-85* and *Karachi Strategic Development Plan 2020* to assess how government response has changed or adapted to accommodate and plan for this phenomenon. The author also shares the findings of a *Public Opinion Survey* that he conducted that was carried out of a few selected commercialized roads. The main objective of the survey was to collect views on the commercialization of some selected major traffic corridors in the city in terms of the resulting impact on the quality of lives of the residents. The *Paper* ends with some recommendations for regulating the process with interventions at the policy, institutional and implementation levels.