

A Master Plan for Colombo

An alternative to the Concept of a "Down -Town" Development

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The case against the CMRSP can actually be traced to its very basics; the idea of a down town development. In fact, the concept of "downtown" is culturally alien to Asia. It is a concept developed in USA to describe an area that developed early in their very short cultural memory; an area that needed to be rejuvenated, made habitable and livened due to neglect. We therefore, do not need to develop a downtown in the real sense of the world, but we need to bring life back into the building stock, which forms the core of the city, which boast of history older than the USA itself.

Over the years, the core was converted to pure commercial activity, driving away the people who originally lived within. This core is kept alive artificially during office hours, but dies a natural death after 6 P.M., giving rise to the more unsavory activities. The rich building fabric, which makes up these spaces should be made human and alive again. They should be extensively landscaped and rehabilitated.

The problems of Colombo are miniscule compared to large cities in other parts of the World. But unless we view it as part of a larger matrix or canvas, many of the assumptions will be errored. Colombo is only a small part of a larger landmass known as Sri Lanka. Therefore, any vision for Colombo should be the outcome of a carefully studied overall vision for Sri Lanka. The main focus should be the country and not the creation of a disney land called Colombo. This proposal is made in the light of this premise.



A MASTER PLAN FOR COLOMBO
AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE CONCEPT
OF A DOWN TOWN DEVELOPMENT

If one were to examine Colombo from a mega perspective, the concentration of intense activity in the Fort area has led to excessive traffic congestion stemming from a poorly located transport terminal, which is a drain on all services. Every solution to date has been curative and short term. The Port extension and development, the shifting of the wholesale market and the relocation of the government offices in the capital complex have not been taken into account. However, Colombo will eventually become a proud Tropical Asian City with a friendly human scale if an alternative concept to the hackneyed and out of date Down Town Development is adopted.

An Alternate Concept to a "Down -Town" Development

The attached sketch is a simplistic representation of a basic concept we propose, which we may call the Baseline Road concept. The dedicated high-rise development is shown in Brown and located along the Baseline/Elvitigala Mawatha spine, with the green areas on either side allocated to low-rise housing and suitable mixed development. The redesignation will relieve the pressure on the marshland in the periphery, which in the future will not be filled; instead they will be opened out, extended and allowed to remain in tact as they should.

Land freed by the Vanathamulla Reel Development, land made available after the shift of the prison, existing railway land, police land, pola land and army land etc. most of which belongs to the state could be available and incorporated into the area indicated in Brown, if the Baseline Road concept is acceptable.

The green area on either side of the spine of large high-rise mixed commercial developments will support a fast access sky train, which will encircle the green area on both sides of the high-rise

development before entering the Baseline Road/Elvitigala Road spine. The sky train could replace the existing coastal train and will be more efficient.

The introduction of a sky train will permit the main railway line to be terminated at an appropriate location at the North and South entrances to the city thereby enabling the landscaping and development of all railway lands, presently locked, underutilized and are idling.

The emphasis on the green area is to ultimately project an extensively landscaped green city concept where the modified roads and wide tree planted pavements will support housing and appropriate mixed developments. This area needs to be carefully studied and appropriately designated. In many areas, some of the existing zoning can be readapted or redesigned.

The Baseline Road development could take place on an elevated platform, a minimum of ten meters above the ground. This will permit some of the traffic crossings to function unhindered while areas for parking and service will also be more efficient.

It is proposed that the available land will be broken into larger parcels. The spaces between buildings however need to be carefully considered and designed. The planning of the high-rise development inland from the coast will not affect the traditional wind patterns; the gentle breezes from the sea and the hinterland, making the city a more pleasant place to live in. The high corrosion factor, which affects buildings and equipment etc. along the coast, can also be minimized.

The termination of the Railway with new transport terminals located at the North and the South entrances to the city will free the Colombo coast line and provide uninterrupted access and open

vistas to the sea.

As this is a new development area, services and transport could be easily provided pre-built in. The complex will be accessible both to those living in Colombo and outside and will become the new commercial center for the City.

There is no doubt that such a planning strategy will require a greater vision and commitment of the planning authorities. UDA undeniably has to take a more visionary stand and an attitude that will create their approaches more humane.