

The Social Impact Assessment of Road Widening

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Abstract - This paper shows the social impacts likely to occur due to proposed road widening. The study concentrates to assess the social impact on local people near Punjabi University Patiala. The result demonstrated that the project will be highly beneficial for the surrounding area and the commuters of the road. The project resolves perpetual traffic problems and risks of accidents.

Keywords - social impact assessment, development, road widening

I. INTRODUCTION

Change is the law of nature and essential for living beings. Society also must change. The planned change called development. Development therefore encompasses many positive and negative results. Moreover, due to development projects people often have to leave their homes and sometimes people are forced to change their area of operation as well. These interventions may lead to need for rehabilitation and resettlement of the people which further leads to new challenges. As a result, there has always been a need to understand the adverse impacts of development projects in order to minimize the negative outfalls of any project. Initially we were concerned about the environmental impacts but later on the need for assessing social impact of any project led to the concept of Social Impact Assessment.

Definition by Vivek Misra explains The Social Impact Assessment as follows: "Social Impact Assessment (SIA) is predicated on the notion that development interventions have social ramifications and it is imperative that decision-makers understand the consequences of their decisions before they act and people affected get the opportunity to participate in designing their future. Social assessment helps to make the project responsive to social development concerns. Developmental initiatives informed by social assessment alleviate poverty, enhance inclusion and build ownership while minimizing and compensating for adverse social impacts on the vulnerable and the poor". [1]

Another definition by Vanclay adds further to our understanding of the concept. According to him:

"Social Impact Assessment is a process of analyzing, monitoring and managing the intended and unintended social consequences, both positive and negative, of planned intervention (policies, plans programs, projects) and any social change processes invoked by these interventions. Its primary purpose is to bring about a more sustainable and equitable biophysical and human environment". (Vanclay: 2003) [2]

It explains that social impact assessment analyzes and manages the social consequences of development projects.

The aim of SIA is to promote the sustainability of these projects. The purpose of SIA therefore is to identify the impacts of any proposed developmental plan before executing the project in order to reduce negative impacts and promote the positive ones.

II. AREA OF STUDY

There is a proposal of road widening of NH 64 from Zirakpur to Bathinda. This 219 km long highway connects via Banur, Patiala, Bhawanigarh, Sangrur, Dhanaula, Tapa, Rampura Phul. This national highway is going to be four lane. The Central Works Division, Patiala is responsible for the designing and bidding of the NH 64 project. The central Works Division is a joint wing of the State PWD¹ and NHAI² headed by a Superintending Engineer (S.E.). The road needs to be widened because there has the maximum fatal accidents. It would have been the first cemented concrete expressway of Punjab like Delhi-Jaipur road. Five toll plazas will be set up near Lehra Mohabbat in bathinda, Dhanaula in Barnala, Bhawanigarh in Sangrur, near village Kauli in Patiala and Banur in Mohali. The total cost of the project will be 3300 crore. This project will have positive and negative impacts, so it is important to assess the social impacts before the implementation of the project. In the present study, From the Zirakpur-Patiala stretch, Punjabi University area is select for social impact assessment. As the part of road widening project NH 64, service lanes, a Vehicular under Pass (VUP) and Fly-over will be construct at the places where such institutions has established. For this purpose, land will be required from the both sides of the road. One side of the road bordered by the University wall and the other side of the road is flanked by a market where there are a few shops and vendors and auto/taxi drivers working for their livelihood. Maximum total 73' land is required from both sides for this construction. For this requirement of land, some people will have to leave their place and relocate. Front shops will have to be removed from there and the vendors and auto drivers will need to relocate at some other place.

¹ Public Works Department (Buildings and roads) is an agency of the state government for construction and maintenance of roads, buildings and bridges in the state. The department also acts as the technical advisor to the state government in all aspects of construction.

² The National Highway Authority of India is an agency which is responsible for building, upgrading and maintaining most of the national highways. It operates under the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MORTH).

The focus of this research is to assess the social impacts of this road widening adjacent to the University campus. As the part of the SIA, the stakeholders affected by this road widening will be identified and interviewed to assess the pros & cons of this development effort by the State.

III. METHODOLOGY

Details of the project related to the road-widening of the stretch adjacent to Punjabi University were acquired from the concerned Department of the government in the form of secondary data. Primary data was collected through field-work of the affected area. A sample of 60 respondents was selected and interviewed them with the help of an interview schedule. Researcher developed insight on various issues with the help of observation method used by researcher through the field-work.

IV. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The major findings of the study were discussed as following;

- The proposed acquisition does serve public purpose. There was an overwhelming consensus among respondents too with regard to the benefits accruing due to the proposed project.
- Local people face many problems while crossing the road. With the construction of Vehicular under Pass and service lane, local people will find it safe and comfortable to cross the road.
- The road widening project will reduce travel time and ease traffic jams at the NH 64 because road from Zirakpur to Bathinda is going to be four lane and many over bridges and VUP will be constructed at possible sites.
- The road widening will reduce the risk of accidents because this area is accident prone area. With no traffic

jams in front of the University, its aesthetic value will improve and the students will have a risk free crossing in front of the gate.

- The project will not have any significant adverse impact on the existing residential area. There will be no loss or damage to livelihood of the stakeholders. All the stakeholders who will be displaced by the project are reasonably prepared for their relocation. Since they have voluntarily encroached upon the government land with a calculated risk, they were mentally prepared to vacate the land whenever required by the govt.
- There will be no adverse impact on health of local people. The pollution levels are likely to reduce with congestion free flow of traffic once the road is widened. The only concern however remains the duration during which the road-widening will be under process.
- Local people have welcomed the project as it will reduce risks of accidents and diminish traffic problem.
- Bare minimum adverse impacts are identified such as shopkeepers and vendors will have to relocate and leave their shops. But they were informed about this project from time to time.
- Local poor boys and girls who are working as workers in these shops will find their jobs at stake.
- Felling of trees will lead to major loss of tree cover.

The negative impacts which were found were the removal of shops, replacement of shopkeepers and vendors, environment impact due to cutting trees. No other possible negative impact came up throughout the study. Though the total cost of road widening NH 64 from Zirakpur to bathinda is around 3300 crorerupees, yet this cost will resolve perpetual traffic problem and risks of accidents. Positive and negative aspects of the project have been discussed in the following table:

Positive impacts	Negative impacts
Comfortable to cross the road	Loss of employment
Savings in travel time	Relocation of shopkeepers
Reduce risks of accidents	Loss of trees
Increase road safety	
Increase beauty of university	

After careful examination of various positive and negative impacts it has been found that the proposed project would be beneficial for local community at large. The positive outcomes of the proposed plan of road widening NH 64 far outweigh the possible negative impacts. Hence, the paper concludes that the road widening of stretch adjacent to the university campus should be carried out as per project proposal. However, there are a few suggestions

made on the basis of the study which will help in ameliorating whatever adverse impacts are likely to occur.

V. SUGGESTIONS

In the present study the likely negative impacts have been mentioned in the previous chapter. To minimize the negative impacts the following measures are proposed on the basis of the study conducted.

The shopkeepers in the front shops will be directly affected by the project. The govt. should not have allowed these shops to mushroom in the area as that has already caused lot of bottlenecks in the traffic in front of the university gate. Now that shops have been in place for quite some time, the govt, must convince them timely to move away from the current area and start their business at some other location. Timely removal of these shops will ease in speeding up the project. Felling of trees for widening the road will deprive people of lot of shaded area. The trees lined along the existing road provide greenery and freshness to the surroundings. The planners should try to plan the service lanes in such fashion that minimum trees are required to be removed. With the help of NSS unit of the university, tree plantation drive should be started so that green cover in the area remains intact. A bus stop should be constructed near the university for daily commuters. The university should open its secondary gate opening towards phase-II during the construction on the main highway.

VI. REFERENCES

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