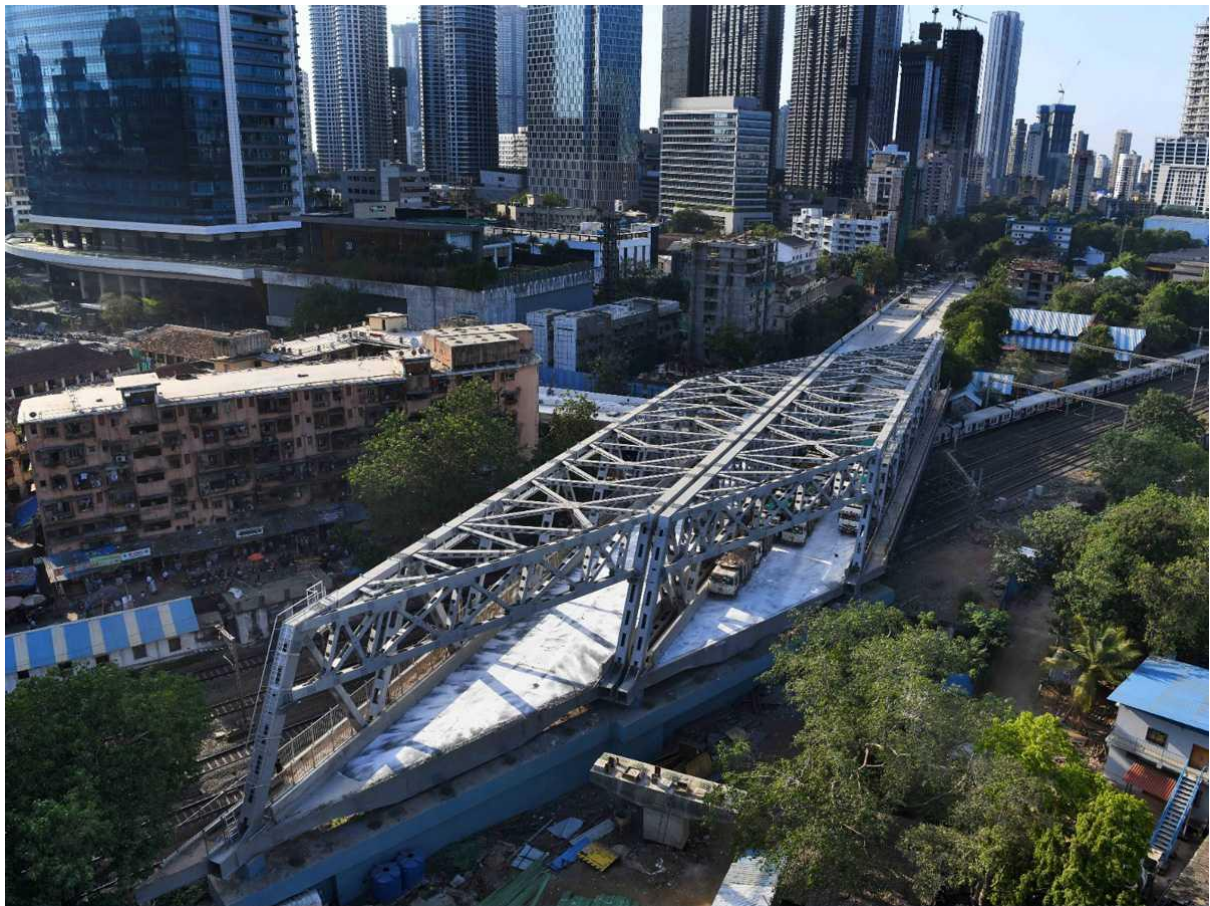


## Why Does It Take So Long to Build Bridges in Mumbai?

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- In Mumbai, bridges serve as crucial connectors within the city
- Many were built in the late 19th century and are in need of repair. Citizens are wary of the time it may take to fix or restore the structure
- Delisle Bridge was shut down after the IIT-Bombay conducted a structural inspection
- Five years on, just one arm of the bridge is set to reopen by May-end
- Earlier, Hancock Bridge and Himalaya Bridge works continued for years while citizens continued to suffer
- Architects, town planning experts, citizen activists and even politicians say the problem lies in lack of coordination and poor planning

In Mumbai, bridges serve as crucial connectors within the city. When even one of them is rendered out of service, the traffic load overwhelms other routes and enormously inconveniences commuters and local residents.

However, many of the bridges, built in the late 19th century by the British, are in need of repair or renovation. Citizens are wary of the time it may take to fix or restore the structure. And their worries are not unfounded. The Delisle Bridge was shut down after the IIT-Bombay conducted a structural inspection following the collapse of a section of the Gokhale Bridge in Andheri in July 2018.

Five years on, just one arm of the bridge is set to reopen by month-end.

Earlier, Hancock Bridge and even the Himalaya Bridge works continued for years while citizens continued to suffer. Entire neighbourhoods became inaccessible and office-goers reported a drastic increase in commute time.

Architects, town planning experts, citizen activists and even politicians say the problem lies in a lack of coordination and poor planning.

Shirish Sukhatme, the past president of the Practicing Engineers Architects and Town Planners Association, also blamed bureaucratic ego, official apathy to the common man's problems, the rush to take credit and the lack of a platform for people to raise their voices.

Milind Mhaske, of Praja Foundation, a non-partisan organisation working towards enabling accountable governance, feels things would move faster if projects are handled by local governance bodies.

BJP MLA Ameet Satam, meanwhile, said political will often dictates how civic infrastructure works pan out. While the Delisle bridge work took almost 5 years, Satam confidently claimed the Gokhale Bridge work, which started in November 2022, will be wrapped up within a year under the new government.

Nikhil Desai, a King Circle-based citizen activist, said given the technology available today, there is no excuse for such delays. He pointed out that delaying projects, besides causing inconvenience to the common man, also escalates the project cost. His solution is to hold people, especially the contractors, accountable. Levy on heavy penalties for not meeting the deadline could help wrap up the works on time, he said.

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