



# Navigating Displacement and Inequality along the ML-1 Railway Corridor: Perspectives from Urban Pakistan

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Cover image: J SILVER

In the realm of mega infrastructure projects, the human costs of development often find itself overshadowed, leaving households in a state of uncertainty and displacement. The Mainline-1 (ML-1) China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project is no exception, echoing the histories of prior initiatives across Pakistan. From the Neelum Jhelum Hydro-Electric Project to the Karachi Circular Railway, the stories resonate with a common thread: the marginalization of the very individuals whose lives are irrevocably altered by such ambitious undertakings. In examining the intricacies of the ML-1 project, this report aims to illuminate the human costs intertwined with its development—the dislocation of communities, the erosion of livelihoods, and the pervasive absence of adequate resettlement frameworks. It is imperative to confront the realities faced by those displaced or left in limbo, as their struggles often become collateral damage in the pursuit of progress. In shedding light on these issues, we seek to advocate for a more inclusive approach to development—one that prioritizes the rights and dignity of affected populations, ensuring that they are not mere footnotes in the annals of infrastructural advancement.

# 1. Mainline-1 (ML-1) Project: An Introduction

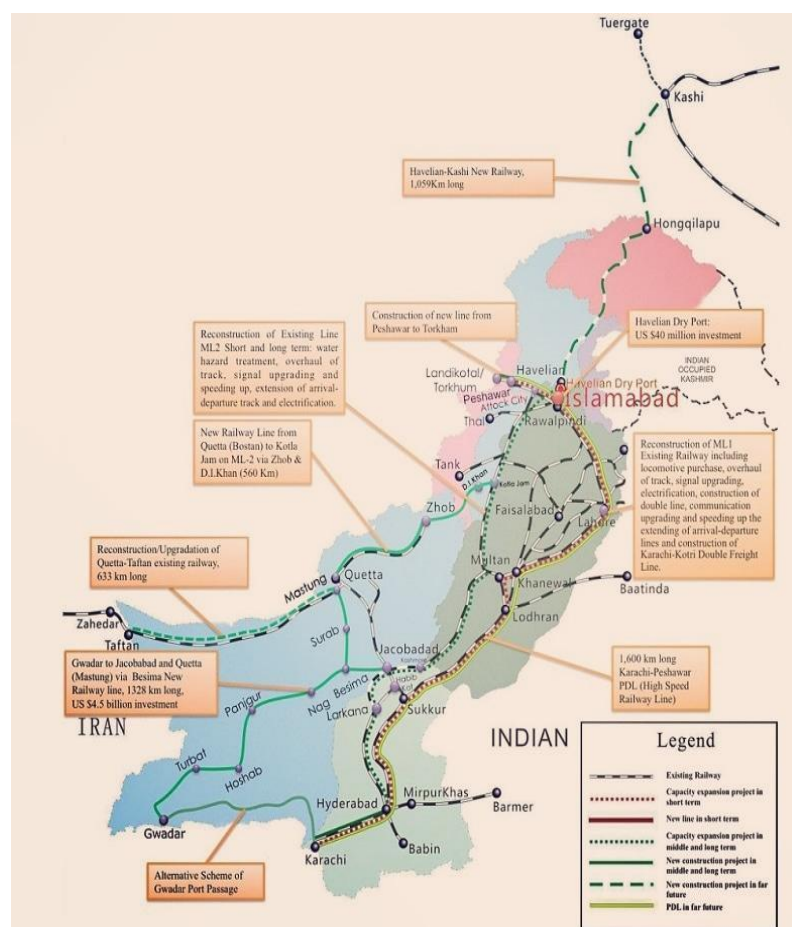
The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) serves as a pivotal framework for bilateral economic cooperation between China and Pakistan, directing substantial investments towards enhancing Pakistan's railway sector, notably through the Mainline-1 (ML-1) project. This initiative aims to upgrade the existing railway infrastructure, focusing on improving quality, speed, and capacity. Encompassing the double-tracking of the 1,726 km railway line, the installation of modern signaling and train control systems, electrification of the tracks, and the establishment of trunk workshops, the project aims to address the infrastructural deficiencies that have arisen over years of operation. Originally projected at approximately \$9.85 billion, the cost has been revised to a newly rationalized figure of \$6.678 billion, primarily financed by China, and is expected to generate employment opportunities, boost trade and economic activity, and lower transportation costs within Pakistan<sup>1</sup>. The ML-1 line, which connects Karachi to Peshawar, is one of the four main railway lines in the country and is critical to its transportation network, accommodating 75% of the nation's cargo and passenger traffic across its 184 railway stations, (see map 1.1). The ongoing upgrade, with a planned completion time of six years, aims to double the average rail speed to 160 kilometers per hour. The Federal Government's comprehensive plans for the ML-1 project include enhancing bridges, tunnels, buildings, telecommunications, and track maintenance, in line with Pakistan's Vision 2025, which emphasizes regional connectivity and aims to strengthen ties with SAARC countries. Additionally, CPEC is expected to facilitate the establishment of special economic zones that will promote domestic industries, boost exports, and reduce the trade deficit.<sup>2</sup>, positioning the ML-1 project as a cornerstone of Pakistan's broader efforts to modernize its transportation infrastructure and stimulate economic growth.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1780800>

<sup>2</sup> Khan, A. U. (2014). Pak-China economic corridor: The hopes and reality. *Regional Studies*, 33(1), 45-63.

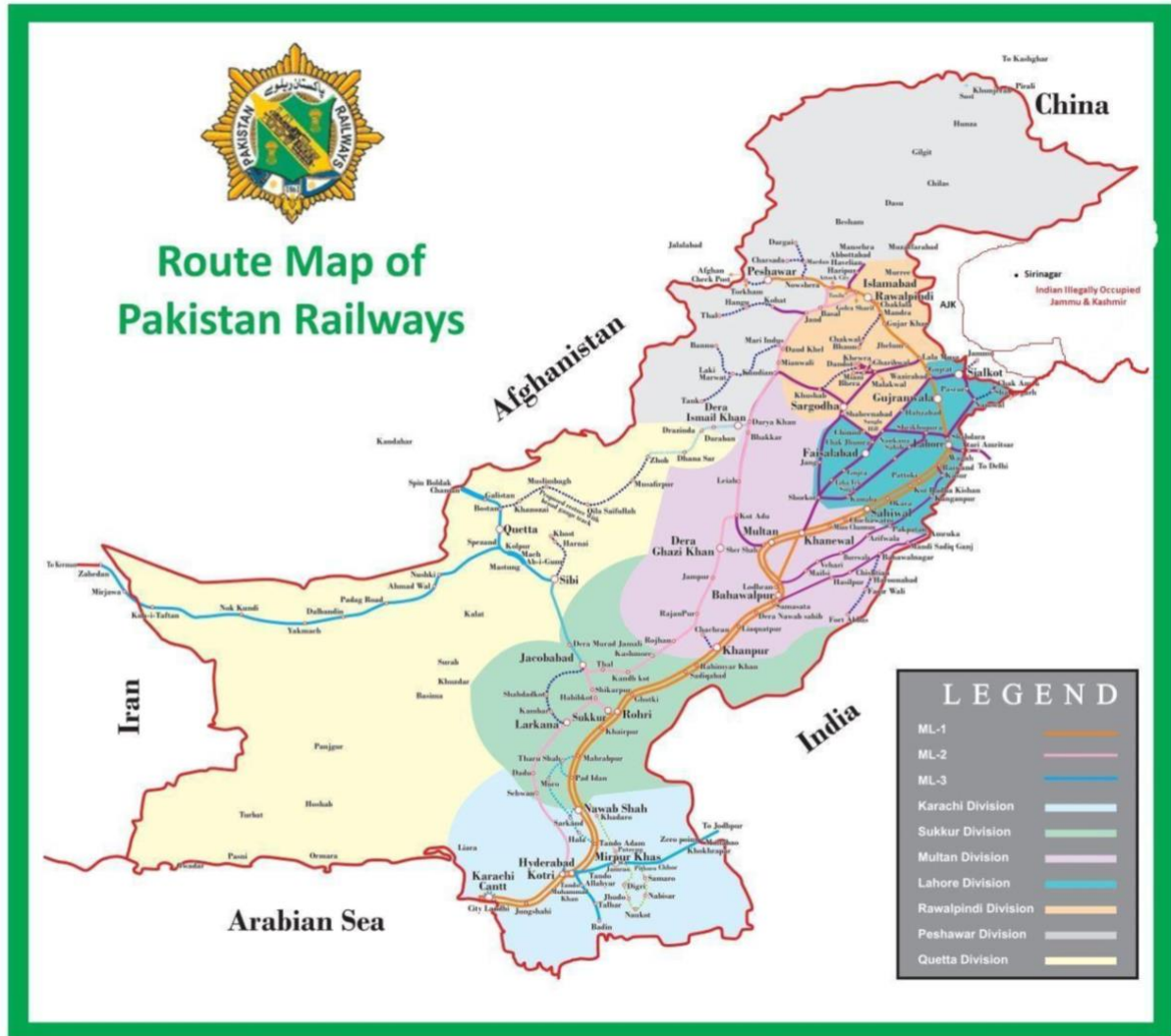
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Map-1: The ML-1 line connects Karachi to Peshawar, is one of the four main railway lines in the country (Source: CPEC Official Website (Government of Pakistan, 2019))

The Pakistan railway network comprises 7,791 Kilometers, in which 7,479 kilometers (km) of broad gauge lines and a 312 km section of meter gauge (1,000 mm). Some 1,409 km of broad gauge is double tracked. None of the network is electrified. There are three main lines. Main Line 1 (ML1) extends via Rohri, Bahawalpur, and Multan to connect with Karachi to Lahore, Islamabad, and Peshawar. The Karachi–Lahore segment of ML1 is double-tracked. Main Line 2 (ML2) extends from Karachi to Peshawar. Between Karachi and Dera Ghazi Khan it runs parallel with ML1, then proceeds inland towards Peshawar. Main Line 3 (ML3) extends north and west from Jacobabad to Quetta, the Afghanistan border at Chaman and the Iran border at Taftan where it connects with the Iran railway network. The Pakistan railway network<sup>3</sup> is shown in Map - 2

<sup>3</sup><https://www.railways.gov.pk/Detail/OTgONzMIYzAtOWFhOC00MGZlWFIMzEtNzYIMjZhOGFiZTMw>



Map-2: Official map of Pakistan railway network (Source: <https://www.railways.gov.pk>)

The journey of the Main Line-1 (ML-1) project, a cornerstone of the CPEC, has been marked by a series of pivotal decisions and milestones. These key actions have shaped the project's trajectory, ensuring its alignment with Pakistan's economic ambitions and infrastructural needs.

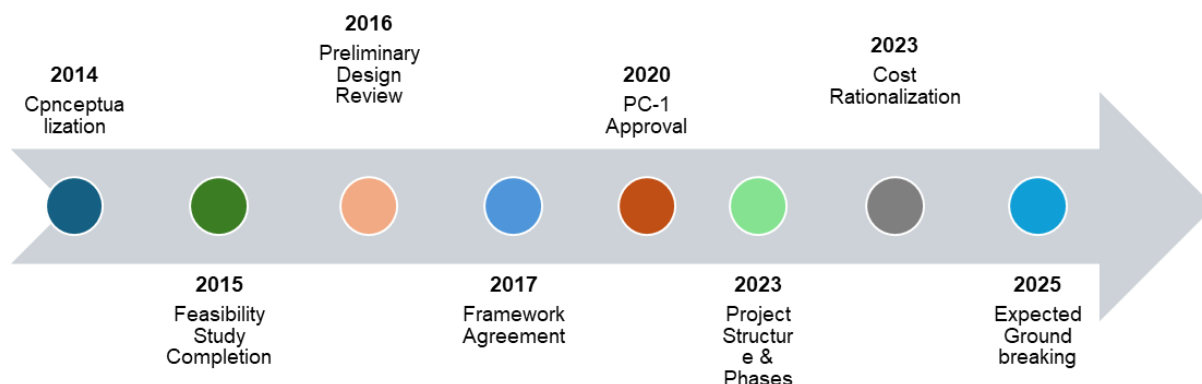


Figure-1 Timeline of key decisions for ML-1 & expected delivery (Source: Author/Archival data)

The ML-1 project under CPEC aims to transform Pakistan's railway infrastructure, making it more modern, efficient, and competitive. By achieving the following objectives, the project is expected to have far-reaching positive impacts on Pakistan's economy, trade, transportation, and overall development.



Figure-2 Main objectives of the ML-1 project under CPEC (Source: Author)

## 2. Research Methodology and Mainline-1 Affected Areas

The ML-1 starts from Karachi, passes through Kotri/Hyderabad, Rohri, Multan, Lahore, Rawalpindi, and terminates at Peshawar, we focused on three major urban centers to estimate the anticipated displacement of populations along the Mainline-1 railway track, such as Karachi, Lahore, and Hyderabad. The research has focused on two distinct pathways to assess the impact of the railway project on local communities based on the amount of space surrounding the railway tracks required for the engineering works.

**Displacement Pathway-1 (Scenario-1)**, involves the areas surrounding the railway track, extending 40 feet on both sides. This scenario identifies and quantifies the populations at risk of displacement within this zone

**Displacement Pathway-2 (Scenario-2)** involves the areas surrounding the railway track, extending 25 feet on both sides. This scenario identifies and quantifies the populations at risk of displacement within this zone

By employing these two scenarios, we will provide a detailed assessment of two different anticipated displacements and the populations at risk.

The study estimates population displacement due to the ML-1 project by identifying vulnerable settlements along the Karachi-Peshawar railway track. Using Google Earth Pro and SASPlanet, the railway track is digitized with a 40-foot and 25-foot offset in ArcMap to mark affected informal settlements. High-resolution satellite imagery and census data are analyzed to identify housing structures, with field visits validating findings. Each structure is digitized, and household estimates are derived based on census and field data. The total displaced population is calculated by multiplying the estimated number of families per structure by the average family size, ensuring an accurate assessment of affected communities.

To estimate the anticipated displacement of populations due to the Mainline-1 (ML-1) project, a structured methodology was employed, integrating GIS-based spatial analysis and demographic assessments. The process began with preparation and planning, where the study objectives focused on identifying settlements along the railway track from Karachi to Peshawar that would be affected. The next step involved the digitization of the railway track and vulnerable settlements using Google Earth Pro to map the existing railway alignment, followed by creating a 40-foot offset and 25-foot offset boundary on both sides in ArcMap, as specified in project documents, to identify settlements at risk.

High-resolution satellite imagery was then acquired using SAS Planet to ensure the most recent and accurate representation of settlements. Census data and local knowledge were incorporated to understand household sizes, family structures, and socio-economic characteristics, supported by field visits to validate data and contextualize findings. Within each identified settlement, individual housing structures that fell within the 40-foot offset were digitized using ArcMap, which ensured accurate enumeration of affected dwellings. The population estimation process was then carried out by determining average household sizes from census data and field observations. Using previous field data, family distribution within structures was assessed, and the total number of families was calculated by multiplying the total structures by the estimated number of families per structure. The total affected population was then estimated by multiplying the total families by the average family size. The impact assessment considered social, economic, and physical effects, and distinguished between full and partial displacement. It evaluated disruptions to access, mobility, infrastructure, and community cohesion, while also identified the need for resettlement, compensation, or rehabilitation. To ensure accuracy, the estimates were validated through on-the-ground investigations, where satellite-derived data was cross-verified with field observations, and necessary adjustments were made. Finally, findings were compiled into a comprehensive report, integrating maps, visualizations, and detailed assessments to systematically document the anticipated displacement, which made the analysis transparent and adaptable to diverse urban contexts in Pakistan.



### 3. Three Cities of Pakistan – Impact on Urban Life

The study proceeded in three major urban cities along the ML-1 Railway line, Karachi, Hyderabad and Lahore – as these were considered the urban settlements most likely to have populations residing within the railway spaces. However, it was noted that other urban areas along the alignment might also have such populations, though in smaller numbers.

According to the 2023 Census of Pakistan, the household statistics for three cities – Karachi, Hyderabad, and Lahore are as follows:

City	Population	Households	Average Household Size	Owned House	Rented House	Rent Free/Others
Karachi	20,382,881	3,434,103	5.93	2,070,680	1,219,145	144,278
Hyderabad	2,432,540	448,191	5.42	325,964	84,303	37,928
Lahore	13,127,000	2,010,225	6.41	1,343,960	576,294	89,971

There are 6 settlements in Karachi, 5 settlements in Hyderabad and 6 settlements in Lahore that were identified as being partly on railway land.

S.No	Settlement Name	City
1	Ghareebabad PIDC Colony	Karachi
2	Kashmir Mujahid Colony	
3	New Sindh Muslim Colony	
4	Umer Colony	
5	Darvesh Colony	

6	Moria Khan Goth	
7	Railway Line Colony Qasimabad	Hyderabad
8	Bengali Colony	
9	Phuleli	
10	Pakka Qila	
11	Syed Ghafoor Shah colony	
12	Ittehad Colony	Lahore
13	Christian Colony	
14	Railway Survey Colony	
15	Iqbal Park Colony	
16	Shamspura	
17	Mustafabad	

### 3.1 Karachi City Profile:

Karachi, the largest urban agglomeration in Pakistan, situated along the Arabian Sea coast, is a bustling metropolis with a population exceeding 30 million (officially 20.38 million – census 2023), with an area 3527 sq km, density per sq km is 5779.1, making it one of the most densely populated cities in the world, particularly in its inner districts where densities can reach over 48,000 people per square kilometer. According to the 2023 Census, Karachi's population is (20.38 million), accounting for about 36.6% of Sindh's total population of approximately 55.70 million. With 3,434,103 households, the average household size in Karachi is 5.9, compared to Sindh's average of 5.64. The average population annual growth rate is 4.1.

In Karachi, 60.3% of the population owns their houses (as reported by residents in census 2023 including both formal and informal), while 39.7% do not (with 35.5% renting), compared to 76.1% home ownership in Sindh province. From 1872 to 2017, Karachi's population has grown exponentially, with significant demographic shifts post-Partition in 1947, leading to urban sprawl and a current population residing increasingly further from the city center. The city has experienced rapid growth since its establishment, driven by migration from various regions of Pakistan, resulting in a diverse demographic landscape. The city features a mix of high-density high-rise buildings, limited green spaces, and informal settlements (katchi abadis) with varying access to resources like water and electricity.

Karachi faces a severe housing crisis, with a growing demand-supply gap exacerbated by rapid urbanization and inadequate formal housing. 62 percent of the population resides in informal settlements, where infrastructure and services remain insufficient. Homeownership is increasingly unaffordable, forcing many into rental housing, with high rents burdening low-income households. The lack of affordable housing policies and formal development leaves millions vulnerable to displacement and poor living conditions.

However, Karachi faces significant challenges, including a severe housing crisis characterized by the proliferation of informal settlements, where residents often lack secure land tenure and basic infrastructure. The ongoing urban development initiatives, aimed at beautification and infrastructural upgrades, frequently displace low-income communities, exacerbating their precarious living conditions. Despite these challenges, Karachi remains a vital economic hub, with its labor force playing a crucial role in the city's functioning and development, highlighting the complex interplay between urban growth, socio-economic disparities, and the quest for affordable housing.

### **3.1.1 Growth of the Railway in Karachi City:**

The first railway line in Pakistan was opened in 1861 between Karachi City and Kotri, marking Karachi's pivotal role as the main port of entry for the British administration. The line was crucial for military transport and connecting the port to the upcountry regions of Punjab.

A significant, yet ultimately tragic, development was the Karachi Circular Railway (KCR), which began operating in 1964 to serve the city's rapidly growing population and outlying suburban communities. The KCR was intended to be the backbone of modern commuter transport but suffered from mismanagement and financial losses, leading to its effective closure in 1999 (with full shutdown by 2004). Revival efforts, often linked to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Supreme Court directives, have been a recurring theme in recent urban planning.

### 3.1.2 Communities along the Railway Line in Karachi City:

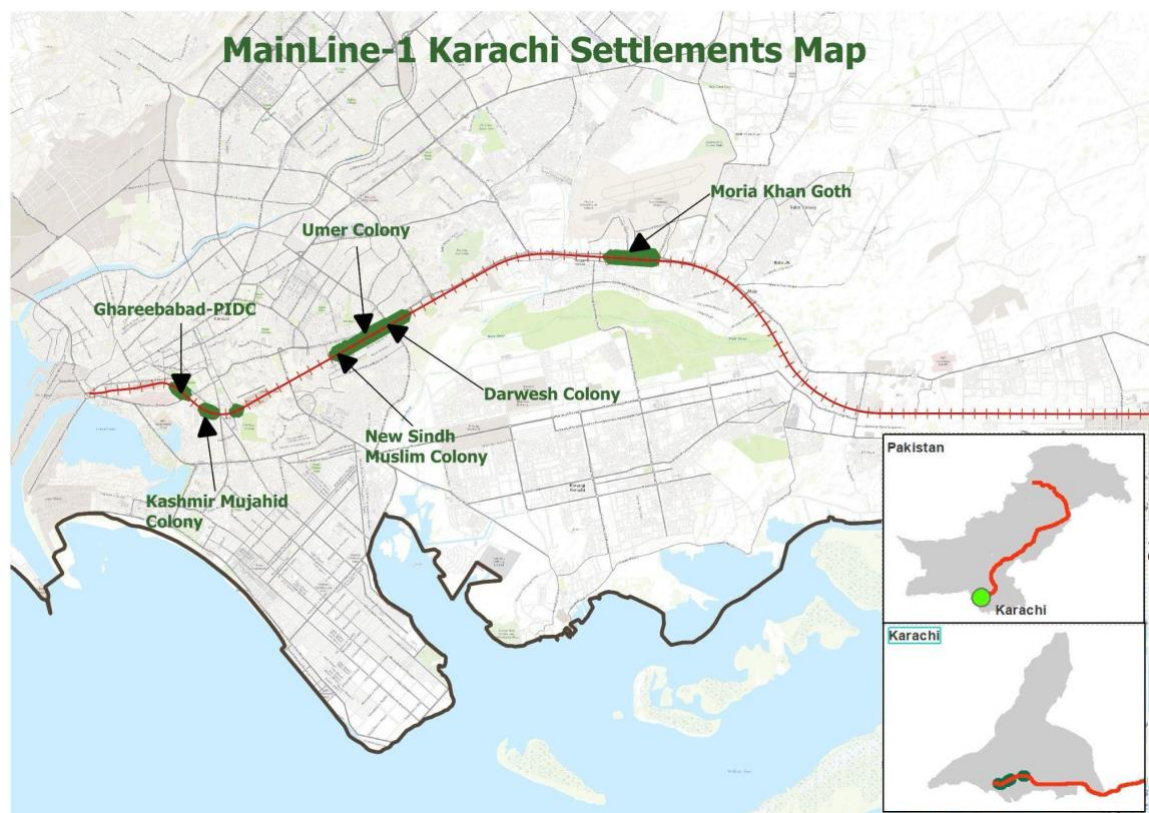
The original railway lines (Mainline-1 up and down tracks) and the defunct Karachi Circular Railway (KCR) corridor have created a significant ribbon of Pakistan Railways (PR) land running through the city. Over time, these areas became hosts to informal settlements (katchi abadis) , often populated by migrants drawn to Karachi for economic opportunities.

The unused and loosely guarded railway land, particularly the defunct KCR track, provided space for low-income housing. Political patronage, where local leaders or parties would facilitate or ignore the occupation in exchange for political support (voter blocs), further entrenched these communities. These settlements often housed diverse ethnic and linguistic groups who arrived during successive waves of migration.

#### *Clearance and Displacement /Attempts:*

Karachi has experienced some of the most visible and contentious anti-encroachment drives along railway land, especially concerning the KCR. Attempts at clearance are frequent, often mandated by the Supreme Court of Pakistan to revive the KCR or clear the Mainline-1 (ML-1). One notable instance involved plans announced to demolish an estimated 10,000 houses on Pakistan Railway land, primarily to clear the path for the KCR revival. This has put the government and judiciary in conflict with the large, decades-old, and politically sensitive population of affectees, who face homelessness with little or no provision for alternative housing or compensation.

Large-scale clearance of railway land in Karachi along the ML-1 alignment resulted in widespread demolitions and displacements, particularly in densely populated settlements near PIDC, Kashmir Colony, Kala Pul, Moria Khan Goth, and adjoining neighbourhoods. These areas, which had developed over decades within and alongside railway spaces, were home to low-income families, small businesses, and community networks closely tied to the urban fabric. The demolition drives removed hundreds of housing structures and commercial units, leading to the forced displacement of residents without adequate resettlement or compensation in many cases. The process not only disrupted household economies and social networks but also intensified urban vulnerability by dislocating communities from their places of work, schools, and essential services. The clearance highlighted the contested nature of railway land in Karachi, where state-led infrastructure development collided with long-standing informal habitation and the survival strategies of marginalized groups.



Map-3: Settlements along Mainline-1 in Karachi

### 3.1.3 General Characteristics of Settlements along ML-1 in Karachi

#### 1. Historical Origins and Informality

- Most settlements originated post-Partition (1947), primarily settled by migrant-refugees from India.
- Over time, these areas attracted internal migrants from Sindh, Punjab, KP, and other parts of Pakistan.
- They are classified as *informal settlements* built on land owned by Pakistan Railways, making them vulnerable to eviction.

#### 2. Demographics and Social Composition

- Populations range from a few hundred to several thousand residents per settlement.
- Ethnically diverse: include Sindhi, Punjabi, Pakhtun, and Urdu-speaking communities.
- Socio-economic profile is predominantly low-income, with reliance on informal jobs and daily wage labor.

#### 3. Infrastructure and Basic Services

- Most settlements have partial access to infrastructure, with notable gaps:
  - Electricity and water were gradually introduced in the late 1970s and expanded in the 1990s through political patronage.

- Sewage and waste disposal systems exist but are often inadequate or depend on informal arrangements.
- Gas connections are present in some areas but not universal.
- Healthcare and education facilities are generally absent or minimal, forcing reliance on neighboring areas.

#### *4. Economic Activities and Livelihoods*

- Residents are engaged in a vibrant informal economy, including:
  - Daily-wage labor (construction, domestic work, etc.)
  - Street vending and small shops
  - Home-based enterprises such as tailoring, embroidery, and furniture trade
- The proximity to commercial zones and transport hubs enables economic activity despite precarity.

#### *5. Land Tenure and Eviction Threats*

- Settlements are built on railway land, with no formal land titles.
- Residents face a constant threat of eviction, especially during projects like the Karachi Circular Railway (KCR) revival and now the ML-1 expansion.
- Past eviction drives have sparked community resistance and led to displacement without proper resettlement.

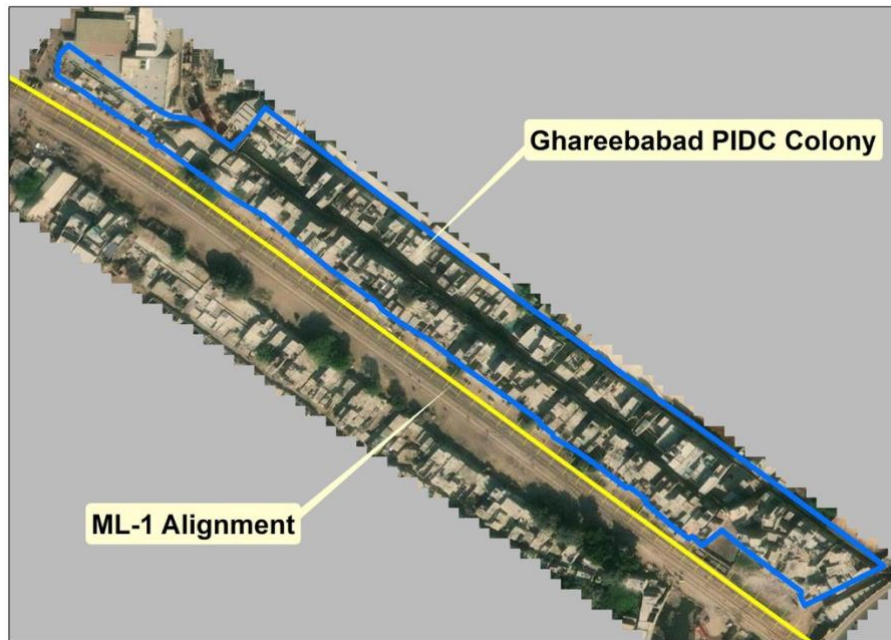
#### *6. Political Engagement and Vulnerability*

- Many communities have historically supported Pakistan People's Party (PPP) but shifted to PTI in the 2018 elections due to disillusionment.
- Infrastructure provision often depends on political patronage, creating instability when leadership changes.
- Local political activists and community leaders play a crucial role in organizing resistance and advocating for rights.

#### *7. Community Resilience*

- Despite precarious conditions, communities have shown strong resilience and collective organization:
  - Engaging in anti-eviction campaigns
  - Negotiating basic services
  - Organizing informal schools, childcare, and support systems
- These settlements reflect deep-rooted urban belonging and contribute to Karachi's labor and service economy.

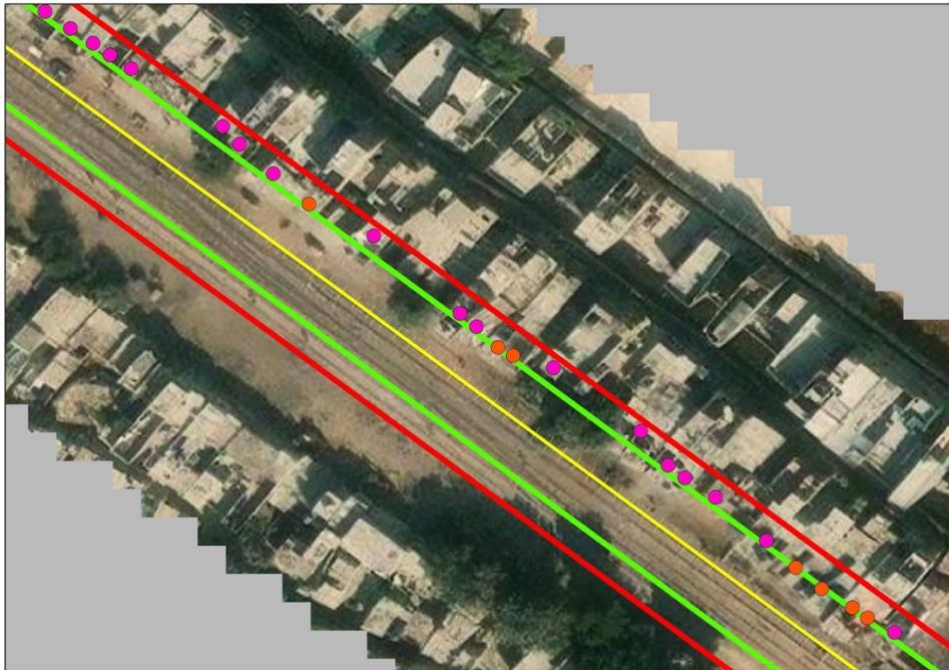
The ML-1 corridor in Karachi cuts through a dense network of long-established informal settlements that embody the city's complex history of migration, labor, and marginalization. As illustrated by the profiles of communities like Ghareebabad-PIDC, Umar Colony, Moria Khan Goth, and others, these settlements have evolved over decades,



often without formal recognition yet have developed vibrant social fabrics and informal economies vital to the functioning of the city. Despite their resilience, residents face chronic insecurity due to contested land tenure, inadequate services, and the looming threat of eviction under infrastructure expansion projects like ML-1. Any development along this corridor will affect these communities. Planning should prioritize inclusive planning, legal protections, and equitable resettlement strategies that respect the dignity and contributions of those who have built their lives along the railway line.



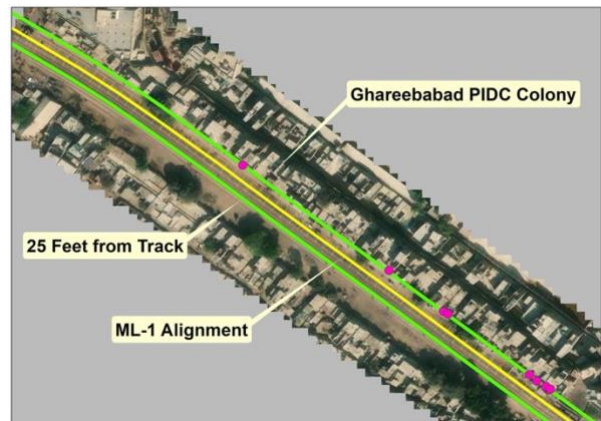
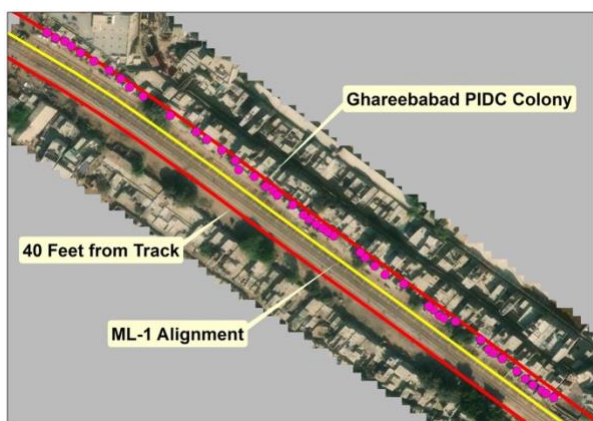
### Remote Sensing Analysis



Scenario-1 (40 feet)

Scenario-2 (25 feet)

The maps show that structures at risk with different distances, 40 feet and 25 feet along the track Community Scale what we term Scenario-1 and 2



According to analysis the following structures are at risk in Karachi city:

S. No	Settlement Name	Scenario-1 (40 feet) (housing structures at risk)	Scenario-2 (25 feet) (housing structures at risk)
1	Ghareebabad PIDC Colony	47	8
2	Kashmir Mujahid Colony	34	0
3	New Sindh Muslim Colony	98	6
4	Umer Colony	103	46
5	Darvesh Colony	51	0
6	Moria Khan Goth	133	17

Scenario	Housing Structure	Families	Population
Scenario-1 Full Displacement (40 feet)	466	1088	9792
Scenario-2 Partial Displacement (25 feet)	77	179	1611

### 3.2 Hyderabad City Profile:

Hyderabad, the second largest urban center, situated south-central Sindh province, southeastern Pakistan, lies just east of the Indus River. With a population of 2.43 million. The total area of Hyderabad is 993 sq km, while per square density is 2449.69 sq km and population average annual growth rate is 1.69. According to the 2023 Census data, the District of Hyderabad's population is approximately 2.43 million, accounting for about

4.4% of Sindh's total population of approximately 55.7 million. There are 448,479 households in Hyderabad, resulting in an average household size of 5.42, compared to Sindh's average of 5.64. In Hyderabad, 72.7% of the population owns their houses (as reported by residents in census 2023 including both formal and informal), while 27.3% do not (with 18.8% renting), compared to 76.1% home ownership in Sindh province.

Hyderabad city, is a communications center, connected by rail with Peshawar and Karachi and with Indian railways via the border towns of Khokhropar and Munab. In historical context, Hyderabad is the second largest city of Sindh Province. Founded in 1768 on the site of the ancient town of Noreen Kot by Ghulam Shah Kalhora, the saintly ruler of Sind, it was named for the Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law, Ali, also known as Haidar. It remained the capital of Sind under the Talpur rulers, who succeeded the Kalhoras, until 1843 when, after the nearby battles of Miani and Dabo, it surrendered to the British and the capital was transferred to Karachi. The Hyderabad city is rich in culture, traditions and history because it lies alongside the River Indus.

Hyderabad faces a growing housing crisis, with a widening demand–supply gap, particularly affecting low–income groups. Informal settlements continue to expand as affordable housing remains scarce, forcing many into inadequate living conditions. According to the 2023 Census, 19 percent of the population still relies on rental housing, while ownership rates remain higher than the provincial average. Rising urbanization and limited formal housing projects exacerbate the challenges, leaving vulnerable communities with few sustainable options.

### **3.2.1 Growth of the Railway in Karachi City:**

Hyderabad's railway growth is intrinsically linked to Karachi via Main Line (ML–1), as it was the initial terminus of the subcontinent's first operational railway line in the region, connecting it to Karachi in 1861. The railway positioned Hyderabad as a key junction for travel and trade moving up the Indus Valley, solidifying its economic and strategic importance in Sindh. Today, it remains a major station and a crucial stop on the country's Main Line (ML–1) connecting Karachi to Peshawar.

### **3.2.2 Communities along the Railway Line in Hyderabad City:**

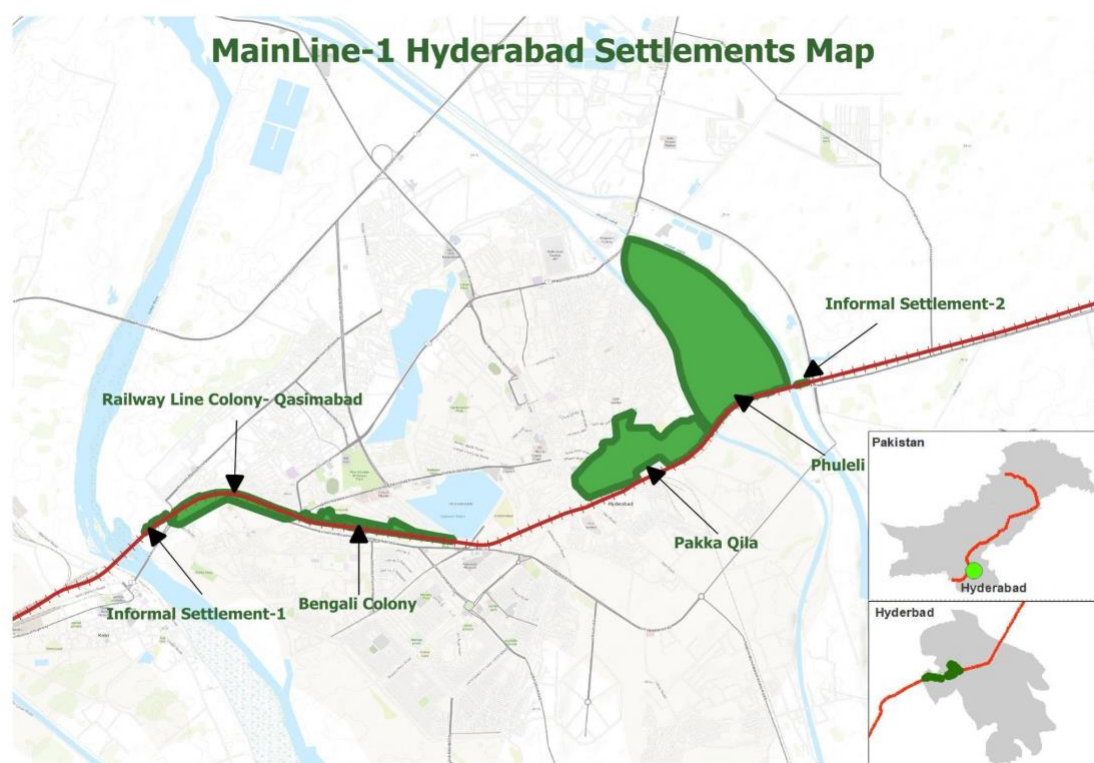
As a major railway junction and city along the Main Line (ML–1), the railway land in Hyderabad has also attracted informal settlements and commercial ventures. The presence of the railway provides a source of work for many low–income residents, creating communities that rely on its services and peripheral economic activity.

Proximity to the main railway station and junction provides economic access for small–scale vendors, labourers, and service providers. Like Karachi, the slow pace of railway development and underutilization of vast tracts of Pakistan Railway land created opportunities for residential and commercial encroachment over decades.

### 3.2.2.1 Clearance and Displacement /Attempts:

While anti-encroachment drives are a nationwide phenomenon on Pakistan Railways land, Hyderabad has seen its share of operations, often tied to efforts to clear space for infrastructure upgrades or general land recovery. Local residents reported that anti-encroachment actions in the wider Hyderabad area (such as the Qasimabad region, though sometimes targeting non-railway land initially) have been met with violent resistance from residents, highlighting the deeply rooted nature of these settlements. The general national trend of Pakistan Railway retrieving illegally occupied land in Sindh (along with other provinces) confirms ongoing attempts at clearing railway land.

In recent years the authorities in Hyderabad have initiated operations to remove encroachments and clear railway land along the main-line, particularly affecting communities around Railway Line Colony, Qasimabad, Bengali Colony, Phuleli, Pakka Qila, and Syed Ghafoor Shah Colony. These clearances have involved demolition of informal structures, shops, and houses that were built close to or on railway property.



Map-4: Settlements along Mainline-1 in Hyderabad

The displaced residents—many of whom have lived there for generations or depend on nearby livelihoods—face acute challenges in relocation, loss of shelter, and disruption of income. While the state justifies these measures on grounds of safety, preventing accidents, and securing right-of-way for rail operations, critics argue that these operations often proceed with limited notice, inadequate compensation, and insufficient

alternative housing. The tension underscores a recurring pattern in urban Pakistan: pressing infrastructural and safety needs on one side, and deep social, economic and humanitarian impact on vulnerable communities on the other.

### 3.2.3 General Characteristics of ML-1 Settlements in Hyderabad City

#### 1. Proximity to Railway Track

- Settlements like Railway Line Colony (Qasimabad) and Bengali Colony are located directly adjacent to the ML-1 track.
- The average distance between homes and the railway line ranges from 10 to 35 feet, with narrow lanes (15–20 feet wide) separating residences from the elevated tracks.

#### 2. Historical Origins

- These communities are historically rooted in the Pakistan Railways system, with many established during or soon after the British colonial period to house railway staff (e.g., Railway Line Colony).
- Over time, migrants and laborers from Sindh, Punjab, and Bangladesh settled here, leading to informal expansions.

#### 3. Ethnic and Religious Diversity

- All settlements show significant ethnic diversity:
  - Sindhi, Punjabi, Urdu-speaking, Pashtun, and Bengali populations.
  - Bengali Colony includes a notable Christian minority (~200 families), complete with a local church.

#### 4. Informal and Densely Populated Housing

- Predominantly single-story housing, with some two-story extensions to accommodate multi-family arrangements.
- Structures are often built incrementally with minimal planning.
- High population densities, e.g., Bengali Colony houses 17,000–18,000 people in ~1,850 units.

#### 5. Insecure Land Tenure

- All settlements are located on Pakistan Railways-owned land, creating precarious tenure situations.
- Persistent threat of eviction due to ML-1 upgradation plans causes residents to refrain from long-term housing investments.

#### 6. Delayed and Inadequate Infrastructure

- Basic services were introduced late and irregularly:
  - Electricity (initially through illegal Kunda connections, later metered),
  - Gas supply came years later (e.g., 1993 in Railway Line Colony),

- Water access remains unreliable and often insufficient.
- Poor drainage, overflowing sewage, and waste accumulation along railway tracks are widespread issues.

### 7. *Vulnerable Socioeconomic Conditions*

- Populations mostly comprise low-income laborers, including:
  - Retired railway staff, daily wage workers, masons, carpenters, drivers, hawkers, home-based workers, and informal shopkeepers.
- Informal and low-paying jobs dominate, reflecting economic marginalization.

### 8. *Environmental and Health Risks*

- Accumulation of solid waste, open dumping, and lack of sanitation pose significant health and environmental hazards.
- Settlements lie in high-risk zones due to their closeness to the active railway line and absence of protective infrastructure.

### 9. *Social Resilience and Community Networks*

- Despite systemic neglect, communities demonstrate strong social cohesion and adaptive strategies.
- Community structures such as local religious institutions and informal associations help maintain social order.

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The ML-1 corridor in Hyderabad reveals a stark and unsettling reality for thousands of residents living in informal settlements along the railway line. These communities—such as Railway Line Colony, Bengali Colony, Pakka Qila, Phuleli, and Syed Ghafoor Shah Colony—are home to diverse, low-income populations whose lives have been shaped by decades of urban neglect, tenure insecurity, and infrastructural decay. While each settlement has its unique history and demographics, they are uniformly characterized by vulnerability: proximity to the railway track, lack of legal land rights, poor access to

essential services, and the constant threat of displacement due to the ML-1 expansion project. This corridor is not just a site of transport infrastructure—it is a living space for thousands of people whose futures now hang in the balance. Any redevelopment must place human costs and community voices at the center of planning to ensure equitable and just outcomes.

S.No	Settlement Name	Scenario-1 (40 feet) (housing structures at risk)	Scenario-2 (25 feet) (housing structures at risk)
7	Railway Line Colony Qasimabad	90	0
8	Bengali Colony	188	70
9	Phuleli	96	3
10	Pakka Qila	5	0
11	Syed Ghafoor Shah colony	25	1

Overall in Hyderabad City, Scenario-1 (40 feet), 428 Structures are at risk, while with Scenario-2 74 structure at risk

Scenario	Housing Structure	Families	Population
Scenario-1 Full Displacement (40 feet)	428	571	4568
Scenario-2 Partial Displacement (25 feet)	74	99	792

### 3.3 Lahore City Profile

Lahore, a capital metropolitan area of Punjab province and second largest city of Pakistan, situated near the eastern border with India. The total area of Lahore is 1772 sq km, while per square density is 7338 sq km and population average annual growth rate is 2.65. It lies along the Ravi River and is approximately 24 kilometers (15 miles) west of Wagah Border, which connects it to Amritsar, India. Lahore serves as the provincial capital of Punjab. According to the 2023 Census, Lahore's population is 13.13 million, accounting for about 10.28% of Punjab's total population of 127.69 million. The city comprises 2,010,225 households, resulting in an average household size of 6.4, slightly below Punjab's average of 6.43. In Lahore, 66.8% of the population owns their houses ( as reported by residents in census 2023 including both formal and informal), while 33.2% do not (with 28.7% renting), compared to 84.3% home ownership in Punjab province

It has a long rich cultural history of more than 2000 years, having been ruled by the Mughal Empire and later came under British colonial rule. Lahore is known as the “cultural heart of Pakistan”. Various historical places such as architectural buildings, mosques, churches, tombs and temples make the city a tourist attractive destination. In recent decades the city has grown many-folds. It comprises a walled city along with adjacent urban and sub-urban regions. The city has emerged as a hub for the technology sector offering various commercial and trade opportunities. Lahore – the second largest city of Pakistan, has a long history of more than 2000 years. It reflects the developmental aspects of Mughal Era and remnants of British colonial rule. From 1999 to 2011 the growth rate of the city in terms of built-up area has doubled. Thus, mounting huge pressure on the city administration responsible for managing infrastructure and housing and consequently informal settlements established. Due to rapid urbanization, and population growth imbalance the demand supply gap of housing.

Lahore faces a growing housing crisis, with a rising population and an increasing demand-supply gap in affordable housing. Nearly 40% of the city's residents live in informal settlements, lacking basic infrastructure and secure tenure. While 66.85% of the population owns houses, 29 % in Lahore relies on rentals, facing high costs and insecure tenancy. Rapid urban expansion, inadequate planning, and limited low-income housing schemes further exacerbate the crisis, pushing many into overcrowded and substandard living conditions. Although the city is facing various other challenges such as lack of urban development policies, soaring population, energy crises. The recent development in the city endorses new land use and socio-ecological conflicts. Which instigates pressure on urban administration for providing infrastructure facilities, at the same time it's an opportunity for creative urban development solutions

### **3.3.1 Growth of the Railway in Lahore City:**

Lahore is historically the heartland of the railway in Pakistan. As the headquarters of the colonial-era North Western Railway (NWR) (and later, the Pakistan Western Railway, and finally Pakistan Railways), the city's infrastructure and identity are woven with the railway. The iconic Lahore Railway Station is one of the largest and oldest stations in South Asia. The city is the core hub of the entire national network, connecting the north to the south. Its future growth is focused on major modernization projects, notably the Main Line-1 (ML-1) upgrade under CPEC, which aims to convert the Karachi-Peshawar corridor into a high-speed line.

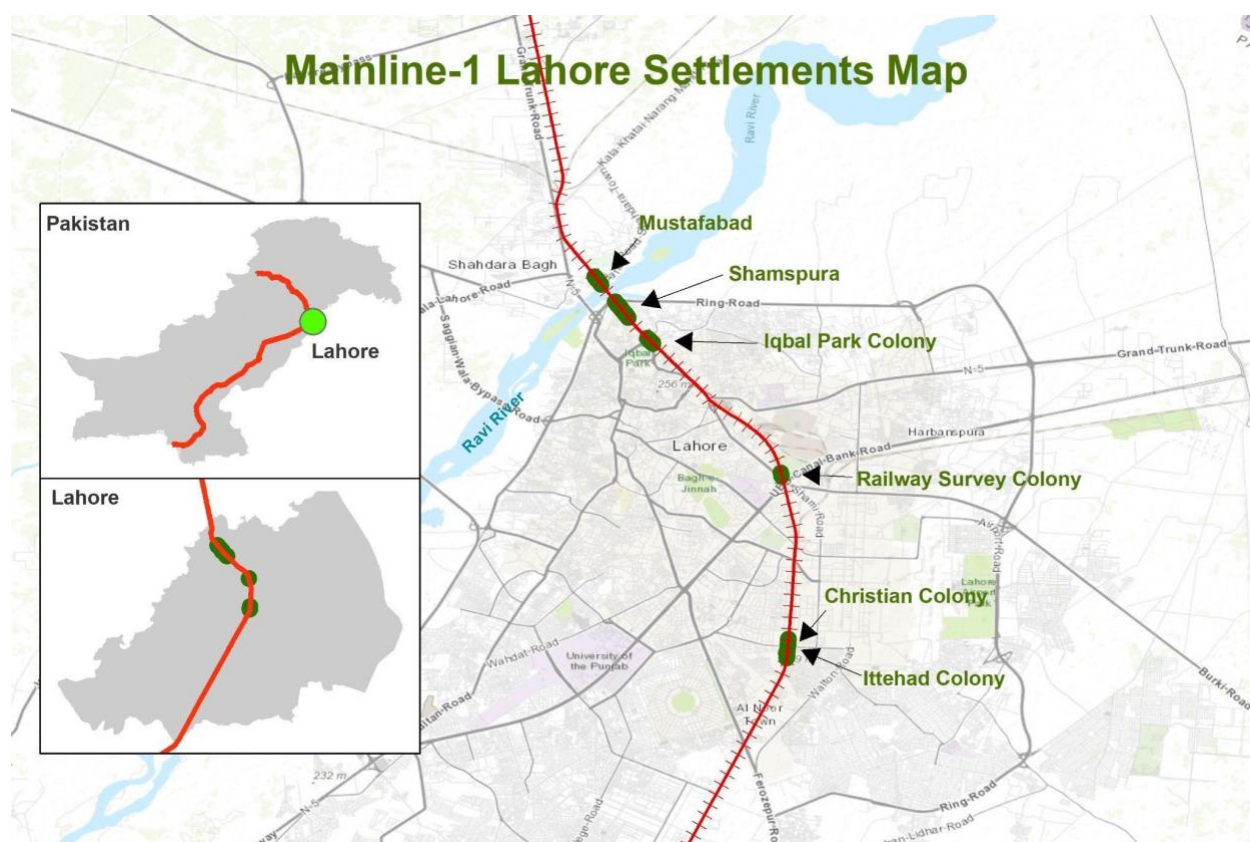
### **3.3.2 Communities along the Railway Line in Lahore City:**

Lahore's railway presence has fostered vast 'railway colonies' (residential areas for Pakistan Railway employees), which were formerly part of the original planned railway infrastructure. Beyond these official colonies, the extensive network of tracks and yards has naturally given rise to numerous informal settlements (katchi abadis) and informal commercial areas in the surrounding regions.

The immense railway footprint, including workshops, yards, and peripheral lands around the main station, has provided open space for settlements. The long history of the railway has allowed communities, often comprising the urban poor and internal migrants, to settle and become entrenched over generations. The official 'railway colonies' themselves also face challenges of maintenance and potential policy changes.

### **3.3.3 Clearance and Displacement /Attempts:**

Lahore has been the site of numerous anti-encroachment drives, often targeting slums and illegal shops along the tracks. Railway colonies and katchi abadis are a consistent topic for the Ministry of Railways, with official reviews of the challenges faced by these areas being commonplace. Given the massive scale of the upcoming ML-1 project, there is an anticipated increase in displacement. Official announcements often discuss resolving the issues of these communities through planning and review.



Map-5: Settlements along Mainline-1 in Lahore

### 3.3.4 General Characteristics of Settlements along Railway ML-1 in Lahore City

#### 1. Origins and Historical Background

- Most settlements originated in the post-Partition era (1950s–1980s) to accommodate migrant laborers and low-income families.
- They grew organically without formal planning, often on or adjacent to railway land.

#### 2. Location and Physical Setting

- All settlements are directly adjacent to or flanked by the ML-1 railway line, forming linear or ribbon-type settlements.
- Houses are often separated from the railway track by only 5–15 feet, with minimal protective barriers.
- The proximity to the tracks poses serious risks to safety, especially for children and during emergencies.

#### 3. Demographics

- Predominantly working-class communities, with population sizes ranging from 1,480 (Christian Colony) to over 25,000 (Railway Survey Colony).

- Communities are ethnically diverse, including Punjabis, Pathans, Saraikis, and Christian minorities.
- Employment is largely informal, with many working as daily-wage laborers, factory workers, craftsmen, or sanitary workers.

#### *4. Housing and Built Environment*

- Housing is typically dense and modest, with single- to double-story structures, mostly built with red bricks and GI sheets.
- Some settlements have RCC roofs, indicating incremental improvements by more economically stable families.
- Settlement layouts include narrow lanes, often 4 to 10 feet wide, causing mobility issues.

#### *5. Infrastructure and Basic Services*

- Electricity, water, and gas were introduced decades after settlement, typically between the 1980s and 2000s.
- Drainage and sewerage systems are often inadequate or non-functional, with frequent flooding during monsoons (notably in Shampura and Railway Survey Colony).
- Informal waste disposal is common due to unreliable municipal services.

#### *6. Socio-Economic Activities*

- Several communities (e.g., Itthad Colony) have become semi-commercial hubs, focusing on small-scale industries like woodwork and furniture manufacturing.
- Residents often operate informal home-based businesses, such as kiosks, shops, and vending.

#### *7. Community and Social Life*

- Despite hardships, there is a strong sense of community solidarity, especially in Christian-majority areas like Christian Colony.
- Shared spaces (e.g., lanes between tracks and houses) are used for communal interaction, children's play, and socializing.
- However, in some settlements like Shampura, community mobilization is weak, with little collective advocacy.

#### *8. Key Vulnerabilities*

- Environmental hazards: Regular flooding, poor drainage, and sewage overflows threaten health and housing stability.
- Safety risks: The lack of barriers near ML-1 exposes residents—especially children—to rail-related accidents.
- Legal insecurity: Many structures are on informal or semi-regularized land, with interference from Pakistan Railways preventing repairs and improvements.

- Infrastructure strain: Increasing population densities strain already limited public services and utilities.

9. Opportunities and Aspirations

- Communities like Itthad Colony could be formally designated as industrial hubs if supported with infrastructure upgrades.
- The strong community networks in places like Christian Colony provide a base for grassroots advocacy.
- Urban renewal programs that integrate residents' needs can enhance both living conditions and economic productivity.



The ML-1 corridor in Lahore is home to thousands of vulnerable families whose lives are deeply entwined with the railway's presence. While these communities contribute meaningfully to the city's informal economy, they bear a disproportionate burden of urban neglect, with unsafe housing, poor infrastructure, and constant displacement threats. Any upgrade of ML-1 must therefore incorporate comprehensive resettlement, compensation, and infrastructure support plans, centering the voices and rights of affected communities.

S.No	Settlement Name	Scenario-1 (40 feet) (housing structures at risk)	Scenario-2 (25 feet) (housing structures at risk)
12	Ittehad Colony	27	0
13	Christian Colony	22	0

14	Railway Survey Colony	16	0
15	Iqbal Park Colony	36	0
16	Shamspura	18	0
17	Mustafabad	12	0

Scenario	Housing Structure	Families	Population
Scenario-1 Full Displacement (40 feet)	131	174	1392
Scenario-2 Partial Displacement (25 feet)	0	0	0

## 4. The Multi-Dimensional Impacts of Displacement

Displacement in urban settings like Karachi, Hyderabad, and Lahore entails profound social, psychosocial, and economic impacts that reverberate across individual, household, and community experiences. As ML-1 moves closer to potential implementation, the consequences for affected communities become increasingly significant, bringing to light not only the immediate loss of homes and livelihoods but also the enduring changes to social fabrics and local economies. Displacement disrupts long-standing networks, affecting community resilience, mental health, and economic stability in ways that are difficult to quantify but crucial for comprehensive planning.

The displacement, particularly in urban areas, is not a single event but a prolonged process that continues to impact people through loss, waiting, and a diminished quality of life. This ongoing cycle intensifies vulnerability across generations, leaving lasting scars on the social fabric and economic prospects of displaced communities

The displacement could be seen with different lenses, as social, psychological and economical.

### 4.1 Social Impact

Socially, displacement disrupts established community bonds and social networks that are often critical to a community's support system. In Karachi, as shown in studies<sup>4</sup> by the Karachi Urban Lab (KUL), people who are displaced lose not only their physical homes but also their places within a community that offers mutual support and shared resources. The disconnection from these networks can isolate individuals and reduce their access to resources like childcare, job opportunities, and collective social identity. Displaced communities also face stigma, as residents are often labeled as "illegal" or "encroachers," which affects their integration into new areas and their ability to claim urban citizenship rights.

#### 4.1.1 Psychosocial Impact

Psychologically, displacement induces stress, anxiety, and a pervasive sense of insecurity. The constant threat or reality of eviction can lead to chronic anxiety, as

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<sup>4</sup> [https://karachiurbanlab.com/assets/downloads/IDRC\\_Report.pdf](https://karachiurbanlab.com/assets/downloads/IDRC_Report.pdf)

families live under the pressure of possible future displacement, sometimes for years. Women, who are often confined to the domestic sphere and have limited mobility, experience heightened distress due to the loss of social safety nets and the disruption of familiar domestic spaces. This psychosocial distress is compounded when people are moved to areas with inadequate facilities, poor living conditions, or fewer employment opportunities. The mental strain is particularly acute among those resettled on the peripheries of cities, where they may feel a loss of agency and control over their lives.

## 4.2 Economic Impact

Economically, displacement disrupts livelihoods and increases vulnerability to poverty. Many informal settlements are in central city areas where residents work nearby as vendors, day labourers, or in small businesses. Displacement often forces these individuals to relocate to areas far from employment hubs, significantly increasing their commute time and expenses, or even rendering their previous employment impossible. Additionally, the lack of compensation or insufficient resettlement support exacerbates their economic challenges, forcing them into further impoverishment. For women, displacement often limits economic opportunities even further, as they face additional barriers in accessing work due to restricted mobility and increased domestic responsibilities in resettled areas.

The ML-1 project, therefore, presents a series of critical planning challenges that raise questions about the future of both public welfare and sustainable development. The project's multiple uncertainties—political, financial, and operational—underscore the need for clarity in its next stages. What specific measures will be taken to address displacement's ripple effects on local communities? How will planners ensure that infrastructure benefits do not come at an unaccounted social cost? How can both public and private stakeholders work together to resolve funding, logistical, and regulatory issues, to turn ambitious plans into tangible improvements that honor the needs of affected residents?

These are key questions that must guide the future of ML-1's delivery, as planners work to create a development model that prioritizes inclusivity and resilience for all.

This framing connects the theme of displacement's impact on communities with the planning and operational uncertainties around ML-1, suggesting a roadmap of questions that must be addressed to align the project with the needs of urban residents and broader public interest.

## 5. Community Perspective on Project

The community perspective on the ML-1 project reflects a blend of concern, and pragmatism; also reveals deep concerns about displacement, lack of transparency, the need for fair compensation process and the right to remain in the city.

### 5.1 Fear of Eviction and Displacement:

- Residents worry about being removed from their homes; a concern rooted in past experiences like the KCR project. There is fear that the ML-1 project might similarly lead to forced displacement without adequate compensation.
- Interviewees expressed fear that the ML-1 project will result in significant displacement, similar to previous projects like the Karachi Circular Railway or Orange Metro Line in Lahore.
- Residents are concerned that even though authorities claim not to demolish homes, no guarantees are provided, leaving them vulnerable.

### 5.2 Lack of Clarity and Communication:

- The community criticizes the lack of clear communication from authorities about the extent of the land needed for the project and the exact impact on their homes and livelihoods.
- Despite attending meetings with officials, residents feel they were not given meaningful information or documentation to plan their future.

### 5.3 Preference for Compensation over Relocation/ Resettlement

- While the community is open to relocating, if necessary, they emphasize the need for fair compensation based on market value. They prefer compensation over relocation to distant areas in cities such as Karachi like Surjani Town, which would disrupt their lives and livelihoods.

- While residents are open to resettlement, they insist on receiving compensation at market value. They prefer compensation to relocation far from the city (e.g., Lyari Basti), fearing disruption of their social networks, jobs, and access to schools and hospitals.
- If relocated, they demand resettlement within 6–10 kilometers of their current location, with necessary utilities and infrastructure in place.

#### **5.4 Impact of a Proposed Wall:**

- The potential construction of a wall along the railway tracks is a significant concern. While the wall would prevent ongoing uncertainty, residents fear it could block pathways, disrupt utilities (like water and gas lines), and make daily activities difficult, such as children going to school or accessing the mosque.

#### **5.5 Attachment to Place and Social Networks:**

- The community shares a strong emotional and social connection to their neighborhoods, with longstanding bonds between families, including intermarriages.
- Moving away would not only disrupt their lives but also dismantle the sense of unity and community support they have built over the years.

#### **5.6 Economic and Logistical Challenges of Relocation:**

- Relocation would create economic hardships, especially for the many daily wage earners and those employed in nearby facilities like the airport or PIA.
- Residents worry about the feasibility of rebuilding their lives elsewhere, especially if compensation does not match the value of their properties.

#### **5.7 Concerns about Infrastructure Changes:**

- The construction of walls along the railway tracks is seen as a mixed outcome: it would end uncertainty but also block access to utilities, schools, and public spaces.
- They stress that any changes should ensure emergency access and maintain pathways for everyday movement.

## **5.8 Distrust in Authorities:**

- There is a prevailing mistrust in government intentions, with concerns that promises made in meetings will not be honored. The community feels abandoned by political parties and other institutions, except for the Urban Resource Center (URC), which has been their main support.

## **5.9 Community Cohesion and Solidarity:**

- There is a strong sense of unity among residents, regardless of ethnic differences, with everyone supporting one another during emergencies and communal events. This sense of belonging is central to their resistance to displacement.

## **5.10 Mixed Attitude Towards the Project:**

- Although the community acknowledges the potential benefits of ML-1, they emphasize that the project must not harm their livelihoods. If the project proceeds without disrupting their access and living conditions, they are willing to cooperate.

## **5.11 Demand for Dialogue with Authorities:**

- Residents express the need for meaningful communication with railway officials to ensure their concerns are addressed. They suggest establishing a platform where community representatives can engage with authorities before any work begins.

This nuanced perspective underscores the importance of balancing infrastructure development with the social and economic well-being of affected communities. The residents' perspective highlights a desire for transparency, fairness, and the protection of their social fabric while expressing a cautious willingness to cooperate if their needs are adequately addressed.

## 6. Views from Railway Planners



Discussions with senior Pakistan Railways officials, including former CEO Mr. Nisar Ahmed Memon and Chief Engineer Mr. Basharat Waheed, highlight how the ML-1 project remains suspended in uncertainty. Their perspectives reveal four interlinked areas of concern: political instability, financing delays, bureaucratic inertia, and unresolved land issues.

### 6.1 Financing as the Decisive Bottleneck

Officials stressed that the central obstacle to project initiation lies in unresolved financial agreements with Chinese lenders. As one railway planner observed, *“The paperwork has been going on for the last ten years... the real thing is when an agreement is signed with a Chinese bank for a loan. Without finance, nothing can be done.”* This indicates that despite years of technical studies and planning, project momentum hinges entirely on securing loan approval and financial closure.

## 6.2 Political Uncertainty and Reliance on High-Level Decisions

Political transitions and instability have amplified Chinese reluctance to proceed. As Mr. Memon explained, *“Due to political instability, the Chinese were reluctant... How could one say about materializing the project?”* Likewise, Mr. Waheed reinforced this uncertainty, noting, *“There is a lot of uncertainty, and nothing can be said until the work starts on the ground.”* These statements underscore how implementation is not merely a bureaucratic or technical matter, but one deeply dependent on shifting political alignments and the authority of the federal government to push the project forward.

## 6.3 Land Recovery and Contestations over “Encroachments”

Alongside financial and political issues, logistical concerns remain unresolved. Railway land is occupied by settlements often labeled as “encroachments,” yet the extent of recovery has not been finalized. As the Chief Engineer acknowledged, *“It is not decided till now how far from the track the fence is to be placed.”* This ambiguity signals potential contestations with residents and the prospect of forced displacement, adding another layer of complexity to implementation.

## 6.4 Technical Readiness versus Ground Realities

Railway officials maintain that their teams are technically prepared, with Waheed noting, *“The department is ready for June 2024 to start work on the ground.”* However, even this readiness is framed conditionally—“but it all depends on the approval of the project by the Prime Minister.” This juxtaposition between technical preparedness and reliance on political decision-making illustrates the structural disconnect between planning and execution.

Taken together, the planners’ views portray ML-1 as a project stalled less by technical incapacity than by political instability, financing delays, and unresolved land-use disputes. Their testimonies reveal a persistent gap between aspiration and implementation. Until these foundational uncertainties are addressed, both railway authorities and affected residents remain in a state of waiting, caught between the promise of modernization and the ambiguities of governance.

## 7. Planning Issues and Uncertainties – Upcoming Stage



In concluding the ML-1 project analysis, several critical planning issues and uncertainties emerge that need addressing for smoother execution and public assurance. The ML-1 project embodies a range of complex planning issues and uncertainties, posing questions crucial for the next stages of delivery and demanding clarity for both public stakeholders and planners:

Here are some key reflections that can be formulated as questions for consideration in the upcoming stages:

## **7.1 Encroachment and Settlements:**

A significant planning challenge is the fate of the urban settlements that lay along the railway track. While formal and regularized areas may avoid impact, non-regularized settlements are classified as "encroachments," leaving residents at risk of displacement. Key questions remain: how will Pakistan Railways balance technical needs with social responsibilities? What support or compensation mechanisms will be in place for displaced communities?

## **7.2 Right-of-Way Ambiguities:**

With no fixed specifications for the right-of-way, the width varies based on location, affecting urban and agricultural areas differently. As the railway is planned within its existing land boundaries, clarifying the boundaries will be critical, particularly where settlements closely border the tracks. For planners, defining these boundaries transparently is necessary to ensure minimal conflict and enhance public understanding.

## **7.3 Fencing and Accessibility:**

The plan to install fencing, with variations in urban and rural areas, is essential for safety but could restrict access for nearby communities. The "safety wall" design may limit mobility, particularly for those in unregularized areas. Questions remain on how access will be managed, especially for communities that rely on crossings for daily commutes and economic activities.

## **7.4 Social Infrastructure and Utilities:**

The project's impact on existing utilities—gas, water, and electricity—raises concerns. Coordinated planning with utility providers will be essential to mitigate potential disruptions and preserve social infrastructure. Addressing these impacts effectively will require detailed mapping and collaborative engagement with affected communities and service providers.

## **7.5 Financing and International Partnerships:**

How secure is the current financial commitment from the Chinese partners, especially given recent adjustments and delays? What contingency plans exist if further political or economic shifts affect funding?

### **7.5.1 Scope and Design Modifications:**

With the initial design reduced by excluding certain underpasses, flyovers, and adjusting speed parameters, how might these changes impact overall project utility and public safety? Are these adjustments sustainable or will they require further modification down the line?

### **7.5.2 Operational Disruptions:**

How will the planned track replacement impact daily rail operations and freight services, particularly if single line working disrupts commuter schedules? What communication strategies will be in place to keep the public informed?

### **7.5.3 Project Phasing and Long-term Goals:**

Given that the ML-1 project will roll out in phases, starting with Karachi to Multan, is there a timeline or phased approach communicated to ensure consistent progress without unnecessary disruptions or delays?

### **7.5.4 Public and Environmental Impact:**

Have studies or public consultations been conducted to assess how communities along the rail line might be affected, both during construction and operational phases? What mitigative actions are planned to address any adverse environmental and social impacts?

### **7.5.5 Transparency and Accountability in Execution:**

How will Pakistan Railways ensure that stakeholders, including the public, are kept informed and engaged throughout project execution to build trust and transparency? Is there a framework for independent oversight or community feedback?

These questions aim to frame the current planning uncertainties in the ML-1 project, facilitating a clearer path forward for both the public and planners involved.

## 8. Future of Communities living along track

Furthermore, the project must address potential community displacement and resettlement issues, particularly for populations living near the railway line, which could impact planning and execution timelines. Overall, the challenges identified in the feasibility study for the ML-1 upgrade require a coordinated approach that balances technical requirements with careful planning to ensure successful implementation and minimal disruption to affected communities.

The upgradation of the Mainline-1 (ML-1) railway project encompasses several critical issues related to both planning and design that must be addressed to ensure successful implementation. One primary concern is the comprehensive scope of deliverables expected from the consultants, which include alignment sheets, typical cross-sections, detailed drawings for bridges and tunnels, track-work layouts, hydraulic structures, land acquisition and resettlement action plans, as well as rolling stock yard layouts and project documentation. Adherence to the specified codes, standards, and best practices is crucial, with guidelines deriving from the Pakistan Railway Act of 1890, Pakistan Railway Track Standards, and various international standards from organizations such as the American Association of Railroads (AAR) and the International Union of Railways (UIC).

Another significant challenge is the need to construct new track sections and rehabilitate existing ones to accommodate higher speeds of 120 to 160 km/h. This necessitates the upgrading, reconstruction, or extension of bridges to meet design specifications, as well as the rehabilitation of level crossings based on traffic counts and safety assessments. Additionally, the reconstruction of signaling and telecommunication systems is critical to enhance operational efficiency and safety.

The anticipated increase in rail traffic due to the establishment of CPEC and the import/export of industrial goods from regions such as Sialkot and Wazirabad further underscores the urgency of these upgrades. The importance of enhancing ML-1 is amplified by its role as a vital transportation route, facilitating passenger and freight movement between Lahore and Karachi, with connections to Rawalpindi via Shadara Bagh.

The Major challenges are proposing efficient train operational plans, restricting the required capital investment related to rolling stocks, and identifying the required rolling stock and locomotives that meet the upgradation requirements. Security and safety issues within stations and yards and addressing potential issues with encroachments due

to population growth near railway boundaries are also relevant technical challenges for the up-gradation of ML-1. The up-gradation of ML-1 faces a range of technical and economic challenges that require careful planning, precise management, and significant investments.

Finally, despite the outlined challenges, the documentation lacks specific details regarding potential issues encountered during the upgradation process. Addressing these planning and design challenges is essential to ensure that the ML-1 upgrade meets future transportation demands and contributes effectively to Pakistan's economic development.

There may be issues relating to potential encroachment of railway land due to population growth near railway boundaries. However, the railway officials do not provide any details or information about planning or displacement issues related to ML-1 up-gradation. Nonetheless, it is likely that resettlement and potential displacement of communities living near the railway line due to the implementation of the up-gradation project might impact the planning aspect of the project.

The anticipated displacement issue is of higher importance, as uncertainty prevails and railway officials' statement is very diplomatic as anyone asked 'about the resettlement of Katchi Abadis alongside of MI-1, to be dismantled due to the construction of the up-gradation project'.

'The response from the railway authority is, 'Contents of the complaint depict that the complaint's concerns are based on some misconceptions. In fact under MI-1 upgradation project the existing tracks which are operational as of today, will be upgraded on the existing alignment. Any legal/ approved Katchi Abadi will not be dismantled. The acquisition of land if required will be dealt as per law of the land (which is called The land acquisition Act 1894). furthermore, details pertaining to ML-1 up-gradation project will be made public once tenders are advertised for the execution of project' (17 Oct 2024 )



**Prime Minister's Performance Delivery Unit (PMDU)**  
**Pakistan Citizen's Portal (PCP)**  
 Prime Minister's Public Affairs & Grievances Wing (GW - III)  
 Federal Govt  
**SD031024-91524228 (MB)**  
 Date Filed: 03/10/2024



**A. Complaint Details**

<b>DATE OF COMPLAINT</b>	03/10/2024	<b>CURRENT STATUS</b>	Resolved (14 Days, 0 months, 0 years)
<b>COMPLAINT CATEGORY/ LEVEL 1:</b>	Transport & Communications	<b>COMPLAINT SUB-CATEGORY/ LEVEL 2:</b>	Irrigation Roads (General Complaint)
<b>LOCATION OF COMPLAINT</b>	Karachi Central (Sindh, Pakistan)	<b>COMPLAINT ADDRESS:</b>	KARACHI SINDH
<b>GPS ADDRESS:</b>		<b>CITIZEN PROFILE</b>	Provided by Citizen
<b>COMPLAINT SUBJECT</b>	Redrassal of Applicant's Grievance		

**Contents**

Application is Attached

**Attachment**

This complaint has 1 attachment.

**B. Complaint Processing History**

#	DATED	FROM	TO	STATUS	REMARKS
1	03/10/2024	Train Leader PIU / CPEC ML-1	Citizen	Resolved (RCG)	Dear Valued Complainant, Thanks for your valuable concern as mentioned in your complaint, regarding the resettlement of Katchi Abadaies alongside of ML-1, to be dismantled due to the construction of the ML-1 up-gradation project. In this context, the complainant has referred to the Cabinets' approval of the ML-1 up-gradation project. Contents of the complaint depict that the complainant's concerns are based on some misconceptions. Infact, under ML-1 up-gradation project, the existing tracks which are operational as of today, will be upgraded on the existing alignment. Any legal/approved Katchi Abadi will not be dismantled. The Acquisition of land if required will be dealt as per law of the land. Furthermore, details pertaining to ML-1 up-gradation Project will be made public once tenders are advertised for the execution of the project.

Figure-3: Response from Railway authorities against letter from community

In one of the interviews with, Chief Engineer of Pakistan Railways Lahore Division, regarding displacement, resettlement, and encroachments along the ML-1 track; he told that,

"We will not touch any declared/regularized Katchi Abadi (informal settlement) but if there are some Katchi Abadis those are not regularized so we called them 'encroachment', and encroachments might be removed and it's Pakistan's railway right to recover their land. Generally, we conduct anti-encroachment drives to recover the railway land, and it is a practice by the department. In this project if we need, we will recover the railway land'

In response of one question about the access to the informal settlement (Katchi Abadi's) that might be compromised, railway official responded,

"You mean Encroachment? It's not Railway concern if their access is compromised in case of fencing because fencing is the most important component for this project. Otherwise, we cannot go with the advanced signaling system and speed, also the fence helps to reduce the number of accidents along the tracks. So, you consider it a safety wall for the communities."

As mentioned earlier, some settlements are very close to the track, and even if there is no displacement but in case of fencing their social infrastructure will be destroyed, including common spaces, access and mobility, basic infrastructure etc, the railway official response regarding specific settlements near track is clear that those settlements might face anti encroachment operation.

"I visited one of the settlements in Karachi namely Umer Colony- Baloch Colony, where the distance between existing track and houses is just 10-12 feet...that settlement was probably on Railway land and not regularized, so we considered Encroachment and placed the fence according to technical requirements. We might need to conduct an anti-encroachment operation there, but it all depends on the approval of the Project and release of the funds so after that, the department will be ready to start work on ground."

He further added about the social spaces and infrastructure,

"The impacts of the ML-1 project include track fencing without displacement, reduction of social spaces for encroachers, and at some places loss of access and mobility, and potential loss of existing infrastructure such as gas lines, electricity, and water and sanitation facilities. The railway objective is to save the formal infrastructure/formal housing and carry the project activities within our land but in a broader perspective this project will serve hundreds of thousands of people and have a positive impact on the economy."

The approach is clear that Pakistan Railways intends to take regarding non-regularized settlements termed as "encroachments," emphasizing anti-encroachment measures, fencing priorities, and the broader perceived benefits of the ML-1 project.

As the Pakistan Railway official and Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs, Government of Pakistan emphasized, if land acquisition is needed, they will follow 'The land acquisition Act 1894' which is a colonial law and not addressed about the people who have no land tenure security. and not talk about the resettlement or rehabilitation, it is only talking about the 'compensation', and in many cases in the past, as the government required the land for any of the projects, they set the compensation rate below the market price as well as discriminate on the basis of the lease type. For instance a settlement that has a lease by land owning agency like Karachi development Authority and Malir Development Authority (KDA/ MDA) has a different land price as compared to a settlement that has a lease under Katchi Abadi as of Sindh Katchi Abadi Authority, usually they set a lower compensation value for the same area of housing under Katchi Abadi Authority lease.

But here, we must focus on their statement, as they consider all of the informal settlement dwellers that has no lease/ land tenure security as 'encroacher' and that settlement is 'encroachment' so any time they can start anti-encroachment operation and dismantle these settlements which is a kind of 24/7 risk for the communities those are living along the railway track.

A deeper look at the Land acquisition act and how it deals with the people those don't have legal entitlement of land and living since 50-60 years along the railway track,

The Land Acquisition Act of 1894 (LAA) does not benefit informal settlement dwellers without land tenure security primarily due to legal and structural biases that fail to recognize informal housing arrangements. The LAA permits the state to acquire land for public purposes but requires formal documentation of land ownership for any form of compensation or resettlement. Most katchi abadi (informal settlement) residents lack official land tenure documents, as they often live on land they have occupied for years without formal recognition. Consequently, when these areas are designated for development or infrastructure projects, such residents are labeled "encroachers," which effectively excludes them from protections and compensatory measures under the Land Acquisition Act (LAA)<sup>5</sup> (Karachi Urban Lab - IDRC\_Report).

The Karachi Urban Labs - IDRC report further elaborated the term encroachment,

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<sup>5</sup> Land, Governance and Gendered Politics of Displacement in Urban Pakistan, <https://karachiurbanlab.com/projects/land-governance-gendered-politics-of-displacement.html>

Additionally, colonial-era bureaucratic structures and narratives around "encroachment" continue to influence land governance. Informal dwellers are often marginalized in state-led development projects because they are seen as obstructing public land use, leading to evictions without sufficient legal recourse. The absence of tenure security thus leaves these communities vulnerable to displacement, without the redress or assistance that formally recognized landholders might receive (Karachi Urban Lab – IDRC\_Report).

## 8.1 Challenges and Limitations

As mentioned by Pakistan Railway, The acquisition of land if required will be dealt as per law but The Land Acquisition Act of 1894 primarily addresses compensation for land acquisition rather than resettlement, which poses several challenges for formal settlement dwellers, such as those holding leases in Katchi Abadis. While leaseholders may receive monetary compensation under this law if their land is acquired, several critical challenges and limitations arise:

### 8.1.1 Lack of Resettlement Provisions:

The Act does not mandate resettlement, leaving residents with the financial compensation but without alternative housing or land. This can disrupt social networks, access to jobs, schools, and healthcare—resources they rely on within their current communities

### 8.1.2 Inadequate Compensation:

Often, the compensation under the 1894 Act does not reflect the current market value of the property, making it insufficient for securing comparable housing elsewhere, especially within city limits where prices are higher.

### 8.1.3 Legal and Bureaucratic Challenges:

Residents may face difficulties proving legal ownership, which could reduce or negate compensation. The Act places a heavy burden on individuals to produce documentary proof of ownership, a challenge in areas where informal land arrangements are common

Given these issues, leaseholders in Katchi Abadis may find that the 1894 Act's limited scope for resettlement fails to address the broader impacts of displacement, often leaving communities in vulnerable positions both during and after land acquisition.

In the urban centers of Karachi and Hyderabad, the ML-1 upgradation project starkly illustrates the scale and complexity of displacement tied to large-scale infrastructure development.

Under Scenario-1 (40 feet clearance), Karachi faces the full displacement of 466 housing structures, impacting 1,088 families or approximately 9,792 people, while Hyderabad anticipates the displacement of 428 structures, affecting 571 families and 4,568 individuals. Lahore anticipates the displacement of 131 structures, affecting 174 families and 1392 individuals. Combined, these cities witness the uprooting of nearly 15752 people, with entire neighborhoods losing homes, social networks, and access to vital services.

In Scenario-2 (25 feet clearance), displacement lessens but remains significant, with 77 structures and 179 families and 1,611 individuals affected in Karachi and 74 structures, housing 99 families and 792 individuals in Hyderabad. No displacement will take place in Lahore. Together, this partial displacement affects 151 structures and over 2,403 people.

Scenario	Housing Structure	Families	Population
Scenario-1 Full Displacement (40 feet)	1025	1833	15752
Scenario-2 Partial Displacement (25 feet)	151	278	2403

These figures underscore how even reduced land clearance intensifies vulnerabilities, disrupting livelihoods and social cohesion in informal settlements. Without inclusive planning and equitable resettlement measures, such displacements risk deepening urban inequalities, exacerbating socio-economic precarity, and dismantling decades-old community fabrics.



# Navigating Displacement and Inequality along the ML-1 Corridor: Perspectives from Urban Pakistan

