

# DHARAVI

## FORTNIGHTLY

ISSUE 03:  
DHARAVI ON THE MOVE  
(IN A PANDEMIC)



14<sup>th</sup> October, 2020

While public transport is slowly resuming in the city, it is still inadequate to meet user needs. For many people, the lockdown has brought several challenges in mobility as they have had to find alternatives to the affordable local train services that transported both goods and people. This issue of the Dharavi Fortnightly

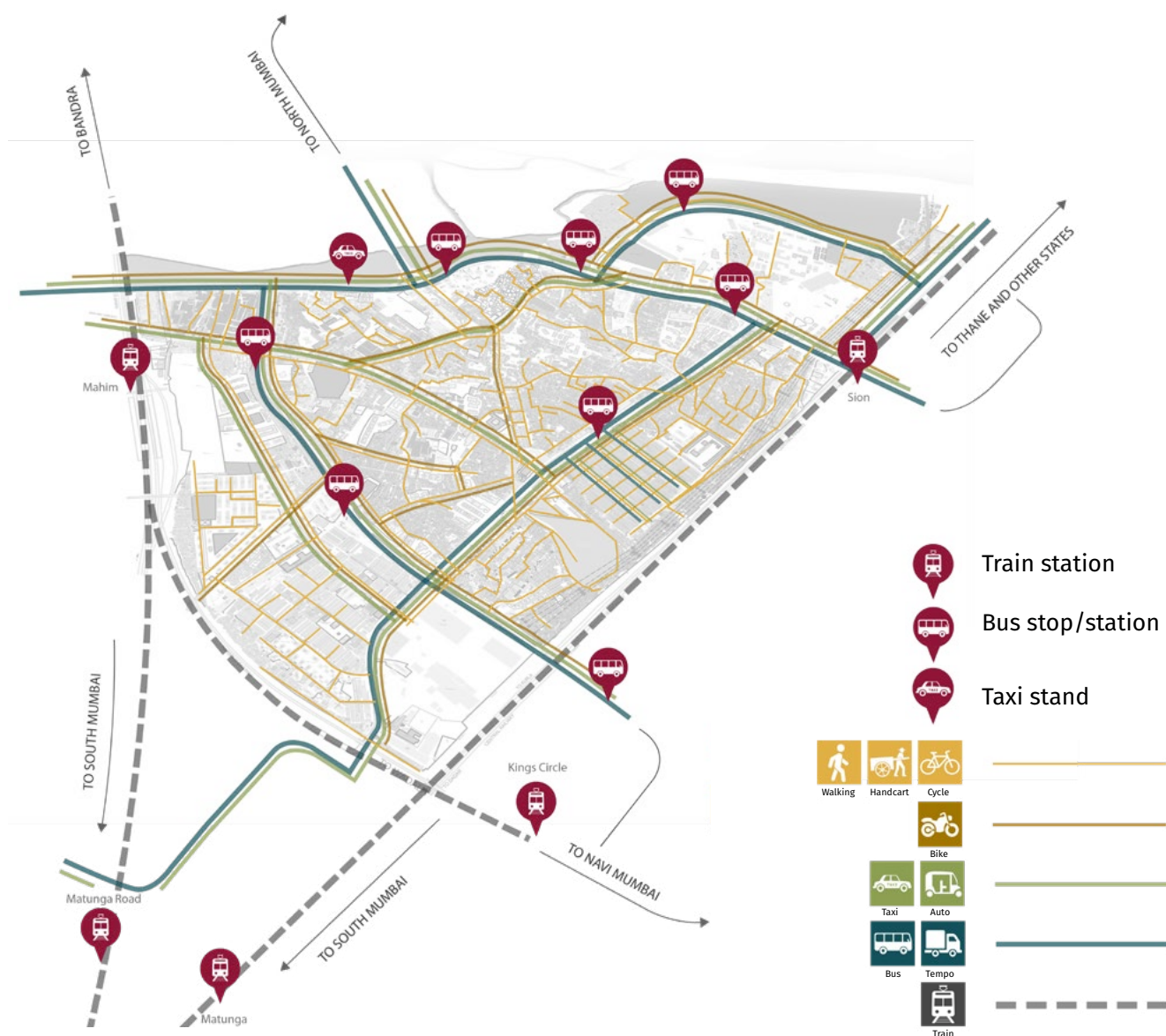
seeks to explore how restricted mobility due to the lockdown has affected the movement of people and goods with and around Dharavi. We interviewed 33 people that included local business owners, transport service providers, and daily commuters based within Dharavi to understand how they are coping.

Distribution of our 33 interviewees:

**19** respondents are business owners

**11** respondents provide transport services

**3** respondents are salaried people



The illustration shows different modes of transport and bus/train stations in and around the span of 2.16 sq.km covered by Dharavi

## Morphed Mobility

We asked people how they have adapted to all the restrictions in mobility and what has changed while on the move during the lockdown. Affordability and good connectivity are the two most important features of mass public transport in Mumbai. Discontinued or disrupted services, to maintain social distancing, is putting unrealistic demands on people's time and pockets.

The hardest blow to commuters, local businesses and transport service providers alike was the Mumbai local train service that came to a grinding halt at the start of the lockdown. While some trains have resumed service for essential service providers, it is not even 1/3rd of the 3000 train trips that ferried millions of people and goods in the city before the lockdown.<sup>[1]</sup>

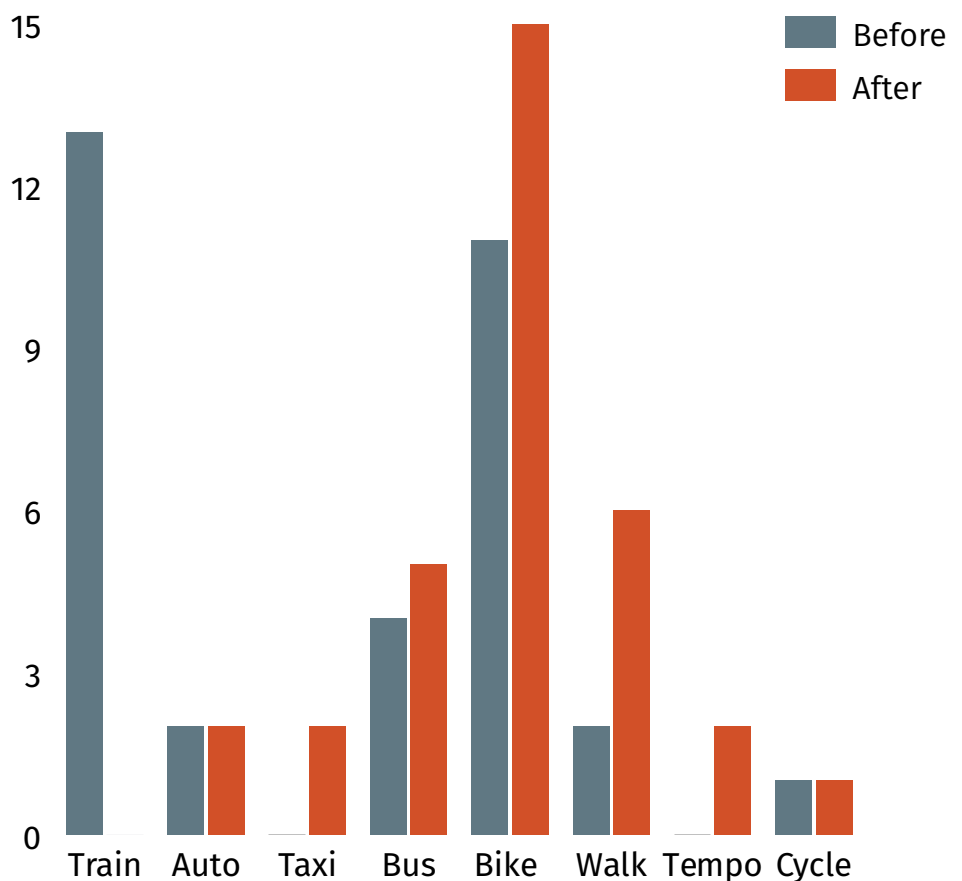
One respondent has changed his weekly routine in order to ease his commuting woes. Most respondents claim an increase in the use of motorbikes as well as a preference to walk. In general, people are not venturing out unless it is to buy essential supplies or to earn a livelihood. Recreational trips were rarely, if not ever, made during the lockdown. Dharavi

## Adapting and re-routing

Chandra Yadav is a resident of 90 feet road. He sells fruits in the neighborhood by lugging his cart around. He recently returned to Mumbai after spending a couple of months in his village. Before the lockdown, he would take the train from Sion to Vashi. He would fetch his fruits from the APMC (Agricultural Produce & Livestock Market Committee) in Vashi and then take a train back to Sion. Now that the trains aren't running, he has to wait for an empty bus early in the morning that takes him to Vashi. The return journey is much more difficult as the buses get extremely crowded by then and he cannot get on with his fruits, compelling him to hitch a ride from fruit trucks which are coming into the city.

is a walkable neighbourhood and this has ensured that household supplies can be easily procured. Not much has changed here since

access to supplies became consistent and dependable. The sourcing of perishables, like fruits and vegetables, however has become more



The graph shows mode of transport opted by the no. of respondents before and after the lockdown.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hindustantimes.com/mumbai-news/local-train-services-to-remain-suspended-in-mumbai-rly-ministry/story-Xv9QnlgwHupyihLqIEF7L.html>

cumbersome as we were told by Chandra Yadav, a fruit seller from Dharavi.

Some transport service providers have observed a change in the profiles of commuters. In conversation with a local auto driver, we found that most of his customers are only people who

are traveling to and from work.

He said

*“older people are hardly [to be] seen; I’ve probably seen [only] 2 or 3 old people”*

According to Sagarbhau, the auto driver we interviewed, people are only stepping out for essentials and to earn a living, making sure that the

elderly and children remain at home.

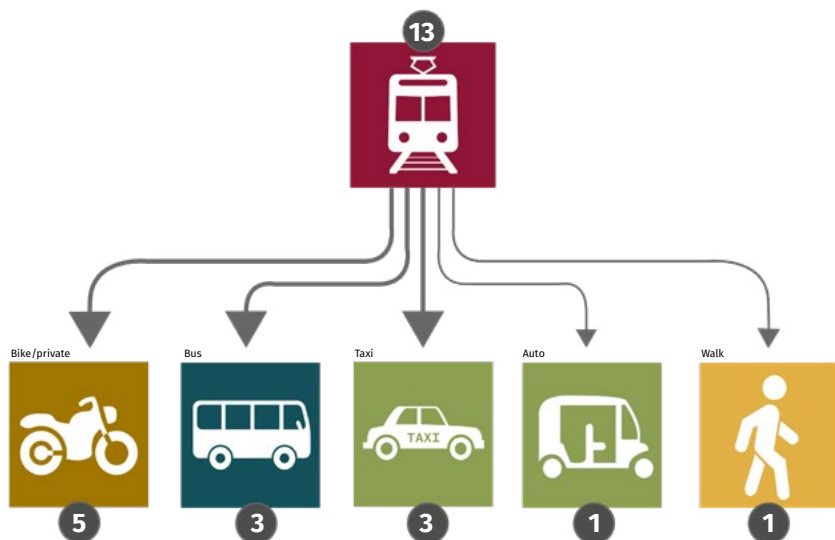
## Mass transit systems of Mumbai

While Dharavi is opening up its businesses and work, the ongoing restrictions on the local train service have continued to cause hindrances. Dharavi is surrounded by three main train stations, resulting in a high dependency of daily commuters, small and medium scale entrepreneurs and other suppliers on the train service.

Mumbai local trains are one of the busiest and cheapest transport services in the country, becoming a ‘life-line’ for the people of Dharavi along with other commuters in the city.

About 7.5 million people in Mumbai use the local trains for their daily commute.<sup>[2]</sup> However, the extended temporary termination of the service has forced people to shift to other means of mobility which are comparatively expensive and time-consuming.

For Dharavi, the suspended train service has much inflated commuting costs and hours, especially for those working outside the neighbourhood. They are paying higher fares for buses, taxis and autos, which



The illustration shows the distribution of the 13 respondents to other modes of transport in the absence of trains.

## No local trains? Change house

Murtuza Malik is a resident of Mira Road, he runs New Raj Medical in Dharavi Koliwada. He also has a house in Dharavi. Murtuza would use the trains to commute daily from Mira Road to Dharavi, getting off at Bandra station. Before the lockdown, he would only use the trains for commuting and never private transport. Murtuza now predominantly uses his bike and only occasionally uses the bus. His daily travel time has increased significantly as there is a lot of traffic. As a result of this, he now spends one night in Dharavi and one night in Mira road. He does this as he does not want to spend his entire day travelling, and to save on commuting costs as petrol is more expensive now. He hopes the trains start soon, as he would like to go home more often.

<sup>2</sup> <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/mumbai-rail-officials-study-feasibility-of-restarting-local-trains-for-essential-workers-6456395/>

is adding to their monthly expenses. Local businesses have been affected because they now find it more difficult to procure raw materials from within and outside of the city. Rekha Tai, a respondent from our last fortnightly,<sup>[3]</sup> has discontinued her *papad*-making business since trains were the primary mode of transportation of goods to Dharavi. The prolonged closure of the trains has also increased the stress on the overstretched

bus system, adding to the inconvenience caused to people who have begun commuting for work. Although the bus services are a relatively cheaper option, respondents say that they are strained, often take longer time and can transport fewer people due to social distancing protocols. Regulations on both of the mass transit systems - buses and trains, have aggravated people's difficulties.



The image shows traffic on road caused by private and public modes of transport

## Post-lockdown conditions escalate travel costs

Tahir bhai lives in Naik Nagar in Dharavi, and commutes to Grant Road where he runs a fabrication business. Before the lockdown, he would travel to Grant Road using a BEST bus, which would cost a maximum of Rs 20 to travel to any area of Mumbai. Sometimes, he would take the local train from Sion to Byculla station and then take a relatively inexpensive share-taxi from there to travel back to Dharavi. Since restarting work on the 11th of June, his operational costs have increased substantially. Waiting for a bus these days takes upto 3 hours, so Tahir bhai and his employees have to commute to the workplace by taxi, which costs between Rs 350-400 one way, a significantly more expensive journey than it used to be. These travelling expenses coupled with the rising costs of raw materials (up by Rs 30/kg) have resulted in losses to his business and are even eating into his savings.

<sup>3</sup> <https://urbz.net/articles/dharavi-fortnightly-02-toolhouse-story>

*“The buses aren’t stopping at bus stops to avoid more people boarding the bus. Instead, they’re stopping the buses a little distance away from the stop.” - Chandra Yadav*

In a previous study<sup>[4]</sup>, we found that most residents of Dharavi found the upcoming Mumbai metro unaffordable and not convenient to transport goods as large packages and containers are not allowed on the metro. The study concluded that people would prefer to continue travelling by local trains instead of the metro.

Following up on this, we asked a couple of our respondents if they would prefer travelling by local train or the metro during the pandemic. Most of the interviewees who said that they would prefer travelling by the metro, said they would prefer it only if the stations were located close to their destination and not because it would be safer during the pandemic. Girirajbhai, a local contractor said,

*“I would prefer to use the metro as long as it drops me close to my destination, otherwise the metro wouldn’t be of any use to me”.*

Among those who replied they wouldn’t use the metro, two people cited the higher price, and one person said that the metro used to be packed just like the local trains. The lack of

appropriate ventilation makes it more dangerous than local trains during the pandemic. Many of our respondents had never used the metro before and were unable to speculate whether they would prefer it over local trains until they have had a chance to use it.

## Transport service providers

For most commuters, auto and taxi services are generally not affordable for long-distances but provide last mile connectivity, ferrying them to

and from local train stations. With trains out of action, auto and taxi drivers are seeing a major loss in their income. Shared autos and taxis, an otherwise perfectly logical way to reduce costs, are now a big no-no for fear of catching the virus. Moreover, pandemic induced economic recession has led to people avoiding travel for non essential purposes, minimising auto and taxi trips and choosing to wait for buses instead. On better days, auto and taxi drivers are reporting a 50% loss in income.

### Private transport services take a hit

Sagar bhau drives an auto rickshaw and is a resident of Dharavi Koliwada. Sagar bhau informed us that before the lockdown he would earn Rs 1200 a day on average, but ever since the Unlock process has started he earns only about Rs 300-400 on average, and is very rarely able to earn more than Rs 700. On some days he ends up running at a loss, as he is driving around the entire day and is unable to find a hire. Before the lockdown, he would get most of his passengers from Sion station and ferry them as far as Dahisar and Borivali. Most of his customers now are from within Dharavi and his recent trips are largely in and around neighboring areas such as Sion, Kurla and Bandra. He has observed people on the highway waiting for BEST buses for hours on end, but refusing to take an auto or taxi. He believes that people cannot afford taking these modes of transportation as their salaries have been reduced due to the pandemic induced recession. He has noted that people are only making trips if necessary, causing reduction in his earnings.

<sup>4</sup> <https://urbz.net/index.php/articles/exclusively-unaffordable>

## Entwined interstate-local transport networks

Abdul Kalam is a respondent who uses a haath-gadi (handcart) to load and unload threads used for stitching up wounds and cuts after medical operations. He loads them from Kurla station and unloads them at hospitals in and around Dharavi. These threads are made in Gujarat and transported to Mumbai. Abdul is now helping local garment business owners in transferring goods as the threads coming from Gujarat are currently restricted due to the limitations of mobility, the scarcity of raw materials and people's altered eating habits, he says, *"The threads are made from the intestines of goats. These days goats are quite expensive and people are not earning enough to afford the increased price of mutton (goat meat)...this is another reason why the business won't pick up pace anytime soon."*



Abdul Kalam with his haath-gadi.

## Door-to-door services sold more

Iqbal\*, a bread delivery person, is a resident of Dharavi. He sells bread in the neighbourhood by driving around on his cycle. He gets his bread from Matunga-Dadar and sells it to households in Dharavi as needed. He was working during the lockdown and was able to earn a lot more than usual as most shops selling bread were closed. Since the unlock process has begun, he feels that his business has reduced by 50%. In our studies so far we found a few cases that showed a surge in profits during the lockdown, we suspect that there may be more such stories of hyperlocal enterprises or delivery services doing better business during the lockdown.

*\*an alias has been used since the respondent wanted to remain anonymous.*

## An indefinite halt on tourism

Anilbhai is a resident of 90 feet road. He runs a travel business, where he would drive tourists from Mumbai to places such as Kolhapur, Sholapur, Rajasthan, and Goa. During the lockdown, he drove migrants back to their villages in the interiors of Maharashtra. He helped arrange buses for migrants from other states during the lockdown. Anilbhai told us that despite the Unlocking process, nobody is travelling for tourism anymore. He says most bookings he gets now are for people going to meet their families or for weddings, and most are travelling only short distances to Pune or their villages in the Konkan. He has not received any bookings in the last 15 days and his business has reduced by more than 80% since the lockdown started.

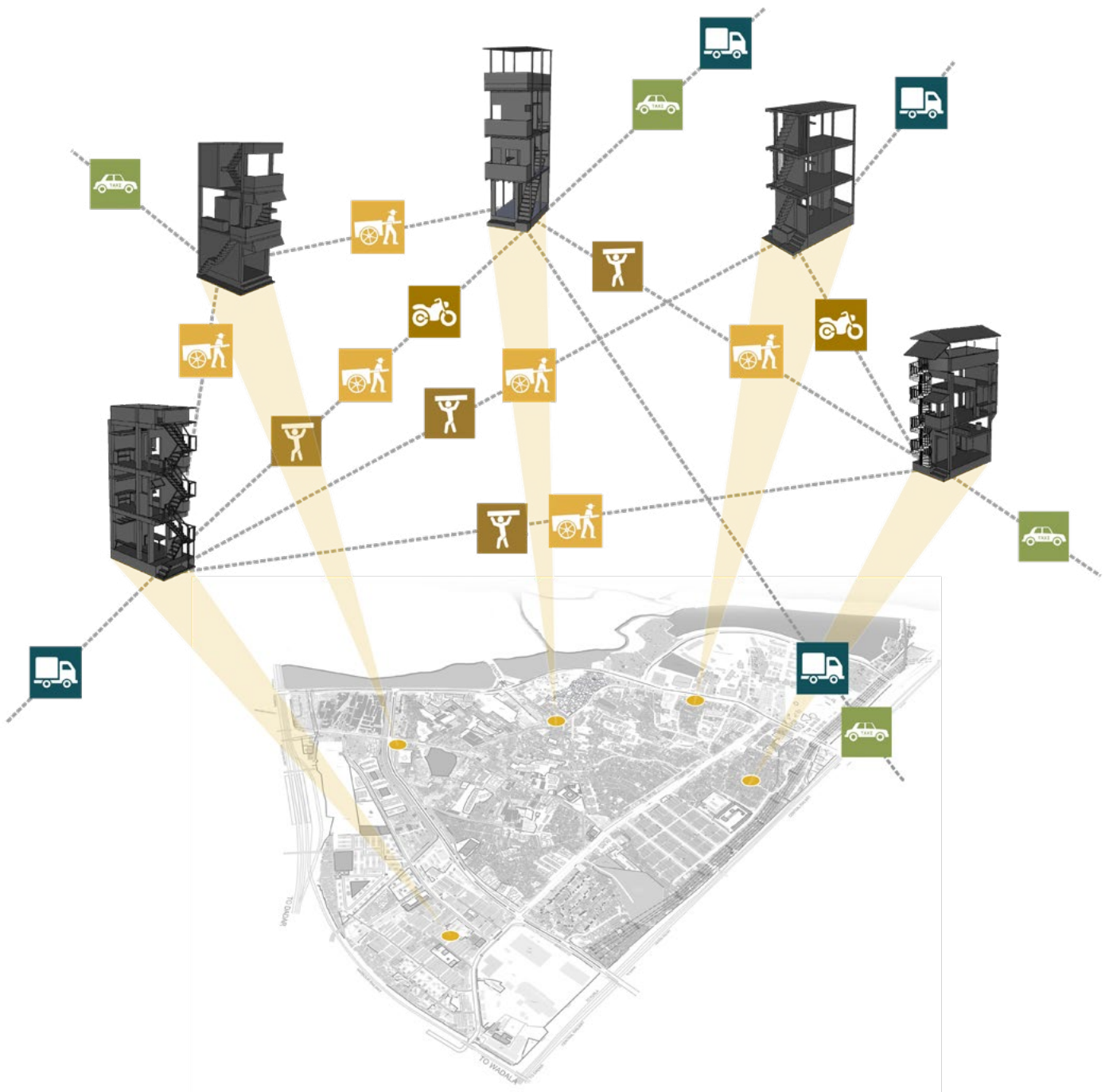
Since Dharavi is part of the larger production and supply chain and is involved in transportation of goods across the country, the tempo drivers that help transport these goods have been affected due to lower demand and kinks in the nationwide supply chains. Sonu is a tempo driver who used to make multiple trips to different parts of Gujarat every month. Now the frequency of his trips has dropped drastically.

*“Pre-covid I would make around 10-20 trips to Gujarat every month, now I hardly manage 4 trips a month.” -Sonu*

One fortunate respondent only offered transport services to clients whose goods and materials were all sourced and supplied within Dharavi. It seems that these hyper-local systems operating within Dharavi were not badly affected.

## Business as usual?

While many people operate in a tool-house set up and thus are not required to travel for work, they may still be dependent on different forms of neighbourhood and city level transport, from cycles and haath-gadis (handcarts) to autos, trains and buses to deliver their services and goods to their customers, and to procure raw materials. Mustaq Bhai, an embroiderer who



The illustration shows the mobility networks around some of the tool-houses in Dharavi.

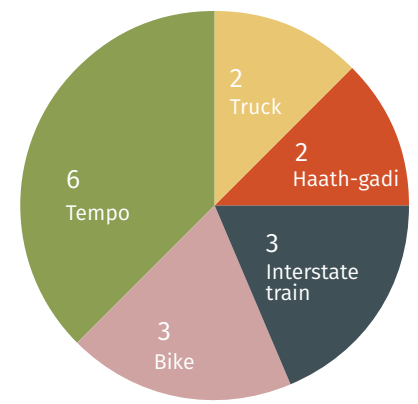
works out of a tool-house in Dharavi says that the larger retailers in the area send him clothes and garments to embroider which he then sends back to them once done. He thus becomes part of a network of buyers and sellers who collaboratively keep the local markets running.

As we found in the last Dharavi Fortnightly,<sup>[3]</sup> the toolhouse is a live-work typology that predominantly exists in Dharavi and can be said to have been instrumental in enabling people to restart their work. No tool-house exists in isolation but exists as part of a larger network of economic activity. The typology has emerged thanks to the interdependent and hyper-local nature of various services and skills. The post-fordist system of production and manufacturing in Dharavi allows for the smallest of components to be manufactured here and supplied to national and global markets making mobility an important facet of the smooth functioning of tool-houses.

Within Dharavi the transportation of goods between tool-houses is often done manually through

hand carts or carried by people through the streets and alleyways of the neighbourhood. However, the goods, services and materials that need to be imported or exported from outside Dharavi depend on forms of mobility that were unreliable during the lockdown. Our study confirmed the resilience of hyper-local systems, which remained, for the most part, unaffected during the lockdown. This is in contrast to our respondents who depended on national and international supply chains, that saw a slump in business.

*“People are really waiting for local trains to start, as supply chains and businesses will profit from increased and cheap mobility.” - Zia Bhai*



The chart shows modes of transport for the respondents who run a business which requires transportation of goods.



Local transport of garments for a factory at Koliwada, Dharavi

## Gaps in transportation amplifies costs for all

Kundan runs a leather business. He manufactures leather products and sells them to wholesale dealers. Due to the pandemic, Kundan has found it difficult to acquire raw materials. He would usually get the raw material from Chennai by train. There were two trains coming to Mumbai from Chennai everyday, but now there is only one train in four days. This has increased the price of raw materials. Because of this increased cost, he has to sell his goods at a higher price to wholesalers. But since there is no major demand for luxury leather goods at the moment, Kundan is finding it difficult to make profitable sales.

<sup>3</sup> <https://urbz.net/articles/dharavi-fortnightly-02-toolhouse-story>



## Severed international mobility affects local businesses

Tarun Swami owns a shop in Masjid Bandar where he sells electronic products and toys. Most of his supplies used to come from China via ships at Nehru Port in Mumbai. Because of the pandemic, the international shipping industry is facing various issues, this combined with the restrictions on Chinese products, has made Tarun Swami's normally dependable supply of goods highly uncertain. He now manages to get his stock from elsewhere, namely Musafir Khana. He would stock up frequently before, but these days he re-stocks only once in a few days. Moreover, his own commute has become stretched as he has to travel longer distances on his bike due to the unavailability of trains.

## The environmental cost of being mobile

*"Traffic on the road has increased since people are travelling by bikes and taxis as the trains aren't running"*

- Salimbhai, Taxi driver

An unexpected outcome resulting from the enforcement of the nationwide lockdown was the improvement in air-quality in Indian megacities. The abrupt reduction in the functioning of vehicles meant lower levels of pollutants being emitted into our atmosphere- specifically nitrogen oxides (NOx) and particulate matter. Less traffic and clearer surroundings did not go unnoticed by the general public. Across the world people are hoping for sweeping changes that would encourage better air quality. Habib Tepu of Transit Camp, Dharavi talks about having an easier time travelling during the lockdown because of lower traffic congestion and pollution levels on his routes. Meanwhile, other residents of Dharavi brought up how traffic levels have now resumed to normal, or even higher than before because most people who travelled by trains are now commuting by autos or private vehicles.

The temporary albeit significant decline in air pollution during the lockdown offered a much-needed reality check that makes evident the correlation between mobility and air pollution.

So what does this mean for mass public transport, private mobility, and their relation to the environment as we adapt and proceed post-covid?

Dharavi is largely a walkable neighbourhood, and while it's inhabitants may aspire to own private cars there is also great potential to turn it into an exemplar for sustainable transport. This can be achieved by facilitating non-motorised transport infrastructure in alignment with people's needs but without altering the human scale of it's streets to accommodate larger vehicles.



Pedestrians on Dharavi main road