

Creating a Sense of Place: A Proposal for Shopping Street of MM Alam Road, Lahore, Pakistan

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Streets play an important role in Cities especially shopping streets as they determine the urban pattern, but Lahore still lags behind in this aspect of urbanization. Formerly, making a good street where people wanted to be was easier than it is today, because people didn't have to compete with its own machines for a piece of space. Lahore has fallen victim to the same ideology. The motor cars have taken over all open spaces and sense of place is disrupted affecting people feelings and perception of a shopping street. This paper analyzes the street shopping and leisure activities associated to it in the city of Lahore. Primary focus is on the MM Alam Road, one of the most attractive shopping areas of the city. Although for many of the city dwellers, motorized transport is the primary mode of travelling from one place to another but every sensible and aware citizen realizes that it is taking us away from nature thus away from happiness. MM Alam Road is facing the same issue which is hampering it to become the best place of city for shopping, dining and leisure activities for the people. Detailed study was carried out of the existing conditions, local bye-laws and surveys were conducted regarding traffic flow, parking duration and origin/destination. It was found that MM Alam Road of Lahore had all the potential and physical characteristics that can provide livable place not only to local visitors but international tourists as well. Pedestrian's facilities, street furniture, motorized traffic and mainly the parking issue needed to be resolved in befitting manner. The objective of the paper was to identify the lack of physical attributes hampering the sense of place and propose recommendations accordingly.

1. Introduction

Lahore being a historical city and provincial capital of Punjab has its importance in offering high level of cultural, educational, commercial and recreational activities to its residents. City boundaries are expanding to accommodate migrants from rural areas and other cities in the form of new housing societies and commercial centers. 2000-2020 marks the rapid city expansion of Lahore, Pakistan that has led to significant land use and cover changes, causing environmental impacts such as degraded habitat quality (Fahad et al., 2021).

Lahore city has a great potential to become a compact city by promoting high-density living, infilled development, and efficient public transport provision. (Nadeem et al., 2021). City infrastructure is also being improved constantly to mitigate the pressure on utilities specially road network. But it seems that all development is meant to favor the motorized traffic and pedestrians are being ignored everywhere. Lahore still lags behind in many aspects of urbanization especially good shopping streets which can be considered having a sense of place (Obeidy. & Shamsuddin., 2017). Perception of streets is shaped by urbanization, socioability, mobility, convenience, serenity, pollution, security, and nature, influenced by sensory stimuli, cognitive processing, and subjective evaluation (Rezvanipour et al., 2021).

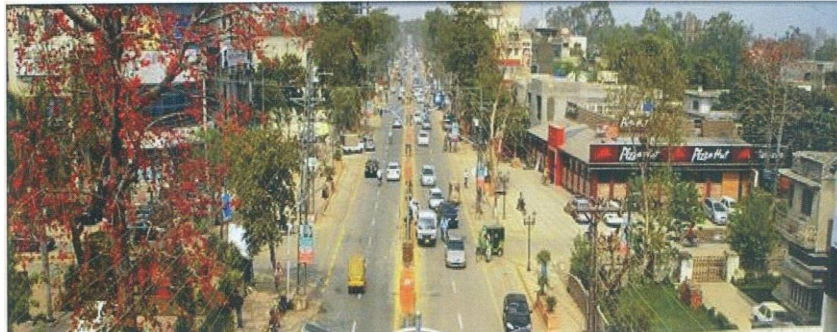
Once upon a time making a good street where people wanted to be was easier than it is today, because people did not have to compete with its own machines for a piece of space. Lahore has fallen victim to the same ideology. A few decades ago, double-decker buses and horse-carts used to roam the streets of Lahore. People used these modes of transports to reach a terminal point and then used to walk to their respective destinations. Then motor cars arrived and it changed everything. It not only created congestion on the roads but also took over the open spaces in the form of ever-increasing parking lots. For many of the city dwellers, motorized transport is the primary mode of travelling from one place to another but every sensible and aware citizen knows that it is taking us away from nature thus away from happiness (Transit-friendly streets, 1998; Roucolle, 2024). Hence the change of street uses, types and activities erase what is precious to the users. The priority is given to the movement of motor vehicles which makes the shopping street an uninteresting space (Shamsuddin & Sulaiman, 2018).

MM Alam road, is the place where majority of the elite class of Lahore likes to spend their leisure time with their family. The street offers all kind of branded shops, best local and international food chains, fashion boutiques, art galleries, beauty salons, gift centers and other commercial activities for all age groups as shown in figure 1. However, authorities have not been able to generate a sense of place in this street due to absence of certain physical qualities and type of activities. Haphazard parking in front of shops, lack of pedestrian roaming area and necessary street furniture and sufficient plantation has hampered its status of being the best shopping street of the city. A few years ago, development authorities closed all the openings in the median to facilitate smooth flow for vehicular traffic which resulted in increase of speed of vehicles and created more difficulties for pedestrians while crossing the road to access the opposite side shops. In other words, the pedestrians were once again ignored to facilitate the car owners.

This research identifies the physical attributes that can make this road a livable place and suggest solutions to develop the existing MM Alam (Muhammad Mahmood Alam) road in such

a way that it becomes a pedestrian friendly heaven for shoppers, dinners and for those who just want an escape from their normal tiresome life. And also, that it becomes safe streets for people of all age groups and abilities, balances the needs of different modes, and supports local economies, culture, and natural environment. In other words, to find solutions to create a sense of place rather than a street merely serving traffic and shopping needs.

Figure No 1: A View of the MM Alam Road



Source: Author

2. Literature Review

Shopping is a primary activity in which almost every individual in society takes part which gives a shopper a social pleasure and relaxation. Shopping is a social ritual besides a necessity therefore it is important to recognize that a shopper does not come only to purchase goods but also for communication and entertainment that encourages social interaction (Rogers, Lombardi, Leach & Cooper, 2012). Traditional shopping streets provide social, economic, and environmental benefits, and addressing their decline through place attraction can help preserve their vitality and economic value in cities (Carmona, 2021). The criteria of shopping streets has changed overtime and increased traffic has also put a strain on the streets. Shopping malls are the modern versions of shopping streets where all facilities are provided under one roof (Cunha & Selada, 2009).

Malls can be both environmentally irresponsible and economically and socially beneficial, but they also reinforce car dependence, reinforce economic stratification, and emphasize consumption. (Corroto, & Richardson, 2018). These shopping malls have advantages like ample parking space in basements and less crowdedness but it has disadvantages too. They are less exploring and simplistic design that gives bored feelings. Whereas the streets are more interesting to experience. People always lean towards those designs which are closer to nature. Therefore, the trend of people is shifting back to places that are more walk-able and greener.

Shopping street design is a very critical issue as it is vital part of livable, attractive communities. A good shopping street should be comfortable, safe, interesting with a variety of goods available. Present day concepts focus more on building design rather than street design. But looking as a whole street are the places between the buildings which should be given importance. A shopping street is an open-air mall where stores are arranged in row with pedestrian walkway in front. (Dover & Massengale, 2014) Therefore the literature review will analyze the shopping trends, their design, requirements and response of commercial facilities as a whole being followed internationally and locally.

2.1 Champs Elysees Street Paris, France

The Champs Elysees is an avenue known for its variety of both popular and prestigious shopping, including grand hotels, cafes and branded store in the world as shown in figure 2. Paris is one of the most travelled cities of the world and champ Ely sees itself has a share of admirers around the world which call it one of the best and most beautiful streets of the world. As the traffic has increased the French government has given an underground metro for fast travel. (Swiney, 2013) No vehicular parking is allowed on the main street and in front of shops as it causes hindrance for the pedestrian movement. The parking areas are provided at various other areas. A thick line of trees separates the pedestrian walkway and the main road.

The main road is for through traffic only this has not been totally cut off as it connects to main areas of the Paris city. To further promote walking, an underground walkway is also given which is also attached to the metro platforms. The right of way of champ Ely sees is 200 feet and divided as 60 feet for pedestrian on either side of the road which is 80 feet wide to cater the through traffic is paved with cobbled stone to reduce the traffic speed. The champ Elysees was revitalized in 1994; incorporating broader sidewalks and a lot of street furniture including benches and street lamps. It has muted palette of colors, materials, textures, rather than a riot of bright stripes and loud traffic signs.

Figure No 2: Champs Elysees Street Paris France



Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Champs-%C3%89lys%C3%A9es>

2.2 Las Rambla Street Catalonia, Barcelona

Rambla Catalonia is one of the Barcelona's distinctive and elegant urban streets. It is a multimodal street type distinguished by large and central Pedestrian Island, limited narrow carriageways and monumental streetscape. The Rambla plan relatively a stable plan along its entire length. The right of way measures 96ft. having pedestrian Central Island 42ft. wide. Both sidewalks are 11 feet wide each and both single one-way traffic and parking lanes are 16feet wide each. (Alexander & Tang, 2010). Most of the Rambla's length includes retail stores, cafes, fruit market and restaurants along its both sides as shown in figure 3.

Figure No 3: Las Rambla Streetscape

Source: <http://courses.be.uw.edu/SDMasterStudio/wp-content/themes/gehl-studio/downloads/Winter2010/LasRamblas.pdf>

The dimensions of the two traffic lanes are small as compared to width of the pedestrian island and which shows that pedestrian traffic is favored. Continuous row of trees on both the edges of Pedestrian Island and street furniture contributes comfortable visual character of the place. Allan Jacobs, who is an expert on urban design and was a former city planner of San Francisco, wrote in his book “Great Streets” that Las Rambla street is designed for people so they can easily walk on, can meet and talk (Jacobs, 1995). The buildings define the edges of the street, while building entrances and building windows provide a sense of fluidity. Moreover, the street allows public gathering events like performances by local artists and musicians as shown in figure 4. This makes its visual and cultural landscape different with every visit.

Figure No 4: Las Rambla Streetscape

Source: https://www.uc.edu/cdc/niehoff_studio/programs/great_streets/s09/foundry.pdf

2.3 Liberty Market, Lahore

It is also one of the famous markets of Lahore. It is a D-shaped market located in a posh locality called Gulberg. Located on the road connecting liberty chowk and Hussain chowk, the D-shaped area has a radius of 672 ft. The central part is a green space surrounded by 133 ft. wide parking belt as shown in figure 5. The shops along the curve have 45ft wide paved area in the front for pedestrians only. There is some street furniture provided in this area like sitting benches, attractive lights, dustbins and kiosks for vendors who sell small items of ladies’ interest and traditional street food items. Over the years, due to heavy traffic and rising parking issues, the main area of the liberty market was pedestrianized with proper parking in the center by local authorities providing a proper sense of place. One of the very important design aspects of liberty is that the streets from all sides are inter connected which makes it very easy to travel from one

point to the other. After separation of traffic, parking and pedestrian areas the market has become more attractive and enjoyable for people. However, due to increase in traffic the parking area is no more sufficient and requires attention of the authorities for its expansion.

Pedestrianization at Liberty Market in Lahore is successful due to factors such as landscaping, street furniture, parking facilities, security, adherence to law and overall ambience of the space (Yasin et al., 2021).

Figure No 5: Liberty Market View



Source: <https://propakistani.pk/2017/09/18/10-populated-cities-pakistan-pictures/>

2.4 Model Town Link Road, Lahore

This road is an important urban venue which is vibrant and full of commercial and economic activity. The Model Town Link Road is a residential area converted into a busy commercial strip over few years. It has a 3-lane each side dual carriage way with service road on both sides. The 40 ft. wide service road is meant for parking towards shops side and two-way traffic of vehicles in the remaining width. But as shown in figure 6, there is parking on both sides of the road and of course the two-way traffic is also managed within the left-over space. In the whole scenario what mainly lacks is the foot path for pedestrians as shown in figure 6. They use the same service road and manage access or exit to the shops through space in between the parked vehicles. Currently this area is mismanaged and chaotic. The area has the potential of becoming an excellent public space but requires good traffic management and civic design.

Figure No 6: Model Town Link Road Views



Source: Author

2.5 PIA Road, Lahore

Similar situation was repeated a few years later in the PIA Road commercial area. The residential properties gradually converted to a busy commercial development. The government again facilitated vehicular traffic by developing a 3-lane wide dual carriage way with service lane on both sides. The function of service lane is the same that it accommodates parking as well as two-way traffic as shown in figure 7. However, there is no foot path or any safe pedestrian area. People have to walk on the same road at their own risk. There is another common issue that usually one lane of the main road is occupied by fruit vendors creating traffic jams. In segments of popular shopping areas, the parking on service road is not sufficient enough; vehicles are also parked on the main road as well creating problems for the thoroughfare traffic as shown in figure 8.

Figure No 7: Main PIA Road Views



Source: Author

The problems are exaggerating day by day due to increase in multistoried shopping plazas. The rising traffic volume is eating up the left-over walking space through parking of motorbikes and vendors all over.

3. Research Methodology

The research methodology of this study involves a multi-layered approach that combines site analysis, physical environment assessment, and traffic studies. Initially, we will conduct a thorough contextual analysis by reviewing literature and visiting the MM Alam Road site to understand its historical and current conditions. Next, we will assess the physical environment in detail, including mapping streetscape elements, analyzing walkability, and evaluating connectivity. At the same time, we will conduct parking surveys and traffic counts to assess parking availability and utilization, traffic flow patterns, and their impact on pedestrians. We will then synthesize the collected data to identify key issues and opportunities. Based on these insights, we will develop design proposals for improving the streetscape and make policy recommendations that focus on enhancing the overall sense of place.

3.1 Physical Surveys

These included measurement of the Right of Way at various points, existing land use, general appearance of the road and buildings, landscaping if any, parking needs, pedestrian facilities, street furniture, availability of infrastructure and environmental conditions. As per observational findings it was found that MM Alam Road qualifies for the following attributes of a livable space; mentioned in the table 1.

Table No 1: Traffic Count Survey at Hussain Chowk

Sr. No.	Present	Absence
1	Accessibility	Significant Appearance of the buildings
2	Landmarks	Street Vendors
3	Number of visitors	Landscaping
4	Diversity of business	Pedestrian Walkways
5	Lighting at night	Wall Arts
6	Safety	Street Furniture

3.2 Traffic Count Survey

The traffic count survey provided the summary of vehicular movement at various times of the day. It was helpful to understand the through traffic and the number of people who stop at the MM Alam Road for different purposes. Traffic count survey was conducted on Saturday, (weekend) at three different times of the day. This was to check the flow of traffic at various times and also to learn when the pressure on the road is at its peak. The timings of the day were 12:00 p.m.-2:00 p.m., 5:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.-10:00 p.m. These selected times have their own significance, so a considerate amount of thought was given to select the right times of the right day. The 12:00 p.m. till 2:00 p.m. time signifies the after-school rush, 5:00 p.m. till 7:00 p.m. time signifies the off time of offices. The 8:00 p.m. till 10:00 p.m. identifies the dinner time, for which the MM Alam Road is famous for. Table 2 represents traffic count survey at Hussain Chowk while Table 3 represents traffic count survey at the Mini Market Roundabout.

Table No 2: Traffic Count Survey at Hussain Chowk

Survey Time	Entering from the Hussain Chowk	Leaving from the Mini Market Roundabout
12:00p.m. till 1:00p.m.	1754	2296
5:00p.m. till 6:00p.m.	1826	1944
8:00p.m. till 9:00p.m.	2106	1249

Table No 3: Traffic Count Survey at the Mini Market Roundabout

Survey Time	Entering from the Mini Market Roundabout	Leaving from the Hussain Chowk Roundabout
1:00 p.m. till 2:00 p.m.	1648	1914
6:00 p.m. till 7:00 p.m.	1635	1912
9:00 p.m. till 10:00 p.m.	2276	1589

From 1:00pm to 2:00pm, majority of the people use MM Alam Road for through crossing. 5:00pm to 7:00pm was the busiest time of the entire day. **6:00pm to 7:00pm** is perhaps the worst time to be on MM Alam road. But as per human psyche and the climate of Lahore, this is the best to come out for a leisure activity, as both the temperature is moderate and people are free from their work.

As the readings were taken on the weekend, so we can see a sudden change in the moods of people coming to MM Alam road, people stayed at the road for a longer time than they would have in other times. But the major problem which was observed for this time was that due to lack of proper parking spaces, people have taken too much space of the through traffic road and this causes a major hurdle in the flow of traffic.

3.3 Parking Survey

Parking survey at peak times of the day was conducted and it was observed that there is very little parking of about six cars for small restaurants/shops & about twenty cars for the large ones as compared to actual need. It was observed that around 30% cars were parked away from a shop on side streets by people themselves with a security risk or through valet parking facility if available. During the peak hours of business specially on week-ends this issue becomes unmanageable which results in disappointment of customers intending to go to a particular restaurant, so either they postpone it for next time or opt a restaurant in other areas.

3.4 Inspection of Existing Buildings and Roadside Facilities

The existing buildings were inspected and their facades, heights and shapes were studied to give guidelines for the skyline of the road. The number of buildings on MM Alam Road can be categorized as: 49 Shops and Plaza, a Cinema, 28 Residential properties, 21 Restaurants, 4 Banks, 2 Petrol Pump, a Hospital and an Open Ground. The pathways about 5 feet wide are provided on both sides of road. The parking is allowed in front of the shops and it functions as a barrier between the two properties hindering the pedestrian movement from one end to the other end of the road. Another aspect in which MM Alam road lacks behind the famous shopping streets is that it does not have proper street furniture. It lacks variation and the focal points are missing as well. There are no proper signs and markings to help reach the destination easily.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Comparative Study of Mm Alam Road, Lahore and Champs Elysees Street, Paris

MM Alam Road is one of the most prominent shopping streets of Lahore. It has everything for everyone who comes out for a leisure activity, except the peace of mind. After discussing the various case studies of both national and international examples, it was interesting to note that MM Alam road and Champs Elysees have many similarities in physical terms. Champs Elysees Street is the world famous road of Paris and is a favorite shopping street for many people around the world. So, a comparative analysis is derived between the two roads to identify the difference which can be improved to tap the full potential of MM Alam Road and give it due place in the best shopping destinations at local as well as international level.

The following similarities were identified between the two said cases:

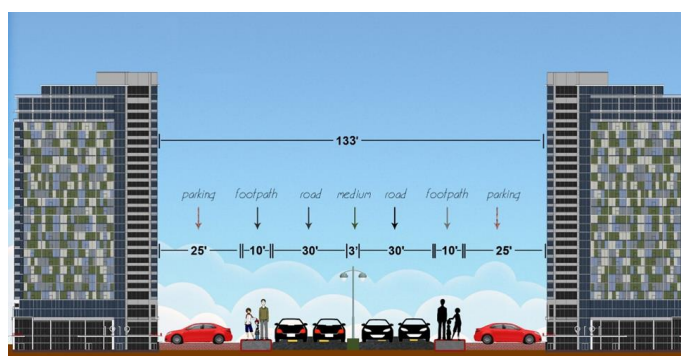
- a) The most obvious similarities between the two are that both start and end with the circular junctions. This indicates that the traffic flow pattern is comparable between the two. The Champs Elysees Street starts with Place De La Concorde and ends at Arc De Triomphe. While the MM Alam Road starts with the Hussain Chowk (roundabout) on one side and ends at Mini Market roundabout on the other.
- b) Both represent the upper classes of their respective cities that provides the top of the line brands, restaurants and entertainment facilities.
- c) The two shopping streets have almost same length. Champs Elysees runs 1.91 km while MM Alam Road has a length of 1.8 Km.
- d) Champs Elysees Street has about 40 feet wide pedestrian's walkway in front of shops on both sides. Whereas MM Alam road has 30 feet wide space in front of shops which is being used for parking of cars.
- e) Both streets witnessed the transformation from Residential to Commercial. The Champs Elysees was initially intended to be a residential place by King Henry IV in 1667. But as the years progressed it became a commercial place full with glitz and glamour. MM Alam Road is not that historical but it is undergoing the same change. It was not initially intended to be a commercial zone but its location has converted into one. But there are still a number of homes on the street which disrupt the regular Right of Way of the road.

4.2 Analysis of Existing MM Alam Road

MM Alam road is one of the most prominent shopping streets of Lahore. It has everything for the shoppers who come out for leisure activity. The dual carriageway has a length of 1.8 km having roundabouts at both ends and Right of Way of 133 ft. Whereas only 5 ft. wide foot path is available for pedestrians on both sides of the road, rest of the area is taken by two lane dual carriage way and car parking in front of shops as shown in figure 8. Parking is a major problem and in peak hours this issue is exaggerated because of parking everywhere even on foot paths. MM Alam road lacks special landmarks and points of attraction. The poor condition of infrastructure and lack of street furniture is one of the drawbacks that is not expected in people friendly streets. MM Alam was not planned as a commercial area but it gradually converted from residential area. So it brings with it certain amount of limitations which cannot be ignored. The road sides and building front areas are all used as parking.

There is no adequate distance between parking and buildings. Benches and decorative poles are placed right in the middle of pathways which create hindrance for the pedestrians. Another problem is that each owner has put partitions or barriers on its property lines so people cannot walk in continuation from one shop to another. The main issue is that parking and pedestrian movement is mixed up. So in a culture where people are impressed with size, model and brands of cars, obviously the advantage or priority over use of a space will be taken by the cars. Wherever better environment in public space has been observed, the pedestrian area has priority and kept free of traffic and parking hazard.

Figure No 8: Existing Sectional Detail of MM Alam Road (ROW)



Source: Author

5. Conclusion

Defining a street as just a road is different from designing it as a public space. Roads built to handle a certain number of vehicles per hour turn the street into a route that prioritizes the efficient movement of people to essential places like work, school, or hospitals. Creating interlink between the people and street is to ensure a bond between people and place. The attributes being identified in this study like walkways, street vendors, street lights, variety of shops plantation of trees and flowers, water bodies, accessibility and wall art, entertainers in the form of acrobats, music players or fun statues are necessity to create a sense of place for the people. Living quality of people can be enhanced with the design of such places where these activities take place. The intent of study is not limited to identify or explore the problems of MM Alam Road but to suggest a physical proposal to address the significant issues. In most of the areas, fast traffic on the streets has developed security risks for the pedestrians making the streets unsafe and unsocial.

It lacks most of the attributes which are necessary to create a livable place. The street's main purpose should be its use as a place of social interaction, communication among different segments of society, variety of entertainment and creating a sense of place for people of all age groups. There is a need to reset our priority in favor of pedestrians rather than cars which unfortunately is in practice in Lahore. While learning through good examples of suchlike streets there seems to be a lot of potential for upgrading MM Alam road to an exemplary level that can be followed for other commercial streets of Lahore with the attention and help of city's development authorities.

5.1 Recommendations

The major issues identified as significant about the MM Alam road were the parking in front of shops which hinders pedestrian movement from one shop to the other, lack of landscape, street furniture and speedy vehicular traffic on the thoroughfare road. Design proposals were initially considered with their pros and cons to make an effort to reach to an ideal solution. The recommended proposal suggests the solution as stated below and shown in fig.9 and 10.

5.2 Proposal of Through Traffic on Main Road with Parking Underground

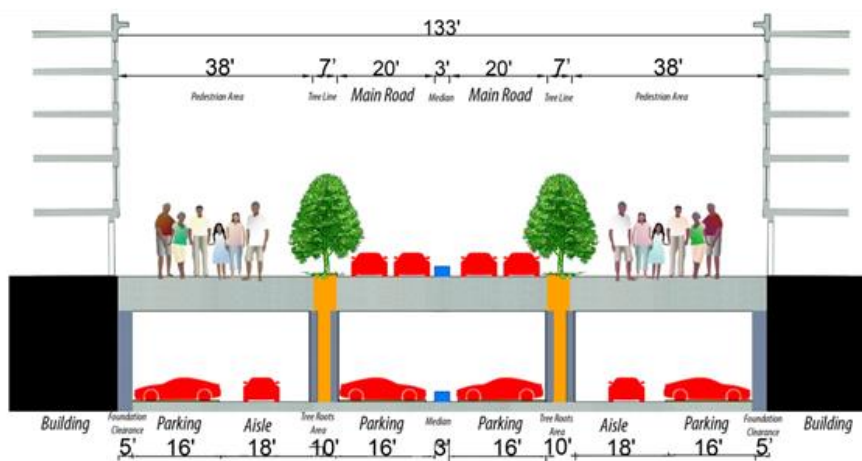
All parking should be taken in the basement and the area in front of shops with increased width of 38 ft. is dedicated for pedestrian movement only. The width of the dual carriageway should be reduced to 20 ft. on each side having three feet wide median with no openings in between to ensure continuous flow of thoroughfare traffic. The road surface should be paved with cobbled stone to reduce the driving speed of vehicles. To enhance the visual comfort of the pedestrians landscaping of the whole area with provision of sufficient street furniture should be ensured. Entry in basement should be provided at the start of both ends. Access to shops/ pedestrian area can be provided in the form of stairs, escalators and elevators at convenient intervals in the form of stairs, escalators and elevators.

Figure No 9: Proposed Plan of MM Alam Road



Source: Author

Figure No 10: Sectional View of the Proposed MM Alam Road



Source: Author

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