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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

The Question Behind the Delhi Master Plan 2047: Who Can Afford to Stay?

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The Indian Express 25 August 2026 GS1 GS3

INTERVIEW ANGLE

"A master plan can increase the total number of dwelling units in a city while reducing the number of people who can afford to live there. How should a planner measure success, by units built or by residents retained?"

Source: Original editorial ↗ The Indian Express

Every fact web-verified against primary sources

THE LIFT LINE

A city can build four million homes and still lose the people who live in it. Units are a supply statistic; staying is a price question.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

Urbanisation, urban planning and inclusive growth recur across GS1 and GS3, and aspirants usually prepare urban schemes as lists rather than as mechanisms. This editorial supplies the mechanism, and the tension inside it.

GS Paper 1: Urbanisation, their problems and remedies; distribution of key population characteristics.

GS Paper 3: Infrastructure; inclusive growth; investment models.

CONCEPT	MEANING	WHY IT IS TESTABLE
Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)	High-density, mixed-use development concentrated within walking distance of mass transit nodes	The organising principle of MPD-2047
In-situ rehabilitation	Rehousing slum residents on the same land rather than relocating them to the periphery	The safeguard that determines whether redevelopment displaces
Land value capture	Public recovery of a share of the increase in land value created by public investment	The financing mechanism that could fund affordability without pricing residents out

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Plan

The **Delhi Master Plan 2047 (MPD-2047)** was unveiled on **20 August 2026** by Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister **Manohar Lal**.

ELEMENT	DETAIL
Target population by 2047	32 million
Total new affordable housing units sought	Approximately 40 lakh, with private investment
Affordable homes in TOD zones	Approximately 18 lakh
Units through redevelopment of existing areas	Approximately 7 lakh
JJ cluster residents to be housed	Over 17 lakh
Preferred unit size	Small-format, 25 to 60 square metres carpet area
TOD zone definition	Within 500 metres either side of Metro corridors; within a 500-metre radius of RRTS and railway stations
Transit expansion	Six new RRTS corridors

The Institutional Setting

The **Delhi Development Authority (DDA)** was constituted under the **Delhi Development Act, 1957** and is the master-planning and principal land-owning agency for Delhi. Delhi's master plans form a sequence: **MPD-1962**, the first statutory master plan for the capital, followed by **MPD-2001** and **MPD-2021**, with a draft **MPD-2041** having been under process before the present plan.

Governance is unusually fragmented. Delhi is a **National Capital Territory under Article 239AA**, inserted by the **Sixty-ninth Constitutional Amendment Act, 1991**, with land and public order outside the elected government's legislative competence. Municipal functions sit with the Municipal Corporation of Delhi and the New Delhi Municipal Council, while the **Seventy-fourth Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992** and the **Twelfth Schedule** assign urban planning, including town planning, to urban local bodies, a function Delhi's structure divides between the DDA and the municipal bodies.

THE ANALYSIS

1. Density and price move together, which is the plan's internal tension. Transit-oriented development is spatially correct: concentrating people near mass transit reduces commute length, private vehicle dependence and sprawl. But accessibility is capitalised into land value. Designating a 500-metre band around a Metro corridor for high-density development simultaneously creates housing capacity and raises the land price against which affordability must be assessed. The plan's two central goals therefore pull against one another in the same locations.

2. Private investment sets the price floor. A redevelopment model that depends on attracting private capital requires each project to clear a commercial return. That return, not the paying capacity of current residents, determines pricing. Affordability then has to be manufactured by cross-subsidy, density bonus or direct subsidy, and the strength of the affordability obligation becomes the whole question.

3. Delhi's own record is the strongest evidence for caution. Master plans since 1962 have set substantial housing targets. Over the same decades, the share of residents in unauthorised colonies and JJ clusters grew. That divergence indicates the constraint was never the absence of sanctioned units. It was price, tenure insecurity and location, because a formally allotted unit forty kilometres from a workplace is not a substitute for an informal one within walking distance of it.

4. Location is the hidden variable in affordability. Households in informal settlements are frequently paying an implicit premium for proximity to work, accepting poor shelter to save commute time and cost. Rehousing that ignores location converts a housing gain into a livelihood loss. This is why **in-situ rehabilitation** and same-location delivery of affordable units matter more than the headline count.

5. The counter-argument is serious and cannot be waved away. A city heading toward 32 million residents must densify or sprawl, and sprawl is worse on every environmental and fiscal measure. Public resources cannot close a deficit of this scale. Small-format units of 25 to 60 square metres are a genuine affordability instrument, not a token. Rejecting private capital yields fewer homes, not cheaper ones. The honest position is that the model is right and its safeguards are what require scrutiny.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

PRELIMS-GRADE FACTS:

MPD-2047 unveiled 20 August 2026 by Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Manohar Lal.

Target population by 2047: 32 million. Affordable housing sought: approximately 40 lakh units, of which about 18 lakh in TOD zones and about 7 lakh through redevelopment; over 17 lakh JJ cluster residents to be housed.

Small-format units defined as 25 to 60 square metres carpet area.

TOD zone: within 500 metres either side of Metro corridors and within a 500-metre radius of RRTS and railway stations. Six new RRTS corridors planned.

Delhi Development Authority constituted under the Delhi Development Act, 1957. Master plan sequence: MPD-1962, MPD-2001, MPD-2021, draft MPD-2041.

Delhi is an NCT under Article 239AA, inserted by the 69th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1991.

Urban planning is a municipal function under the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 and the Twelfth Schedule.

Do not confuse the **69th Amendment (1991)***, which gave Delhi its Legislative Assembly and Article 239AA, with the* **74th Amendment (1992)***, which deals with urban local bodies generally. Also note that a master plan is a* **statutory instrument** *under the Delhi Development Act, not an advisory document.*

THE DEBATE

FOR (the plan risks pricing out existing residents): Redevelopment financed by private return sets prices by developer viability, not resident capacity. TOD raises land value at precisely the sites it densifies. Delhi's history shows sanctioned units rising alongside informal settlement, which means supply targets have never been the binding constraint.

AGAINST (densification with private capital is the only realistic path): A city of 32 million must densify or sprawl into the NCR, and sprawl imposes higher environmental, fiscal and commuting costs. Public finance cannot deliver 40 lakh units. Small-format housing and TOD are genuine affordability instruments, and refusing private investment produces fewer homes rather than cheaper ones.

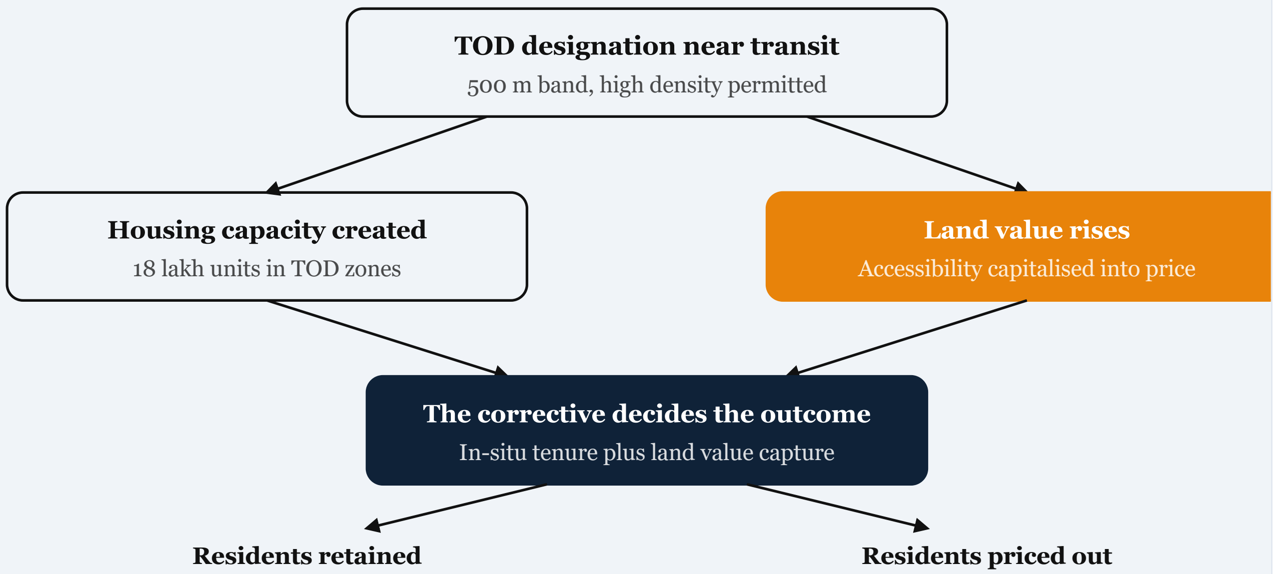
Balanced verdict: The spatial strategy is sound and the financing model is unavoidable; the affordability safeguards are where the plan will succeed or fail. Attaching the obligation to the land rather than to the project, through mandatory in-situ rehabilitation with secure tenure, same-location delivery of affordable units without substitution by peripheral allotment or payment in lieu, and public capture of the transit-generated land value uplift, is what converts a supply plan into an inclusion plan.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS

When assessing any development intervention, ask whether the mechanism that creates the benefit also creates the harm. Here it does: the same act of designating high-density transit corridors both enables housing supply and inflates land price.

Where a single mechanism produces both effects, the policy question is never whether to use it. It is what accompanying instrument neutralises the second effect while retaining the first. Land value capture is that instrument in urban planning, and the general principle, that a policy with a built-in counter-effect needs a paired corrective rather than a rethink, transfers across domains.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS



One designation produces both effects at once. Whether the city ends up on the left or the right depends entirely on which safeguards are made binding.

TAKEAWAY BOX

A city can build four million homes and still lose the people who live in it. Units are a supply statistic; staying is a price question.

MPD-2047 unveiled 20 August 2026 by Manohar Lal; 32 million target population; 40 lakh units, 18 lakh in TOD zones, 7 lakh via redevelopment, 17 lakh JJ residents; 25-60 sq m small-format units; TOD within 500 m of Metro and RRTS; DDA under the Delhi Development Act, 1957; Article 239AA via the 69th Amendment, 1991; 74th Amendment and the Twelfth Schedule.

When public transit investment raises private land values, who has the better claim to that increase, the landowner or the public that funded the transit?

Connects to past UPSC Mains questions on smart cities, urban flooding and infrastructure, and on the adequacy of the 74th Amendment in empowering urban local bodies.

"Transit-oriented development creates housing capacity and housing unaffordability through the same mechanism." Critically examine with reference to a recent Indian master plan.

Source: The Question Behind the Delhi Master Plan 2047: Who Can Afford to Stay? — Ujiyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Writing in The Indian Express, the argument is that the Delhi Master Plan 2047's headline promise of roughly 40 lakh new homes, including about 18 lakh affordable units in transit-oriented development zones, must be tested against the question of who can actually afford to remain in the city, because a redevelopment-led model financed by private investment tends to raise land values and unit prices in precisely the locations it densifies, and therefore risks displacing the residents it claims to house.

✓ SUPPORTING

- The plan's delivery mechanism depends on attracting private investment into redevelopment of slums and unauthorised colonies, which means the commercial viability of each project, and therefore its pricing, is determined by the developer's return rather than by the paying capacity of existing residents.
- Transit-oriented development concentrates permitted density within 500 metres of Metro corridors and RRTS stations, which is also where land is most valuable, so the same intervention that creates housing supply simultaneously raises the land price against which affordability must be measured.
- Delhi's planning history offers direct evidence: successive master plans have set ambitious housing targets while the share of the population living in unauthorised colonies and jhuggi jhopri clusters continued to grow, which suggests the binding constraint has been affordability and tenure security rather than the absence of a plan.

⚠ COUNTER

The counter-view is that Delhi's housing deficit cannot be closed from public resources alone, that transit-oriented densification is the only way to accommodate a projected population of 32 million without further sprawl into the National Capital Region, and that small-format units of 25 to 60 square metres carpet area are a genuine affordability instrument. On this reading, refusing private capital would mean fewer homes rather than cheaper ones.

→ WAY FORWARD

The reconciliation lies in binding the affordability obligation to the land rather than to the project: mandate in-situ rehabilitation with guaranteed tenure for displaced residents, require that affordable units be delivered in the same location rather than substituted by peripheral allotment or a fee, capture a share of the land value uplift that public transit investment itself creates, and measure the plan against residents retained rather than units sanctioned.

MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

QUESTION

Transit-oriented development is presented as a solution to both urban congestion and housing shortage. Critically examine whether redevelopment-led, private-investment housing models can deliver affordability for the urban poor, with reference to the Delhi Master Plan 2047. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

The Delhi Master Plan 2047, unveiled on 20 August 2026 by Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Manohar Lal, sets out to accommodate a projected population of 32 million through roughly 40 lakh new dwelling units, with transit-oriented development as its organising idea. The Indian Express poses the question the numbers do not answer, namely whether the residents currently living in Delhi will be able to afford to stay in it.

BODY

The plan’s architecture is specific. It envisages approximately 18 lakh affordable homes in transit-oriented development zones, around 7 lakh additional dwelling units through redevelopment of existing areas, and housing solutions for more than 17 lakh residents of jhuggi jhopri clusters, with a stated preference for small-format units of 25 to 60 square metres of carpet area.

Transit-oriented development permits high-density, mixed-use construction within 500 metres of Metro corridors and within a 500-metre radius of RRTS and railway stations, alongside six new RRTS corridors. The difficulty is structural rather than administrative.

Delivery depends on attracting private investment into the redevelopment of slums and unauthorised colonies, which means each project must clear a commercial hurdle rate, and pricing is therefore set by developer return rather than by the paying capacity of existing occupants. Simultaneously, the decision to concentrate density around transit nodes raises land values at exactly those nodes, because accessibility is capitalised into land price.

The result is that the intervention creating supply also inflates the benchmark against which affordability is judged. Delhi’s own planning record supports the caution: successive master plans since MPD-1962 have set substantial housing targets while the share of residents in unauthorised colonies and JJ clusters continued to rise, which indicates that the binding constraint has been affordability, tenure security and location rather than the absence of sanctioned units.

CONCLUSION

A balanced answer should concede that densification around transit is the correct spatial strategy for a city of 32 million and that public resources alone cannot close the deficit. The corrective is to attach the affordability obligation to the land itself through in-situ rehabilitation, same-location delivery of affordable units, and public capture of the land value uplift that transit investment creates, and to judge the plan by residents retained rather than units sanctioned.

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