

The Times of India 15.02.2014

## 85% of Chennai roads of poor quality, corporation data shows

CHENNAI: Almost 85% of city roads have failed Chennai Corporation's quality test. Data accessed by TOI shows 27 of the 172 samples collected were tested, and only four roads were found to be of standard quality.

Of the samples taken for testing, 12 were collected during re-laying of roads, and nine failed. Of the 15 samples taken from completed roads, just one passed. The corporation had taken up nearly 10,000 roads for relaying at an estimated 400 crore but most re-laid roads, say commuters, began deteriorating within months.

TOI had recently exposed how contractors form cartels to take up work at high cost and compromise on the quality of work. Contractors blame it on institutionalized corruption where 10% of the project cost is to be paid to politicians and officials at different levels.

Corporation officials said they were checking the quality of newly laid roads for the first time. "We will ask contractors to relay these roads and have decided not pay any further amount to them if they fail to do it," said an official.

A quality control wing, comprising 21 employees, has been formed in the corporation. "We procured two mobile vans for site inspections and more samples will be collected from roads for tests," he said.

The quality control wing will conduct inspections to see if the required temperature was being maintained while preparing the aggregate and bitumen mix, said an official. The bitumen content, the level of penetration and road thickness should also be checked, he added.

Commuters say strict punishment to road contractors doing a shabby job will send a message. "Two days after a road is re-laid, it begins developing holes," said Vinod Jain of Sowcarpet.

Experts say inviting global tenders can ensure quality. "It cannot be ensured when work is broken into packages and handed out to local contractors. At present, there are no third party inspections to ensure quality. The money should be released only if the contractor follows all guidelines," said Roshan Toshniwal, a road expert with Transparent Chennai, an NGO.

On their part, contractors say they will not get any profit if they follow all guidelines. "The corporation should first stop interference from ward councillors and officials before taking action against us. No bill is passed without 'cuttings' being paid to politicians and officials," said a contractor. The estimated value of a project was always lesser than the market value, he added.

A few experts say systems like the one introduced in Mumbai can help to an extent. Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's Rs 60 lakh pothole tracking system allows residents to upload photographs of potholes and geotag them. Once a picture is put up on [www.voiceofcitizen.com](http://www.voiceofcitizen.com), a BMC engineer is tasked with ensuring that the contractor concerned fixes it within 48 hours.