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## Crazy rich Karachi – where the streets are paved with gold

Murtaza Irfan Ali

[m.irfan.ali@khi.iba.edu.pk](mailto:m.irfan.ali@khi.iba.edu.pk)

*Master of Science in Journalism*



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This capstone report is submitted to the Faculty of Business Administration as partial fulfillment of Masters of Science in Journalism degree

by

**Murtaza Irfan Ali**

Supervised by

**Shahzeb Ahmed**

Lecturer

Centre for Excellence in Journalism

Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi

Fall Semester 2019

Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi, Pakistan

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**Murtaza Irfan Ali**  
(Student Number: 19902)

## **Committee:**

### **Shahzeb Ahmed**

Supervisor  
Centre for Excellence in Journalism  
Institute of Business Administration (IBA)

### **Muna Khan**

Centre for Excellence in Journalism  
Institute of Business Administration (IBA)

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### **Sameer Mundhro**

Express Tribune

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Fall Semester 2019  
Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi, Pakistan

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## **Dedication**

This capstone project would not have been possible without the help of God and support of many people. I would like to thank:

- My parents for being a wall of support for me. This project is dedicated to them.
- My friend Hussain Akhter who was there for me during the research days and helped me in many ways during this project

## **Acknowledgement**

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I would also acknowledge the support of the local DMC South parking office, headed by Mr Tanveer Ahmed and his assistant Mr Ikramullah, who filled me in with the statistics and information whenever I needed them.

Similarly, Mr Zahid Kalam and Mr Muhammad Ilyas of Karachi Cantonment Board and the Clifton Cantonment Board respectively, who helped me with extremely delicate information that wouldn't have been obtainable otherwise.

Special thanks to Dr Noman Ahmed, the Dean of Architecture at NED University, who sat with me for a long interview regarding the civic limitations and parking problems in Karachi, which added a strong argument to my case.

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## **Abstract**

I am a resident of Karachi. Always have been, born and bred. I have been obsessed with the Old town that lies to the south of huge metropolis. Ever since I got my driving license, I have always been finding reasons to go and witness activity in the heart of Karachi.

Started to go there as an avid explorer, only coming to find myself first office space in the Pakistan Chowk quarters, right before M.A. Jinnah Road. Interestingly, despite my sky-high enthusiasm, I was always varied of the fact that where would I park.

Karachi also happens to be Pakistan's economic powerhouse but the irony is (and will be) that it never received its fair share of development. Which is why, to this day, I have no clue where to park, when I visit the southern district of the city. The random and sporadic parking has costed me with a hundred scratches and 2 pairs of side-view mirrors during the course of a year.

So to find exactly where I could safely and "legally" park, I set out to find some answers.



## Introduction

If you are reading this in Karachi, chances are you own a car — or a motorcycle at the very least.

If you do own a motor vehicle and use it regularly to get around the city, you'll probably relate to the frustration of finding a parking spot in most localities.

And when you do find one, you will inevitably find a man in a high-viz jacket, wearing a lime green cap with the name of some government agency inscribed in permanent black marker, rapping on your window and demanding you pay up for the spot. Most times you give in, just for the sake of not getting into an argument. It's just Rs20 or Rs30 or Rs40 or Rs50 or Rs100, after all, depending on where you're trying to park.

If you're lucky, you're handed a receipt bearing the insignia of the government agency levying the charge.

Have you ever wondered, though, why these rates differ in different spots? Which agencies charge for parking? Which can? Who are the people actually making the transaction? Who decides how much to charge? Who decides which site can be designated charged parking? Most importantly, who is getting rich off the millions extorted out of citizens in the name of charged parking?

Chances are you may not have given it so much thought. I have. I decided to at least try to understand how the system works. Keeping in mind the deadlines and the complexity of the issue at hand, I decided to focus only on district South —the oldest and most vibrant part of the city— through which I hoped to tell the story of the whole metropolis. Little did I realise what I was getting myself into.

Short answer: No one knows how the system works. Read on for the long answer.

## The City of Lights



Before we begin dissecting the whole parking business though, it is important to understand how the port city, a teeming conurbation of 16 million to 25 million people (depending on who you ask), is such a hot mess when it comes to the provision of basic civic amenities.

Karachi, the country's economic powerhouse, is a city of many anomalies. It's difficult to talk about the city's scale, owing to disputed census figures and dwindling public systems.

Once upon a time, Kurrachee—as it was called back in the day—happened to be the ideal town for the Crown to display its trading power, and with its harbour, it was soon established as “the city by the sea”.

The subcontinent's partition was an extraordinary event that saw hundreds of thousands of refugees, mostly from Northern India, come and make Karachi their home.

As a result, Karachi's population grew from a humble 400,000 in 1947 to a staggering 1,068,459 in 1948. Much like everything else, new towns and facilities were established to cater to the ever-growing population of Pakistan's newly-established capital. It grew northwards, eastwards and westwards—but its heart was always in the south.

So it wouldn't be wrong to say that the South district, particularly its Saddar Town, is a mini-Karachi in itself — what with the heritage, diversity, culture and trade it has to offer. The industrial market in the heart of the old city, Jodia Bazaar, was one of the highest tax-paying regions of Pakistan in the fiscal year 2019-2020 – so much so that combined with the Tariq Road market, in the city's East district, it paid more in taxes than Lahore and Islamabad combined.

Six blocks downwards, II Chundrigar Road – also considered the Wall Street of Pakistan – is home to offices of all the country's major financial institutions.

Then comes the Clifton bridge that bifurcates the elite from the rest of the city, entering the upscale neighborhoods of Clifton, Bath Island and further inwards to the Defence Housing Authority (DHA) located at the mouth of Sea View—Karachi's answer to Mumbai's Juhu Beach—the ultimate recreation spot for all Karachiites.

The south in a way can be called the nucleus of Karachi, which grew from a mere fishing village to a full-fledged port and now one of the busiest centers for trade in South Asia.

But even as it expanded, Karachi's legendary public transport woes led to an exponential increase in the number of cars and bikes in the city over the years. The Green Line BRT project, which was supposed to be completed by April 2017, appears to be just out of the construction phase, and is far from buses plying its routes. And that's just one of six BRT routes planned for the city, besides the Karachi Circular Railway, which has just started running on a limited route.

As a result, more and more cars and motorcycles have taken to the streets, contributing to the city's ever-growing traffic.

According to a study conducted by the NED University's Urban Engineering Department in 2017, around 800 new cars and 1,300 new bikes emerged on Karachi's

streets each day. This number increases by a good 2% - 5% per annum, with more and more vehicles joining the already congested streets of the country's financial hub.

Another report, commissioned by the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), titled *Jamming the Wheels of Economy*, notes that there were 4 million registered vehicles in 2017 – a number that had grown at an alarming rate of 38% per annum since 2013.

According to Dr. Noman Ahmed, dean of the Faculty of Architecture and Management Sciences at NED University, Karachi's total road mileage is approximately 11,250 kilometers.

“Equating the substantial increase in the number of cars against the city's static road mileage tells us that we're only putting more cars on already congested streets,” says Dr Noman.

More cars mean more cars that need to be parked somewhere – in a city that lacks basic infrastructure for its exponentially growing population.

To explain the rudimentary requirements for the city's parking systems, Dr Noman pinpointed three essential elements: time zones, space and revenue (Ahmed, 2019).

## **The basics**

Timing, of course, is everything – at least when it comes to traffic and parking in Karachi. “Morning peak hours and evening peak hours are when you make an effort to manage the vehicles per unit time, so that spaces aren’t oversubscribed,” explained Dr Noman. “The idea is to discourage people from bringing in their vehicles every day.”

He pointed to Central London as an example, where parking fees are so exorbitantly high that people think twice before bringing in their vehicles during those hours.

Business districts, industrial zones and the city centers are the areas where your normal peak hour traffic goes, said Dr Noman.

“Parking by randomness is theoretically not correct. If that happens, there are a lot of things that can go wrong,” he went on, stressing the fact that designated parking areas are vital to maintain the flow of traffic and avoid parking on the main arteries.

According to him, such spaces must be designed keeping in mind the frequency of vehicles per unit time and then applying charges accordingly.

These may be facilities provided by the government, though often, private entities are encouraged to take up this task and provide land and parking management. The public-private partnership model is also an avenue explored by developed economies.

Plus, Dr Noman said, it is necessary to understand that the operating costs of parking facilities can never cover the capital costs, let alone generate much revenue.

He was quick to point to other avenues for revenue generation, such as setting up advertising spaces at these sites.

## **‘Accidental’ Parking**

But that’s what’s needed, not what the city has. And making sense of Karachi’s current parking conditions is a near-futile endeavor.

By virtue of the lack of effective public transport in the city, the working class and elite alike tend to rely on private vehicles, which have subsequently flooded the streets.

Where do these vehicles end up being parked? The nearest available space.

Quick to point out the dearth of parking facilities in Karachi, Dr Noman says parking here is “accidental.”

As a proper facility, he claims, it has never been thought out by the authorities. “The facilities for public use have long been converted into [building] complexes or other projects because of the poor land management policies of administrative bodies.”

The eternal question of where to park in the city centre – also the hub of Karachi’s business activities – has even affected real estate, with prices for commercial property plummeting as a result.

Karachi’s powerhouse district losing its might? Strange, but true.

Driving in through II Chundrigar Road or MA Jinnah Road, clients attending meetings struggle to find parking spots – one of the reasons why commercial entities have become increasingly reluctant to open up offices in this part of town.

“The South, and especially the city centre, will reach its saturation point in the near future because of this – both for residential and commercial purposes,” states Dr Noman.

In Karachi, all roads lead South – or at least, the major arteries, such as Sharae Faisal, MA Jinnah and II Chundrigar Road do. The district’s growth skyrocketed after Partition and it’s the city’s most densely populated region.

Contrary to popular belief, according to Dr Noman, there’s no real principle giving a person the right to park in front of the apartment where they reside (but good luck convincing them otherwise).

With little in the way of managing peak hour traffic and ineffective parking policies, vehicles end up parked on the roadsides, making streets even narrower and more congested.

## Nowhere to go

Are there actually any designated parking spots where the public can park their cars without obstructing traffic?

Tanvir Ahmed, the South district municipal committee's (DMC) director for charged parking, claims there's just one in the entire district – the parking lot behind Dolmen Mall Clifton.

The parking plaza in Saddar, right across the road from Empress Market, could have been one, potentially setting a precedent for others to follow. To this day, though, it remains practically deserted.

While much criticism has been hurled at the project, Dr Adnan Qadir, the chairperson of NED University's Urban Engineering Department, points out that parking plazas are always situated away from the main markets. "For those who want such plazas right in front of their shops...that's just not going to happen."

In his view, the problem for the project arises from Karachi's brutally hot weather, making it difficult for people to walk distances under the sweltering sun.

"You need to either make supplementary places that add to the experience, like a developed walkway of sorts, or you put in a shuttle service without an extra fee," he suggests.

Instead, he says, there could be a higher parking fee – perhaps around Rs200 – so that commuters can avail such services without having to deal with the nightmare that is Saddar during peak hours (Qadir, 2019).

Utopia may exist – but Karachi is not it.

## Money matters

Most cities have some sort of parameters for collecting parking fees in designated areas. Karachi, though, has its own methods to derive the charges.

“Parking rates are determined by two things here: precedent, and not being considered a value-added service,” explains Dr Noman.

The first of these is confirmed by Tanvir. On being questioned about how the South DMC calculated parking fees in particular areas, he replies, “It’s a good question...but we don’t really know how it’s done. We just follow the prices that were in place earlier and increase them over time.”

The relevant official at the Clifton Cantonment Board (CBC), Ilyas, had a similar response.

“We take it from where the last administration leaves it. We haven’t gone and researched it to the extent where we know how it’s calculated,” he says nonchalantly.

Only one of the four agencies involved in the South district’s charged parking business – the Karachi Cantonment Board (KCB) – had a satisfactory answer to this question, and so there is little indication as to what metrics determine the costs of parking.

“They [the agencies] never dump the precedent, nor do they try to scientifically equate it,” says Dr Noman. “So if an entity is charging Rs20, the most it can do is increase it to Rs25. If they try to take Rs50, there will be a backlash and so, this is the safest way to go about it.”

He is also critical of the practice given that the parking fees are never compared against the required operational costs, which appear to play little role in determining the fees.

He further points out that charged parking wasn’t really considered a value-added service in Karachi either. In other words, when the agency representative comes to collect the fees against a parking ticket, it is with an attitude that parking is at the owner’s risk. So if you go to Saddar’s Atrium Mall, for example, paying Rs50 to park outside on Raja Ghazanfar Ali Road, you’re running a high risk of losing your vehicle’s side-view mirrors to the booming business of stolen car parts.

And the best part? You can’t even hold the parking authorities responsible.



## **The confusing distribution of power**

For many, Karachi may not be far from a mini-banana republic, but most of its current woes can be traced back to one thing – the Sindh Local Government Act (SLGA) of 2013. This is the legislation that lays out how Karachi’s – and the rest of Sindh’s – governing bodies work, right down to revenue generation, which ultimately includes charged parking. In Karachi, the municipal bodies that can collect taxes in their respective jurisdictions include the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC), the six DMCs as well as the seven cantonments.

“First things first, we have to see whether charged parking comes under the Act’s mandatory provisions or the optional ones,” says Taha Zaheer, who runs Subai Pakistan, an organization aiming to strengthen Pakistan’s assemblies and help citizens better understand the laws of the land (Zaheer, 2019).

It turns out that the SGLA, when talking about charged parking tax collection by the KMC and DMCs, uses the words “...may be...” So why, when authorities are unable to implement mandatory provisions, are they so eager about this particular optional clause, Zaheer asks rhetorically.

Well, any revenue is good revenue, of course.

“In principle, the street where I park my car is public property. Why should I pay for a space that is my property?” questions Zaheer, adding that in order to collect something that is optional, the authorities first need to do what is mandatory.

“Developing and maintaining the street in question is one of the mandatory tasks of the KMC and DMCs. Are they doing that?” he questions. “I am entitled to only pay parking fees on a street if I see something being done to develop it.”

With the SLGA, the KMC, DMCs and cantonment boards all work in parallel – in contrast to previous regimes, where the KMC was the whole and sole body responsible for the development and maintenance of Karachi and its assets.

What is baffling is that the KMC, which is supposedly the entity responsible for the entire metropolis, is now on equal footing with the DMCs, along with seven cantonment

bodies that do not answer to the Sindh government at all but rather to the Ministry of Defence – and hence, the federal government.

And so, as if things aren't confusing enough, the jurisdictions of these bodies are often adjacent to each other, especially in the South district, where there are two cantonments — the Karachi Cantonment Board (KBC) and the Cantonment Board Clifton (CBC). As a result, in the radius of a square kilometre, you can sometimes have three civic bodies holding sway, each with multiple parking sites and their own not-so-carefully determined parking fees.

The confusion has given an opening to claims by people such as former city mayor Wasim Akhtar that the KMC has been made toothless.

Zaheer, though, argues the law could not be biased. “If it is biased, it can be contested in court, and if such charges are proved, the relevant authorities must redraft it,” he says.

He points out that the city had started off quite small and though its population had mushroomed, the rules to govern it hadn't evolved in step with its growth. “The law [with regard to parking] was made back when there were fewer cars. Now, no one revisits it or has time to redraft it.”

## The Stakeholders

Karachi's South district – what may be termed the 'original Karachi' – is a melting pot of all the city has to offer. It's loud, busy and the goose that lays a golden egg for all who hold a stake in it.

The busiest district in the port city, it also has the most parking sites – 58 officially documented ones, to be precise, divided between the KMC, South DMC, CBC, and KCB. The South DMC administers 41 of these, according to its documents, followed by the 'crippled' KMC, which hold 11 sites in the district and 34 in the city as a whole. KMC officials claim they used to run 52 sites in 2015.

“These issues began to grip the KMC in 2017, as part of its systematic devolution from power after the party running it fell out of favour with the Sindh government,” maintains Babar Ali, an assistant finance officer in the KMC's charged parking department. The KCB has a similar story of decline. The city's oldest cantonment board, it was established in 1842 by the British government, initially controlling the greater part of Lines Area and Clifton.

According to its website, it was during the 70s and 80s that some of its land was handed over to the newly formed CBC.

Zahid Kalam, in charge of KCB's parking sites, says it currently has six such sites under its jurisdiction. As of November 2020, three sites had been given to a single contractor while the remaining three were under the KCB's direct supervision (Kalam, 2019).

The PA to the KCB chief executive, Muhammad Zahid, said all prior contracts had been dissolved and the 2020 auction called off due to the Covid-19 pandemic, until another auction was held. Kalam, the charged parking in-charge at the board said otherwise. CBC, too, has not awarded any new contracts for its two active charged parking sites because of the pandemic. Administering areas in the coastal south and neighborhoods of DHA and Clifton, both its sites are currently run by its own employees.

The practice of handing out sites to contractors, though, makes the situation a bit more complicated – not that it needed more complication.

According to the office of Waseem Qaimkhani, the deputy director general for KMC's charged parking, all parking sites under the KMC are run by 450 of its own employees, with none awarded to any contractors. On paper, they charge Rs20 for cars and Rs5 for motorcycles.

Almost all of the South DMC's parking sites, though, have been given to contractors, with the parking fees for cars set at Rs20 and that for motorcycles at Rs10. While the KCB has called off its auction for contracts this year, its gazette says it is entitled to charge Rs20 for cars and Rs10 for motorcycles too.

As mentioned earlier, three of its sites – at Sarwar Shaheed Road, Atrium Mall and Star City Mall – have been awarded to a contractor, Ahsan Khyber Company or Mustafa Sons, for different amounts. While the officer in charge was reluctant to share details because of KCB policies, I was able to grab a quick peek at the document, suggesting amounts of Rs720,000, Rs4.25 million and Rs5.6 million, respectively, for these sites.

Meanwhile, according to Ilyas, the CBC had planned to set up another parking site under the Gizri flyover, but was unable to do so in light of the pandemic.

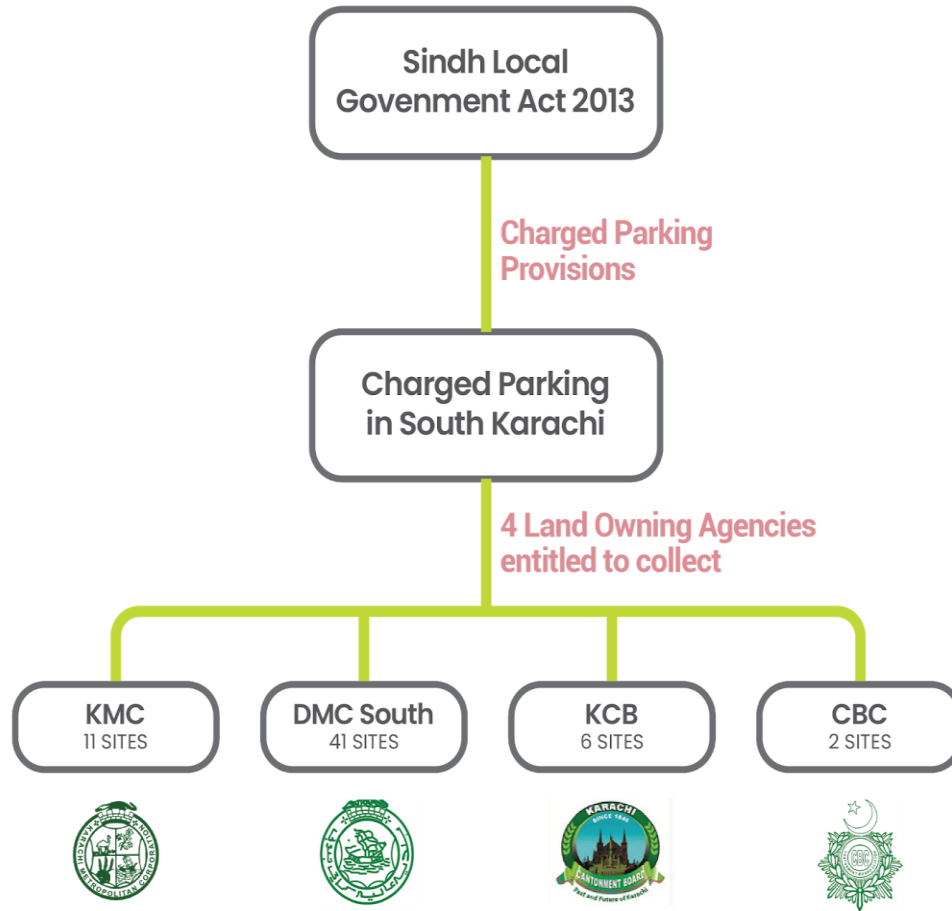
The contract for the Sea View parking site was auctioned to the previous contractor for Rs21.5 million, while that for Clifton Block 8/9, stretching from Teen Talwar to Do Talwar, was awarded for Rs19.3 million.

There's another stakeholder involved in the city's parking business too: a union of parking contractors that regulates matters for them.

“They [the union] have specific people for specific sites. They don't get involved with sites that are not in their domain,” says Ikramuddin, an inspector with the South DMC's charged parking cell.

KCB's Kalam backs this up. “Unions are everywhere. They are very strong in regulating auction costs in this way.”

# Flowchart distribution of Charged Parking bodies



## **Can Cantonment Boards charge for parking?**

In 2016, the Sindh High Court ordered all cantonment boards to stop charging parking fees, after residents of the Sea Breeze Plaza in Saddar filed a petition against parking charges being levied by the KCB in their vicinity.

The basis of their argument was the fact that the Cantonment Act of 1924 had no provision for the cantonment board to do so.

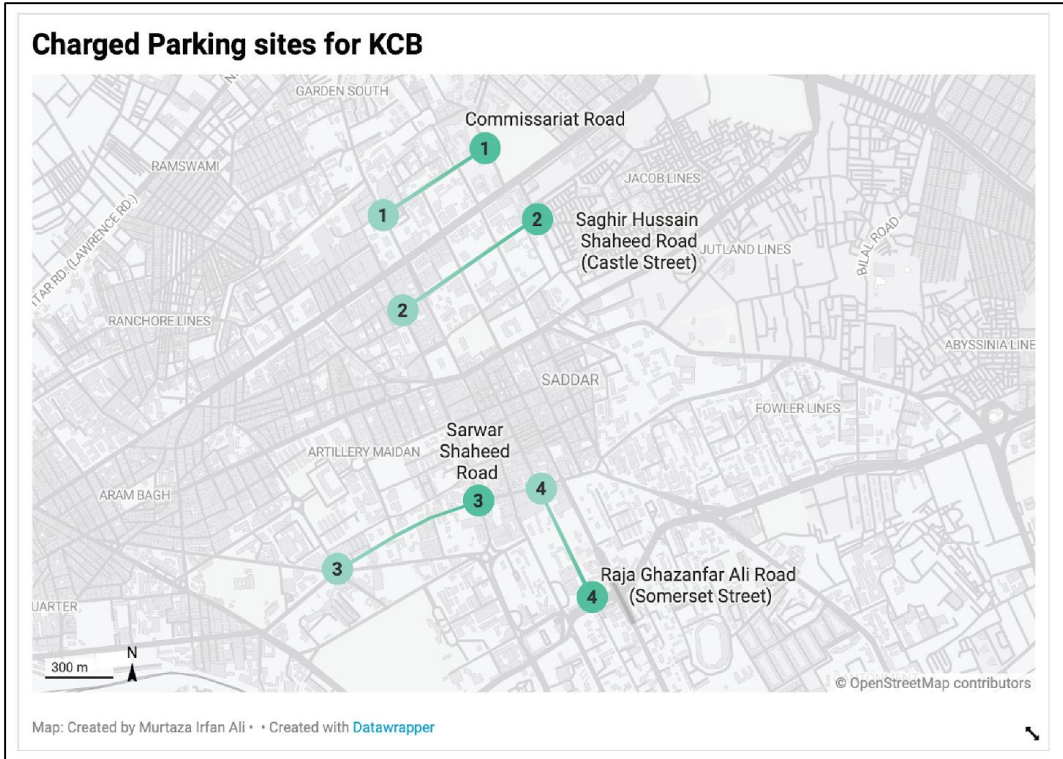
The CBC, on the hand, has introduced by-laws in 2015 that allow it to establish charged parking sites.

This gives weight to Zaheer's claim that while systems have evolved over time, the law has failed to keep up. After all, one may ask, what was traffic like in Karachi when this piece of legislation was passed 96 years ago?

But Dr. Noman has a simple answer to the question of whether the cantonments are entitled to charge for parking. "The power given to the cantonments has been vested by the Sindh government, and they can do as they please because they don't answer to the provincial government itself," he notes.

Zaheer, though, insists that amenities should never be handed over to the cantonments. "If the KMC cleans all the city's nullahs but the drains get choked near Sea View, it then becomes a cantonment problem because Sea View falls under the cantonment's jurisdiction," he gives an example.

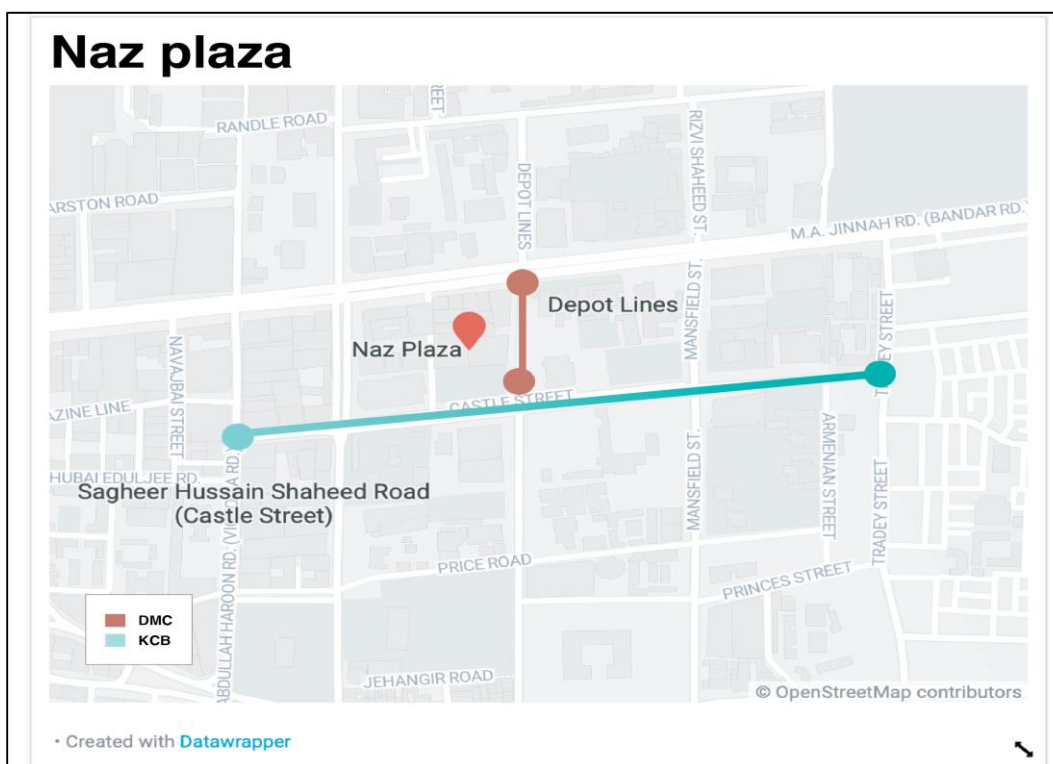
What the cantonments can and cannot do in Karachi is a separate debate, but according to Kalam, the KCB official, they have continued charging for parking in their respective jurisdiction after appealing the court's decision.



## A Fragmented Map

With the administrative fragmentation in the South district, many of its territories are divided among two agencies – and sometimes even three.

Gul Plaza, for example, is a market that attracts clientele from across the metropolis, who have a choice between two agencies if they choose to park at the designated spots there. Parking in front of the plaza, you'd be handed a ticket with the KMC's logo. Parking at the side of the building, you'd get one issued by the South DMC.



Another such site is at the intersection of the Depot Lines Road (which goes on to become Dr Daudpota Road) and Castle Street, stretching from what is colloquially referred to as the mobile market to the bus stop area. The former is administered by the KMC, while the latter is in the KCB's jurisdiction.





Dolmen Mall Clifton, too, is divided in this way, with the parking lot behind it being the South DMC’s territory, while the one next to it is run by the KMC. The same is the case with Do Talwar, where the DMC and the KMC have their own fragments to take care of.

On top of this, MA Jinnah Road – famously known by its old name, Bunder Road – is a long stretch administered by the KMC. And so, looking at some of its tributaries, you find three stakeholders in less than a square kilometer.

With all this, if you were to draw up a map of the district, all you would see is areas split up arbitrarily between the four land-owning agencies. And the best part? None of them have an updated map of the area under their control either.

After discussing the matter with academics specializing in urban planning, administrative officials in the land-owning stakeholders and legislative experts, it becomes apparent that there's obviously a political angle to this fragmentation.

In almost every case, when you look at the city's charged parking machinery, it comes down to the attempts of one political force to do away with another by usurping and restricting the latter's administrative powers. And there are always two sides to each story.

The KMC, for example, may have its long-held narrative of being 'crippled' by the provincial government, but it also doesn't have a solid track record that would permit it to be entrusted with the funds it demands.

With the never-ending politics, the mega-city has ended up in a sad state of affairs – and the movement of traffic and charged parking, while seemingly unrelated, tell a clear, appalling story of its struggles distilled to their essence.

## Doing the math

According to the *Car Park Designer's Handbook* by Jim Hill, used as a reference guide by NED University's Urban Engineering Department, the average length of a vehicle in the United Kingdom is about 2m by 4.8m (Hill, Rhodes, Vollar, & Whapples, 2005)

With the demographics of Pakistan, where cars are much smaller than in the developed Western countries, I have taken up average calculations from two popular cars in the country: the evergreen Corolla sedan and the budget-friendly Cultus hatchback.

The Corolla measures at about 1.77m by 4.75m, while the Cultus comes in at 1.6m by 3.6m. And so, we can take an approximate of 1.7m by 4.2m for an average car in Pakistan.

### Length of Local Cars

SUZUKI CULTUS  
- HATCHBACK



3.6 m

TOYOTA COROLLA  
- SEDAN



4.75 m

### Width of Local Cars

TOYOTA COROLLA  
- SEDAN



1.77 m

SUZUKI CULTUS  
- HATCHBACK



1.6 m

### An Average Pakistani Car



4.2 m



1.7 m

## **The KMC**

I had made it a point to go to one prominent site of each of the 4 land-owning agencies that prevail in the South district of Karachi. Turns out, and much to my surprise, the KMC—the largest and the oldest one of the four—did not seem to have the data available for me.

“The records have been taken away by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) as a part of their investigations”, said Mr Wasim Qaimkhani, Deputy Director Charged Parking at KMC (Qaimkhani, 2019).

He was kind enough to let me know about the public auction that was to take place in the following week, in the lawns outside the main KMC Building at M.A. Jinnah Road. As a result, I wasn't able to find even the slightest figure that could've been used to get me started on my estimations.

## **In focus: Raja Ghazanfar Ali Road (KCB)**

Known as Somerset Street under the British Raj, this thoroughfare was renamed Ghazanfar Ali Road after the Muslim League stalwart who became a minister in the newly-formed state of Pakistan and later a diplomat.

According to KCB's Kalam, the site was auctioned to Mustafa and Sons for Rs4.25 million by the KCB in June 2020, for the 2020-2021 fiscal year.

A stretch of around 290m, it starts from Atrium Mall and ends just short of the Baloch Officers Mess gate, near Avari Towers.

With no actual parking statistics for the area during the day, I set out to do my own set of calculations.

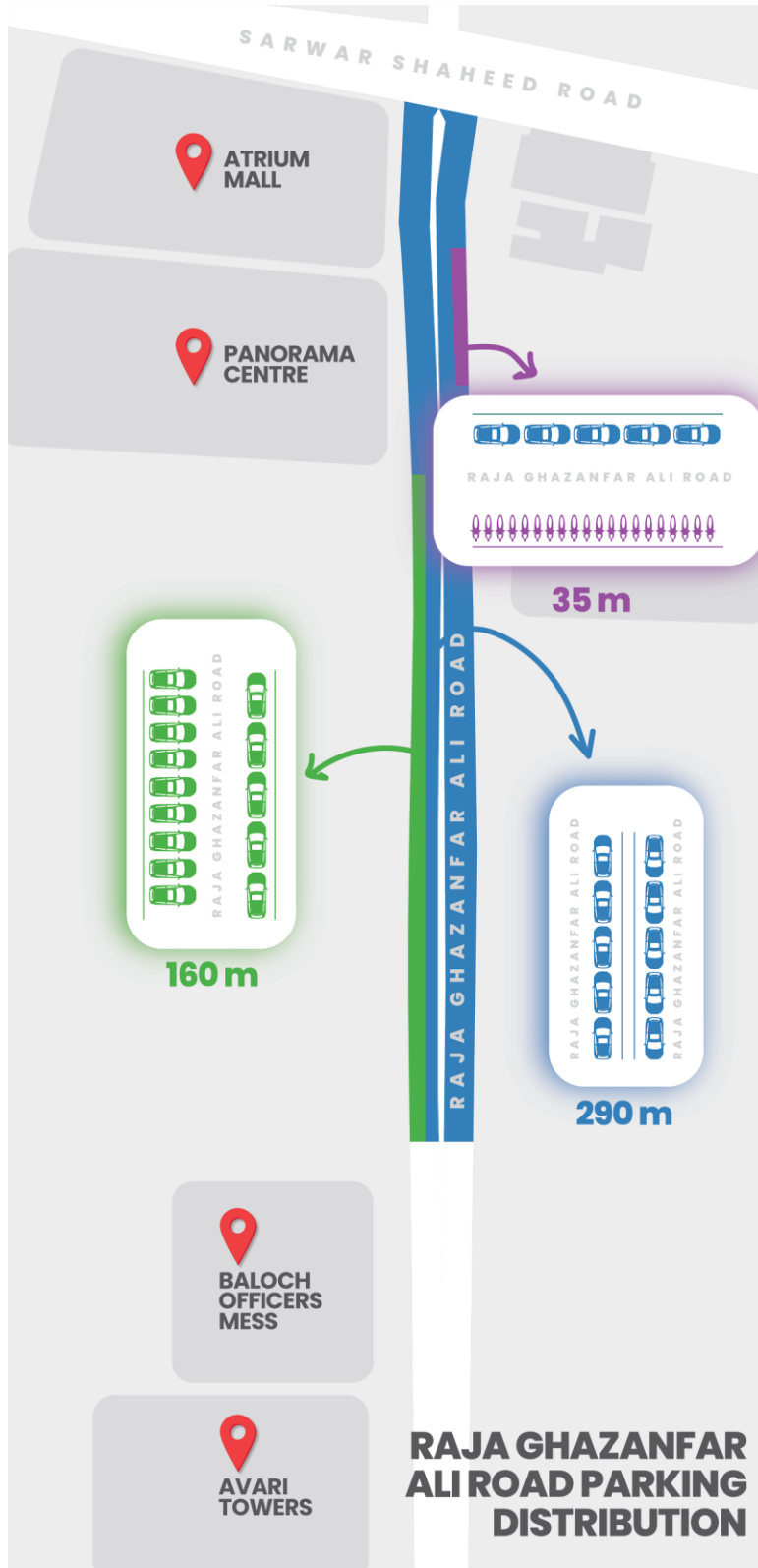
Ostensibly, for a four-lane parking avenue, with the island in the centre lined with parallel-parked cars for the entire length of 290m on both sides — adding a gap of 1m between cars — there would be about 55 cars parked in the centre on either side.

Then there is a stretch of about 35m just opposite the Atrium Mall entrance, where three and a half rows of motorcycles are packed tightly next to each other, with nearly 100 in each row and an estimated 350 in total.

Going a little further in the opposite lane, there is another length of 160m where drivers can park cars side by side. Assuming the average vehicle length to be 1.7m and the

combined distance between two vehicles to be about 2 feet (or 0.8m), each vehicle would occupy around 2.5m. And so, about 64 cars can be parked there.

All in all, about 174 cars can be parked in the dedicated sites, along with 20-25 cars parked in arbitrary spaces in the territory. This brings the figure to about 200 cars, along with 350 motorcycles, at a single point in time.



According to Kalam, an average parking spot is believed to have at least four vehicles occupying it in a single day.

Here comes the fun part.

The KCB gazette prices parking fees for a car at Rs20 and for a motorcycle at Rs10. On multiple visits to the site – driving a car and a motorcycle, respectively – I was charged Rs50 for the car and Rs20 for the motorcycle.

At the gazette parking fees, the revenue for all cars and motorcycles parked in the space at one time would add up to Rs7,000. Multiplying this by four, for the average parking fees in a day, the amount becomes Rs28,000.

On the other hand, with the actual fees being charged at the site, the sum for a single point in time comes out to Rs17,500, while that for the entire day becomes Rs70,000 – a massive difference.

	<b>Per Instance</b>	<b>Per Day (4 times)</b>	<b>Per Week (6 days)</b>	<b>Per Year (52 weeks)</b>
<b>Mentioned Price</b>	Rs.7,000	Rs.28,000	Rs.168,000	Rs.8,736,000
<b>Actual Price</b>	Rs.17,500	Rs.70,000	Rs.420,000	Rs.21,840,000
<b>Extra charge</b>				<b>Rs.13,104,000</b>

Given the auction charges of Rs4.25 million, charging motorists the stated fees leave the contractor with a yearly revenue of Rs4.5 million from this one site alone.

There were also around eight fee collectors at the site, gathering the charges and distributing parking tickets. A simple daily wage of Rs500 would add up to Rs156,000 a year, with the contractor paying them around Rs1.248 million in all. This would leave him with a profit of Rs3.29 million for the year.

Now for the actual profit.

Removing the initial bid and salaries, at the rates the contractor is actually charging, they are left with Rs16.34 million – five times the profit he would make at the stated parking fees.

And it doesn't end here.





## In focus: Boat Basin (DMC South)

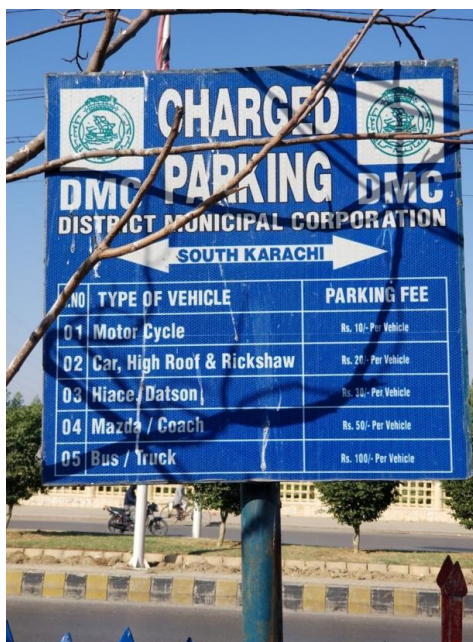
Next up is the food street on Boat Basin.

Starting at Motta’s supermarket, up until Qasre Nakheel Restaurant just before Karachi Grammar School, the 1km stretch is packed with diners during lunch and dinner hours.

With parking on two sides of the street, the parking tariff – mentioned on a neglected board – is similar to that at Raja Ghazanfar Ali Road.

This site had been auctioned off by the South DMC to Radiant & Co in June 2019, for Rs1.43 million.

Visiting the busiest part of the road at peak dining hours of around 9pm on a weekday, I was handed a Rs50 ticket that said ‘charged parking’ with no agency name.



At a second visit on a weekend, a little off the most crowded space on the block, a collector, Aijaz Hussain, brandished a Rs30 ticket with the South DMC’s credentials on it. On being asked when the charges increased beyond Rs20, he animatedly said in English, “No, I’m sorry, friend, the change is here!” – a literal translation of the ruling party’s campaign slogan.

Meanwhile, motorcycles were being charged Rs20 on the ground, instead of the stated Rs10.

According to Hussain, there were around 20 to 25 workers tasked with collecting parking fees in the area.

Measurements suggested 17 feet as the average space occupied by cars parked at an angle, while the two parking lanes on either side of the road ideally suggested 2km of parking estate, with another 100m left out for service lane openings and other no-parking areas.

Further, a ratio of 60 per cent motorcycles and 40 per cent cars was assumed – a slight increase from the 64-36 breakdown at Atrium Mall, given the relative affluence of the Boat Basin area.

Parts of the Stretch	Length (m)	Distribution (m)	Assumed Figure (Cars)	Type of parking	Cars that can be parked (40%)	Bikes that can be parked (60%)	Total Occupation of the lane (%)
Motta's -KFC	600	300	200	Angled	100	150	51.9
		300		Parallel	100	150	94.5
KFC - Dera	80	40	30	Angled	15	45	68.75
		40		Parallel	15	45	98.75
Dera - End	220	110	74	Angled	37	56	79.3
		110		Angled	37	55	79.2
					304	501	

**Note:** Angled parking is mostly towards the side where the restaurants are located. To and fro movements from the area usually has a lower parking density. (from observation)



The revenue generated from the estimated 304 cars at a time, at an average parking fee of Rs40 amounts to Rs12,160, while for 501 motorcycles, it adds up to Rs10,020 – a total of Rs. 22,180 at a single time. The official revenue generated from this traffic in the Boat Basin area at a time, however, should be Rs11,090.

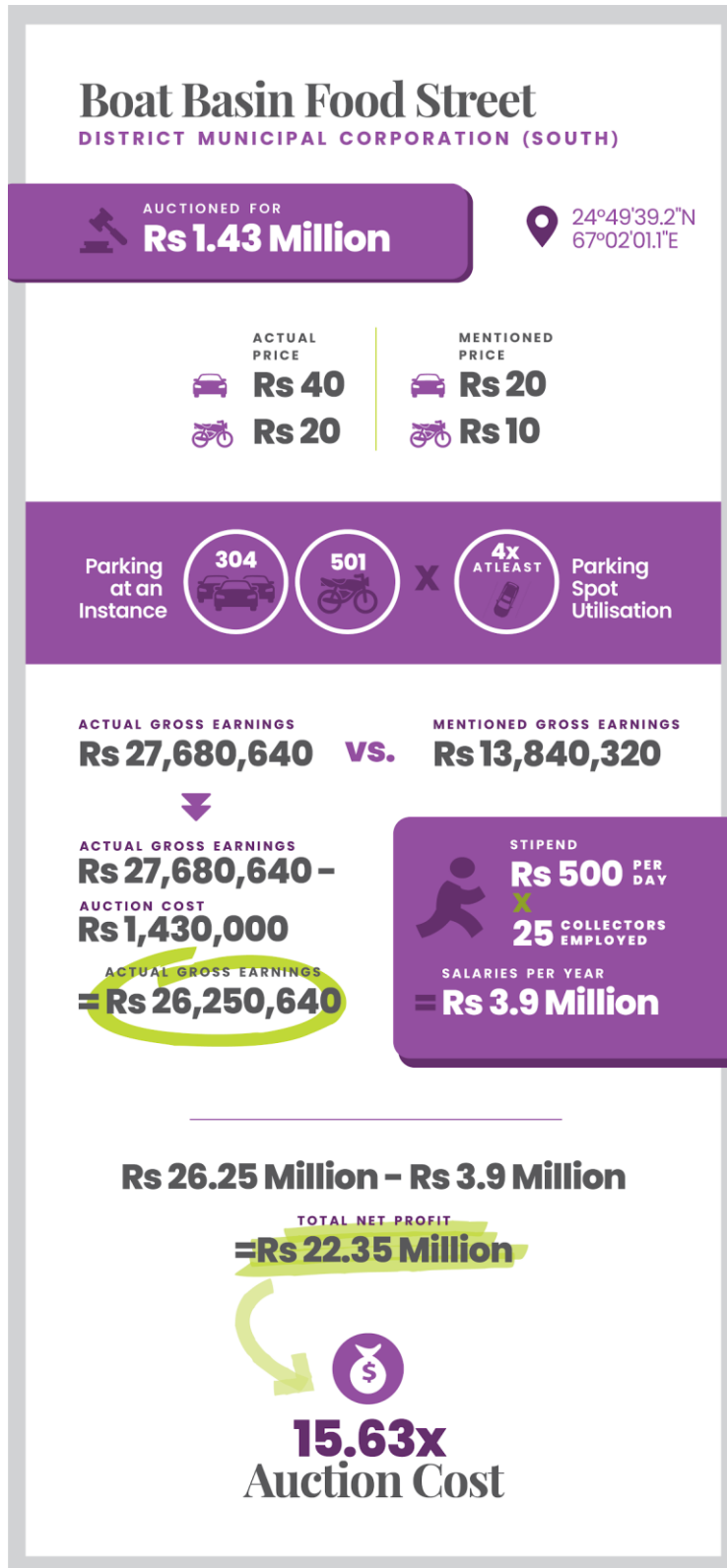
Using the same formula employed by the KCB to evaluate the occupancy of a parking spot in a day, being used at least 4 times, the total amount for a day at the actual fees would add up to Rs88,720.

	<b>Per Instance</b>	<b>Per Day (4 times)</b>	<b>Per Week (6 days)</b>	<b>Per Year (52 weeks)</b>
<b>Mentioned Price</b>	Rs.11,090	Rs.44,360	Rs.266,160	Rs.13,840,320
<b>Actual Price</b>	Rs.22,180	Rs.88,720	Rs.532,320	Rs.27,680,640
<b>Extra Profits</b>				<b>Rs.13,840,320</b>

Given the revenues for the stated fees and the auction price, the profit would be Rs12.4 million. The profits for the actual charged fees tell a different story – of Rs26.25 million in gross profits.

Take out the salaries of 25 collectors paid Rs500 each day—amounting to Rs3.9 million a year—the contractor still takes home a handsome Rs22.35 million in profit for the year – 15.6 times the auction amount!

Startled? Boat Basin isn't even their biggest parking site.



## **In focus: Sea View (CBC)**

Karachi and the sea just go together – it is impossible to separate one from the other. And Sea View beach is the one place that encapsulates the city that never sleeps in its truest sense.

Go there in the morning, and athletes of all ages will run and cycle past you. Drop by in the afternoon, and young lovers will dot the beach, skipping classes to meet each other. And as the sun goes down, the beach awakens.

All this means one thing: Sea View is where you can mint money.

Falling under the CBC’s jurisdiction, the parking space on the service lane of what is now known as Abdul Sattar Edhi Avenue – right at the beachfront – was auctioned off for Rs21.5 million last years, according to CBC parking officer Muhammad Ilyas.

According to documents on the CBC website, the parking fee collected at the entry points of the 3km strip should be Rs20 for cars and Rs10 for motorcycles. But here, too, the spectre of extra charging raises its head.

On three visits, the parking was Rs40 for a car, Rs20 for a motorcycle, and Rs30 for a car again.

Between Gate 1 and Gate 2, there are about 122 marked car parking spots, along with 36 for motorcycles – but knowing the beach belongs to the masses and not just the elite who live nearby, it’s safe to say there will always be more motorcycles than cars parked there.

An elderly ticket collector at Gate 2 says there are around eight gates for the beach. “I can tell you, I hand out 100-150 tickets for cars and motorcycles combined each day. On some days, like the weekends, the number even goes up to 200,” he estimates.



Given the locations of the gates, though, only these two churn out such high figures, while the other six can be combined for a similar amount of vehicles.

Compared to the ratio of cars and motorcycles from the previous two sites, Sea View is likely to have more of the latter than the former, and so, these calculations assume a ratio of 70:30 in the favour of motorcycles.

These calculations use an average of 125 vehicles through Gates 1 and 2 on weekdays and 200 on the weekends, along with an on-ground average tariff of Rs30 for cars and Rs20 for motorcycles.

The table below shows the figures for weekdays:



	<b>Per Instance</b>	<b>Per Day (4 times)</b>	<b>Per Week (5 days)</b>	<b>Per Year (52 weeks)</b>	<b>All Gates (8 gates)</b>
<b>Mentioned Price</b>	Rs.1,620	Rs.6,480	Rs.32,400	Rs.1,684,800	Rs.13,478,400
<b>Actual Price</b>	Rs.2,870	Rs.11,480	Rs.57,400	Rs.2,984,000	Rs.23,878,400
<b>Extra Profits</b>					<b>Rs.10,400,000</b>

Meanwhile, this table shows the figures for weekends:

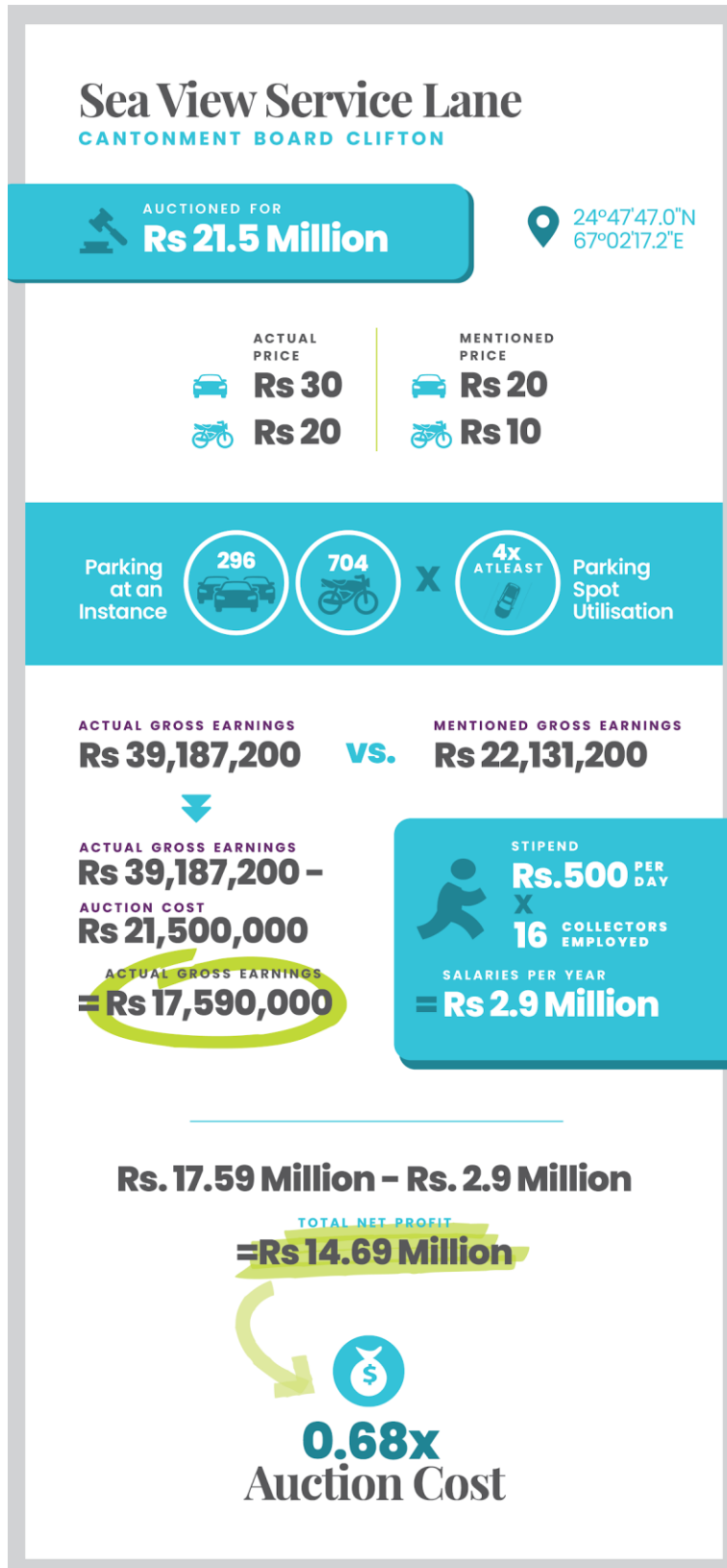
	<b>Per Instance</b>	<b>Per Day (4 times)</b>	<b>Per Week (2 days)</b>	<b>Per Year (52 weeks)</b>	<b>All Gates (8 gates)</b>
<b>Mentioned Price</b>	Rs.2,600	Rs.10,400	Rs.20,800	Rs.1,081,600	Rs.8,652,800
<b>Actual Price</b>	Rs.4,600	Rs.18,400	Rs.36,800	Rs.1,913,600	Rs.15,308,800
<b>Extra Profits</b>					<b>Rs.6,656,000</b>

Based on these calculations, the combined gross profit with the extra charges adds up to Rs25.7 million a year, as opposed to the charges defined by the CBC.

As for the salaries, there are at least two collectors at each gate, adding up to 16 with a total yearly salary of Rs2.9 million with a daily wage of Rs500 for each worker.



While the profits here may not seem too high, parking isn't the only form of revenue generation at the beach. The administration also rakes in money in the form of entry fees from the hundreds of vendors and stalls hawking their wares on the strip.



## Questions, questions and more questions

Setting out to find simple answers to simple questions about a seemingly trivial matter such as parking has only led to a multitude of further questions.

The sites explored are just three from a long list in the South district alone, without venturing into the rest of the city. But they offer a clear look at the massive amounts of money in play, encouraging contractors and agents to find creative ways to enhance profits even as the institutions fail to capitalise on the opportunity.

Ikramuddin at the South DMC points out some aspects of the increased – even if arguably fraudulent – revenue collection taking place under the authorities’ noses.

“We have blacklisted contractors involved in handing out fake parking tickets and overcharging people,” he insists, rifling through his files. “But these guys...nothing can be done about them. They go back to their old ways as soon as a little time passes after they are reprimanded.”

KCB’s Kalam, too, mentions taking action against such contractors. But in the end, it may boil down to this observation by Ikramuddin: “What can the contractors do too? They have to pay the auction fees, then the area SHO, and then the traffic police and their section officer take a slice of the pie too. If they’re not paid, they lift away parked cars randomly or sometimes even lock up the collectors.”

When this happens, bailing their workers out can cost the contractors between Rs5,000 to Rs10,000 a pop.

Though this offers a different perspective to the overcharging, questions remain: If there is so much money involved, why don’t the civic bodies revise their rates and use the increased revenue to improve their machinery? Who’s to blame for the parking situation in the city? And – more importantly – how do we fix it?

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- **Dr Nauman Ahmed** — Chairman, Department of Architecture and Planning, NED-UET, Karachi. **Ph:** 03333417250 **Email:** [nahmed@neduet.edu.pk](mailto:nahmed@neduet.edu.pk)
- **Dr Adnan Qadir** — Dean of Urban Engineering, NED-UET.  
**Email:** [cuid@neduet.edu.pk](mailto:cuid@neduet.edu.pk)
- **Mr Wasim Qaimkhani** — Deputy Director Charged Parking, KMC.  
**Ph:** 03335869597
- **Mr Tanveer Ahmed** — Director Charged Parking, DMC South.
- **Ikramuddin “Inspector”**  
**Ph:** 91211429-30
- **Zahid Kalam** — Officer Charged Parking, KCB  
**Ph:** (021) 99204311
- **Babar Ali** — Assistant Finance Officer, Charged Parking, KMC  
**Ph:** (021)99216446
- **Muhammad Ilyas** — Parking Officer, CBC  
**Ph:** 35847831-2 Ext. 304
- **Taha Zaheer** — Founder, Subai Pakistan  
**Ph:** 03452399555 **Email:** [taha.zaheer@hotmail.com](mailto:taha.zaheer@hotmail.com)
- **“Pathan”** — Ticket collector at Naz Plaza (No agency, no ticket)
- **Aijaz Hussain** — Collector at Boat Basin (DMC South)
- **Qayyum** — Collector at Forum (DMC South)
- **Aziz** — Collector at Gul Plaza (DMC South)