



Runways to the Sky

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Road building in the Maldives - an archipelago of small coralline islands - sounds a bit like a euphemism for a ridiculous task. Maldivian roads present uniquely closed circuits, as they loop around and cross-cut discrete islands on the Indian Ocean archipelago - a location better known not for its connectivity but for the appeal of its isolation. The Republic of Maldives comprises of around two thousand islands (Bell 1940), of which about two hundred are inhabited. Only three roads link up otherwise disconnected islands to form a continuous landscape. Additionally, of the 90,000 square kilometres of national territory of the Republic of Maldives, only three hundred square kilometres is recognised as



land (Bremner 2016: 289). The 'real road', some would claim, should be considered as the water that surrounds the islands, with the series of ferry channels between the islands and the atolls as the public road network that the fragmented polity of the Maldives has never fully realised.

Instead, roads emerged as dominant as a concrete instantiation of modernity and development on the islands.

The common Divehi term for development, *thara'gee*, is a relatively new word, with *thara* said by some to derive from the English word tarmac. *Thara'gee* is thus explicitly linked with concrete or asphaltic manifestations of change on the islands (see Heslop and Jeffery, forthcoming).