

# A Manifesto for an Equitable, Accessible & Sustainable Mobility

<http://bengalurumobility.wordpress.com/>

## A Response to Bangalore's Transport & Congestion Crisis

We believe that mostly everything related to our city's mobility planning, decision-making and implementation is broken and needs to be fixed. We present this manifesto as our approach to fixing the situation as we see it. What we **envision** is the following:

- A **livable city** with **livable neighborhoods**
- A public transport system that is fast, efficient, and cheap
- A **pedestrian and cycling friendly** city
- A significant increase in the share of public transport in everyday travel
- Drastically reduced usage of cars and two-wheelers
- Clean air free so that everyone can lead a healthy life.
- Safety on the roads so that children, the aged, and differently abled can move freely
- Participatory, democratic and inclusive mobility planning

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## Current approaches to the transportation issue & their drawbacks:

The current approach to solving our city's transport-related problems is not working and will not work, unless changes are made. Private vehicles have mushroomed on our roads at the expense of public transit. This is resulting in skewed usage of an important resource - our roads. The city belongs to every one of its residents. All its resources, including roads, need to be equitably allocated. Consider this -

- 5500 BMTc buses carry 45% of the population, or, 38 lakh people every day!
- 17,00,000 two-wheelers carrying 25% of the population
- 5,00,000 cars carry 7% of the population, or, 9 lakh people

Cars occupy maximum road space while carrying minimum number of people.

A Bangalorean who takes a public bus to his workplace should not have to pay, in terms of wasted time, for the fact that private vehicles are holding up traffic along the route. She should also not have to pay a higher fare to subsidize otherwise loss-making air-conditioned buses. A child cycling to school should not have to be exposed to danger of speeding motor vehicles and to pollutants spewed by these vehicles. Similarly, aged people and people with special needs should all be able to move around freely. No one should have to suffer sound and air pollution nor endure dangerous traffic that has pervaded even our local neighborhoods.

We are subsidizing use of private vehicles in a variety of ways. One of them is through increased usage of road space for moving and for parking. Another is increased travel times for users of more efficient modes of travel like public buses and walking and cycling.

To address congestion resulting from burgeoning private transport, we have many projects worth thousands of crores. Some of them are misguided attempts to ease movement of the relatively well-off people of our city traveling in their own vehicles, at the cost of the rest of its residents. Road-widening, flyovers, underpasses, signal-free roads are some examples. Others projects, like Namma Metro, are too costly, will take too long, and will deliver minimal benefits to the city when completed. Most of these projects are unconcerned with using existing infrastructure efficiently. They ignore the fact that congestion cannot be made to vanish with the magic wand of new infrastructure. They also ignore the fact that cheaper, faster alternatives exist. In addition, they are harming the livelihood of affected people, eating away the city's green cover, and marring its aesthetics permanently. And the quality of life of our city's residents is plummeting.

The deep, underlying issue is lack of public consultation when taking decisions on mobility. All these projects have been conceived without active participation of the most important stakeholder - the resident who calls the city her home. Whatever public participation has happened is restricted to a certain section of the city's residents. Such top-down, elitist planning will no longer do. People will have to be included in the decision-making process. It is their city, they need to have the decisive voice.

There is a way out. We need to involve the public and design a system round a core consisting of fast, efficient, and cheap public transport and non-motorized modes of travel. We need to dispassionately take steps to remove private vehicles from public roads by various means. If people still want to use their cars or two-wheelers we need to price their use of the public space appropriately. We should work towards a city in which, when people want to travel around the city either for work or for pleasure their first choice should be either public transport, or walking, or cycling, or indeed some other form of non-motorized transport. We need to include the needs of differently-abled people when planning & designing mobility systems.

The following are our demands from the future municipal corporators of Bangalore:

## **Demands On the way forward**

### **1. Promote CyBaNa - Cycling, Bussing and Nadiyodu (walking); Discourage use of two-wheelers and four-wheelers**

Make bus travel fast by dedicated lanes on major roads, or by dedicating entire roads to buses, or any other means. Make it cheap by keeping fares low. Dedicate clearly marked space to cyclists and pedestrians on roads. Make them attractive so that people use them, say, by planting shade-giving trees. Penalize private vehicle usage by making parking more expensive, levying congestion tax on vehicles entering core city areas, by daily registration number based usage, and any other means possible. Introduce better designed bus routes. The National Urban Transport Policy clearly gives priority to public transport, pedestrians, cyclists, and suggests measures to reduce private vehicles. ***Follow the National Urban Transport Policy during planning and implementation.***

### **2. Make public transit accessible economically and physically**

Re-route BMTC from its present system centered around K.R.Market, Majestic and Shivajinagar. Put up bus-information systems at all bus-stops. Make bus-information accessible through sms and the internet. Public bus shelters are non-existent at some bus stops, fix this. Non-kannada speaking people too have difficulty currently in using BMTC services, allow for other language boards. Volvo bus fares keep reducing and ordinary bus-fares keep increasing. Don't just subsidize the Volvos, all bus-users need to be subsidized.

### **3. Utilize existing road space equitably - disallow parking on roads**

Parked vehicles occupy up to 30% of available road width. We demand that parking be banned on busy roads and dedicated parking lots and basements of commercial complexes be used instead. Maintain existing roads well and encroachment free, to allow smooth movement of vehicles

### **4. Create awareness and dialogue on transportation issues - make use of public transit meaningful**

After all, it affects the quality of their lives directly. Let everyone understand the impact their choices have on their lives, the lives of their children and loved ones, and indeed everyone around them. Educate them on their civic responsibilities. Have a sustained campaign through various media. Give them the means and motivation to change.

### **5. Streamline traffic movement**

Synchronize signal lights so that hitting one green light allows one to hit several green signals in succession. This is a well known technique to improve road utilization and reduce trip duration.

## 6. Make roads pedestrian & cyclist friendly

- **Pedestrian crossings MUST be at road level:** Zebra crossings should be *preceded* by speed-breakers and/or traffic lights to enable pedestrians to cross without worry.
- **Strict enforcement of a ban on use of high-beam headlights, which cause driver blindness and consequently high risk to pedestrians at night. Better implementation of pedestrian signals:** After waiting for 3 minutes pedestrians are given just 10 seconds or so during which they must run across the road to avoid being trampled by traffic itching to get started. Even this window is routinely violated. Violators must be punished, and the time window for pedestrians must be increased. Recently installed pelican signals are a step in the right direction, but need to be more widely deployed, and strictly enforced.
- **Corridors free of motorized vehicles should be created:** Streets with high pedestrian density (Commercial Street, Brigade Road) could become pedestrian plazas, like Kolkata's Lindsay Street, and New York's Times Square.
- **Dedicated bicycle lanes** should be provided on all major roads for safety of cyclists, and incursions by motorized vehicles should be penalized.
- **Provide for cycle parking at all public facilities**
- **Provide Cycle racks on all buses**
- **Provide theft and accident insurance cover for the disadvantaged amongst cyclists**
- **Improve quality of footpaths:** Most pavements are unusable thanks to poor quality surface, slopes, very steep access points (often 1 foot high), and encroachments by parked & moving vehicles (two-wheelers) electric transformers, and illegal constructions. This forces pedestrians to walk on the road alongside and in between motorized traffic. Local residents should be given powers to decide on footpaths and fix them
- **Street trees provide much needed shade for cyclists and pedestrians.** Protect them. Grow more of them

Create a well-funded, well-equipped **Non-motorized transport cell within BBMP** to focus on the above.

What creates an enabling environment for increasing the number of walking trips is a good public realm strategy. We must provide for more public spaces like pedestrian only roads, open spaces; we must have a vibrant pedestrian street life. Having good, pedestrian friendly, safe and vibrant public spaces will draw more pedestrians to the streets.

## 7. Allocate space on the roads for Street Vendors

Street vendors are an integral part of our city's economy and roads. While planning the roads of the city and transportation policies it is important to include the street vendors and their concerns in the process. Towards this, The National Policy on Urban Street Vendors 2009 should be implemented immediately.

## 8. Transparent, Participatory and Democratic Governance for Mobility issues

This is the most important recommendation, for it impacts most other issues beneficially if it is done right. Involve people in every stage of mobility planning especially before projects are finalized. It is their city. Ensure transparency in all aspects using necessary means. Make public consultation inclusive - let people from all social strata provide inputs. The required laws are in place to democratize decision making - follow them

**An elected BBMP, the MPC and BMLTA should be responsible for mobility within Bangalore**

**Disband extra-constitutional bodies such as ABIDE, VISIN, INFRA** Elite groups and special interests and lobbying should have no special seat at the planning table. This will only lead to blinkered thinking and narrow approach to problem solving. Use disinterested experts from academia for technical insights and let people's representatives and people take decisions.

**Decentralize** - Ward Committees should be empowered to take care of footpaths, cycle lanes and other pedestrian and cycling infrastructure

## **Demands On existing approaches**

### **1. Road widening is a temporary solution at best, we need to stop it.**

Indiscriminate and misguided road-widening is destroying thousands of homes, livelihoods and urban greenery. Road widening is similar to inserting stents to expand narrowed arteries while the patient continues to eat excessive amounts of cholesterol-rich food. It won't work in the long run. 5 years ago we had 18 lakh vehicles, now we have 30 lakh. 5 years hence we'll have 50 lakh. Then what? Do I really have the right to break your home or shop so I can travel faster for just a couple of years? *Indiscriminate road widening is a knee-jerk, expensive, irreversible, destructive reaction that does not address the root cause of vehicular congestion.*

### **2. Don't let planning be divorced from the real world and the very real people living in it**

Currently, planning concerned with mobility-related projects involves no public involvement or approval. Just to name one instance, Tagore Circle in Basavanagudi had so little traffic that even a traffic light was not there. Now an underpass is coming up there. Who planned it? Basavanagudi residents have not been consulted at all. Most of them oppose the project. What happens to their voice? Don't ignore their concerns and wisdom, and that of the rest of the city's citizens. It is our city - we need to have a voice in everything that happens to it.

### **3. Flyovers, underpasses and signal-free roads - expensive, exclusionary and pointless. No more of these, please**

These solutions, without proper planning merely shift congestion points from one point to another. Further, by allowing vehicles uninterrupted, high-speed travel, these "solutions" deny pedestrians the ability to safely cross our streets. Cyclists, the elderly, children and the differently-abled are marginalized to make way for vehicles. Both solutions are FLAWED because they are fundamentally self defeating: they facilitate private vehicle usage, which in turn drives the growth of the vehicular population, which in turn creates demand for more road infrastructure.

### **4. Immediate review of viability of the Metro**

The cost of the metro was initially estimated as 5,800 crores. It has now jumped almost double to 11,500 crores. And not even half the project is complete. Statistics from Delhi Metro, released by the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, show that Metro usage estimates are wildly optimistic. Unless every locality can access the Metro with a small walk, adoption of Metro by the entire city will not happen. Why pursue such a costly project of questionable utility over many cheaper and quicker alternatives? BRT systems have carrying capacity that is comparable to the metro, at a fraction of its cost. Stop work on the Metro and consider such alternative solutions like the BRT, before more money is spent.

### **5. Skywalks, pedestrian subways, concrete foot-high medians. Why penalize the pedestrian?**

- Skywalks do not address the needs of differently-abled and senior citizens, nor the needs of cyclists, vendor-carts, people with luggage and other non-motorized means of transport. The pedestrian is harming the city environment the least. In fact she is humanizing the cityscape. Don't penalize her by asking her to walk up a skywalk just to get across the road.

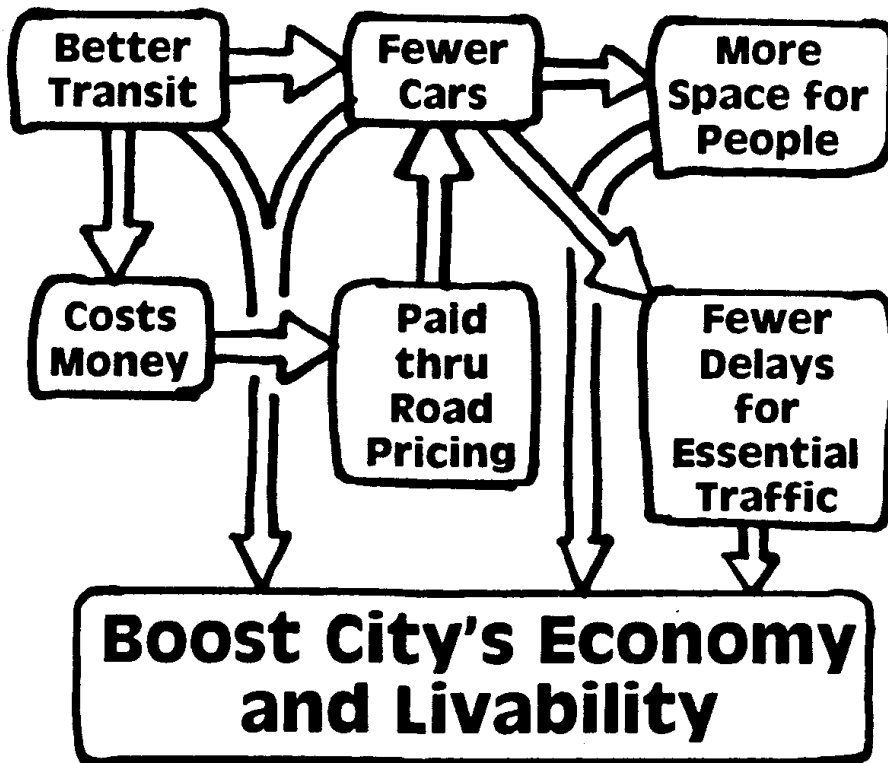
- Poorly maintained pedestrian subways are little used and when used they are used reluctantly. They get flooded during rains and present themselves as dark, dangerous places. They are also frequently used for illegal activities.
- Crossing the road by taking advantage of a speed breaker requires one to continuously dodge vehicles moving at different speeds. Many speed-breakers actually span the entire zebra crossing. Vehicles rapidly accelerate after covering half the crossing, negating the idea of a safe pedestrian zone.
- Road medians are inherently pedestrian unfriendly. Breaks in these medians are few and far between, prompting people to climb over them to cross the road in a very risky manner.

## Annexure

### 1.

The following diagram shows a system that can be self-reinforcing and boost a city's livability and also its economy:

## How It Works:



(Source: <http://www.auto-free.org/>)

### 2. Some critical facts

#### a. Rapid rise of private vehicles on our roads

A rise in prosperity levels and ready access to easy finance & and prosperity has led to a rapid increase in the number of private vehicles in Bengalooru.

- 19 lakh vehicles in 2002
- 31 lakh vehicles in 2007
- 42 lakh vehicles in 2012 (estimated)

## **b. Disproportionate number of people moved by private vehicles & Public transit**

An overwhelmingly larger number of people are carried by existing public transit - BMTC - as compared to private vehicles

- 5500 BMTC buses carry 45% of the population, or, 38 lakh people every day!
- 5,00,000 cars carry 7% of the population, or, 9 lakh people
- 17,00,000 two-wheelers carrying 25% of the population

In addition to usage of road space by moving vehicles, parking of private vehicles takes up an estimated 30% of road area. Users of private vehicles are pulling more than their weight in terms of consumption of roads, a common resource which should be shared equally by all citizens.

## **c. Deterioration of health and safety**

Deaths and injuries are on the rise in Bangalore roads as are pollution related health problems. According to Deccan Herald (Jun 14, 2007), between 2004 & 2006, the number of pedestrian fatalities rose by 44%. The deadliest roads are Outer Ring Road, Tumkur Road, Hosur Road, Sarjapur Road, Electronics City, Bannerghatta Road, Mysore Road & Mahadevapura.

## **d. Accessibility & affordability**

**Accessibility:** "Walkability Index is calculated by weighing parameters like footpath length, length of major roads in the city and available pedestrian facilities. The higher the index, the better the pedestrian facilities in the city. According to the index, Chandigarh gets a 0.91, New Delhi 0.87, Mumbai 0.85, Ahmedabad 0.85, Kolkata 0.8, Pune 0.81, Chennai 0.77, Hyderabad 0.68, Jaipur 0.64 and, **at the bottom of the heap, Bengaluru at 0.63.**" (Source: DNA India, 28/7/2009)

**Affordability:** Public transport costs more in Bangalore than any other Indian city. Incredibly, majority of BMTC service users do not use Volvo buses, and end up subsidizing the cost of operating the expensive luxury fleet. The irony is deep in that the poor are subsidizing the rich when it comes to BMTC services.

## **e. Huge costs of Metro Rail Project**

Namma Metro is a high cost project.

- Current cost estimates are 12,000 crores for just Phase 1. Phase 1 is expected to cater to only 10 lakh customers. BMTC today caters to 38 lakh.
- Based on data from Delhi & Kolkata, such ridership projections are notoriously optimistic. The Delhi Metro ridership is 29% of the revised ridership estimate, 24% of the original estimates!

The huge sums involved will affect future government expenditures especially those aimed at social justice, since the government can always say, 'We don't have the money'.