

SAVE BANGALORE COMMITTEE

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Dear friend,

You must have noticed that, with a lot of fanfare, BBMP has taken up widening of more than 220 roads across the city claiming that 'Road widening is inevitable to address the massive traffic woes'. Equally inevitable is the demolition of thousands of houses and shops – in whole or in part - displacing lakhs of people. The process has started with many houses already flattened by the JCBs. There is palpable anxiety among the people in general and those who have received eviction notice in particular.

Save Bangalore Committee – a city level platform of citizens' forums - has raised the following serious questions, put forth relevant demands and has organised a **Citizens' Convention on 4 July at NGO Bhavan** to voice the genuine interests of the people. Renowned judges, writers and artists are participating in this convention.

At the outset, we wish to assert that we are NOT 'anti-development'. We are definitely for the betterment of city's infrastructure. We've already taken up many movements in the past (see page 4) towards better civic facilities. We've provided scientific suggestions involving experts. We love our city. Our biggest concern is that the road widening project is conceived, planned and being executed in a manner that can prove to be a recipe for disaster for our beloved Bangalore!

Questions:

1. No doubt, traffic congestion is the bane of our city and urgent remedial measures are required. But is widening of roads, the most optimal measure? Which roads are most appropriate for widening and **how is it decided?** Are there other alternative options that do not warrant displacement? Has BBMP conducted any scientific study on these matters?
2. It is common knowledge that BMTC - the notorious public transport service - is the **principal cause** behind the ever-increasing number of vehicles on the city's roads that has crossed 32 lakhs. BMTC and the government should provide **convenient, reliable and affordable** transport service with sufficient number of buses covering all parts of the city. The number of ordinary buses has not kept pace with the growing population at all; but, air-conditioned 'Volvo' buses - that charge 4-5 times more than the regular fare and run empty during non-peak hours - are seen more and more on city's roads! Is it enough to declare a 'Bus Day' for cheap publicity? **If public transport service is improved, it naturally results in lesser vehicle density.** What measures are taken to meeting this growing demand?
3. Work has already begun on **Metro rail project**. Metro has promised a carrying capacity of 12.22 lakhs in 2011 (and 19.72 lakhs in 2021). If this snail-paced work is completed on schedule and **rapid, reliable, inexpensive** service is guaranteed, it is very likely that the number of private vehicles on the roads comes down. And, there are talks of **Mono rail/LRT, BRT systems** that promise to connect areas as far as Outer Peripheral Ring Road and act as feeder to Metro. Has BBMP considered all these aspects while deciding to widen the roads?
4. Has BBMP conducted an **impact study** on environment, green canopy cover and livelihood of the displaced people? What efforts are made to interact with concerned and affected citizens upfront and resolve the

questions and anxieties? Is it too much to expect that a project meant for 'public interest' be preceded by a 'public interaction'? How can a responsible elected civic agency like BBMP simply issue notices to people to vacate themselves or get vacated forcibly, that too, at their own cost? **Is it democracy or autocracy?**

5. Those stripped of their land or building, get neither money nor alternate site – traditional forms of compensation in such large infra projects. Instead, they get **TDRs** (Transferrable Development Rights). But the havoc wrecked by TDRs in Mumbai is well-known today. Private developers amassed TDRs under projects meant to rehabilitate slum dwellers in Mumbai. They used these TDRs (called 'Slum TDRs') to expand their property in prime areas like Bandra, Chembur, Khar, Santa Cruz that has led to haphazard and unrestrained development. This has resulted in poor quality construction, drinking water crisis, endless traffic snarls, packed roads and so on. **What if this happens to Bangalore leading to a bigger infrastructure crisis than solving perhaps, a smaller one?** TDR rates - similar to stock quotes - are market driven and private developers who can be influential manipulators are eyeing TDRs. So, if the TDR rates are down, the retail owners who surrender their land for TDRs could be the ultimate losers!
6. If you question the rationale behind TDRs, BBMP dodges it with an excuse: 'What to do? Our coffers are empty'! But why are they short of funds when they have an assured revenue worth thousands of crores? They collect property tax; they have JNNURM aid; Dr.Yeddyurappa has announced a fabulous grant of Rs.18,872 crores (driven largely by loans) in the last state budget meant for Bangalore infrastructure development in the next 3 years that includes roads and transport. In 2009-10, in terms of property tax, Chennai Corporation collected Rs.500 crore, Delhi Corporation collected Rs. 700 crores but BBMP collected Rs.750 crores! **What has BBMP done to arrest corruption and massive pilferage of public funds?**
7. Even if people take recourse to legal action to get these glaring policy anomalies addressed, the courts are washing their hands off with a standard disclaimer that these infra projects are in 'larger public interest'. But, what is the prime mover of these projects? **Public interest or the interest of politician-developer-bureaucrat nexus?** Otherwise, why there is a pall of secrecy? Why the requests for information under RTI Act typically evoke no response from the Palike?
8. The politician-builder-bureaucrat evil nexus is garnering a large share of funds in the infrastructure corpus. **Who will repay all the money** borrowed from various sources including World Bank for the so-called development? Us or them?
9. **Will this road widening scheme end with the current scope?** Once this process – so obviously meant for the benefit of builders, mall owners and politicians - starts, will it not engulf the whole city like a wild fire?
10. **Significantly, there are experts who have questioned this method of addressing traffic problem by widening roads.** "Widening roads to ease traffic congestion is ineffective and expensive at the same time, it's like trying to cure obesity by loosening your belt." says Roy Kienitz, Executive Director of Washington- based Surface Transport Policy Project (STPP). An analysis of the respected Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) shows that the capacity improvement plans like widening of roads has had virtually no impact on traffic congestion in major US urban areas in the last 15 years. Has BBMP considered these expert opinions?

Such large-scale malpractices going on in the name of 'infrastructure development' cannot be fought by mere complaints, memorandums or individual struggles. It requires a **city-level organisation of conscious citizens**; it requires a common platform of local citizen forums; it demands a firm resolve and a plan of action to build up movements in a systematic manner. Then, and only then, it would be possible to ensure that peoples' opinion will

get counted in matters related to development; to root out corruption in the corridors of civic agencies like BBMP, BMRDA, BDA, BMTC; and to make public interest as the focal point of any talk of development! It is significant that peoples' protests have forced the BBMP to suspend road widening works at certain places. Such struggles have to be integrated at the city-level and further developed to consolidate this victory. Towards this end, 'Save Bangalore' Committee is organising a **Citizens' Convention on 4th July at NGO Bhavan**. So, on this occasion, Save Bangalore Committee puts forth the following highly relevant demands:

Demands:

1. Ensure that **people's interest and NOT the interest of politician-bureaucrat-builder nexus** is the focal point in all infrastructure development works including road widening
2. **Stop all road widening activities immediately** and appoint a **quasi-judicial body** to oversee all matters related to infrastructure development
3. Consider the reduction in traffic density due to Metro/Mono/LRT/BRT projects while deciding on road widening. Ensure on-time completion of these ongoing projects. **Ensure reliable, affordable and rapid rail transit service.**
4. Improve BMTC-managed public road transport service. Ensure sufficient number of buses connecting all parts of the city. Ensure optimal frequency. **Ensure it is affordable to low income groups.**
5. Explore and implement alternate options such as flyovers, underpasses, magic boxes, co-ordinated signal system etc..
6. **Scrap TDRs immediately**
7. Any road widening should be taken **ONLY** after:
 - clearance from the quasi judicial body
 - taking concerned citizens and forums into confidence
 - adequate compensation over and above market price and rehabilitation before any acquisition of property
 - protect the interest of displaced tenants
8. **Stop awarding projects to private contractors and builders.** Government and civic agencies should take up all infrastructure development activities
9. **Ensure ecological balance**, ensure that overall green cover is replenished and enriched by replanting even if felling of trees is warranted as the last resort
10. Take immediate measures to **arrest corruption** in BBMP, BDA, BMRDA and other civic agencies and ensure stringent punishment to guilty
11. Take measures to prevent **vertical growth in the central parts** of the city
12. Make all information on planned on on-going infrastructure development projects **freely available**; provide all required information for queries under **RTI Act**
13. **Protect heritage sites**, take stringent measures to prohibit any construction in and around such sites
14. **Enforce mandatory parking space** in large multi-storey commercial, industrial or residential buildings

Convention	
Place	NGO Bhavan, Cubbon Park
Date & Time	4 th July, 2010 10.30 AM
Speakers	Justice S. Rajendra Babu (ex-Chief Justice of Supreme Court) Dr. U. R. Anantha Murthy (Jnanapeeth award winning Author) Sri. H.G. Somashekara Rao (Film & Theatre artist) Sri. L.V. Sriranga Raju (ex-Chief Engineer, Bangalore Mahanagara Palike) Dr. B. R. Manjunath (Convener, Save Bangalore Committee) Dr. H. G. Jayalakshmi (General Secretary, AIMSS)

Achievements of Save Bangalore Committee so far:

1. In 2005-06, victorious movement organised by Vivekanandanagar Citizens' Forum – a constituent of Save Bangalore Committee - demanding asphaltting of roads. Demands achieved.
2. In 2007, successful movement against the attempt by KPTCL to grab Central College Grounds premises to install power substation; successful movement against BBMP's attempt to convert **5 playgrounds** including Malleswaram Grounds and Jayanagar Freedom Park; wholehearted support and guidance extended by veteran freedom fighter **H.S. Doreswamy**, veteran theatre artists **H.G. Somashekara Rao** and **R.Nagesh**, renowned cricketers **G.R.Viswanath** and **Brijesh Patel**, former world Snooker champion **Arvind Savur** and others
3. In 2007, successful movement organised by Malleswaram Citizens' Forum – a constituent of Save Bangalore Committee – demanding railway overbridge at Mathikere and demand achieved.
4. In 2008, successful movement jointly organised by Malleswaram and Rajajinagar Citizens' Forums – constituents of Save Bangalore Committee – demanding improvement measures at Malleswaram Railway Station such as public display system, loud speaker announcement, platform extension, toilet facility etc.. and major demands achieved.
5. In 2008, protest in front of BBMP office and meeting with Health Minister Sriramulu demanding 'fogging' and other measures to control the spread of Chikungunya and Dengue epidemics. As a result, **mosquito menace control measures** taken up by BBMP in several areas.
6. In 2008, successful movement against 'Akrama-Sakrama' plan and BBMP was forced to put the plan on hold
7. In 2009, victorious movement organised by Rajajinagar Citizens' Forum – a constituent of Save Bangalore Committee - demanding asphaltting of roads. Demands achieved.
8. In 2009, Save Bangalore Committee took active part in the successful movement against ID Card system at Lalbagh
9. Movements against street dog menace, drainage overflow, waste disposal, underpass at Basavanagudi Tagore circle, demanding traffic police at busy junctions at Rajajinagar etc..

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