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These streets were made for walking!

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*BACK ON OUR FEET: On vehicle-free days, Church Street is a busy place indeed**By Manisha Nainani**Pedestrians, there is some good news: Plans afoot to give you more space*

Bengaluru may soon get more 'pedestrianised' streets. The good response to Church Street pedestrianisation, has prompted officials to make plans to increase the number of pedestrianised streets where vehicles can be kept at bay and the walkers can take over the street for a day.

V Manjula, Commissioner, Directorate of Urban Land Transport (DULT) said, "If groups, resident welfare associations, and citizens can demand pedestrianised streets, we can work with them to make it happen. There needs to be appetite and momentum from citizens for pedestrianised streets in neighbourhoods. We are convinced that we need to do this for a liveable city." She said the Church Street Impact Assessment had an impact on DULT draft Transport Oriented Development (TOD) Policy that is currently with the government for approval.

Nearly a year after the Church Street First Initiative kicked off in the CBD area, key stakeholders gathered virtually to talk about the process, experiences, and learnings from the first pedestrianisation project in the city with the hope of inspiring more streets that belong to people. Church Street First was a pedestrianisation initiative, led by DULT in association with IISc, Bengaluru, Catapult UK, and Urban Morph Bengaluru under the Clean Air Street Initiative. The street was closed off for vehicular traffic every Saturday and Sunday from 10 am to midnight between November 2020 and April 2021.

In Koramangala and Jayanagar

Basavaraj Kabade, (Superintending Engineer, BBMP) suggested, "In each constituency like Jayanagar or Koramangala we must identify streets with lot of commercial activities and people coming in and going out. Such streets should be converted into pedestrianised roads. There must also be Metro accessibility, overall connectivity near such streets."

During pedestrianisation we could see how street vendors also found such spaces productive from their point of view of being able to do business

—Prof Ashish Verma, IISc

Sathyanarayanan Sankaran (Bengaluru Bicycle Mayor and Founder, Urban Morph) said there has been a boost to economic activities in the area where the project was implemented. He said, “We had heard that in London economic activity grew by 40 per cent after pedestrianisation but that’s hard for most people to believe, but we now we have an example from an Indian city. When we interacted with businesses prior to pedestrianisation, there were some who were hesitant about change, but the pilot proved pedestrianisation can help businesses discover new customers and new opportunities,” he said.

Productive for vendors

Prof Ashish Verma from IISc said that equity is an important goal for the improvement of quality of life through pedestrianisation. “During pedestrianisation, street vendors also found the space productive in terms of business,” he said. Yatish VT, founder, Broke Artists collective, gave the artists’ perspective. “When we started, we found a handful of artists. Today there are over 190 looking for a space like Church Street.”