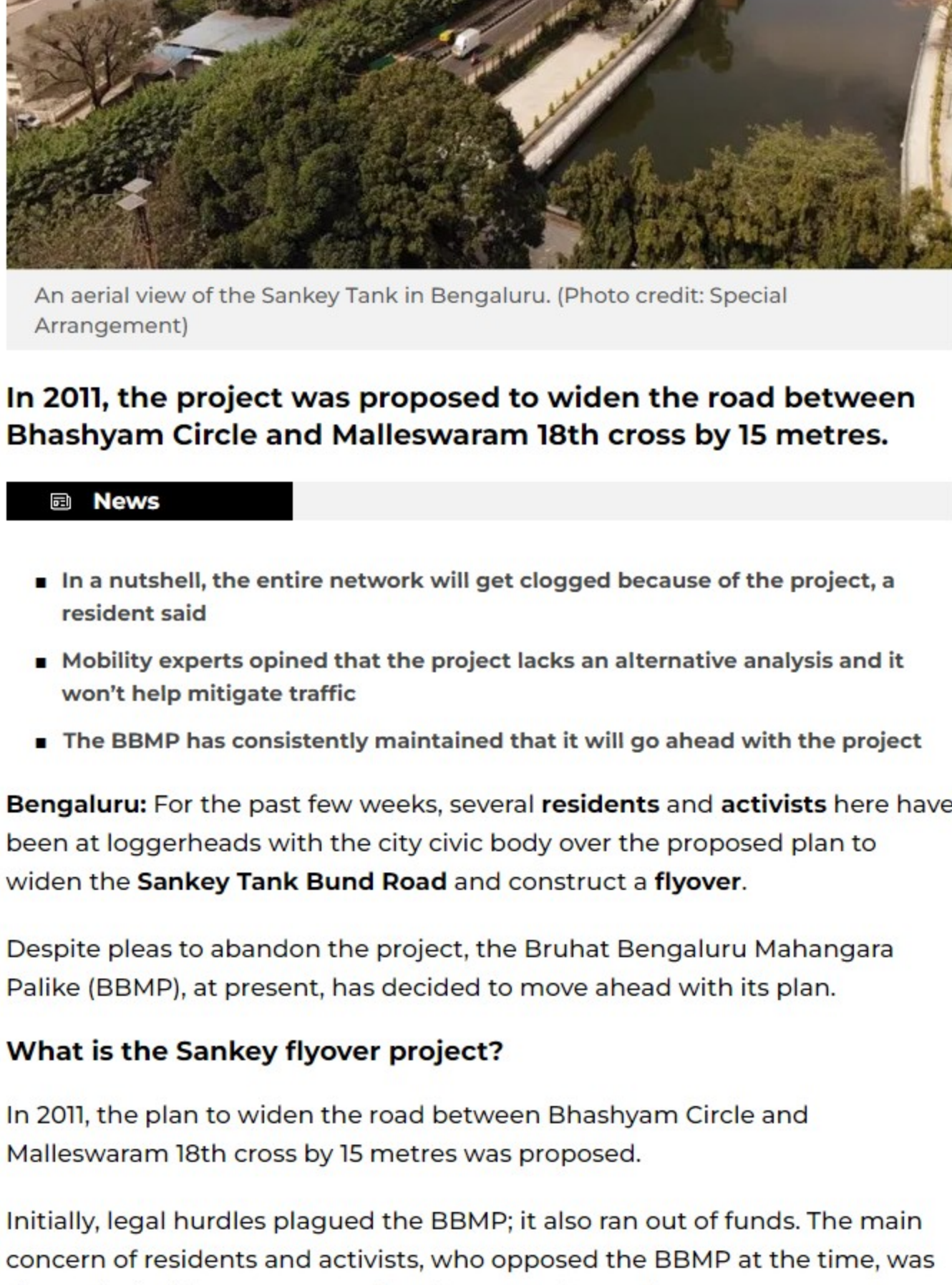


# Bengaluru's Sankey flyover plan a colossal mess, say experts; BBMP remains adamant



Prajwal D'Souza  
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An aerial view of the Sankey Tank in Bengaluru. (Photo credit: Special Arrangement)

**In 2011, the project was proposed to widen the road between Bhashyam Circle and Malleswaram 18th cross by 15 metres.**

## News

- In a nutshell, the entire network will get clogged because of the project, a resident said
- Mobility experts opined that the project lacks an alternative analysis and it won't help mitigate traffic
- The BBMP has consistently maintained that it will go ahead with the project

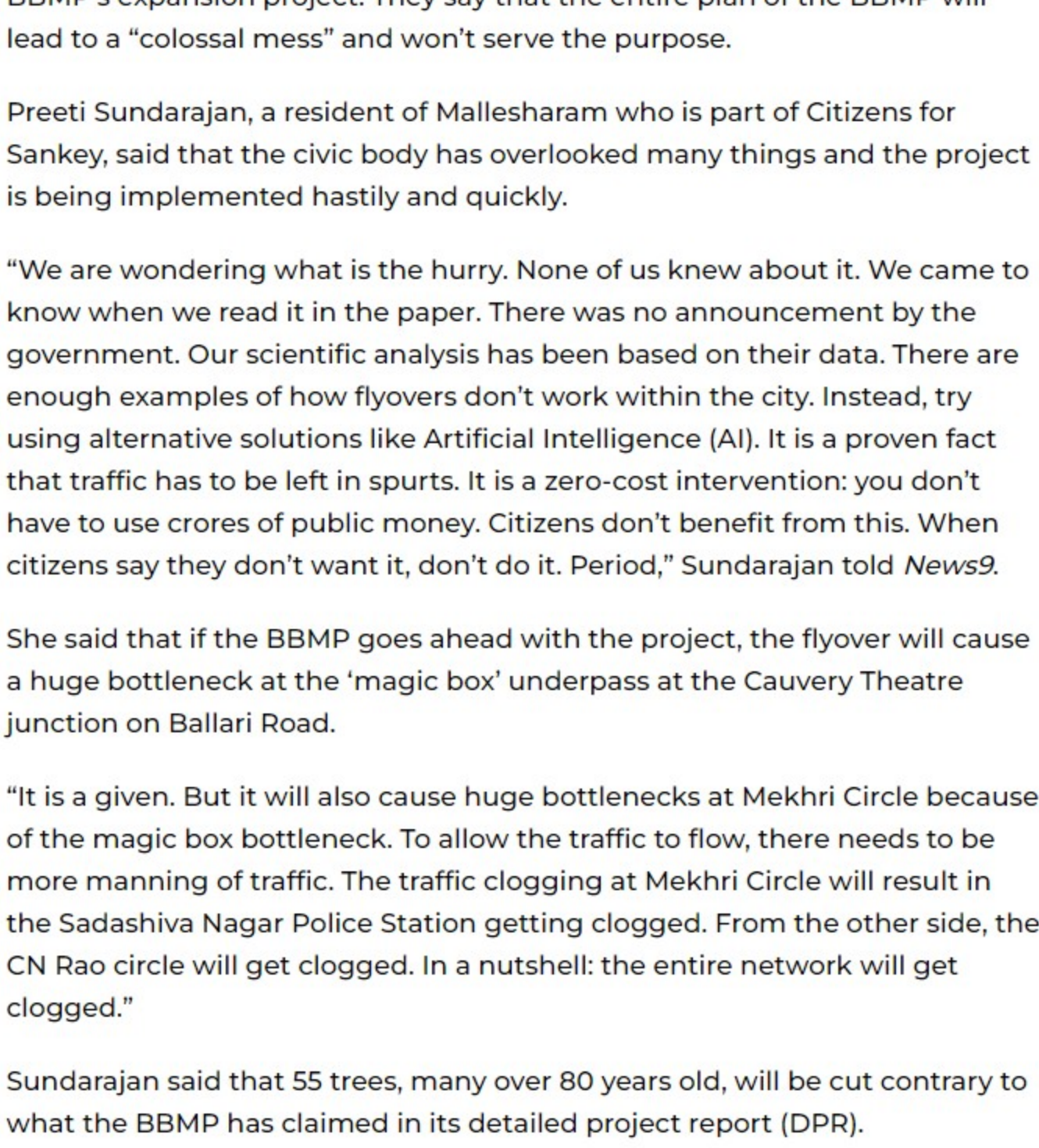
**Bengaluru:** For the past few weeks, several residents and activists here have been at loggerheads with the city civic body over the proposed plan to widen the **Sankey Tank Bund Road** and construct a **flyover**.

Despite pleas to abandon the project, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), at present, has decided to move ahead with its plan.

### What is the Sankey flyover project?

In 2011, the plan to widen the road between Bhashyam Circle and Malleswaram 18th cross by 15 metres was proposed.

Initially, legal hurdles plagued the BBMP; it also ran out of funds. The main concern of residents and activists, who opposed the BBMP at the time, was the ecological issues surrounding the expansion project.



An aerial view of the Sankey Tank and adjoining neighbourhoods in Bengaluru. (Photo credit: Special Arrangement)

The BBMP, in the same year, received a shot in the arm from the Karnataka High Court, which ruled in its favour. "It is a project where trees are cut for widening the road for the public good," the High Court observed.

The High Court also directed the BBMP to follow the procedures prescribed in the Karnataka Preservation of Trees Act while axing the trees on the proposed stretch.

In December 2022, the BBMP began calling tenders for the execution of the project after it was renewed. It was also proposed to build a 560-metre-long, four-lane flyover along Sankey Road at an estimated cost of Rs 30 crore.

This triggered the latest opposition from residents, whereas experts have pointed out the loopholes of the project.

### Why is the project opposed and who is behind it?

Residents of Malleshwaram, Vyalikaval and Sadashivanagar, many of whom are part of the residents' collective 'Citizens for Sankey', are opposing the BBMP's expansion project. They say that the entire plan of the BBMP will lead to a "colossal mess" and won't serve the purpose.

Preeti Sundarajan, a resident of Malleshwaram who is part of Citizens for Sankey, said that the civic body has overlooked many things and the project is being implemented hastily and quickly.

"We are wondering what is the hurry. None of us knew about it. We came to know when we read it in the paper. There was no announcement by the government. Our scientific analysis has been based on their data. There are enough examples of how flyovers don't work within the city. Instead, try using alternative solutions like Artificial Intelligence (AI). It is a proven fact that traffic has to be left in spurts. It is a zero-cost intervention: you don't have to use crores of public money. Citizens don't benefit from this. When citizens say they don't want it, don't do it. Period," Sundarajan told News9.

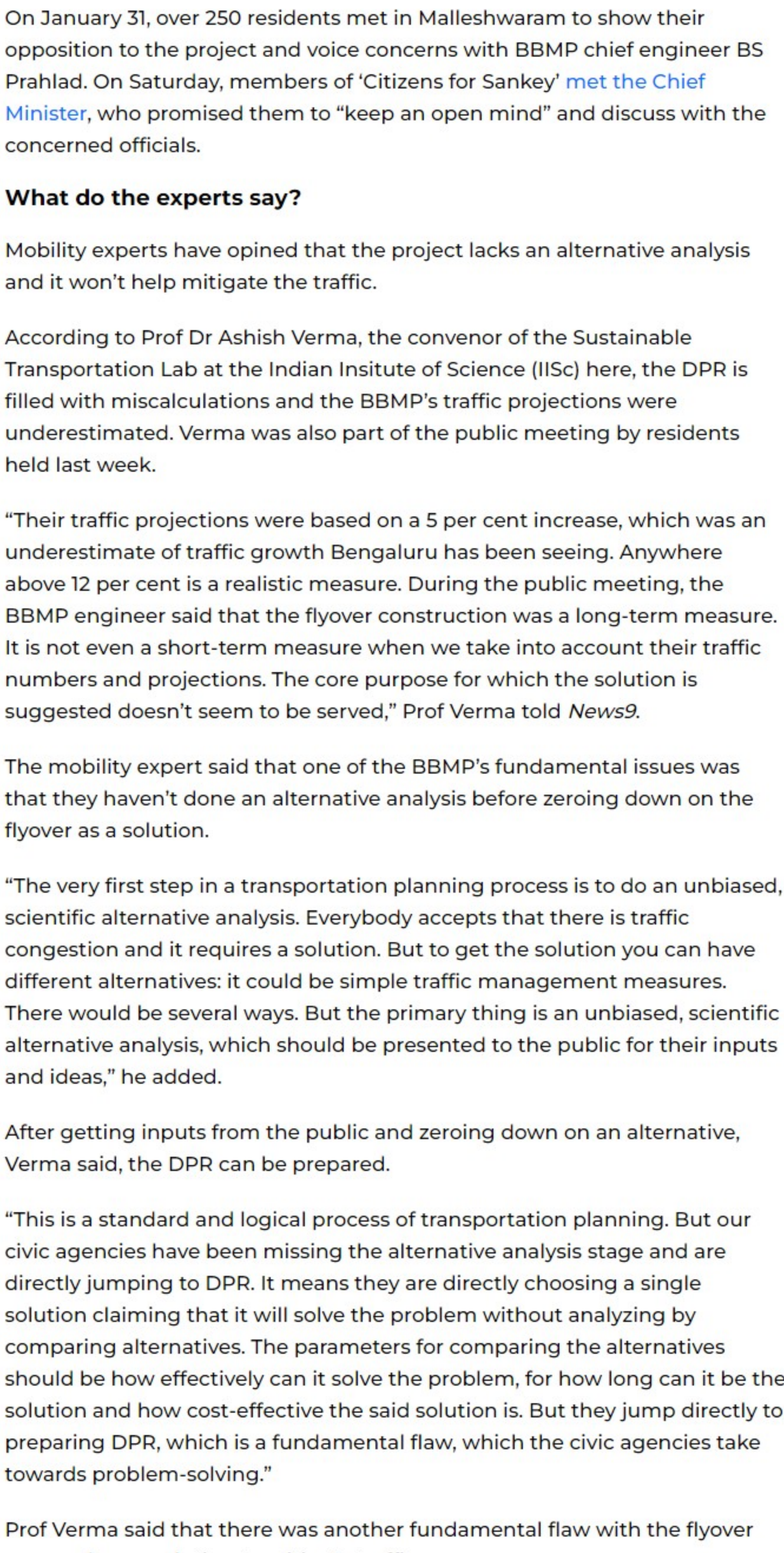
She said that if the BBMP goes ahead with the project, the flyover will cause a huge bottleneck at the 'magic box' underpass at the Cauvery Theatre junction on Ballari Road.

"It is a given. But it will also cause huge bottlenecks at Mekhri Circle because of the magic box bottleneck. To allow the traffic to flow, there needs to be more manning of traffic. The traffic clogging at Mekhri Circle will result in the Sadashiva Nagar Police Station getting clogged. From the other side, the CN Rao circle will get clogged. In a nutshell: the entire network will get clogged."

Sundarajan said that 55 trees, many over 80 years old, will be cut contrary to what the BBMP has claimed in its detailed project report (DPR).

"The DPR says 39 trees will be cut. But an independent Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) assessment says that 55 trees from 23 species will be cut. There are over 400 saplings, which will perish for the project. This requires an EIA, which has not been done by the BBMP. They have conveniently said 39 trees, so it can skip all these assessments," she added.

The EIA report by researchers from Azim Premji University and Vruksha Foundation was released on Thursday. The report noted that 55 trees of 23 species and 14 families will be axed for the project, which will have "multiple irreversible environmental impacts".



Trees that are expected to be axed during the expansion project. (Photo credit: Special Arrangement)

It also noted that trees in the area collectively store 121 tonnes and play a major role in "reducing greenhouse gas emissions and the impact of global warming".

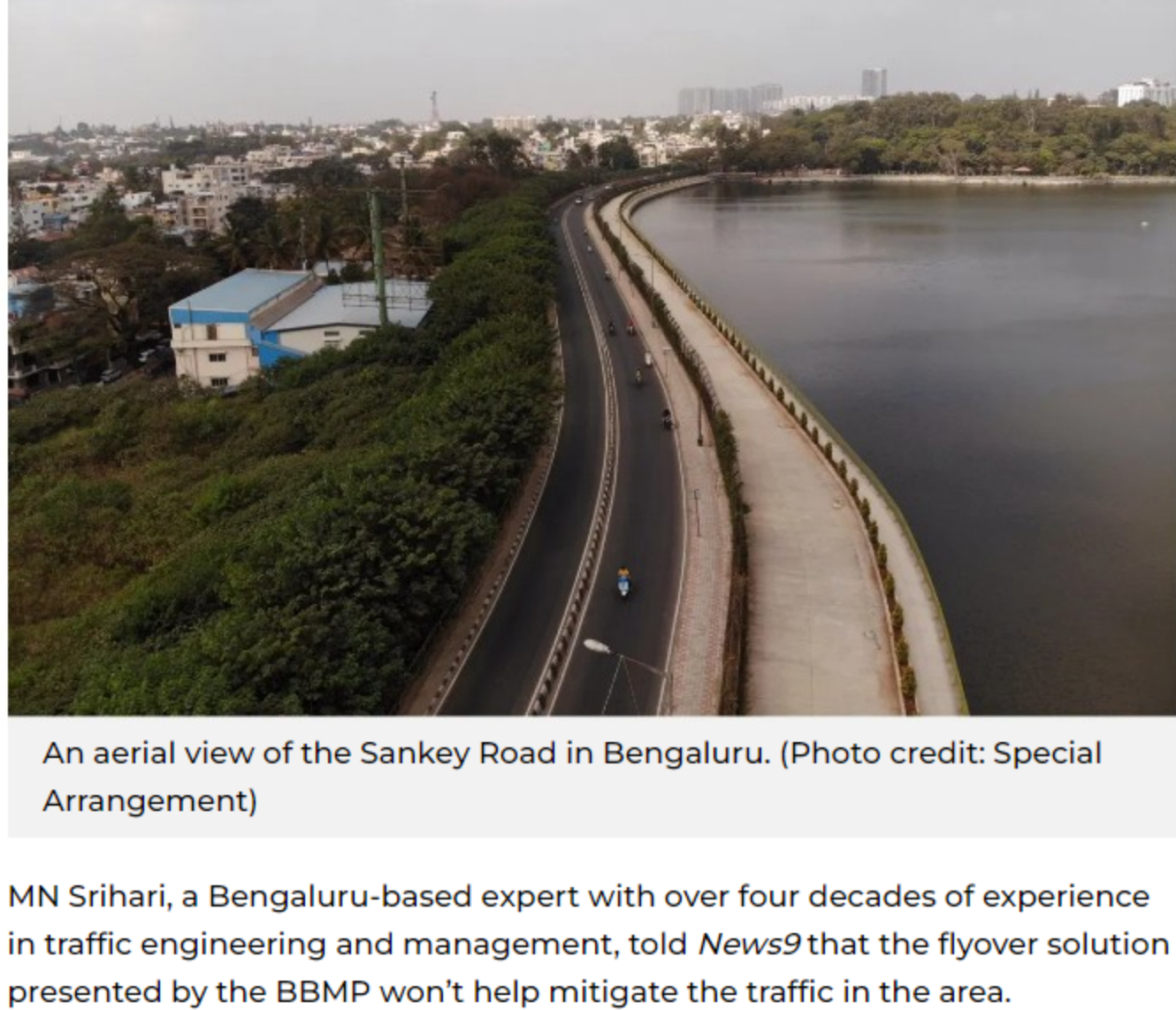
Highlighting the crucial contribution of the trees in the area, the report said that a "typical passenger vehicle emits 4.6 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year".

'Citizens For Sankey' has said that the flyover will require acquiring the portion of Stella Maris school and will be built at the spot where students assemble, play games and eat lunch.

Apart from the hundreds of residents who have met the BBMP head-on, thousands of others have shown their support by signing online petitions.

A petition on [Jhatkaa.org](#) for "no flyover on Sankey Road" has over 25,000 signatories to date.

On January 20, nearly 2,000 students here wrote handwritten postcards to Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai and asked him to drop the flyover project. "Dear Bommai Uncle, Please save our environment. We want to learn in a healthy and safe atmosphere. We do not want Sankey Flyover," one of the postcards read.



A postcard written by students and addressed to Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai. (Photo credit: Special Arrangement)

A written petition signed by over 20,000 residents was also submitted to Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) chief commissioner Tushar Girinath to drop the project.

On January 31, over 250 residents met in Malleshwaram to show their opposition to the project and voice concerns with BBMP chief engineer BS Prahlad. On Saturday, members of 'Citizens for Sankey' met the Chief Minister, who promised them to "keep an open mind" and discuss with the concerned officials.

### What do the experts say?

Mobility experts have opined that the project lacks an alternative analysis and it won't help mitigate the traffic.

According to Prof Dr Ashish Verma, the convenor of the Sustainable Transportation Lab at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) here, the DPR is filled with miscalculations and the BBMP's traffic projections were underestimated. Verma was also part of the public meeting by residents held last week.

"Their traffic projections were based on a 5 per cent increase, which was an underestimate of traffic growth Bengaluru has been seeing. Anywhere above 12 per cent is a realistic measure. During the public meeting, the BBMP engineer said that the flyover construction was a long-term measure. It is not even a short-term measure when we take into account the flyover numbers and projections. The core purpose for which the solution is suggested doesn't seem to be served," Prof Verma told News9.

The mobility expert said that one of the BBMP's fundamental issues was that they haven't done an alternative analysis before zeroing down on the flyover as a solution.

"The very first step in a transportation planning process is to do an unbiased, scientific alternative analysis. Everybody accepts that there is traffic congestion and it requires a solution. But to get the solution you can have different alternatives: it could be simple traffic management measures. There would be several ways. But the primary thing is an unbiased, scientific alternative analysis, which should be presented to the public for their inputs and ideas," he added.

After getting inputs from the public and zeroing down on an alternative, Verma said, the DPR can be prepared.

"This is a standard and logical process of transportation planning. But our civic agencies have been missing the alternative analysis stage and are directly jumping to DPR. It means they are directly choosing a single solution claiming that it will solve the problem without analyzing by comparing alternatives. The parameters for comparing the alternatives should be how effectively can it solve the problem, for how long can it be the solution and how cost-effective the said solution is. But they jump directly to preparing DPR, which is a fundamental flaw, which the civic agencies take towards problem-solving."

Prof Verma said that there was another fundamental flaw with the flyover approach as a solution to mitigate traffic.

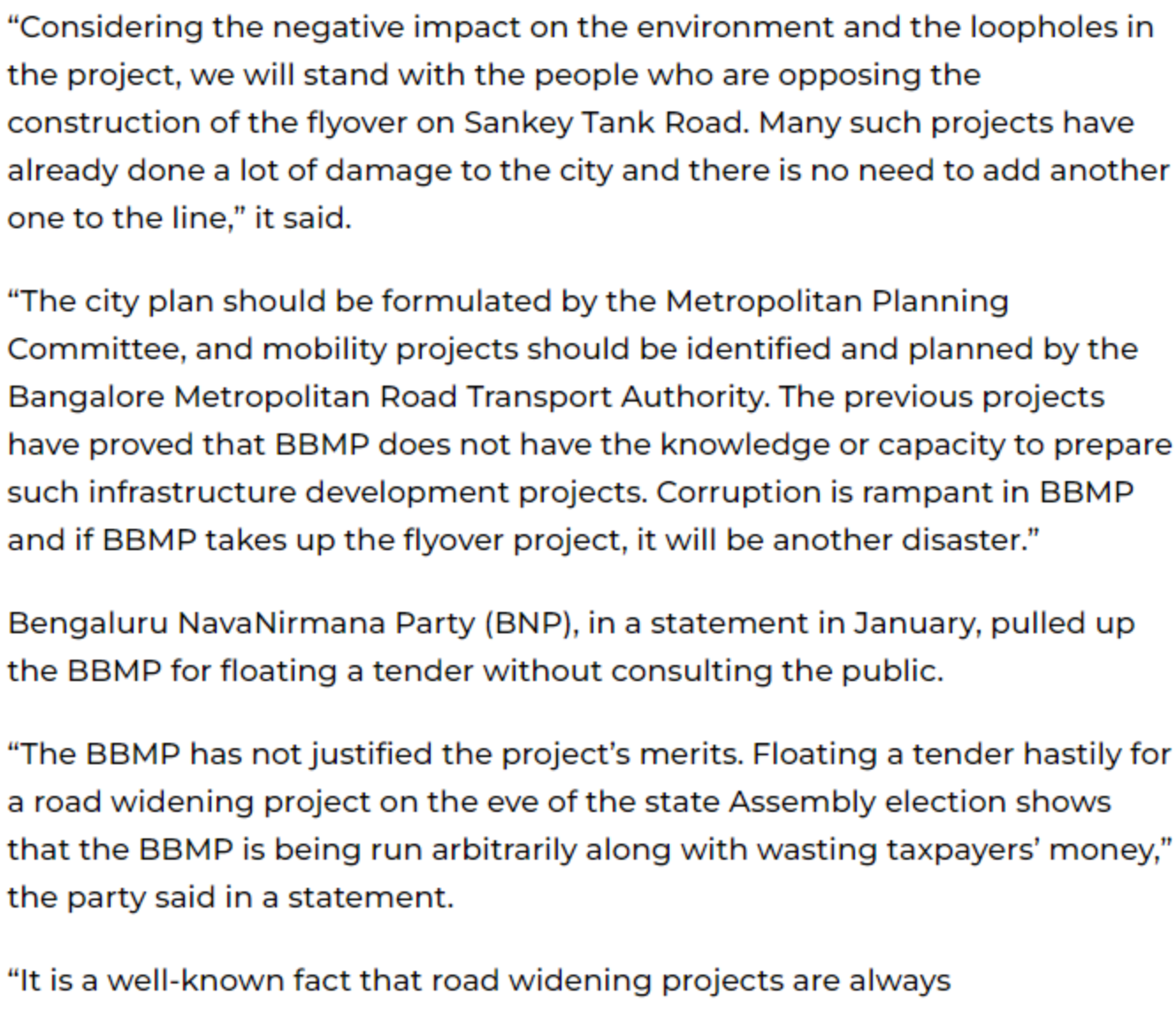
"Using the V/C ratio parameter as a benchmark is focused on the point of view of the vehicle's mobility. One is because it focuses on vehicles as a unit of comparison and it neglects the core philosophy, which is to move people and goods and not vehicles. It is not a people-centric approach to use V/C," he said.

Another issue of it is neglected.

"In this case, they are only looking at what's happening at Bhashyam Circle, without considering the impact on the magic box or Cauvery Junction or further towards the Mariyamma Temple side and other adjoining junctions and roads. Often, the impact of such flyovers is the creation of a bottleneck somewhere ahead and the spillover effect on the flyover itself. The whole purpose and the rationale that they give is completely lost," Verma said.

The expert also called for prosecuting the civic engineers, who backed the idea and gave technical arguments, for fooling people and wasting public money.

"Another thing it doesn't consider is the ecological and environmental impact and how tail-pipe emissions would change and increase and the increased consumption of fossil fuel. EV adoption rate is minuscule. These flyovers will increase tail-pipe emissions as vehicles kilometre travelled (VKT) will rise. The effect on ecology, the impact on tree cover and water body is also ignored."



An aerial view of the Sankey Road in Bengaluru. (Photo credit: Special Arrangement)

MN Srihari, a Bengaluru-based expert with over four decades of experience in traffic engineering and management, told News9 that the flyover solution presented by the BBMP won't help mitigate the traffic in the area.

"Instead of this, they need to organise traffic signals – which is called signal coordination – in such a way that vehicle movement is smooth. It is the simple solution suggested for scenarios like this. The residents in that area are highly educated and they understand what is required and what is not. You cannot simply tell people that they need this and that facility to fill the coffers of the civic bodies," Srihari, who is a consultant to the Government of India, said.

The mobility expert explained that the columns in that area can't take the load as the soil is from the bund, which might be weak due to the penetration of water.

"In such conditions, if you have an elevated road, the load might be more due to the vehicles, which will be transferred to the column and the ground. This will result in the development of cracks and the flyover might not be able to function for an extended period. The corporation will form some committees – nobody knows who its members are – and then start construction based on its recommendations," he added.

Last week, Bengaluru Metropolitan Land Transport Authority (BMLTA) sought details and a report from the BBMP over its decision to go ahead with the Sankey flyover project. BMLTA is responsible for planning and coordinating transport in the Bengaluru Metropolitan Area and is currently led by Chief Minister Bommai.

### What does the Opposition say?

The issue has knocked on the doors of politicians as the state will go to the polls in a few months.

Congress leader Priyank Kharge, in a series of tweets on February 1 asked the government why it was "hell-bent on widening the Sankey Bund Road and building a flyover?"

"Govt has not had any public hearings/consultations despite filing objections with BBMP and Govt. Govt has not made the Detailed Project Report public. National Green Tribunal has directed to maintain a buffer zone and green belt of 75 meters from the periphery of lakes. Does the project satisfy this criteria? No," Kharge wrote.

"Project conflicts with the provisions of the Comprehensive Bangalore Mobility Plan of the Govt. 2,000 students from Malleshwaram, Vyalikaval & Sadashivnagar have written postcards to @BSBommai uncle opposing the Sankey Tank Bund Road project, yet Govt is mute. Why the urgency? For whose benefit? Why is Govt being so adamant?"



Aad Aadmi Party (AAP) in Karnataka, too, opposed the expansion plan.

"AAP strongly opposed BBMP's decision to construct a flyover and widen the Sankey Tank Road, and if AAP comes to power in BBMP, it will cancel this project and provide world-class infrastructure as per the people's wishes and needs," the party's state president Prithvi Reddy said on February 3.

"Considering the negative impact on the environment and the loopholes in the project, we will stand with the people who are opposing the construction of the flyover on Sankey Tank Road. Many such projects have already done a lot of damage to the city and there is no need to add another one to the line," it said.

"The city plan should be formulated by the Metropolitan Planning Committee, and mobility projects should be identified and planned by the Bangalore Metropolitan Road Transport Authority. The previous projects have proved that BBMP does not have the knowledge or capacity to prepare such infrastructure development projects. Corruption is rampant in BBMP and if BBMP takes up the flyover project, it will be another disaster."

Bengaluru NavaNirman Party (BNP), in a statement in January, pulled up the BBMP for floating a tender without consulting the public.

"The BBMP has not justified the project's merits. Floating a tender hastily for a road widening project on the eve of the state Assembly election shows that the BBMP is being run arbitrarily along with wasting taxpayers' money," the party said in a statement.

"It is a well-known fact that road widening projects are always counterproductive and only shift the problem elsewhere on the network besides attracting even more traffic. This project is BBMP's deliberate move to pander to the vested lobbies and inflict continued misery on the honest tax-paying citizens. We demand that the BBMP immediately suspend the tendering procedure and review the necessity for the project since it was first conceived a decade ago when awareness of transport demand measures was not prevalent," it added.

### What will the BBMP do?

The BBMP has consistently maintained that it will go ahead with the project.

Speaking with reporters on January 30, BBMP chief commissioner Girinath said: "I have said this before. There will be differing opinions since we are a democracy. We had told the court earlier that the road will be widened. The new component is the flyover. We have to do it along with the road widening. Our stand is that it must be done and we are proceeding as per the technical recommendations."

During the public meeting with residents of Malleshwaram last week, BBMP chief engineer Prahlad said the suggestions from the public and experts were welcome and asked them to submit them in writing to the civic body.

