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Global tenders invited for two-way tunnel road project under Brand Bengaluru

International firms are also expected to come to the Karnataka capital to study, review and design a machine to construct the 150km tunnel.

By: **Express News Service**
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D K Shivakumar said he had met Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari in New Delhi. (Photo: PTI/File)

Global tenders have been invited for Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar's ambitious 150km two-way tunnel road project for Bengaluru. The deadline for expression of interest for the Rs 50,000-crore project has been extended to August 17.

Multiple meetings held with engineering consultancy firms, both domestic and international, over the past many weeks have seen discussion of several designs and modalities, according to Shivakumar, who is also the Bengaluru development minister.

The cost is roughly equal to the expenditure of the government's five poll guarantee schemes.

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Shivakumar has received road infrastructure designs that can help decongest traffic by preventing heavy vehicular movement into the state capital from important national highway routes like Airport Road, Hosur Road, Nelamangala and Mysore Road and Kolar Road.

"Remedial projects including tunnel road and flyovers have been discussed for traffic decongestion in Bengaluru for many weeks now. Expression of interest was called for this by BDA (Bangalore Development Authority) and BBMP (Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike). It expired on August 7. But it has been extended by one week, i.e. till August 17, in view of more organisations showing interest in participating in it. A global tender has also been called," Shivakumar told reporters on Tuesday.

"A metro tunnel can only run in one direction. Therefore, I have suggested that there should be a two-way road in the proposed tunnel road. Many organisations, including international firms, are coming forward to discuss the design and financial viability, among other modalities," he added.

Shivakumar said he had met Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari in New Delhi. "National highways connecting Nelamangala, Bellary, Kolar, Hosur and Mysore to the roads of Bengaluru city are responsible for traffic congestion. I have requested the minister that the central government should also take responsibility to come up with a solution. He has now asked us to submit a detailed report on the same," he said.

The idea of a tunnel road sprouted in view of the growing traffic congestion choking Bengaluru. In the TomTom Traffic Index 2022, Bengaluru ranked second in the world with increased travel time—it took nearly 29 minutes and 10 seconds to drive 10 km in the city. The city is second to London, which recorded a travel time of 36 minutes 20 seconds for a 10km drive.

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According to sources in Shivakumar's office, a study for the tunnel road project will be conducted by international engineering and mobility firms, after which a suitable tunnel-boring machine will be designed specially to meet the requirements of Bengaluru.

"Machinery in India is not equipped or technically advanced yet to construct road tunnels with a length of 150 km. So we need to look for international collaborations and as a result, we had to call for global tenders. International firms will come to Bengaluru to study, review and design a machine to construct the road tunnel, as per the customisation," said an official privy to the project.

Soon after Congress formed the government, Shivakumar announced his mega infrastructure plan for Bengaluru in the form of tunnel roads, flyovers and a peripheral ring road to address the city's notorious traffic congestion. Taking a jibe at Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Shivakumar recently said that he was not going to buckle under pressure from residents' groups and activists when it came to infrastructure projects. He was referring to the Rs 1,791-crore steel flyover project proposed for Bengaluru in 2016 by the then Congress government. It was abandoned after several rounds of protests.

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His proposal for a big-ticket infra boost has also met with opposition from mobility and transport experts, including prominent institutions like the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru. The experts warn that tunnel roads can be of real help only when it fulfils the conditions of sustainability. They also want the state and central government to fast-track projects such as Namma Metro and the suburban rail to address the traffic congestion in the city.

The experts also argue that the government should, instead of introducing new plans, put to use the "comprehensive mobility plan" prepared by the Directorate of Urban Land Transport. Prof Ashish Verma of the Indian Institute of Science told indianexpress.com, "Tunnel roads and flyovers can be a viable option only when it fulfils the conditions of sustainability and liveability. Otherwise, constructing tunnel roads and flyovers will only attract more vehicles, increasing carbon emissions."

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To the argument that flyovers and tunnels would only attract more cars, Shivakumar responded that road widening or a city entry tax was not possible in Bengaluru. "We cannot stop people from buying cars and using them. We cannot restrict the use of cars by imposing 'city entry tax', like in Singapore. The major complaint has been traffic congestion. Roads cannot be widened now since buildings have come up. Hence, construction of a road tunnel will help people commute in less time than today," he said.

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