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## Sankey road widening, flyover will not solve traffic congestion: IISc expert

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The sustainable solution lies in reducing the total vehicles kilometre travelled (VKT) by motorized mode and reduced dependence on fossil fuels. Fundamental strategy should be to reduce number of motorized vehicles, reduce total motorized VKT, and fix India's energy mix to renewable sources.



Mobility expert from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Prof Ashish Verma, said the proposed project will not solve traffic congestion in the area, and that is not even a short-term solution (HT Photo)



By Priyanka Rudrappa

The proposed widening of Sankey Tank Bund Road and the flyover from T Chowdaiah Road to 18th Cross in Bengaluru has drawn criticism from residents, civic activists and urban experts. According to the residents, the project will not reduce the traffic congestion in the area and the felling of trees close to the bund could have serious ecological implications.

Residents living close to Sankey Tank have also said they were not consulted about the project before BBMP floated tenders, and sought a detailed project report (DPR) to be made public and organise a public consultation before taking up the project. In an interview, a mobility expert from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Prof Ashish Verma, said the proposed project will not solve traffic congestion in the area, and that is not even a short-term solution. Prof Verma also said there are fundamental flaws in the process as well as in the DPR.

Edited excerpts:

**The BBMP has refused to revoke its proposed road-widening plan for Sankey Road despite opposition from various quarters. What is the feasibility of the project? Do you think it will help clear traffic congestion in the area?**

According to our analysis, some sections will get congested right from the beginning after the construction of the flyover. According to the DPR, the traffic growth forecast is highly underestimated by assuming a meagre 5%. Taking a more realistic growth rate of 13% or anything above, the situation would be worse in the coming few years. BBMP has been proposing it as a long-term solution. In all likelihood, this project will not help ease traffic congestion not even in the short-term.

**Citizens have raised concerns over 40 heritage trees that will be axed due to the project. What kind environmental issues will the relentless cutting of trees in the city lead to?**

It will definitely have ecological implications which we have studied as well. We don't care for natural air purifiers and when the pollution is bad, the agencies say they will install artificial air purifiers. Nothing is more ironical than this.

**Residents fear that Vyalikaval may witness floods due to the project as the tank bund road had caved in earlier. Is this something we need to worry about?**

These constructions have a huge impact on the drainage pattern. We have seen extreme flooding in Bengaluru in August last year. The main reason behind that is white-topping, which has been done indiscriminately and level of the road has been increased. Concrete slabs are put on top of existing roads. But doing so, you lower the level of the entire property. The flooding in Bengaluru last year, was predominantly man-made. Likewise, we don't even realise how much these constructions will affect the drainage patterns. This definitely will have an impact on how the water flows when the rain occurs, into the nearby areas and into the lake.

**Citizens claim that there has been no public consultation and project details have not been shared with the public either. Do you think ad-hoc projects without a planned approach are detrimental to both the environment and urban planning?**

There are fundamental flaws in the process as well as in the DPR. In terms of process, there should be a scientific, unbiased and alternative analysis. You think there is traffic congestion in the Basyam circle and nearby roads, and you want to solve it. To solve it, you need unbiased selection of possible alternatives which could be road-widening, a flyover or an underpass, traffic management measures, optimising traffic or some kind of signal coordination along the corridor, or pushing modes of public transport or cycling. There could be several alternatives to solve the same problem.

The first logical step is to always look at these possible alternatives, do a thorough analysis on the impact it will have in mitigating the problem, and at what cost. Once you do this analysis, then you should present it to the public and take their inputs. Then, they should we which is the best option in terms of effectiveness as well as cost and accepted by the public. After this, we should go for a DPR. But it has not been the case for this project. Here, we have missed the whole alternative analysis and decided that flyover or road widening is the only solution and then prepared a DPR. This is the fundamental flaw in the project.

In terms of preparing the DPR, they have missed out the congestion mitigation potential evaluation. This is the most basic thing which is part of an engineering practice. This has been completely missed out.

**What should an ideal transportation planning be about?**

You have to go through alternative analysis which is unbiased and there should be scientific evaluation. The infrastructure work should be presented before the Bengaluru Metropolitan Land Transport Authority (BMLTA) which will scrutinise the work. The BMLTA should see what is the best solution for the specific problem and then the DPR should be prepared.

**What is the way ahead to solving Bengaluru's traffic congestion?**

The sustainable solution lies in reducing the total vehicles kilometre travelled (VKT) by motorized mode and reduced dependence on fossil fuels. Fundamental strategy should be to reduce number of motorized vehicles, reduce total motorized VKT, and fix India's energy mix to renewable sources. We have to make sustainable mode options more attractive to use and at the same time personal mobility modes less attractive to own and use to get the right balance of sustainable mobility solutions.