

Activists, urban planners come down heavily on tunnel project, bat for better public transport network

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THE HINDU BUREAU

The State government's emphasis on building tunnel roads and double-decker flyovers in Bengaluru will encourage usage of private vehicles instead of resolving the city's increasing traffic problems. This will have a direct impact on ridership in public transport defeating the very purpose of decongestion: this was the popular sentiment at an event organised by a citizens' collective on the misplaced priorities of projects by the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP).

In the programme held by the Citizens' Voluntary Initiative for the City (CIVIC) on Friday, citizens, activists, and urban planners came together to scrutinise the implications of the implementation of tunnel roads and other localised solutions to ease the city's traffic. Experts also spoke about enhancing public transport infrastructure through a comprehensive mobility plan.

The twin-tube tunnel road, aimed at alleviating traffic congestion, is planned to connect the Hebbal flyover to Central Silk Board and K.R. Puram to Mysuru Road at an estimated cost of ₹32,700 crore in two phases. However, urban planners and civic activists remain sceptical about its efficacy in addressing traffic woes and the need for sustainable mobility solutions.

Ashish Verma of the Indian Institute of Science, specialising in transportation and systems engineering, provided a solution-oriented critique of the city's suburban and metro rail networks.

Prof. Verma warned that double-decker roads and tunnel corridors, while offering localised travel-time reductions, would encourage private vehicle usage, diminish public transit ridership, and exacerbate environmental and social inequities.

"To achieve sustainable solutions, we need to enhance suburban rail capacity, expand metro rail transport system (MRTS) coverage, and ensure seamless modal integration for a resilient urban mobility framework," he emphasised.

Rajkumar Dugar, founder of Citizens for Change, echoed these concerns, stating: "The cost of land acquisition and the disruptions caused during construction outweigh any potential reduction in commute times. Congestion at tunnel entry and exit points would neutralise the benefits."

Mr. Dugar highlighted Bengaluru's troubling private vehicle ownership ratio of nearly 1:1, compared to the global average of 3:1. "We need better public transport systems as traffic solutions, not merely more roads," he said.

A survey conducted by Citizens for Change on X (formerly Twitter) revealed that 90% of respondents favoured improving public transport over building new roads, he added.

D.T. Devare of the Bangalore Environment Trust highlighted governance lapses, noting the absence of elected BBMP representatives for over four years and the lack of

Metropolitan Planning Committee (MPC) meetings since May 2021.

“There is a complete lack of transparency. Even the Comprehensive Mobility Plan (CMP), which should form the basis of such projects, does not approve the tunnel road. Moreover, an environmental impact assessment is entirely absent,” he said, adding that Right to Information petitions seeking project details have gone unanswered.

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