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Experts stress for data on Bengaluru's underground utilities

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Representative Image Photo | Pushkar V

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BENGALURU: With the Karnataka government firm on constructing an 18-km tunnel road from Hebbal to Silk Board Junction in the first phase of the proposed project to ease traffic congestion in the city, experts have expressed apprehension over its implementation, especially in the absence of data on underground utility networks.

The experts have stressed the need for data on what lies below the city's roads before taking up such projects. But officials of BBMP, BMRCL, BESCOM and BWSSB have admitted that there is no consolidated data on underground utility networks.

The Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, stressed this aspect in its report submitted to the Comptroller and Auditor General in 2022. Prof Ashish Verma, convenor, IISc Sustainable Transportation Lab, Department of Civil Engineering, IISc, said researchers collectively brought out a lecture series titled 'Recent Trends in Transportation Infrastructure, Volume 2'. In this, there is a chapter titled 'Assessing the Impact of Underground Utility Works on Road Traffic and Users: A Study from an Indian City'. The series was funded by CAG.

Prof Verma, who is the co-author, said the report was submitted three years ago and nothing has changed since then. He said that the government agencies did not understand its importance.

'Drainage system will pose a big problem'

Various utility agencies have made a mess of Bengaluru's roads and this is because of poor management. Traffic law management and traffic law enforcement are two different things. The management aspect should be worked upon by experts, who have domain knowledge, and traffic police should ensure its effective implementation, Prof Ashish Verma, convenor, of IISc Sustainable Transportation Lab, Department of Civil Engineering, IISc, said.

In the report, Prof Verma said, researchers noted that the expansion of major cities in India, with its fast-growing economy, led to a drastic increase in the need for amenities, including electricity, communication and water. There has been an emphasis on developing underground networks to provide amenities to the people.

Since most facilities are placed underground, excavation and construction work lead to a reduction in roadway width, causing congestion. The researchers analysed the impact of underground utility works on traffic and road users.

Prof Chandra Kishen, IISc researcher and consultant for BMRCL, said it is high time there is integration and coordination among civic agencies. The drainage system will pose a big problem during the underground tunnel work.

A senior BMRCL official said that it takes around 50 days to build a 100-metre tunnel, depending upon the geology, utilities, type of rock and overburden. The strata in Bengaluru change every 10 metres and exact pre-hand mapping of locations becomes difficult if there are private structures around.