


Experts outline urgent renewal strategy for Bengaluru's urban crisis

At India Today Environment Conclave 2025, experts in urban planning, transport issues, water and political policies discussed Bengaluru's urban challenges. They called for a comprehensive governance overhaul and innovative solutions to address the city's critical infrastructure problems.



Experts discussed How To Clean Up Bangalore at India Today Environment Conclave 2025.

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Written By: Preeja Aravind

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In Short

- Chief commissioner of Bengaluru needed to unify fragmented governance across agencies
- Water management requires integrated institutional approach to leverage existing resources
- Sustainable mass transit could transform urban mobility through comprehensive rail network

An architect, a professor, a CEO and a water conservationist put their expertise together to speak candidly on “How to Clean up Bangalore” at the India Today Environment Conclave 2025.

The event, which was held in the heart of India's tech capital, the group comprising of architect and entrepreneur Naresh V Narasimhan, water conservationist expert S Vishwanath, CEO of Bangalore Political Action Committee (BPAC) Revathy Ashok, and Head of IISC Sustainable Transportation Lab Ashish Verma discussed the city's systemic challenges.

Their blueprint was to challenge the decades of centralised planning, proposing instead a holistic approach that could turn the city's mounting urban pressures into opportunities for sustainable development, if implemented correctly.

They emphasised that Bangalore's survival depended on immediate, transformative governance reforms.

ONE AUTHORITY FOR ALL CIVIC AGENCIES

Architect Naresh Narsimhan advocated for a chief commissioner with authority over all city parastatals, arguing that current fragmented governance prevents cohesive urban planning. He said that Bengaluru required not just a minister, but also a holistic commissioner overlooking all civic agencies. “Bangalore has BBMP, but it controls very little. It doesn't control water, it doesn't control sewage, it doesn't have control over electricity, and not even broadband,” Narsimhan said.

“The second line of the Congress manifestos says the party will establish a Chief Commissioner of Bangalore and all parastatals will report to him or her or to that position. Every single thing, be it BMTC or electricity board, or water and sewage board. Why has it not been implemented yet?” he asked.

Narsimhan explained that currently the city's administrative agencies operate in complete isolation. “Each agency is doing whatever they want in silos,” he said. Each department functions independently, using incompatible data formats, without any centralised coordination or comprehensive database to track city-wide activities. According to him, if this fragmented approach continued no single entity will have a holistic view of the city and will be unable to overcome Bengaluru's administrative inefficiencies.

ANSWER IS IN BETTER PUBLIC TRANSPORT SYSTEM

Professor Ashish Verma, on the other hand, batted for a robust Metro Road Transport System (MRTS), which would include metro rail as well as suburban rail system. He cited Indian Institute of Science's recent research report that showed an efficient MRTS could carry 80 per cent of the city trips by 2041. It would provide 40 times more passenger capacity per investment compared to proposed tunnel roads and significantly improve urban mobility.

“So a simple metric to see is output divided by input. The output is the carrying capacity of the transport system in passengers per hour per direction, divided by investment to create that infrastructure,” Verma explained.

“So if you simply compare for example a tunnel road and a tunnel metro, a metro going in a tunnel, the difference is almost 40 times in favour of the metro,” he said.

“The capacity that a metro system generates to carry passengers per hour per direction is almost 40 times for the same amount of investment,” he clarified.

“If it is underground, it should be an MRTS. We are interested in carrying maximum people and goods, not empty vehicles. That's not the focus of the transport system. We have to see that holistically,” Verma asserted.

WATER SCARCITY IN BENGALURU IS FALLACY

S Vishwanath challenged the narrative of water scarcity in Bengaluru. According to him, 5,000 million litres of water is available in the city everyday. “And with an efficient system, the city has the potential to support a population of 50 million,” he asserted.

He revealed critical insights into Bengaluru's water infrastructure. He also pointed out how this amount of water would be sufficient for an extensive urban development.

According to him, the city's authorities have highly subsidised water thus taken the power away from BWSSB (Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board). “Currently, it costs BWSSB Rs 52 per kilolitre to supply water. But the residents pay only Rs 7 - 11 between two slab for per kilolitre. Thus a household gets a monthly water subsidy of Rs 1,650,” he said.

He then called for institutional transformation and for development of a comprehensive water management framework. He asked for integration of BWSSB, minor irrigation, and groundwater departments. He also proposed the creation of an institutional architecture for large-scale implementation.

“The only thing we lack is the right institutional architecture to run the system,” he emphasised, noting that political will exists but implementation remains challenging.

CITIZEN ACTIVISM AND SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

Revathy Ashok, too, emphasised the city's core problem: “We have very poor execution and can't see plans through.”

“Any action moving in the forward direction is a good thing,” she said, highlighting the importance of incremental progress in urban governance.

She underscored the critical role of citizen activism in driving urban transformation and the need for more robust institutional frameworks in Bangalore's development.

According to her, BPAC has been pivotal in driving systemic changes, pushing for innovative solutions to the city's urban challenges. Over the past five years, BPAC has spearheaded critical initiatives, including calling for a city-wide Climate Action Plan and creating a dedicated Climate Action Cell.

Despite significant achievements, Ashok highlighted persistent obstacles. The Climate Action Cell, while groundbreaking, lacks jurisdictional powers over key municipal bodies like BBMP and water management authorities. This limitation prevents comprehensive implementation of sustainability strategies.

She also highlighted a landmark intervention by BPAC. She said BPAC successfully advocated for the removal of 4,500 tonnes of debris from the long-stalled Ejjipura flyover, a project that had been under construction for seven years.

She also celebrated Karnataka's renewable energy achievements, with the state generating 65 per cent of its energy from renewable sources – one of the highest percentages in India. ■