

# ‘Congestion tax needs public transport support in Bengaluru,’ say mobility experts

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Heavy traffic at Outer Ring Road in Bengaluru (File Photo | Express)

**Indra S**

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BENGALURU: As part of its 90-day action plan to decongest Bengaluru, the Karnataka government has mooted the idea of a congestion tax among other traffic management measures at a recently held high-level meeting. While mobility experts agree that a congestion tax is a useful tool in principle, they point out that Bengaluru is not yet ready for such a measure due to its poor state of public transport, limited walkability, and incomplete mass transit systems.

The idea is to deduct the congestion tax through FASTag. Prof. Ashish Verma, convener, Sustainable Transportation Lab, Indian Institute of Science, emphasised that such measures work only in tandem with strong alternatives. “Congestion charge is a tested push measure used in cities like London and Singapore. The idea is simple — when you drive into a congested area during peak times, you pay extra because each additional vehicle contributes to congestion.”

“Such measures only work when push is balanced with pull. While you discourage private vehicle use, you must simultaneously strengthen alternatives — high-quality public transport infrastructure. Without these, people will have no viable options,” he added.

Mobility expert Sanjeev Dyamannavar questioned the practicality of the proposal. “With Metro work already slowing traffic, what is the use of punishing vehicle owners further with a congestion tax? Public transport is in a poor state — why aren’t they improving Metro or suburban rail instead?”

Srinivas Alavilli, fellow, World Resources Institute (WRI) India, supported the idea but stressed the need for balance.

“Congestion tax is one of the methods used in global cities to disincentivise personal vehicle usage. As our city grapples with more than 1 crore vehicles and tech corridors face unusually high congestion, it makes sense to consider it in specific corridors such as ORR, between Silk Board and KR Pura,” Alavilli said.

“With near universal adoption of FASTag in Bengaluru — including malls and multiplexes — it is now a viable option. However, a congestion tax cannot exist in isolation. It must be done only after increasing public transport capacity, and the revenue must go towards improving sustainable mobility,” he added.

Former Infosys CFO Mohandas Pai said, “It is ridiculous to even talk about congestion tax right now. Congestion exists not because people want it, but because they don’t have a choice. Our Metro is years behind schedule, BMTC is inadequate, and there is no reliable public transport citizens can turn to.”

He added, “Congestion tax only makes sense when public transport is available in surplus. Until then, penalising citizens for using their vehicles is unjust and uncalled for. Policies like congestion tax should improve quality of life, not punish people for the government’s own failures in delivering public transport.”