

Bengaluru's congestion rank exposes big gaps in mobility planning

The TomTom index measures average travel time for motorised vehicles over fixed distances.



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Gayathri M Kurup

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BENGALURU: Bengaluru's ranking as the second most congested city in the world in the latest TomTom Traffic Index, has once again drawn attention to the city's worsening traffic conditions. While the ranking reflects long commute times and slow-moving roads, urban mobility experts say it offers only a limited view of how the city functions and should not drive policy decisions.

The TomTom index measures average travel time for motorised vehicles over fixed distances. Experts caution that focusing on improving this ranking risks pushing cities towards road widening, flyovers and tunnel projects, approaches Bengaluru has relied on for decades with little success.

Ashish Verma, Professor of Transportation Systems Engineering at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), said the index captures congestion but ignores how people move using public transport, walking or cycling. "If cities chase this ranking, they will only invest more in road infrastructure, which worsens congestion in the long run," he said.

Verma pointed out that cities ranking lower on the index are often smaller American cities that are heavily car-dependent and lack strong public transport systems. "That is not a model Bengaluru should aspire to," he said, adding that cities such as London also perform poorly on the index, despite having robust public transport networks.

Srikanth Vishwanathan, co-founder of Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy, said Bengaluru does not need global rankings to diagnose its problems. "We already know traffic is bad. The focus should be on buses, walkability and neighbourhood-level planning," he said.

Vishwanath stressed that while Metro expansion is important, it cannot work in isolation. "Metro covers only a small part of the city. Without large-scale investment in buses and safe, continuous footpaths, people will continue to rely on private vehicles," he said, calling for a long-term plan to make Bengaluru fully walkable.

Shaheen Shasa, volunteer with Bengaluru Bus Prayanikara Vedike, warned against treating Metro projects as a standalone solution. She said excessive focus on large infrastructure often sidelines buses, first- and last-mile connectivity, and street-level improvements that affect most daily commuters.

Experts also highlighted Bengaluru's uneven growth pattern, with jobs concentrated in corridors such as Whitefield, Electronics City and Outer Ring Road, forcing long commutes. Mixed-use neighbourhoods and better use of public land, they said, are essential for reducing travel demand.