

Report of the workshop

“Namma Raste: Reclaiming Bangalore’s roads”

July 19, 2008

On 19th July 2008, a workshop on “Reclaiming Bangalore’s roads: Namma Raste” was jointly organized by Environment Support Group, CIVIC Bangalore and Alternative Law Forum. The workshop was held between 9:30 AM -5:30 PM at Vidyadeep, Ulsoor Road, Bangalore.

The workshop had over 90 participants, ranging from representatives of traders’ associations, resident association federations, and organizations working with the differently abled & for the urban poor, groups working on pedestrian rights, architects, schools, colleges and members of Hasiru Usiru. (Hasiru Usiru is a collective of individuals and citizens’ groups who are actively engaged in the protection of Bangalore’s trees, lakes (in general the commons) and finding sustainable solutions to Bangalore’s traffic problems.)

The purpose of the workshop was to sensitize the participants about the necessity to actively engage in the process of reshaping Bangalore, especially in light of the scheme to widen 91 prime roads in the city by Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), amounting to a length of about 350 kms through some of the most densely populated areas of the city.

Background of the issue

This scheme that purportedly will reduce traffic congestion and increase vehicle speeds in the city from the current 8-10 km/hr to 40 km/hr will require an investment of over Rs. 4000 crores (by conservative estimates that involve no cost of land acquisition). This ultra mega-project is being proposed despite clear evidence that road widening will not be a solution to Bangalore’s traffic congestion. An analysis of Bangalore’s vehicular traffic reveals that the vehicular population doubles every five years, over ninety percent of which are cars and two wheelers. Every day, 1500 vehicles land in the city, i.e. over 5 lakhs are added to the vehicular population every year. There is no way that road space can increase to keep pace with this explosive growth of vehicles.

More importantly, the BBMP scheme is not backed by appropriate road specific designs and there are no plans to make provisions for the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, street vendors, senior citizens, differently abled and other groups with special needs. This scheme will result in the dislocation of hundreds of homes and loss of livelihoods of lakhs of people in the commercial areas where widening has been proposed. There has been no attempt by BBMP to engage in any consultation even with those who will be directly affected by this scheme. Also, BBMP has violated the provisions of the Karnataka Town & Country Planning Act 1963, Municipal Corporation Act and various other laws in its mad rush to carry out widening works.

Deeply alarmed by this cavalier approach of the BBMP, Environment Support Group and CIVIC Bangalore filed a PIL in the High Court of Karnataka challenging the legality of the road widening schemes and the fact that the interests of pedestrians, senior citizens, school children, differently abled, and other road users have been ignored. In response, the Hon’ble High Court of Karnataka has constituted a Empowered Committee under the chairmanship of Mr.Yellappa Reddy, IFS (retd) and 6 experts from various disciplines (proposed by the petitioners and respondents jointly) to review and verify all details of road widening proposals and suggest measures that are binding on the authorities. During the process of decision

making the committee has to consider the suggestions of the public and work for the larger public interest, while ensuring there is no violation of law.

The Hon'ble Court has also directed that in case of conflicts within the committee, such matters be brought before the Legal Aid Committee headed by Justice Manjunath. In addition, the Petitioners have been provided the right to suggest any "interim measure" to resolve vexatious issues in the larger public interest.

Keeping all these matters in view, the workshop was organized to make people aware of these developments, and motivate them to use the relief granted by the Hon'ble Court in the best possible manner by examining various ways of engaging with the Committee and presenting their concerns about development works in Bangalore to the Committee. The workshop also aimed at making people aware of the immense creative potential of the interim relief, thereby motivating people to raise their concerns about even other developmental works such as the METRO, and bringing the needs of children, senior citizens, differently abled and other road users with special needs to the attention of the authorities, using the Empowered Committee as a platform to air and debate various concerns and considerations.

Interim order of the High Court: A glimmer of hope in a long struggle with irrationality

The workshop started off with an introduction by Leo Saldanha (ESG) where he explained the history of the HASIRU USIRU network, and the events which led to the filing of the PIL in 2008. He explained how HASIRU USIRU was an evolution of deep concerns of concerned residents of the city to ensure that traffic management solutions could be evolved without having to resort to felling trees and widening roads.

When in 2005 the city authorities proposed to widen many prominent roads, there were



Hasiru Usiru members protesting against road widening

widespread protests against the scheme as it lacked rationale, besides resulting in widespread felling of trees. It was highlighted that the proposals at that time did not in any manner conform to the provisions of the Karnataka Tree Preservation Act, Karnataka Town and Country Planning Act, or the Municipal Corporation Act. The main concern of HASIRU USIRU was that the proposal to widen roads was only a temporary measure to solve the traffic woes of the city. It would only be a matter of time before the roads were full again; meanwhile the natural heritage of the city, trees, would be lost forever, besides causing needles agony to hundreds of entrepreneurs and residents who would lose their properties. Further the schemes did not in any manner protect the interests of street vendors, tenants, pedestrians, senior citizens, school children, differently abled and users of non motorized transport.

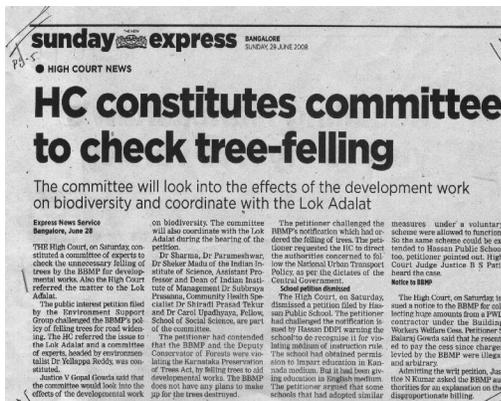
Since there was no withdrawal of its proposals by BBMP to widen roads, despite its illegalities and massive protests, Environment Support Group preferred a PIL in the High Court of Karnataka (WP 17550/2006). As the case was being argued, the Chief Secretary organised a series of meetings of various agencies and confirmed that any road widening programme

would only be undertaken in full conformance with law and after duly consulting the public, in particular HASIRU USIRU. On the strength of this assurance of the Chief Secretary, the Hon'ble High Court of Karnataka disposed off the PIL directing the BBMP to involve ESG and HASIRU USIRU in all decisions concerning tree felling as and when possible.

However, despite repeated efforts from HASIRU USIRU to minimise the loss of greenery in the city, and also promote a variety of intelligent design and management options, the BBMP has not given room for any involvement of the public in decision making relating to the road widening schemes. HASIRU USIRU network participated in many discussions with different government agencies from the BBMP all the way to the Chief Secretary's level, and even represented the Advisor to the Governor during President's rule. But the government in no manner responded to any of the concerns raised.

On 20 December 2007, Environment Support Group, CIVIC Bangalore and Alternative Law Forum along with other members of HASIRU USIRU organized a Public Consultation and invited BBMP and officials from related Government agencies to discuss the road widening scheme with members of the public at Senate Hall of Central College. The top officials stayed away from this consultation. But there was meaningful representation from officials implementing road widening projects. The Consultation was chaired by Mr. P. S. S. Thomas, former Secretary General of the National Human Rights Commission.

But despite this Consultation, there was no attempt to respond positively to the initiative taken or respect the spirit of the 2005 High Court judgment. The BBMP continued with its cavalier approach to road widening, even though this involved blatant violations of a number of laws.



Newspaper report on Empowered Committee

and three persons nominated by the Respondents were appointed to the Committee by the Court.

An opportunity to reclaim Bangalore roads, our commons

Saldanha stressed that that the roads of Bangalore are part of the city's commons, and that decisions made about them should involve everyone in the city. As things are now, such decisions tend to be made by a group of experts in a room without consulting anyone else. The High Court, through the empowered committee has provided room for wider public consultation, especially for affected communities, as part of its terms of reference to ensure that the BBMP strictly complies with law in the implementation of these schemes. As the law

Saldanha explained that these series of events forced ESG & CIVIC to file a PIL in May 2008 challenging the road widening schemes. He spoke about how when they approached the High Court for a stay on tree felling, the BBMP counsel had suggested the formation of an Empowered Committee to examine the matter. In a spirit of building bridges and ensuring a non-adversarial and non-litigative approach could help resolve matters, the Petitioners accepted the counsel's suggestion to constitute an Empowered Committee under the Chairmanship of Mr. Yellappa Reddy, IFS (Retd.). So that the committee was competent in addressing all the complex issues involved, the Petitioners' suggestions to include experts from various disciplines were accepted by the Hon'ble Court. Thereby three persons nominated by the Petitioners

required public consultation and due consideration of the concerns raised by the public during implementation of a scheme, the Committee could be effectively used by all those directly affected by the road widening by making representations and demands for site visits and spot hearings before the Committee. This would not exclude the compliance of statutory hearings and procedures under various related laws. However, the Committee could additionally organise site visits and Public Hearings, so that the public are duly and adequately consulted, and that too before road widening projects are implemented. The High Court direction clearly implies that ongoing road widening programmes must all comply with its orders without any exception.

Illustrating the detail to which the Hon'ble Court has appreciated the nuances of the issue, Saldanha highlighted that the concern to protect greenery in the city, for instance, was promoted by the Court insisting that no tree felling should continue in violation of Section 8 (5) of the Karnataka Tree Preservation Act. A major illegality in all tree felling orders issued by the Tree Officer to accommodate road widening currently was that avenue trees were being permitted to be felled per Section 8 (3) of the Tree Act, without concomitant compliance with Section 8 (5) that requires replanting in the same area or another suitable area. The Court by highlighting this requirement had emphasised the extent of caution that was to be exercised in dealing with the issue, and also as a determinant of the decisions of the Committee's functioning.



Trees felled illegally on Kanakpura Road

Another illustration was that Hon'ble Court required that the "Committee shall also take into consideration not only the felling of trees and the widening of roads to reach the international airport but also such other incidental and related matters which result in the traffic hazards and also in relation to public/private transport, senior citizens, physically handicapped persons, children, ecology, environment and health."

Following Saldanha's introduction, there were a series of presentations by representatives of various organizations, each of whom described how a different group in the city would be adversely affected by road widening.

Widening Avenue Road: Ripping apart Bangalore's heart

Sreedhar (President, The Avenue Road Commercial Association) outlined the BBMP's plans to turn Avenue Road into a 24 metre wide corridor for vehicles to zip through. He expressed his concern over the fact that widening will destroy most of the commercial establishments on the road. Already, the BBMP has painted properties with red marks and the threat of demolition is imminent.

He estimated that 1-2 lakh families will be directly affected by the demolitions and 5-6 lakh will be indirectly affected. There are around 5,000 traders on Avenue Road and the area is the city's hub for thousands of different commodities, ranging from second hand books, vessels, mirrors, jewellery, weighing machines to photo frames, footpath booksellers, fruit vendors

and so on. As Sreedhar aptly put it "You can get anything other than an aeroplane here!" The impact of businesses being demolished would be felt all around the city.

In addition, he explained that many of the shops on Avenue Road have been around for decades. Several historical monuments lie in the path of the road widening, including a *dargah* built by Tipu Sultan and temples built by Krishnadevaraya. As legend goes, Kempe Gowda, the founder of Bangalore is said to have sent off bullocks yoked to a plough in four different directions to set limits to the city based on the area the bullocks covered in a day. Avenue Road is that very spot from the bullocks were sent off, and thus is where the city began.



A view of Avenue Road

Clearly, therefore, this area is a heritage site, and more than just livelihoods will be lost if various shops and residences along this road were torn down to make way for widening.

Finally, Sreedhar explained that it does not make sense to widen Avenue Road. Avenue Road does not require widening, as vehicles only take three to five minutes to travel from one end to the other and traffic accidents have been minimal here. The footpaths need improvement, but the road itself does not need widening. Further, it does not make sense to widen Avenue Road if one looks at the paths that commuters take to work. The purpose of widening would be to connect south and central Bangalore, but as it is people do not use Avenue Road to travel from south to central Bangalore. Besides road widening is a short term solution, and the widened roads are not always used properly.

On a concluding note, Sreedhar said that there needs to be transparent and open discussions between the planning authorities and the residents of the areas where road widening is proposed.

CMH Road Association: Breaking our back for the METRO



Artist's impression of Metro Work ©
Veerendra

Intiaz, President of the CMH Road Association spoke for the association, which comprises mainly of traders. Intiaz explained that CMH Road is only 1 km long, but 32 banks are crammed together within that tiny stretch. This is clear indication of the high rate of capital transfer and savings, and thus demonstrative of the economic contribution of this street. It has a very high number of shops, with approximately 1,500 establishments. CMH Road was marked for the path of the Bangalore Metro in 2003. The traders there have been protesting ever since, but their complaints have fallen on unsympathetic ears. The traders have been branded 'enemies' of the Metro for

demonstratively suggesting that a more appropriate alignment exists within half a kilometre where there is no need to acquire private properties, as the alternative alignment consists

mainly of government buildings. Even though such a road exists, it is not being considered on the ground that the alternative would reduce ridership by 15 per cent.

But the question remains, if ridership will not reduce much more sharply if CMH Road is stripped off all its shops and commercial establishments, which is the main reason why the ridership is claimed to be high presently. The official reason provided for not using the alternative is that it would destroy a graveyard, where again only a pillar or two would of the elevated track would be located. In other words, Imtiaz shared with concern, the dead are receiving more consideration from the Government than the living do.

Imtiaz also said that CMH road is being shredded not only for the METRO but also for road widening. This is being done under the garb of infrastructure development. He went on to say that road widening is a short term solution. The roads will once more have to be widened after another five years, as the volume of traffic in Bangalore continues to increase. He suggested that people should desist from using SUVs in Bangalore, as they take up a lot of space. .

On a concluding note, he said that the traders have been given notices which indicate that the CMH road will be blocked from either end while it is being widened, and only pedestrians will be allowed on the road. He also said that the authorities have threatened to use force if the traders do not back down on the issue of the METRO. He appealed to all for their support and solidarity.

Chamrajpet Traders Association: Destroying a bazaar

Dr. Satish Bhonsle, President of the Chamrajpet Traders' Association, outlined the predicament there. He said that 1.5 km of road stretch (Bazaar Street, 3rd Cross) of Chamrajpet has been marked for widening. He estimated that nearly all the businesses would have to leave after that since the space left in their buildings would be barely enough to move in, let alone conduct business in. For those that remained, it would be extremely expensive to rebuild both their buildings and their businesses – perhaps 1 crore rupees for just one building. He worried that the power lines, water supply, drainage and telephone lines in the area would be damaged during road widening, and that it might take years to get them repaired or replaced.

Further, Dr. Bhonsle explained that the layout was 108 years old, with many shops that are over 90-100 years old. He said that just as in Avenue Road, a significant part of the city's heritage would be lost by widening this road.

He suggested that alternative routes should be explored. Most commuters do not come through Chamrajpet, after all, but through Banaswadi. He lamented that none of the plans for road widening had been made by town planning or traffic experts.

BBMP Road Widening: Lack of integrated planning

Prem Chandavarkar, an architect, reviewed the road widening schemes in the context of urban planning and design. He started by stating that the BBMP's plans disregard the intricacies of the existing road network in the city. Since these aspects are not taken into account, widening in one place merely shifts the problems of traffic congestion to some other place.

He stated that the lack of radial connections has been identified as the cause of Bangalore's traffic problems, many a time. The system of roads is excessively radial, with most routes from one end of the city to the other, running through the heart of the city. This point has also been reiterated in the Bangalore Master Plan, prepared by a French consultancy firm brought in by the BDA to highlight the causes of Bangalore's traffic problems and suggest solutions.

The Master Plan proposes more ring connections, and resorting to widening roads only along the periphery of the city. It also proposes that existing railway tracks be turned into a commuter rail system and setting up high capacity bus corridors throughout the city.

The Bangalore Master Plan contains figures that support these suggestions: 41 per cent of commuters in Bangalore travel by bus, but buses only make up 2 per cent of the actual trips within Bangalore; 35 per cent of commuters in Bangalore travel by private transport (5 per cent by car and 30 per cent by motorbike), but private vehicles constitute 80 per cent of the actual trips within the city; 16 per cent of commuters in Bangalore travel by foot, and 1.7 per cent by bicycle.

Finally, the Bangalore Master Plan does not recommend a Metro, as that would only solve a small part of the traffic problem. It also does not recommend widening the roads in the centre of the city, since this would encourage private vehicles. These suggestions have been ignored by the authorities.



Streets - Lifeblood of a city

Chandavarkar highlighted that roads are the lifeblood of a city; that they perform many functions and space must be allocated to each one. There must be space for pedestrians and greenery, for vendors and hawkers and all the various activities of the city that play out on the street, and finally for traffic. Traffic cannot be placed above all the other functions. Public spaces where pedestrians interact are vital for a city's life and sense of community. These public spaces must be kept open and safe.

He explained that residential spaces in the city are unaffordable to 40-50 per cent of the city's population. These sections, like the slum-dwellers, are forced to find places to live that are not included on land use plans. Land use plans, therefore, end up criminalizing half the city.

It is Bangalore's elite that is pushing for the city to become more like Singapore or Shanghai. The politicians listen to them, and push for schemes like road widening to demonstrate that something is being done. And streets like Avenue Road have no place in such a vision. If Singapore is held up as the ideal, shopping areas will be made to resemble and feel like malls rather than bazaars.

Further, public transport is difficult to popularize among all sections of society since we live in such an unequal society. Chandavarkar sighted the example of Connaught Place in Delhi, where shopkeepers protested against the proposal of free shuttle bus services, as they

claimed that the sorts of people who frequented their shops would not like to mingle with those who would want to take a free bus.

In the end, Chandavarkar said that the BBMP and other authorities need to address traffic related problems, taking into account the needs of various road users. And this could be best achieved by making people a part of planning and giving them an opportunity to put forth their suggestions.

Widened Roads: Nightmare of the Differently Abled

Articulating mobility related difficulties of differently abled persons, Jatin from Samarthana Trust for the Disabled, explained the implications of road widening for this group of people. He started off by saying that it is nearly impossible for visually or physically challenged people to walk along/cross the streets of Bangalore. Even if footpaths exist, they tend to be very uneven and full of obstructions. A project like road widening would destroy even the existing sidewalks, and would further inconvenience the differently abled (also addressed as disabled or physically challenged).

Very often, the differently abled rely on street vendors and others along the street to help them get from one side of the road to the other. When roads are widened, the existence of these other groups also gets threatened, breaking the sense of security that the differently abled require.

On the same issue, Jatin posed a question to the gathering: if even a normal person must run across a street to cross it, how can a person disabled by polio do it?

Elaborating on his organization's initiatives in this regard, Jatin said that they were trying to put together a curriculum for disability trainers. This would include methods that the disabled could use to safely cross the street. Also, Samarthana's office will soon be the first building in Bangalore that is friendly to the visually impaired. At the moment, no such buildings exist.



No pedestrian crossings- A nightmare for the differently abled

Widening Stress and Anxiety

Dr. Aditya from Community Health Cell gave a talk on the impacts of road widening on public health. To explain what he meant by health, he cited the World Health Organization's definition: where, health means physical, mental and social well-being.

Aditya stated that while the benefits of road widening are short term—a temporary ease in traffic congestions—the costs will be long-lasting. When a city loses its pavements and public spaces, the sense of community is lost. This affects people's health. When people lose their livelihoods because their shops have been destroyed for wider roads, it affects their health.

Road widening also compromises on the safety of pedestrians. 50 per cent of fatalities in traffic accidents are pedestrians. Furthermore, simply crossing the street is a life risking task

for the elderly and children. A shrunken sidewalk makes it difficult for people to walk along the streets and forces them to take a bus to work. For the urban poor who commute to work by walk, this shift in mode of transport means 30 per cent of their monthly income would be diverted to public transport instead of health, education and so on.

Bangalore and Asthma	
Year	Prevalence (%)
79	9
84	10
89	18
94	24
99	29

Relating to the importance of trees to health, Adithya said that trees provide oxygen, reduce pollution, relax drivers, absorb noise, maintain the temperature, and hold moisture. Loss of green cover increases the local temperatures, causing physical stress to both drivers and pedestrians. Similarly, there is steep increase in pollution levels when the green cover disappears, which in turn leads to higher rates of respiratory diseases. Children and the less affluent are particularly vulnerable to this. As a case in point 9 per cent of the population of

Bangalore had asthma in 1979, as against the 29 per cent that had asthma in 1999, and the number has steeply increased subsequently.

Drivers also have to concentrate more on wider roads, since the speed of vehicles on such roads is higher. This raises their levels of stress. Noise and air pollution also adds to their woes.

In conclusion, Adithya said that only 1 per cent of India's GDP is spent on health.

Development tends to mean industrialisation and motorisation rather than improving people's lives. If people in Bangalore are encouraged to walk and if the green cover is kept intact, a lot of health related problems can be curtailed.

No space for the ones who pave the roads

Arun Kumar Selva, who runs a Kannada magazine for slum dwellers called *Slum Jagathu*, the only magazine of its kind, explained how road widening and development projects in general affect slum dwellers.

He began with a story about a nomadic community that lived near Cantonment. An underpass was built there that displaced the slums, and the community was forced to move to Tumkur. They had earned a living so far by working on construction sites in Cantonment, but they lost their livelihoods after being displaced to Tumkur as it was too far away for them to commute to work.



Livelihoods being threatened by speeding vehicles

This story is being repeated all over Bangalore. Land is taken for development by the government, and monetary compensation is given to the landowners, who are generally not the worst affected. Ordinary tenants and workers are left out in the cold. As an example, on Avenue Road the shop owners are going to be compensated but the workers in the shops, the cobblers on the street and others will be given nothing.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh claims that anyone who opposes such development is anti-national. Slum dwellers who protest the loss of their homes without compensation are

branded “anti-national,” even though it was slum dwellers who built the Vidhan Souda. Cities rely on the urban poor for such work, but the very development that they help to create displaces them in the end, making them lose their legitimacy.

Selva spoke of how plans for road widening ignore the fact that transportation is not just about the vehicles, but about the journey. It is about the people at either end of the road. He also said that it is important to focus on the source of these development plans: the people who make decisions for everybody else.

In response to a comment from a shopkeeper on Avenue Road that action was needed now, Selva said that this is a process that began years ago. There is a wide outcry now from traders because their shops are being destroyed, but the trouble is that no one raises their voices or becomes concerned unless they’re being directly affected by a policy. The process of road widening is part of a wider project, and has been deep rooted in the agenda of various governments for a long time. We have to understand that entire agenda and its direction in order to change it.

Selva also narrated how walking as a mode of transport is being deligitimised or unsafe. As a boy of 12, Selvas was forced to work to make ends meet for his family. Selva as a little boy would walk every day from Ejipura (near Koramangala) to near St. Martha's Hospital for work, and return home in the evening with Rs. 5 as wages to supplement his family's income. Today that has become impossible given the careless disregard to pedestrian needs, and the high difficulty of crossing streets safely and reaching work in time. From this personal experience he abstracted that the poor in large proportions walk to work, and there is least attention paid for their needs.

He ended by arguing that the economic policies engaged in had increased the gaps between the rich and the poor, and most policies and projects were geared to meeting the needs of the former. He ended by suggesting the road widening is nothing but another instance of the Government rushing to implement an ill-thought out project serving the interests of middle and upper classes, without any regard to the needs of the poor and labouring classes.

Walking Classes Unite

Walking Classes Unite, a group that works on pedestrian rights in Chennai, pictorially presented various risks and issues that pedestrians encounter. Jade, a representative of the organisation began by describing the similarities between Chennai and Bangalore—traffic problems, bad public transport system, urban sprawl, population of about 75 lakh people.

Talking about transport facilities in Chennai, Jade said that though the Metro is fast and good for long distances, it is expensive and not well connected. And since the Metro stations are not near the major bus lines it doesn’t get too many passengers either. Most people use the bus instead, since it is reliable, it reaches everywhere, and it’s cheap. However, the bus system also has shortcomings—the routes are not easily accessible and the number of buses are declining in relation to the increase in population.



Roads sans footpaths

Owing to bad transport facilities, Chennai has a lot of pedestrians. 40 per cent of people cycle or walk, yet there is very little road space given for that. As in the case of Bangalore, most road space goes to cars, and the roads are very hard to cross. The sidewalks are narrow as transformers, vehicles, petrol pumps, utilities, and other obstructions and beautification works take away most spaces. Foot bridges have been introduced, but they are not convenient for the elderly and people with disabilities.

Walking Classes Unite was formed with the object of reclaiming public spaces and promoting public and non-motorized transport. They are trying to accomplish this through audit walks, media coverage and outreach programmes. Some of their main challenges so far have been finding and motivating volunteers and getting information from officials, who are hesitant to help them.

A comment was made from the audience that pedestrians feel a lot of animosity from vehicles, in addition to the other problems the group had mentioned. Also, the commentator suggested that there is a difference between those who walk by choice and those who have to walk, such as hawkers and commuters who are too poor to take

public transport. The latter, therefore, have to be attended to on priority in any road development scheme.

Conflict Resolution Strategies

Highlighting the need to facilitate dialogue between the concerned citizens and the planning authorities, Ashok Pannikar and Beth Fascitelli from Meta-Culture discussed various processes which create such platforms for resolving disputes. They explained their organisation's focus as one of conflict resolution and dialogue facilitation that brings groups together and helps them have constructive conversations. It does this by listening to the two sides of the story and identifying the areas where interests overlap and cause conflicts.

Ashok and Beth made a list of the main themes of the workshop, based on what they had heard. These were:

- People don't want road widening, and don't see why it's necessary.
- Who defines development, and how?
- What are the standards used to see if roads should be widened, and which of these standards are valid?
- What is a healthy democracy, and how should that play out with respect to this?
- How can we be heard, and is there a point in being heard? If we try to have a discussion, how can we make it helpful?

Ashok emphasized that while competition is one of the most obvious traits of democracy, non-competitive dialogue is one of its most integral parts. In other words, practicing democracy means speaking with people we disagree with and possibly giving something up during the negotiation that follows.

A comment was made by a member of the audience that the power difference between the two sides had to be taken into account in this particular case. This was not an abstract dialogue at some theoretically equal table. For instance: How would slum dweller Mariamma and Infosys Chief Mentor Narayanmurthy have a fair dialogue about Bangalore's water crisis. Ashok and Beth replied that their process of mediation involved making the table as equal as

possible, else dialogue would not work. They emphasised that for dialogue to work, effort from all sides to constructively engage was equally important.

Road Widening: A scheme without legal backing

Sunil Dutt Yadav, Advocate and Leo Saldanha, ESG outlined how the road widening schemes promoted by the BBMP blatantly violate the provisions of many laws, most importantly the Karnataka Town & Country Planning Act, 1963.

1. The Karnataka Town & Country Planning Act, 1963 clearly states that any developmental scheme (including road widening) for the city can be carried out only in accordance to the Comprehensive Developmental Plan for the city. It is important to remember that a mere provision in the CDP is not sufficient to support implementation of any developmental work, and a Town Planning Scheme for implementation has to be first prepared by the relevant Planning Authority under the provisions of Chapter 5 of the Karnataka Town & Country Planning Act, 1963. In this case, a road widening scheme should have been framed by the Bangalore Development Authority under Chapter 5, KTCP Act before the BBMP started off on its implementation. As this has not been done, BBMP's action in issuing orders for execution of road widening works is illegal.
2. There is also a problem in the provisions for road widening that have been indicated in the final Comprehensive Development Plan -2015 prepared by the BDA and notified in 2007. When the draft of this plan was circulated among members of the public for comments and suggestions in 2005, the maps proposed no change in road width whatsoever. To introduce the changes in road width only in the final plan is clearly illegal per the provisions of the KTCP Act, 1963 and the BDA Act, as the public has been denied an opportunity to participate in decision making on road widening.



Reaction to TDR

3. At present, BBMP has been promoting the road widening schemes by invoking Transferable Development Rights Scheme provided under Section 14 B of the Karnataka Town & Country Planning Act, 1963. But it is necessary to understand that the TDR scheme is conceptualized as compensation for voluntary surrender of land for a public purpose by the owner and cannot be forced upon property owners during a compulsory land acquisition drive. Compulsory acquisition of land can be made only by strictly conforming to the provisions of the Land Acquisition Act, 1894 that includes giving adequate public notice, hearing of objections and decision on an award of compensation. They clarified that it was simply wrong of BBMP officials to claim, as was being widely reported by affected communities, that if 70% of affected persons accepted TDR, then the others who had not could be forcibly displaced. They emphasised that for the rest of the properties to be acquired, a full compliance with the provisions of the Land Acquisition Act was essential.
4. It is surprising about how the TDR scheme can continue, even in the cases of voluntary surrender, because of the parallel Sakrama scheme that regularizes violations on payment of a fine. The TDR would be a losers' option if the Sakrama

scheme is also continued by the Municipal Corporation. (Who would want to trade in extra Floor Area Ratios when violations of the FAR are being regularized on the other hand)?

5. In the process of widening, the orders to fell trees that have been issued by the Tree Officer, BBMP are in violation of the Karnataka Preservation of Trees Act, 1976. Section 8(5) of the Act requires that whenever an order for felling trees is issued, an order to plant two saplings in lieu of the tree being felled has to be issued. The tree felling orders issued concomitant with the road widening notifications (actually only notifications making available TDR on roads proposed to be widened) do not provide in any manner comply with Section 8 (5) of the Tree Act. This point has been made abundantly clear to the authorities by the Hon'ble Court in its interim directions. Moreover, the orders to fell trees contain very scanty information about the findings of the site inspection of the trees to be felled. (Details of age of tree, girth, health and so on).

6. Bellary Road is an example of what is likely on all the 91 roads set to be widened. In the rush to provide connectivity to the new Airport, the Government of Karnataka (while under President's rule) rushed the widening programme without complying with any applicable law or standard. All that mattered was to put a high speed 6 to 8 lane carriage ways to the new airport to ensure 30,000 air passengers were ushered crisply to the airport. Such was the tearing hurry of this enterprise that the implementing agencies, admittedly, did not care to build in pedestrian crossing, walkways, cyclist zones, lanes for



Bellary Road Widening- No heed pedestrians rights

- two wheelers, etc. The result: 17 people killed and 36 injured in 66 accidents in just five weeks. Every day two people are critically injured on just one road. And that very road is claiming a life every other day. There is nothing that can be done to stop this killing and maiming, as the Government now plans to put a high speed rail link from M. G. Road to the airport (only for air travelers) and thus pedestrian skywalks cannot be built. In all the 30 kms. stretch, there are only 6 traffic lights – on an average one every 5 km
7. The Empowered Committee is bound to listen to the views of the public. Those who are directly affected by the road widening or are working with groups with special needs whose interests are not provided for in the road widening proposal, such constituencies can make representations to the Empowered Committee set up by the Hon'ble High Court of Karnataka expressing issues and concerns about road widening. The Empowered Committee can also be requested to permit participation at the meetings of the Committee.

A city without spaces: Artists' impression of Bangalore

Students of Chitrakala Parishad—Veerendra, Suhasini and Raghvendra, presented their reflections on the city in the form of paintings and artworks. One of the students expressed that in a city like Bangalore there is absolutely no space for people to express their creativity or emotions in public spaces such as streets. One ends up feeling choked and claustrophobic.

One of the paintings showcased how various infrastructure projects- like the Metro, road widening and so on trampled upon people, leaving them exhausted and stretched. Another painting was reflective of a real life incident, in which the artist's friend had met with an accident. The students spoke about the lack of emotive spaces, and how it troubled artists and their creativity.



Vehicles trampling over people © Veerendra

Traffic Solutions: Examples from the World

Bhargavi Rao from ESG presented examples from across the world, which highlighted alternatives to road widening. She talked first about the option of charging private vehicles to come into congested parts of a city during rush hour like in the city of London. She also talked about the option of instituting bike lanes, which has been implemented in several US cities, in Mexico City, and in Sao Paulo, and many other cities of the developing world.

Rao presented pictures from two cities that have been made car free and designated world heritage sites: Bhaktapur, Nepal and Cartagena, Colombia. She spoke of how cycle rickshaws are making a comeback in Delhi, even though they were banned after road widening raised traffic speeds. Slides on M.G. Road in Pune which has been made a walking plaza on Sundays interested the audience. And initiatives like planting a million trees in Los Angeles were also appreciated by all.

She ended by narrating the story of Thimmakka who was childless, but planted and nurtured 400 banyan trees along with her husband, as though the trees were her own children. Thimmakka still looks after these trees despite her dire state of affairs.

Public Transport: The Best Way Forward

Dasarathi gave a talk on Public Transport and how it can help solve Bangalore's traffic congestion problems. He explained first that road widening is an illogical venture as any amount of widening will not be able to contain the increasing traffic in the city. Road space needs to be doubled every five years at the rate at which vehicles are being registered each day. Eventually there will be no living and commercial space left. He emphatically questioned whether the "city is for people or for vehicles?"

Dasarathi enumerated the benefits of public buses. He stated that buses produce less pollution per person than any other mode of transport. Two stroke motorbikes are the worst polluters, with cars not too far behind. Buses are a magical solution to reduce congestion because they can carry many people. At rush hour, buses tend to carry about 70 people

comfortably, with 20 standing. Even 120 people cram into one bus sometimes. Cars and motorbikes, on the other hand, tend to only carry one person each at rush hour.



Road Space: Private Vehicles vs buses

He showed various pictures to demonstrate how easily buses can clean up congestion on a street. Whereas 60 cars (each carrying one person) may fill up a street, 60 people can fill up a bus, which does not even remotely fill a whole street. There are figures to demonstrate this: a person on a bus uses upto 3 per cent of the space of a person in a car, and 5

per cent of the space of a person on a motorbike. In Bangalore, buses carry 50 per cent of commuters, but occupy only make up 1/620th of the street.

Dasarathi suggested bus rapid transit as a solution to traffic problems in Bangalore. 85 cities worldwide have already adopted it, including Jakarta and Bangkok. This solution also has the benefit of being cheaper than road widening or building of an expensive Metro system. While road widening in Bangalore might cost crores and would only work in the short term, setting up bus rapid transport would come at lesser costs and would have long term benefits.

Conclusion

After day long deliberations, the organisers and participants came together to reflect on future courses of action.

- Everyone agreed that requesting meetings with the members of the Empowered Committee, making representations to the Committee and demanding local area Public Consultations of all affected roads was important and had to be taken up on a priority basis.
- It was decided that road widening was an issue that concerned not only the affected communities, but also the entire city. Hence, there had to be events like exhibitions on heritage sites that may be dislocated by road widening, rallies of cyclists and pedestrians, and organizing neighbourhood celebrations of street spaces to catch the popular imagination.
- Writing to newspapers and magazines about people's opinions on the road widening scheme was also considered.

The meeting ended on a high note with a commitment by all to take the learnings from the day's discussions to every neighbourhood across the city, and make the city work for people's real needs.

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Note:

1. All presentations made during the consultation are available online at www.esgindia.org
2. The designs for some roads of the road widening schemes can be downloaded from www.esgindia.org

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