

Cycling Inclusive Planning Workshop

31st January 2009

On 31st January 2009, a "Cycling Inclusive Planning Workshop" was jointly organized by Bangalore Metropolitan Land Transport Authority (BMLTA), EMBARQ, Interface for Cycling Expertise (I-CE), City Connect and RideACycle Foundation (RAC-F). The workshop was held between 9:00 AM -5:00 PM at the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation premises, Double Road, Bangalore.

The workshop brought together concerned individuals, members of various cycling groups like Hasiru Usiru (a collective of individuals and citizens' groups who are actively engaged in the protection of Bangalore's trees, lakes and other commons and finding sustainable solutions to Bangalore's traffic problems) and representatives of agencies of the government and experts on transportation and urban planning issues.

Background to the issue

Over the past few years Bangalore has become infamous for its traffic congestion and mobility related problems. According to some estimates Bangalore registers 298 vehicles per thousand people, with motorization increasing at 10-20 per cent per annum. While the private vehicles account for only 38 per cent of the trips in the city – 40 per cent of daily trips by public transport and walking and cycling account for 17 per cent of trips.

Traffic studies also cite poor condition of pavements, low travel speeds, high intersection delays, and poor or non-existent parking facilities as some of Bangalore's transportation related problems. Besides that there is an ever-increasing threat of accidents and health-related problems like asthma and respiratory disorders due to high pollution levels.

Interestingly, though these issues have assumed center stage at various forums, with experts pointing out to lacunae in urban planning, policy documents evolved hitherto have not been able to provide holistic solutions to address all corresponding issues.

In fact, in most cases instead of taking a preventive approach that targets the root of the congestion problem, curative suggestions—which are rather short-sighted and will do little to solve the problem in the long run—are being prompted. Thus, instead of giving impetus to sustainable transport models which are inclusive of the needs of various road users, the focus so far has been on traditional supply enhancing infrastructure projects like the road-widening, construction of flyovers that cater to needs of private vehicle owners.

Considering that ad-hoc infrastructure development has far-reaching impacts, increasing risks for cyclists, who are the easiest victims on busy city streets, concerned cyclists' groups have been raising several concerns. While negotiating for safer paths for cycling there also has been a silent movement to educate the larger public on the benefits of cycling.

The workshop on 'Cycling Inclusive Planning' was aimed at systematizing the dialogue between various groups and the city administration, to evolve rational models that facilitate the use of cycle and thus encourage people to shift to a low-energy, less-space consuming and zero-pollution mode of transport.

The objectives of the workshop were to:

- Understand the current International and Indian discourses on cycling friendly cities in order to formulate a base awareness of the issues involved, among the various stakeholders
- To reach an informed consensus together with all stakeholders as to what approach would work best for the city of Bangalore
- To formulate a base structure for capacity building of the city of Bangalore and outline a plan for inputs needed to make the city self-sufficient to implement plans on cycle inclusive transport systems.
- To put together an action plan that will identify both short term and long term plans such as, demonstration projects with implementation time-line and get commitment from the stakeholders to their roles in its implementation. The action plan will also identify long term needs such as, Bangalore Cycle Master Plan, Institutional Arrangements, and Capacity Building.

The role of BMLTA and its efforts in promoting cycling as a mode of transport:

The workshop started with a presentation by Mr. Gaurav Gupta, Member Convenor, BMLTA. Introducing BMLTA which was set up in 2007, Mr. Gupta said that Bangalore has the credit of being the first city to initiate an authority which brings under one umbrella various agencies—like the Bruhut Bangalore Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) among the others—involved in urban-planning and transport related issues. Thus BMLTA has the difficult task of ensuring that various traffic and infrastructure plans work in unison. The BMLTA is extremely committed in ensuring that the streets are made safe and do not restrict mobility of different road users like cyclists and pedestrians.

Giving a brief on the current projects, Mr. Gupta said that the BMLTA is engaged in conducting a Rapid Appraisal Study and also formalizing 'Bangalore Traffic and Transport policy'. Apart from

that the BMLTA is also closely working with the Mumbai Metropolitan Regional Development Authority's (MMRDA) to understand the latter's model of skywalks, which have gained popularity in Mumbai.

On the issue of Bangalore's traffic, Mr. Gupta highlighted that the city has a mixed traffic with private vehicles dominating the road space. With increasing vehicular population, pedestrians and cyclists have no right of way. This has increased risks and thus discourages people from doing the same even for short distances.

ABIDE and its vision for transportation

Rajeev Chandrashekar, Member of Parliament and Convener of ABIDE, put forth ABIDE's vision for Bangalore's transportation. He said that pedestrians, cyclists and public transport were at the center of ABIDE's transport policy.

In a slide-show presentation he discussed ABIDE's key references, which are mentioned below:

Guiding principles-policy

- Efficient use of available financial resources
- public transport and pedestrian amenities are a top priority
- Equip existing sub-urban areas to decongest the city
- planning should be data-led and flexible

Guiding Principles- Administration

- Techno-managerial governance
- Coordinate administration
- Data-led planning

Guiding Principles- Method

- Identify trouble spots and streamline these
- Capacity addition v/s maintenance expenditure
- Focus on public transport
- Footprint of new development
- Pedestrian priority

Mr. Chandrashekar said that identification of safe paths is essential for encouraging cycling and a cycling policy has to be formulated to promote it as a safe mode of transport.

A possibility in the past, mishap in the present: The risk of cycling on the streets

Mr. Jyotirmahalingam, Principle Secretary of Urban development, Government of Karnataka, getting nostalgic, spoke about how he would conveniently cycle to school and college in his young days. However, he said he would not recommend cycling to his own children today as it was way

too dangerous to be on the street on a cycle.

Recognizing the need for cycling paths, Mr. Reddy said that at a time when the state government is giving free cycles to school girls, it becomes essential to develop dedicated lanes. Else there would be no infrastructure to support the use of these large numbers of cycles which are being given away.

He said that safety concerns prevent people from cycling, once that issue is addressed more people would join the movement. He hoped that this workshop would help initiate some measures to promote cycling not just a mode of transport, but also as a healthy sport opportunity.

Learning from cycling-friendly cities:

Ms. Anvita Arora from EMBARQ- The World Resources Institute Center for Sustainable Transport, which works with cities to implement sustainable solutions to the problems of urban mobility started her presentation with a film screening. The film 'Cycling friendly cities' outlined the steps taken by various cities in Europe and Latin America to make their cities cycle inclusive. The film reiterated the benefits of cycling for transport as well as for a healthy living.

Taking a cue from the film, Ms. Arora said that Bangalore could adopt such initiatives, perhaps starting with small initiatives. She said that this workshop was aimed at bringing together ideas and a systematic approach to enable a future for cycling.

Position of cycling in India:

In her presentation Dr. Geetam Tiwari, Associate Professor of Transport Planning at the Indian Institute of Technology in Delhi, looked at the position of cycling in India and Asia. She started by saying that there has been a decline in the cycling trend in India. Promotion of cycling as a mode of transport needs to be backed by 'policy support' and 'local manufacturing expertise' like in China, without which cycling won't be an easy reality.

On the issue of cycling on congested city roads in India, Ms. Tiwari said that if one is serious about creating bicycling infrastructure, the question of space would not arise. Road-widening is not necessary as it is not about creating new spaces, but merely re-allocating and prioritizing already existing road space. It is only about shifting allocation from motorized vehicles to non-motorized modes of transport.

Citing the case of Taiwan, which is a closer example to India than the European Nations, Dr. Tiwari explained that the country has adopted cycling even with a per capita income of 17000US\$.

Interestingly, though until the early 1990s Taiwan did not look at the viability of cycling as a transport system, today it has world-class cycling infrastructure. Cycling has received tremendous impetus in the last fifteen years and today one can find dedicated cycle paths everywhere.

On the other hand, in India urban planning is highly car-centric. The design guidelines are very outdated and often construction work is not up to the mark in the country, increasing risks. It is absolutely necessary to maintain bicycle standards during manufacturing and ensure there is appropriate width on the road for a smooth ride. This needs close monitoring as well. Else the safety on pedestrians and cyclists will be compromised.

Dr. Tiwari said that the investment for cycling infrastructure is not high as the general view is that there aren't enough cyclists on the streets. But in reality, there is a considerably large captive cycling population. For example, 17-20 per cent households earn Rs.5000/month in medium and large cities. This group can afford to spend only about 15 per cent (Rs.750/month). This group can be advantage of as a captive rider group and infrastructure can be created to in turn rope in more people.

On integrated urban transport planning, Dr. Tiwari highlighted the fact that European cities which cater to more pedestrians and cyclists necessarily have better public transport systems. In other words, public transport is the key to any urban transportation model and automatically promotes pedestrianization and cycling.

Efforts in Pune to promote cycling:

The presentation made by Sujit Patwardhan from Parisara a NGO in Pune brought out the positives of citizen movements in cities. Sharing his experiences in Pune which has in the past been a victim of traffic chaos and congestion like Bangalore, Mr. Patwardhan said that it is possible to reshape our cities if there is public and political will.

Putting it humorously Mr. Patwardhan said that in India road is a sacred cow. It has wrongly assumed the sign of progress and development. He said there is a need to have a paradigm shift in the way in which we plan our cities. There has to be vision in favour of sustainable modes of transport like cycling, public transport and so on.

After a lot of debate and under public pressure Pune has now created a Non-Motorized Vehicle (NMV) Cell. This cell has been instrumental in noting people's needs and has been effective in putting into practice many suggestions of the public.

Mr. Patwardhan spoke about the importance of educating people. He said that organizations in Pune are undertaking serious efforts to reach out to schools and colleges and other institutions. The focus is on increasing the numbers of cyclists on the street. Posters, rallies and other programmes are used to spread information and it has revolutionized the city's transportation needs.

Roads for all: Creating space for every road user

Pradeep Sachdeva an architect has been instrumental in turning around Nanded's roads. Mr. Sachdeva through a fascinating display of diagrams and architectural designs showcased Nanded's road transformation. He said that today Nanded has created space for every road user- be it cyclists, pedestrians, motor vehicle users, parking or even animals- which are an integral part of the city's landscape.

Mr. Sachdeva said that to ensure perfection in urban planning one must start with perfect top-sheets. This will help in making sure that the nuances of planning are not lost. It is also necessary to quantify data. There have to be clear indications while working on the ground.

Through graphic images Mr. Sachdeva shared various street plans. These streets have dedicated lanes for public transport, parking, cyclists, pedestrians, other motor vehicle users and so on. He suggested that parking spaces be incorporated into the design, else space allocated for other purposes would be wrongly encroached upon. He also said that one of the challenges in dedicating street space for cyclists is to prevent other motorized two-wheeler users from taking over the space. Else, the safety mechanism of a dedicated space is violated.

Mr. Sachdeva reiterated that for cycling tracks to be reality road-widening or creation of new infrastructure is not necessary. It is only about changing allocation patterns.

Cycling Initiatives in Bangalore

Pradeep and Murali from RideACycle Foundation made an interesting pictorial presentation on cycling initiatives in Bangalore. Pradeep stated that the most crucial aspect of planning is to understand the user group. It is important to answer questions like- who, how many and where, while understanding commuting patterns.

Pradeep said that Bangalore has active cyclists groups who are also using the internet widely to disseminate information on ride plans, gadgets, health tips, maps and guides and so on. As part of their campaign efforts various cyclists have been getting together regularly. Critical Mass is one such effort where cyclists ride on prime roads to reclaim space.

Suggesting answers to the question 'what cyclists need', Pradeep pointed out the following:

- Cycle lanes in approach roads to schools
- Safe cycle parking– Offices, public spaces, commercial establishments, bus stops
- Loans and insurance
- Bike racks on buses
- Bike sharing/rental programmes
- Incentives for cycle commuters
- Motor vehicle free roads/days
- Velodrome, BMX track, Mountain biking park

Cycling in Bangalore: Can it be made possible?

Dr Vijay Kovvali, Traffic and Transportation expert said that Bangalore's weather and landscape is apt from cycling. Yet, people do not take to cycling because it is very dangerous. He said that lack of infrastructure means lesser cyclists on roads and fewer users means lesser allocation of funds and space for cycling infrastructure. This vicious cycle causes chaos.

Citing examples from various cities which have made cycling a possibility, Bangalore can also adopt some best practices after careful evaluation and detailed street plans/maps. And this could be developed by cyclists themselves as they understand routes best.

Open discussion: Sharing ideas, perspectives and dividing tasks

The last session of the workshop was reserved for brainstorming on implementable ideas. Some of the points raised during discussion are as follows:

- The participants felt that generating interest among citizens of Bangalore can be undertaken by Hasiru Usiru and other cyclists' groups. One of the ideas was to organize cycling rallies for children and for corporate where a large number of employees could be motivated to symbolically cycle together.
- Hasiru Usiru members insisted that tree felling be stalled till a cycling plan is evolved. Bicycling would be next to impossible without tree covered roads. Development projects need to be considered while forming this action plan to ensure that there is integration.
- Hasiru Usiru members also raised questions on the legitimacy of ABIDe, which is an extra-constitutional body. They said that they would be happy to support the BMLTA but did not like the idea of roping in ABIDe for the same.
- For taking up pilot projects and identifying locations of pilot projects RAC-F and

Hasiru Usiru members have suggested some streets like the Nanda Theatre Road at South End Circle. The groups have also taken the responsibility of doing feasibility studies on other streets which can be used as pilot projects. One suggestion was to develop a cycling lane around the Madiwala lake.

- The BMLTA has promised to create a core consultative group comprising of representatives from various cyclists' groups and Hasiru Usiru. It is hoped that this group will initiate plans and advise the BMLTA on cyclists' needs and so on.

The workshop ended on a positive note with cycling enthusiasts joining the Critical Mass rally at the end of the workshop to celebrate the idea of cycling.

Report prepared by:

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Note:

Some of the presentations made during the consultation are available online at www.esgindia.org