

# Namma Raste, Namma Jaaga, Namma Ooru!

22<sup>nd</sup> July 2008

**Dear Friends,**

We write to draw your attention to a matter of critical concern to all: Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike's (BBMP) proposal to widen 91 prime roads of Bangalore. This is purportedly to reduce congestion and ease traffic flows and thus make living in the city easier for all. It is claimed that road widening will increase average traffic flows from the current 8 kms./hour to 40 kms/hour. Every kilometer of road widening is likely to cost a minimum of Rs. 10 crores (excluding land acquisition costs) thus making the overall exercise a super mega project.

## **Why is road widening being proposed?**

Consider this – an analysis of Bangalore's vehicular traffic reveals that the vehicular population doubles every five years, most of which are cars and two wheelers. We have about 30 lakhs vehicles for a 70 lakhs population. Of this public buses are a mere 5,000 even though they carry 40% of the city's travelers. With 70% of the vehicles composed of two wheelers, and much of the rest cars, the city is spiraling into a disastrous trend where everyone has a private vehicle, but no place to move.



**Bangalore's vehicular population doubles every five years but will road widening help ease congestion?**

Everyday 1,500 new vehicles land on the city, that's 5.5 lakh additional vehicles every year. New vehicles landing on Bangalore roads are up from less than 1,000 every day a few years ago to 1,500 every day in less than a decade. With banks liberally servicing vehicle loans, corporate organisations (esp. IT sector) encouraging employees to get their own car through the company (with IT rebates, and low interest benefits built in) and governments encouraging automobile manufacturers to launch bigger and faster vehicles, it seems more than likely that road widening could only serve for a year or two, before our streets choke up again. Simply put, there is no way that road widening can keep pace with this explosive growth in the number of vehicles on city roads. A multi crore mega project that cannot even be a medium term solution to the city's problems is clearly an unviable investment. We simply have to come up with far more intelligent solutions, and a big pointer for success is expanding our bus fleets, making using of private vehicles unnecessary.

## **How people friendly are road widening designs?**

If we review the designs for the 91 roads, what shocks us into quick realization is that there is only space if you are in a moving vehicle. If you are a pedestrian, or a cyclist, you simply do not figure into the scheme of things. Street vendors have no place, and so do those who use the street as a cultural space. Street widening essentially is the death of the street – making it a monotonous crusade for the automobile.

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 two wheelers, etc. The result: 17 people killed and 36 injured in 66 accidents in five weeks of the new airport becoming functional.

Every day two people are critically injured on just this 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 an elevated high speed rail link from M. G. Road to the new airport (only for air travelers) and thus pedestrian skywalks cannot be built. What is troubling is that in all the 30 kms. stretch of Bellary Road to the airport, there are only 6 traffic lights – on an average one every 5 kms!

For those who dare to dart across widened roads (all of us actually) to get to our school, bus stop, bank, market, relative's house, grocery shopping, etc., what awaits is the high risk of death or injury. This may shock you, but none of the road widening designs we have accessed have actually built in plans to protect the rights of pedestrians, cyclists, street vendors, two wheeler riders, etc.



**In the BBMP's vision, there is no room for pedestrians on the city's prime roads.**

Therefore, if you are a senior citizen, or a child, or differently abled, forget it, you don't simply matter to this crazy scheme. Every law has been violated by BBMP to institute this scheme and despite repeated efforts by us and various public interest groups, the Commissioner is adamant in implementing the scheme: come what may. Do we not have the right to ask him in whose interest this scheme being implemented? Does it matter to him that 40% of Bangaloreans go by buses, and never caused these problems?

The daily floating population in the Majestic area

is 10 lakhs and this enormous surge of humanity has not got a single crore of investment to ensure safety. However, 30,000 air passengers and those that support car based travel seem to claim all the privileges of road widening and such other investment.

### **There is no regard for Heritage**

Road widening therefore cannot be taken lightly. This is a project that will not only reshape the way our city works, but fundamentally affect the way we live and work. Consider this: Avenue Road, the oldest street in Bangalore, where Kempegowda I struck earth to form this city in 1537 (about 450 years ago) is proposed to be widened. Every shop along the road therefore is in the way. BBMP proposes to break down every one of these shops, and ensure Avenue Road becomes a 6 lane expressway. The result: Bangalore's history, heritage and 1 lakh livelihoods that Avenue Road supports (by conservative estimates) will be driven over by the rush to connect Bangalore South's K. R. Road, to Bangalore North's Palace Road and thereon to the airport. No airport built anywhere in the world has so fundamentally damaged the character, economy and livelihoods of a city, as much as Bangalore's new airport is doing.

## **Your Road could be in the list too.....**

But road widening is not just for the airport – 91 roads are to be widened now, and quietly officials admit the number may increase to 123 roads. For instance, the 100 years old Bazaar street in Chamrajpet is proposed to be widened: 2,000 shops and 20,000 livelihoods will be lost. Similarly Infantry Road is to be widened. Bull Temple Road will be widened through N. R. Colony, and hundreds of homes will be destroyed. Cunningham Road, Kamaraj Road, Uttarahally Main Road, Thimmaiah Road, Dispensary Road, Richmond Road, Ulsoor Road,... you name the road and it is to be widened. Bangalore is making way for the cars only zone.

## **A disastrous Proposal**

Shockingly there will not be any compensation for those losing properties. A devious Transfer of Development Rights scheme for voluntary surrender of property that was brought into force through a questionable amendment of the Karnataka Town and Country Planning Act is all that is extended in relief for property owners. By utilizing this, property owners can get to build 1.5 times the area they lost – that is if they have the resources and space left. In case they don't then they could trade that space as a Development Rights Certificate to anyone across the city. The popularity of the scheme is evident in the fact that only 20 property owners have surrendered their properties since the scheme was introduced in 2005.

In effect, road widening for those losing properties is a disastrous proposal. For those who lose livelihoods, it is the end of the road.

## **Impact on urban greenery**

Road widening will destroy 40,000 trees – forever. The city's charm is in its avenue trees – and that is the very thing that will be cut out, ruthlessly, without mercy. Trees don't speak, thus don't hurt any official. Interestingly, roads where trees are removed do not serve the purpose of widening because the added lane is encroached – normally by places of worship. You can witness this all along Kanakapura Road.

Trees aren't merely shade providers and oxygen pumps; they also reduce the need for energy consumption. Studies have proven that tree lined avenues encourage walking and cycling (and thus reduce fossil fuel consumption) and cool down buildings by a good 4°C, thus conserving energy. Trees also provide much needed respite from noise pollution (as leaves absorb noise) and air pollution (as leaves again, absorb dust). Why then are we ruthlessly throwing away these benefits for all?



**Scant regard for urban greenery 1**

## **No regard for local culture**

Our societies since time immemorial have made streets major sites of cultural expression. Come festivals, and our roads transform into exciting spaces that are shared by shoppers, processions, street theatre artistes, folk dancers, musicians and revellers. Road widening will put an end to most of these activities that define Bangalore, as our roads will no longer have pavements on which vendors and hawkers can sell their wares. It will also stop auto rickshaws from entering certain zones of the city just as they have been banned near the new airport – as they are perceived as slow moving hurdles to speeding cars, taxis and SUVs of Bangalore. Bicycles, mopeds will have no place in this city. Walking on these widened roads will mean a death defying act for all.

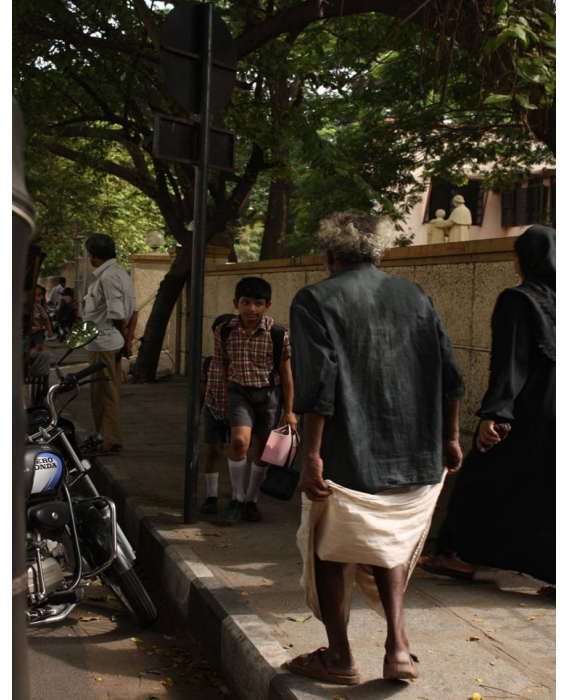
## **Legal position**



All current road widening proposals are illegal. The entire tree cutting related to road widening is also illegal. This is because, BBMP in promoting this mega project has simply failed to comply with basic provisions of the Karnataka Town and Country Planning Act (in changing land use and developing road widening schemes), Karnataka Municipal Corporation Act (for instance by not consulting the public), Karnataka Tree Preservation Act (for felling tree without planting any), etc.

The Hon'ble High Court of Karnataka hearing a PIL filed by Environment Support Group and CIVIC Bangalore has confirmed this, and as an interim relief referred the PIL to the Karnataka Legal Aid Committee to look into all these issues. A committee under the Chairmanship of Mr. Yellappa Reddy, IFS (Retd.) and 6 experts from various disciplines (proposed by the petitioners and respondents jointly) has been constituted to verify all details of road widening proposals and make decisions that are binding on the authorities. This Committee has started functioning, and it is for all of us to make it our cause that the Committee considers every issue in detail and as per law. (A copy of the PIL, the interim direction of the High Court and all related documents are accessible online at: [www.esgindia.org](http://www.esgindia.org))

We perceive this process as a progressive and productive step towards resolving the vexatious issues involved in road widening and ensure that any such proposal is only implemented in full conformity with law and for the larger public interest. The Hon'ble Court has directed that larger public interest will prevail over smaller public interest. Thus livelihoods, and homes, will prevail over the material convenience demanded by corporate sectors for high speed carriageways through our city. Rights of differently abled, the elderly and the children will prevail over speeding motorists. Cyclists will have safe space, as much as motorists do. Every one has the right to shape their city, and not just officials of BBMP.



**The High Court of Karnataka has ruled that rights of differently abled, the elderly and the children will prevail over speeding motorists.**

### **Innovative, practical and feasible ideas from across the world**

World over, the problem of congestion has been resolved through innovation and intelligence, abandoning degenerate ideas of road widening. In many other parts of the world most modern cities have declared their old city areas as heritage zones, as car free zones and as pedestrian friendly zones to help make shopping a easy and a enjoyable experience. In several other cities, decision makers have gone to the public in multiple consultations, holding exhibitions on streets, organizing public hearings, to think up innovative strategies to solving traffic congestion.

Wherever public officials have deeply practiced democratic traditions, whenever their attitudes have been shaped by the desire to serve the larger public good, where officials have shed their *aires* and excess attitudinal baggage and gone to the people, progressive ideas have evolved shaping cities into fantastic places to live, work and play - not merely for the rich, but for just about everyone.

### **It is time for you to awaken and take action.....**

It is time that everyone in Bangalore thought deeply and seriously about the impacts of road widening. As easy as it is to fell a tree, so much easier it is to break down shops and homes. What cannot be replaced are the ethos and the economic vibrancy of the city. Bangalore character is made of its streets. Tear down old shops, pull down Bangalore's avenue trees, it could well be character-less soul-less city that one will not be able to relate with. Your image of the city, the memories you associate with them, will be rendered useless if roads as public commons are redefined as mere carriage ways for motor vehicles.



This is a board on Hosur Road. Do we want this to be Bangalore's future?

**What can you do? How can you be involved?**

1. If you are directly affected by the road widening or if you work with groups with special needs whose interests are not provided for in this proposal, you can make representations to the Empowered Committee set up by the Hon'ble High Court of Karnataka expressing your issues and concerns about road widening.
2. You can request the Empowered Committee to provide you an Hearing for your grievance/suggestions.
3. More importantly, it is time to organize, come out on the streets and demonstrate that roads are for people and not for cars. Do this in very creative ways.
4. Demand that road widening plans are put though in full conformity with the law.
5. Use your Right to Information and ask relevant questions about the scheme?
6. Arrange for talks and discussions in your neighbourhoods, resident welfare associations, offices, etc
7. Hold exhibitions and story sessions (narratives) about your neighbourhood streets in your local areas.
8. Organise street theatre performances as a celebration of streets as cultural spaces.
9. Organise cycle rallies on these roads to raise awareness on the importance of pavements, safety and to demand cycling zones.
10. If you are passionate about the city and its roads, know something about it and proudly share your streets' heritage. Build websites, organize street exhibitions, and facilitate heritage tours for children.
11. Make every school child use a bus or cycle. Stop dropping your children to school in cars (Eg. Bishop Cottons causing four hours of traffic jam every day because parents insist their children should only go by car).
12. Request the BMTC for better and more frequent transport services (it already caters to over 40 % of Bangalore's transport needs – why not 100%!)

***Your imagination is the limit. Make Bangalore yours. Make Bangalore roads your roads. Use and celebrate Bangalore roads as public spaces. Do not allow for road widening and tree felling unless it is fully illegal. Make public authorities respect and consider public opinion – and not just of small section of high income earners.***

Let every body know about the programme you are planning to ensure good participation!

Sincerely,

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CIVIC Bangalore

Alternative Law Forum

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