

26th September 2020

Shri Hardeep Singh Puri.
Hon. Minister, Housing and Urban Affairs,
Government of India
Nirman Bhawan, C-Wing,
Dr. Maulana Azad Road, New Delhi,110011

Dear Sir,

Greetings from Concerned Citizens of Bengaluru !

On 16th September 2020, in a written reply by yourself to Karnataka RS member K C Ramamurthy, you had stated that approval of the proposed Bangalore metro rail project from Central Silk Board Junction to Kempegowda International Airport will depend on the feasibility of project and availability of resources.

In the light of the above, we wish to place before you certain important facts with regard to mobility in Bangalore and to request you for a **thorough review of all infrastructure projects to derive optimum benefits from the investment.**

The Covid pandemic has affected urban mobility in a significant manner. The observable key changes/trends are as follows:

1. Reduced travel demand due to WFH (Work From Home)

As of August 2020, over 90% of employees in Infosys Ltd and Wipro Ltd and 100% in the case of Dell Technologies were working from home. Despite this large %, Infosys COO U.B. Pravin Rao said that the model has not disrupted employee productivity.

Fewer people travelling to offices has thinned out traffic and reduced the pressure on poor quality of public infrastructure. According to a survey by jobs site Naukri.com (reported on August 25, 2020), Work-From-Home jobs have increased three times compared to the pre-Covid levels as more companies announce the extension of remote working policy.

TCS (Tata Consultancy Services) is set to allow 75 per cent of its workforce to work from home, by the year 2025.

Once the pandemic subsides, employees will return to offices but still a significant % will continue to work from home. This will mean LESS COMMUTING, particularly in Bangalore which has a large workforce in IT.

2. Shift towards city outskirts

According to Times of India, Bangalore dated 18th July 2020, the demand for rental residential properties in some core city areas has shrunk because of the changes and disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic. While more people are looking for spacious homes on the outskirts, in many places, rents have fallen or are being renegotiated – a rare occurrence in the tech capital's otherwise thriving rental housing segment. As this trend is also expected to continue in the near future, roads and transportation infrastructure will need to cater to people moving away from the City towards the Suburbs.

3. Modes of travel and their Pandemic Resilience

In Bangalore, the resumption of various modes transport (post lock-down) happened as follows:

- Auto rickshaws, Taxis / Cabs were allowed from 19th May 2020.
- Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTTC) started its bus operations from 22nd July 2020.
- The Bangalore Metro resumed its services in a limited way from 7th September 2020.

It is evident that the Pandemic-resilience of different modes varies and will have to be a factor to decide on future expansion.

4. Pandemic and Pollution

On 24th June 2020, Citizen Matters (an online magazine) reported as follows: "An analysis of air quality data has shown that air pollution (measured as PM2.5) was reduced by an average of 28% in Bengaluru during COVID-19 lockdown. The analysis was done by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA), using data collected by Bengaluru's Healthy Air Coalition. Additional analysis of satellite data also confirms this downward trend."

To encash this positive fall-out of the pandemic, the government should implement suitable measures to control air pollution. These should become an integral part of the planning process of pending/new projects.

5. Development beyond Bangalore

On 23rd July 2020, the New Industrial Policy 2020-25 of Karnataka was announced which aims at holistic development of the State and looks beyond Bengaluru with an aim to promote tier-2 and -3 cities as engines of economic growth.

“Keeping in view the new opportunities post Covid-19 and to attract large investments across the sectors, the policy has addressed many reforms especially in procurement of land, compliance of labour laws and offer attractive incentives and concessions.”

This policy will surely give a fillip to the growth of other cities of Karnataka and will help in decongesting Bangalore to a considerable extent.

6. Sale of bicycles

Times of India, Bangalore reported on 14th June 2020 that according to Venkatesh Shivarama (Venky) of Wheel Sports, there has been a 60% rise in queries for cycles through calls and visits. Of the queries, 50% translate into sales. Venky, who has been into the cycle business for about 12 years attributes this to commuters fearing use of public transport in Covid.

Cycling is a classic example of sustainable and affordable urban mobility and must be encouraged in a city like Bangalore.

7. Airport Connectivity:

The proposed Metro to Kempegowda International Airport from Silk Board via K R Puram (more than 50 kms) with funds requirement of about Rs. 20000 Crores, will be completed after 5 years (or may be 10 years) depending on the feasibility of the project and availability of resources. However, we would like to bring to your kind attention the new development of Halt station at Airport by BIAL management and South Western Railways. Infrastructure of truly international standards has come up with a small investment and in less than 8 months period. Further Railway capacity augmentation through electrification and Crossing stations is under progress which will bring suburban Train services from all parts of Bangalore to Airport. This facility is expected to be opened in few months from now. This halt station development has been highly appreciated by none other than the Railway Minister Shri Piyush Goyal.

It is our sincere opinion that the above factors (combined with the funds crunch being experienced both at the Center and the States) point to the **need for a comprehensive and thorough review of all the mobility infrastructure projects, particularly the Metro which is quite resource-intensive. We also feel that Covid has provided a hidden**

opportunity for future-oriented policies which can benefit the common man in the city.

We strongly feel that more than Metro, what Bengaluru needs is drastic and quick improvement to its Bus Services (BMTC) and also immediate Final Approval for the much-delayed Suburban Train System.

In his white paper “Post COVID-19 World: Sustainable Transportation-Interventions and Solutions Required”, Prof. Dr. Ashish Verma, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore proposes the following:

Covid is the best opportunity for the local authorities to come up with **policies and make transport system sustainable**. It is easier to implement policies for the local authority now than in normal situation. Few measures that can be taken are mentioned below:

- Priority lanes for buses and separate lanes for high occupancy vehicles.
- Integration of auto-rickshaws/ride sharing services with Bus/Metro transport system to provide first and last mile connectivity.
- Subsidized fare for people preferring integrated public transport.
- Segregation of commuters by having measures like; staggering of work hours, morning and afternoon shifts, allowing WFH for one day in a week, and also one day in a week study from home for students.
- Monthly pass for delivery personnel in integrated Public Transport.
- It has been noted from data that pollution has reduced considerably in about 90 cities all over India. This could be taken as a cue to enforce restrictions on personal vehicle usage, possibly in the format of limited number of days a person/ household can use personal vehicles.

We wish to emphasize the following:

1. Integration of Multimodal Public Transport systems is the need of the day. This basic thing is lacking in Bangalore. The present situation has given an excellent opportunity to correct the same on priority between Metro, BMTC and BBMP.
2. Giving priority to other modes of Public Transport like Suburban Rail, Pedestrian facilities, Disabled friendly Public Transport system.

3. With COVID norms in place which have imposed some limitations, there is an urgent need to assess the Travelling Capacity in Metro Trains and improve other modes of Public Transport.
4. Many Citizens in Bangalore are working with state and central governments for improving public transport system and creating awareness among citizens to use more public transport system, Walking, Non-Motorized transport for personal use.

In the light of the above, we earnestly request you to set up an Independent Expert Panel to carry out a quick and comprehensive review at the earliest. Many of our colleagues will be happy to present their concrete, detailed-out proposals for the consideration of the panel.

We look forward to your positive response.

Sincerely,

Sd

Dattatraya T Devare
(Bangalore Environment Trust)

Sd

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Sd

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