Event Report

Walkable Bengaluru

Reimagining Bengaluru's roads as citizen-centric, safe, and vibrant public places for all

30 October 2025 | Sabha Blr

About Jana

Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy and Jana Urban Space Foundation (together called 'Jana'), founded in 2001 and 2007 respectively, are Bengaluru-based not-for-profit institutions working to transform the quality of life in India's cities and towns. Over the last two decades, Jana has worked extensively on urban policy, planning and design, and governance reforms, including engagements with JnNURM, XIII, XIV and XV Finance Commissions, and the Comptroller and Auditor General of India. Our current portfolio of work includes formal collaborations with the XVI Finance Commission, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, NITI Aayog, Comptroller and Auditor General of India, the 5th State Finance Commission of Karnataka, and the state governments of Odisha, Assam and Uttar Pradesh.

Jana believes that transforming quality of life in India's cities and towns requires fixing India's city-systems. It aims to strengthen city-systems and enable the delivery of high-quality infrastructure and services through three strategic priorities:

- Planning and design: focusing on neighbourhood improvement plans, rural-urban transition plans, and design guidelines for roads and public spaces.

- Decentralised participatory governance: policy engagement for strong local governments, leadership development of councillors, and sustainable models of civic participation.

- State capacities: strategic assistance for public finance and staffing reforms in cities.

This is enabled by leading edge work on urban policy and insights, with all efforts seeking to deliver impact across climate, public health, and equity outcomes.

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Ganesh Kamath, Civil engineer and Contractor sharing his perspective. Seated alongside (on right) Magizhan Selvan, Chief Executive Officer, Namma Yatri, Kavya Ramesh, Community representative, and Nitin Sheshadri, Member, Citizen Action Forum Koramangala Third Block RWA

Context

The quality of India's urban roads has steadily declined over the last two decades. Two principal reasons have led to this – first, governance is fragmented, with multiple agencies responsible for traffic management, utilities, and roadworks, but no single agency is specifically accountable for pedestrian safety, inclusion, and convenience, and second, a vehicle-centric approach to road development that continues to prioritise cars over people.

This has led to a mobility crisis across major Indian cities, most notably Bengaluru. The average Bengaluru citizen spends 4.5 days in traffic every year,[1] and one pedestrian dies in the city every 30 hours.[2]

1. Tomtom Traffic Index. 2024
2. National Crime Records Bureau. 2023. Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India 2023

Walkability can be one of the most powerful levers in solving this crisis.

Bengaluru was considered a walking city in 2011, with 35% of all trips occurring on foot or by cycle. This has come down over time to only 10% in 2022, even while the population has nearly doubled. The dependency on public transport[3], comprising 42% of all trips in 2022, also hinges on good pedestrian infrastructure – 75% of all first- and last-mile trips to public transport are on foot[4].

The good news is that the city has the right advantages to achieve 100% walkability:

1

A walkable climate with a year-round average temperature of 22.9°C, and seasonal peaks ranging from 32.8°C in summer to 15.1°C in winter.

2

An extensive public transport network that includes India's second-largest metro network, with 96 km operational and another 124 km[5] under construction and planning.[6,7] The city also operates the country's second-largest bus fleet, comprising 7,007 buses.[8,9]

3

Proven local models such as Tender S.U.R.E. showcase the economic, social, and design benefits of walkable roads.

3. Census. 2011; TUMI. 2022
4. WRI. 2023. Improving metro access in India: Evidence from three cities.
5. Climate-Data.org. (n.d.). Bengaluru climate (Karnataka, India).
6. Metro network, BMRCL
7. Swarajya. 2024. Bengaluru Could Boast of Nearly 400 km Of Metro, Suburban Rail Network By 2030 As Union Govt Approves Namma Metro Phase 3
8. BMTC, 2025
9. SRTU Fleet Handbook-2024

The Tender S.U.R.E (Specification for Urban Roads Execution) model

The Tender S.U.R.E. model has scaled across 174 km of the city's roads, with 134 km completed and 40 km under construction. Another 650 km are planned under a blacktopping and whitetopping roads scheme. A study of the city's completed Tender S.U.R.E.[10] roads in the Central Business District (CBD) revealed the following :

90% roads users found Tender S.U.R.E. roads very walkable (vs 27% on non-Tender S.U.R.E. roads).

+228% more pedestrians on Tender S.U.R.E. roads.

83% found Tender S.U.R.E. roads very safe due to wide footpaths, visible crossings, and good lighting (vs. 30% on non-Tender S.U.R.E. roads).

+117% more women pedestrians on Tender S.U.R.E. roads.

The city now has to scale ambitiously across all 14,000+ kms of its road network, in order to make the city truly walkable.
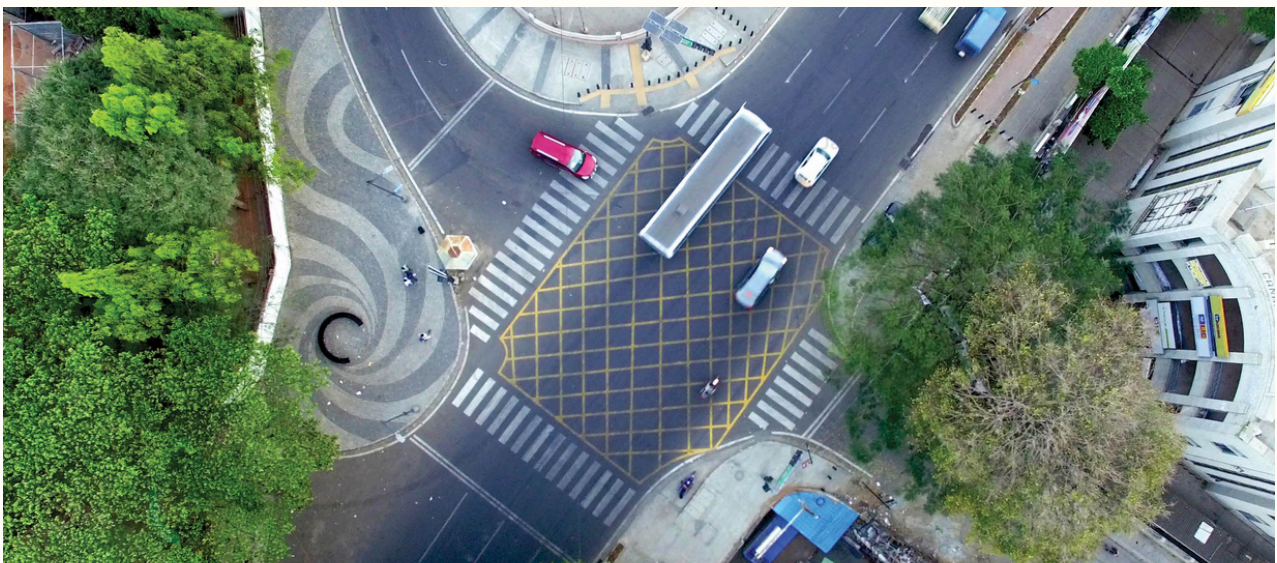
Tender S.U.R.E. phase 1 - Residency road

10. Source: The Tender SURE Impact: Bengaluru. Jana Urban Space Foundation (2025).

Objectives

The roundtable was convened to discuss a broad range of topics across the full lifecycle of citizen experience on roads, covering design, construction and maintenance, first and last mile connectivity, technology, traffic management and safety, and community voices.

The outcomes of this roundtable are meant to serve as a stepping stone to create a shared agenda on making Bengaluru truly walkable.

This report summarizes the discussions at the roundtable and reflects collective insights shared across all participants under Chatham House rules.

Surjyatapa Ray, Associate Manager - Urban Policy, Jana Urban Space Foundation, setting the context for the roundtable.

Participants

1. **Ankit Bhargava**, Co-Founder, Sensing Local
2. **Arun Pai**, Founder, Bangalore Walks
3. **Basavaraj Kabade**, Chief Engineer, South Zone, Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA)
4. **Deepika Shetty**, Community Representative
5. **Devesh Varma**, Chief Executive Officer, Ola Foundation
6. **G T Prabhakara Reddy**, Chief Traffic Manager – Operations, BMTC
7. **Ganesh Kamath**, Founder, Swayam Prabha Constructions
8. **Kavya Ramesh**, Citizen
9. **Krishna Panyam**, Member, Malleswaram Social
10. **Lokesh Mahadevaiah**, Chief Engineer, East Zone, Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA)
11. **Magizhan Selvan**, Chief Executive Officer, Namma Yatri
12. **Nanditha Sharath**, Community Representative
13. **Naresh Narasimha**n, Co-Founder, MOD Foundation
14. **Nitin Seshadri**, Joint Secretary, Citizen Action Forum, Koramangala Third Block RWA
15. **V Ravichandar**, Member, Brand Bengaluru Committee
16. **Vidya Goggi**, Member, RT Nagar Ward Committee
17. **Vivek Chandran**, Co-Founder, Solutions for Sustainable Living
18. **Zibi Jamal**, Member, Whitefield Rising
19. **Surjyatapa Ray Choudhury**, Associate Manager – Urban Policy, Jana Urban Space Foundation [Context presentation]
20. **Nithya Ramesh**, Director – Planning and Design, Jana Urban Space Foundation [Opening and closing remarks]
21. **Srikanth Viswanathan**, Chief Executive Officer, Janaagraha and Executive Director, Jana Urban Space Foundation [Moderator]

Key takeaways

I. Design, implementation, and maintenance

1 **Stronger implementation and engineering capacity:** Bengaluru plans to develop about 1,000 km of pedestrian-friendly arterial roads based on the Tender S.U.R.E. model over the next 2–2.5 years, alongside ongoing footpath improvements to support last-mile metro connectivity. While the city has proven design expertise, engineering cells across the Greater Bengaluru Authority and its five City Corporations currently have only a fraction of the engineers needed to scale walkable roads across all 14,000+ km. Most assistant engineers are hired on an outsourced basis, with limited accountability. Extensive recruitment and skilling are needed for consistent quality.

2 **Integrated design and ownership:** Participants stressed the need for a single road-owning entity or pedestrian/mobility officer to coordinate across utilities and agencies, ensuring accountability for road conditions and pedestrian safety.

Srikanth Viswanathan, Chief Executive Officer, Janaagraha and Executive Director, Jana Urban Space Foundation moderating the roundtable discussion. Seated alongside is Nithya Ramesh, Director – Planning and Design, Jana Urban Space Foundation.

3 **Unified accountability under a comprehensive road management protocol:** All parastatal agencies should report to the Chief Commissioner through a comprehensive road management protocol, not just periodic reports. The existing road engineering cell could be restructured into a mobility engineering cell to manage both underground utilities and surface-level roadworks.

4 **Outer areas implementation challenges:** Scaling Tender S.U.R.E. roads outside the city centre remains slow because peripheral zones are yet to have in place many of the underground utilities already in place in the CBD area. As a result, the approach has focused on a core-to-periphery approach rather than a simultaneous citywide rollout.

5 **Drainage and utilities as critical foundations:** Poor stormwater management and uncoordinated underground utilities were identified as obstacles to the creation of walkable, durable roads. Without fixing drainage, good roads may not be possible.

G T Prabhakara Reddy, Chief Traffic Manager - Operations, Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC), sharing his perspective.

6 **Contractor capacity and viability:** Urban roads are far more complex than highways – night work, utility congestion, facilitating access for the local community during roadworks, and increased costs are some of the factors that make urban roads more complex. The current Schedule of Rates (SOR) for road works in the city is more attuned to highway and rural roads construction, and does not reflect these realities, making projects financially unviable.

7 **Maintenance as a sustained priority:** It was repeatedly emphasized that maintenance must be treated on par with planning and construction. Participants suggested defining clear maintenance budgets and protocols.

8 **Transparent and quality-driven procurement:** Need to move away from least-cost selection (L1 tenders) and toward more transparent, quality-driven Quality and Cost Based Scoring (QCBS) tendering was acknowledged, while balancing audit compliance and accountability.

Ganesh Kamath, Civil engineer and Contractor sharing his perspective. Seated alongside (on right) Magizhan Selvan, Chief Executive Officer, Namma Yatri , Kavya Ramesh, Community representative, and Nitin Sheshadri, Member, Citizen Action Forum, Koramangala Third Block RWA

9 **Community coordination and communication:** Successful Tender S.U.R.E. roads were achieved through collaboration among contractors, engineers, and local communities, with communication maintained throughout the disruption period. Residents reiterated that Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) need to be informed of the planned start and end dates for road construction/maintenance works.

10 **Political and institutional alignment:** Success depends on alignment across elected representatives, bureaucrats, and engineers. The will now exist within the Greater Bengaluru Authority to scale people-centric road design.

11 **Reimagining the Bengaluru Business Corridor (BBC) as a Parkway:** Design BBC so as to allocate 60-75 m for the carriageway and implement Miyawaki forests in the remaining buffer. Could Town Planning schemes be an alternative to the current land acquisition format for the BBC?

Basavaraj Kabade, Chief Engineer, Greater Bengaluru Authority, sharing his perspective.

II. First and last mile connectivity

1 **Direct link to public transport adoption:** Cities like Bengaluru and Chennai reinforce that a vast majority of first-mile trips to public transport happen on foot. Even for multi-modal trips comprising two-wheelers, autorickshaws, buses, and metro, a significant part of the total journey happens on foot.

2 **Safety and comfort deficits:** Participants reiterated that road infrastructure across the city is not designed to accommodate first and last-mile trips. Most notably, the lack of streetlights, seemingly unsafe petty shops along the way to bus stops/metro, garbage dumps, and, in many cases, the complete lack of footpaths and "road crossability" pose formidable challenges to connectivity to public transport.

Nitin Seshadri, Member, Citizen Action Forum, Koramangala Third Block RWA sharing his perspective.

3 **Need-based prioritisation for road works uptake:** Prioritisation frameworks based on safety, comfort, and access rather than uniform road upgrades across zones are needed.

4 **Elevated walkways and cycle tracks:** Instead of elevated roads being reserved for vehicles alone, elevated walkways and cycle tracks too should be considered alongside existing metro pillars to solve for first and last mile connectivity to metro stations along the Outer Ring Road (ORR). In line with this concept, the double-decker metro line from Ragigudda to Bommanahalli can be expanded into a triple-decker system, adding a dedicated pedestrian and cycling walkway alongside the metro line.

Zibi Jamal, Member, Whitefield Rising, highlighting the challenges of poor traffic management.

III. Technology and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)

1 **Real-time citizen feedback:** Feedback systems that allow citizens to rate walkability and report defects may be useful. However, these must link to clear accountability structures that identify who will act on the feedback.

2 **DPI for better walkability and road design:** Examples such as Namma Yatri and Chennai One demonstrate how open digital protocols (Beckn) can integrate metro, bus, and auto systems, helping citizens plan multimodal trips seamlessly. These tools can extend to enable inclusive and safe mobility for pedestrians, for example, real-time navigation support for visually impaired users, crowdsourced data on road potholes, and identification of black spots.

3 **Unified data systems:** The Road Infrastructure Management System (RIMS) under development aims to unify data on road conditions, utilities, cycle lanes, and potholes – creating a single source of truth for maintenance and planning.

Magizhan Selvan, Chief Executive Officer, Namma Yatri sharing his perspective. Seated alongside (on the left) is Ganesh Kamath, Civil engineer and Contractor.

IV. Traffic management

1. **Shift focus from traffic to mobility:** In the past, the focus on roads has predominantly been on traffic management. This has resulted in a mindset that roads move cars, not people. Changing this narrative requires changing nomenclature – for example, renaming the "Traffic Engineering Cell" as the "Mobility Cell".

2. **Coordination between planning and enforcement:** Isolated interventions, such as unplanned medians and random U-turns, often inhibit walkability. The discussion reinforced a need to separate traffic enforcement from road planning.

3. **Fund walkability through fiscal levers:** Vehicle taxes can be raised, and the Goods and Services Tax (GST) can be leveraged to fund walkability initiatives and reduce private vehicle demand.

Zibi Jamal, Member, Whitefield Rising, highlighting the importance of safe crossings.

V. Community voices

1   **Safety and access inequities:** Unsafe, poorly lit streets and broken footpaths limit mobility, force shorter commutes, and constrain employment, education, and recreation options.

2   **Citizen participation and accountability:** Signboards detailing project timelines and contractors, and continuous communication during construction are needed.

3   **Mandatory end-user approval:** A mandatory end-user approval phase is needed before closure for road projects, where pedestrians who use the road review and provide feedback.

4   **Participatory planning successes:** Ward-level walkability audits, such as in RT Nagar, showed that citizen input can shape real improvements when officials respond.

5   **Building empathy through "walks with officers":** Community advocates are organizing early morning walks with government officials to make them experience pedestrian realities firsthand, bridging the gap between design and lived experience.

Deepika Shetty, Community representative sharing her perspective, seated alongside (on left) Suhasini Selin, Janaagraha and (on right) Nanditha Sharath, community representative.

Lokesh Mahadevaiah, Chief Engineer, Greater Bengaluru Authority, sharing his perspective. Seated alongside are Ganesh Kamath, Civil Engineer and Contractor, Magizhan Selvan, Chief Executive Officer, Namma Yatri, along with community representatives.

The way forward

In summary, participants called for a coordinated institutional approach led by the Greater Bengaluru Authority with clear accountability, sustained investment, and participatory processes.

This dialogue marks the beginning of a broader "Walkable Bengaluru Mission", a shared city agenda to make every road safe, inclusive, and accessible, and to reclaim Bengaluru's roads as spaces for people, not just for vehicles.

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