Dubai style intelligent traffic system answer to major Indian cities

PNC Menon, Chairman of Sobha Group *asserts time has come for the cities to focus on traffic management as top priority. Across the cities, the load on infrastructure is increasing and it's cost is humongous, from fuel waste to carbon footprint. In an exclusive column for* ***Track2Realty Global Buyer Report 2020****, Menon suggests measures ranging from walk-to-work and public transport to intelligent traffic system like Dubai.*

Traffic congestion is a pain point for people and businesses across the world. A recent Traffic Index Report by location technology specialist TomTom, detailing the traffic situation in 403 cities in 56 countries around the world, reveals that traffic congestion has increased globally during the last decade.

Nearly 75% of the cities included in the new Traffic Index report had increased or had stable congestion levels between 2017 and 2018. The report puts Mumbai at the top spot this year, with drivers expecting to spend an average of 65% extra travel time stuck in traffic. New Delhi is not far behind with fourth position with an average of 58% traffic congestion.

In India, the problem has increased manifold due to rapid urbanisation, huge population, under-developed public transport network and an increasing number of private/public vehicles on the road. People are spending good amount of time while commuting to their workplaces and back home. This results in spending more hours on the road instead of

quality time at home or productive hours at work. Besides taking away some important hours of one's life, it takes a toll on the mind, affecting the overall quality of life.

Loss due to traffic congestion

While impacting the overall well-being of commuters, traffic congestions also translate into significant losses. Approximately INR 1.47 lakh crore is lost annually due to congestion in Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata, according to a report by Boston Consulting Group (BCG). Bengaluru alone loses around INR 38,000 crore (5.92 Billion USD) every year due to social costs of traffic congestion. Loss of time, fuel wastage due to traffic snarls, traffic accident costs and environmental footprint are some of these social costs.

In the last decade or so, Bengaluru has evolved from being a pensioner's paradise to one of the most cosmopolitan cities of India, attracting working professionals from across the country. This has made Bengaluru the third most populous city in India. The city is expected to have 20.3 million residents by 2031 - beyond the current population in metros such as Mumbai and Delhi, as per Bangalore Development Authority's (BDA) Revised Master Plan 2031. This will aggravate the problem further. There are huge traffic issues in Bangalore. Time has come to look for long-term sustainable methods to address this issue.

Environmental hazards

Needless to mention that traffic congestion has severe environmental implications as well due to carbon footprint. According to World Health Organisation (WHO), the transport sector is accountable for a large proportion of urban air pollution. Increasing number of traditional vehicles are undermining economic development, polluting the air and causing environmental concerns. With growing global clamour for action against climate change, it is imperative for India to take cognisance of the matter.

Practical solutions

Whether it is Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi, or any other metropolitan city, the need to address the traffic congestion issue is becoming critical. While most civic agencies in our cities are still focussed on increasing road network and constructing overpass bridges, the need of the hour is to decrease our dependence on private vehicles, improve public transport services and take up other doable Transport Demand Management (TDM) strategies. This will improve the productivity of the work force and reduce social costs of road congestion.

A simple and effective way to decongest the roads is to live closer to workplace, say within a radius of 5 kms. And if the distance is less than 5 kms, cycling or even walking to work can be considered. Therefore, the concept of walk-to-work has been gaining traction across the world, including India. A workplace that is closer to home helps keep an equilibrium between work and life.

Living closer to one's workplace is one of the most cost-effective solutions to address road congestion. It translates into cost savings for public using both private and public transportation – fuel costs, cab fares, metro and bus tickets. Moreover, people can come to offices on time without commute stress, they can work stress free, secure in the knowledge that home is nearby.

Understandably, this alone will not help manage all the issues around road congestion. We would need better road networks, over-bridges and underpasses, better quality public transit systems, integrated

with last mile connectivity to workplaces among others.

Carpooling or ridesharing is another practical solution to decongest our cities. Ridesharing can reduce the congestion on roads by 17% to 31%. While the concept of carpool is not new, it has become mainstream only recently with growing penetration of smartphones and technology.

Interestingly, Dubai makes for a fine example in the use of technology to manage traffic while tackling the fuel emission issues. The city's Roads and Transport Authority (RTA) is implementing an intelligent traffic systems project to reduce traffic congestion and spot road mishaps for speedy response.

The system broadly includes Dynamic Messaging Signs (DMS), traffic monitoring and data capturing systems, fiber optic network for communication between the on-site devices and central systems, software for the advanced traffic central system and Traffic Control Centre. If emulated in India, a visible impact is certainly expected from such solutions as well. The need of the hour is to find cost effective and long-term solutions that are clean and sustainable.