

Years roll by but Bengaluru's wish-list remains the same

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If one were to make a wish-list for Bengaluru at the beginning of the New Year, it could well resemble the wish-lists of 2018, 2017 and earlier. Well, almost. Saving lakes, speeding up the metro, easing traffic, better solid waste management, people's participation in planning, sustainable solutions... we had them all written down long ago, no doubt. It is not that nothing has changed for the better in these years. It is just that more needs to be done and quickly. ET lists out what needs to be done to revive Bengaluru.

CITIZENS NEED A SAY

A majority of infrastructure projects, big and small, are pitched, passed and executed by the government without a semblance of public consultation. In the recent years, the government has had a taste of the backlash this could lead to. People's ire against the 6.7-km steel flyover from Basaveshwara Circle to Hebbal in 2016 was the beginning. Unfortunately, the state government appears not to have learnt lessons from it, if its urgency to execute the elevated corridor project is any indication. Citizens won a minor victory in 2018 when the BBMP commissioner ordered that ward committee meetings be held every month. This is the first step for public involvement in planning at the ward level. The hope for 2019 is to build on this.

"We hope that, for all large city-wide projects, public consultation is held before it gets budget allocation," said Srinivas Alavilli, cofounder, Citizens for Bengaluru.

RESTORE DYING LAKES

Towards the end of 2018, there was some relief when the National Green Tribunal directed the state government to deposit Rs 500 crore in an escrow account for the rejuvenation of the highly-polluted Bellandur lake. The NGT also formed a committee chaired by former Lokayukta N Santosh Hegde to monitor the process. While this could be a new beginning for [Bellandur lake](#), hundreds of other lakes in the capital await rejuvenation. A survey of 105 lakes, done by the Indian Institute of Science in 2016, revealed that only four were in good condition.

Environmentalists hope that the authorities first clear encroachments and restore lakes on a priority in 2019. "First, measures should be taken to stop sewage entering lakes and ensure that only clean water flows in. Then, all lakes should be desilted so that their waterholding capacity increases. Pollutants inside the lake should be removed and disposed of scientifically" said V Ramnrasad from Friends of Lakes

REVISING THE MASTER PLAN

The [Bangalore Development Authority](#) (BDA) started work on a Revised Master Plan – 2031 a couple of years ago. After much dilly-dallying, it made public a provisional RMP during the end of 2017 and called for objections and suggestions. The draft RMP drew citizens' wrath for being vague and replete with technical errors. Citizens even approached the judiciary questioning the power of BDA to plan the city.

Although Bengaluru development minister Dr G Parameshwara has said that the government will revisit the draft RMP, citizens want the Metropolitan Planning Committee (MPC) to draft the RMP and not the BDA. "The BDA should acknowledge that it is at best a construction company and not capable of preparing a master plan. The government should follow the constitutional process and hand over the responsibility to MPC," said Vijayan Menon from Citizens' Action Forum that has filed a PIL in the HC.

WASTE AS RESOURCE

Unable to manage its waste effectively, Bengaluru, which generates around 6,000 tonne of waste per day, sends most of its unsegregated waste to the Bellahalli quarry on the city outskirts. Plans to process segregated waste and prepare compost has not been quite successful. After a gap of two years, the government appointed a special commissioner for solid waste management in the BBMP last year. After taking charge, D Randeep has come up with several plans, one of which is to call for ward-wise tenders to collect and transport dry waste and wet waste separately.

"If only the BBMP would make a clean sweep of the pile-up at least in 2019, including issuing the new door-to-door collection contracts, resolving pending issues on biogas facilities which have been idle since 2016, clearing all pending proposals of 2017 for mechanised sweepers, procurement of vehicles and transfer stations," said Sandhya Narain from the Solid Waste Management Round Table.

CLEANER AIR

Though the [Karnataka](#) State Pollution Control Board's (KSPCB) data on ambient air quality shows a decrease in air pollution levels during the past two years, people who are exposed to traffic and pollution disagree. An increase in traffic, depleting green cover, road dust, burning of garbage are adding to the pollution. In order to get data that is closer to reality, experts and independent observers of atmospheric pollution demand that the KSPCB install more pollution monitoring stations at the breathing level. After all, getting real data is key to addressing the issue. For now, the KSPCB has 21 monitoring stations.

"The state government has to take policy decisions, such as prohibiting burning of garbage, implementing mechanised street cleaning, strict control on construction sites and cement mixing plants. For all this to happen, we need the KSPCB to fulfil its role with full accountability and transparency," said Zibi Jamal from Whitefield Rising.

THE TRAFFIC QUAGMIRE

The government wants to have an automobile-friendly infrastructure — a 102-km elevated corridor, many small flyovers and widening of roads — and hopes that it will improve the traffic flow. Those who know better are opposing these and advocating sustainable mobility solutions. Big infra projects in brick and mortar will only help the automobile industry and do not solve traffic issues, they believe.





Urban transport expert Pawan Mulukutla argues that the solution lies in a multi-pronged approach. He suggests three solutions that can be implemented in less than a year: Smaller interventions such as installing adaptive signals that turn either red or green based on the volume of traffic on different sides of the junction. Along with coordinated traffic signals, this can reduce congestion at least by 10%, he said. Second, a pay-and-park system at least on roads that have good public transport systems. Last but most importantly, infrastructure to encourage footpath and cycling would discourage use of vehicles for short-distance commutes, he holds.

HURRY UP, NAMMA METRO

The existing 42-km Namma Metro network — which took almost a decade to build — caters to about 4-lakh people a day. Currently, civil work is underway on the 72-km Phase II network. Of them, the metro lines on Mysuru Road (9 km) and Kanakapura Road (7 km) are nearing completion and likely to be operational in early 2020. The transport utility proposed a metro line on the 19-km Outer Ring Road (Central Silk Board - KR Puram) but tenders for this line were cancelled, setting the project back by one year. It also turns out that alignment for the 30-km line to the Kempegowda International Airport is not finalised.

Urban mobility activist Sanjeev Dyamannavar said the BMRCL should acquire land before awarding construction contracts. The other hope is that all the 50 shuttles of the metro will double their capacity (from 3-coach trains to 6-coach trains) in 2019. It is also high time that the city's public transport gets a common mobility card.



SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

The government announced three bigticket projects in 2018 — the suburban rail system, the 102-km elevated corridor and the 65-km peripheral ring road. The much-awaited suburban rail system is likely to take off in 2019. The PRR project could finally see some groundwork.

Urbanist V Ravichandar wants the government to focus on the basics instead of announcing mega projects. "Building a good footpath on 2,000-km road would give out a different message but the government is not communicating that at all," he said. The

different message but the government is not encouraging it at all, he said. The government, he said, should make buses more popular. "Use of technology and rationalisation of routes are the easiest steps but that have been ignored. Even the strength of the bus fleet is stagnant for the past one

MITIGATING WATER CRISIS

In 2018, environment magazine 'Down To Earth' claimed that the IT city is among the 10 cities in the world on the verge of an acute water crisis. The Karnataka government, however, has dismissed the report saying Bengaluru will not run out of water as it is building infrastructure to fetch an additional 775 MLD of water from the Cauvery river. The government is also making efforts to cut down unaccounted-for water and is building infrastructure to provide water supply for 110 additional villages.

Water expert, Vishwanath Srikantaiah, said the solution lies in strengthening the institution (BWSSB), especially by deploying human resource and capital investments. "Some of the infrastructure (underground drainage and water pipelines) are ageing but the BWSSB has no money to fix the problem," he said. He felt the ideal way to raise funds is to stop providing subsidised water to the rich. "The BWSSB spends Rs 65 to supply one kilo litre of water but the consumers are only paying Rs 8 per kilolitre," he pointed out.