

## Hebbal underpass most foolish plan ever: Scientist

By Kushala S, Bangalore Mirror Bureau | May 6, 2015, 04.00 AM IST

Bangalore Development Authority's (BDA) ambitious move to construct an underpass below the Hebbal circle flyover to make seamless connectivity between Old Madras road and Tumkur road will prove to be a major ecological disaster. Not only will it affect the groundwater table system in the surroundings and disturb the inter-connectivity of the lakes, but the project would touch the bed of the lake and will be prone to flooding and seepage.

Also, BDA perhaps doesn't remember its own feasibility study carried out in early 2000 when the SM Krishna government planned an integrated underpass-flyover project at Hebbal. A feasibility study commissioned by RITES gave a thumbs-down to the underpass as the stretch has a lake on one side and had agricultural land on the other. Hence the underpass plan was shelved and only a flyover was constructed.

Inaugurated in 2003, the flyover was built in a record time of two years at a cost of Rs 43 crore and is armed with the main ramp and four loops running up to 5.5 km.

The flyover was initiated by former BDA commissioner Jayakar Jerome who had commissioned a technical feasibility study on an integrated project to decongest Hebbal circle - constructing a flyover and an underpass connecting Old Madras Road and Tumkur road. Though the consultants at RITES, (Rail India Technical and Economic Service, an engineering consultancy company working under the aegis of Railways) okayed the flyover they shot down the underpass proposal. It cited three major reasons to say no. One, Hebbal lake on one side and the paddy fields on the other being used by University of Agricultural Sciences for their studies, constituted a major tank bed area; two, an underpass in that spot would mean going below the bed level of the lake which will result in seepage and flooding; three, the presence of Salem railway line. Once the flyover project was okayed, the BDA acquired the paddy field area to put up its pillars. But the portion remains wetland.

"We shelved the underpass plan then so why are the authorities re-opening the project and giving it a fresh look? The feasibility report is lying in the engineering offices that nobody is bothered about. Planning any major infrastructure project required technical feasibility study which should be carried out by a reputed consultancy firm. It's all about proper traffic planning instead," a highly-placed source involved with the project told Bangalore Mirror.

### Destroying an ecosystem

*According to T V Ramachandra, from IISc's Energy and Wetlands Research Group, Centre for Ecological Sciences, this is "one of the most foolish plans he has seen in his three decades of research of ecology in Bengaluru." Hebbal lake is a major catalyst for recharging the groundwater table in the area and tampering with it would mean creating an imbalance in the ecological system. An underpass next to the lake would also displace the inter-connectivity of the lakes which will create flooding. "The water table is fairly high around Hebbal lake and the project will spell disaster. It will not achieve the purpose. This project has to be stopped in its initial stage. This is nothing but looting public money. The underpass built near IISc main gate is*

*the hallmark of ineffective planning and designing. I am sure the proposed underpass at Hebbal will be nothing short of this," Ramachandra explained.*