

# BETTER BUS BENGALURU

A campaign report

September 2020



COMPILED BY  
ASHWIN LOBO & SANA HUQUE

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## **Acknowledgements**

The privilege of writing this report, and indeed organising this webinar series, would not have been possible without the rich discussions of our illustrious panelists. We are deeply grateful to all of them for joining in these conversations to move Bengaluru forward: Mr. S. G. Neginhal, Prof. Rajeev Gowda, Dr. Uday B Garudachar, Ms. Manjula, Ms. C. Shikha, Mr. B. R. Ravikanthe Gowda, Mr. Shamanth Kuchangi, Prof. Dinesh Mohan, Mr. Satya Prakash Varanashi, Dr. Usha Rao, Mr. Ken Kruckemeyer, Prof. Vinod Vyasulu, Ms. Cyprine Odada, Ms. Shaheen Shasa, Mr. Vinay Sreenivasa, Ms. Suprabha Seshan, Mr. Pradip Krishen, Prof. Geetam Tiwari, Ms. Mamata Yejaman, Mr. Dasarathi, Ms. Nandini BK, Ms. Vanaja, Mr. Rohit Vasishtha and Ms. Taanika Shankar.

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As each webinar was happening, our team of interns was working hard in the background preparing Tweets that were posted on Environment Support Group's Twitter page in order to document the rich discussions. We thank Shreya Saxena, Sneha Ghosh, Himanshu Umesh, Malvika Kaushik, Satvika Krishnan and Ayush Joshi for the excellent Tweets each of them prepared. We also extend our sincere thanks to Janara Pranalike (People's Manifesto), Svarasa, Harish Kukreja and Srikanth for the photographs and motifs that have been used to adorn the cover, contents page and the concluding section of this report.



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## Responding to the Challenge of Mobility in Bengaluru

With about 4.5 million trips daily, the public bus system in Bengaluru should receive far more political, administrative and public support than it now does. A plausible reason for the rather low attention 6500 buses of Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation receive, even as they criss-cross the city and help people move about, could be that the metropolis is enamoured by complex, expensive and heavy engineering solutions. In the mid-1990s Elevated Light Rail Transit Systems were in focus. By the mid-2000s attention shifted to heavy rail Metro systems. As a consequence, Bengaluru today has a swastika type approx 50 kms long metro system, Phase I of which cost at least 2 billion dollars (Rs. 16,000 crores). Following a decade of construction, this system is now operational and supports about 500,000 trips daily. It is now being expanded into Phase II and is projected to support a little over twice its current carrying capacity, but at a cost that is over three times the capital cost of Phase I.



*Cheonggyecheon, an elevated highway in Seoul was torn down and replaced by a boulevard park. Source: Parisa Pakzad, July 2015.*

One can only wonder what a different city Bengaluru would have been if such mega investments had been made in bus based public transit systems, and the city had bus lanes just about everywhere.

By the end of this decade it is projected that the radial megacity that Bengaluru is could be populated by 23 million people. The demands this projected population will place on the weak public transit infrastructure is frightening, to say the least. Already, with the current 13 million population, the city bursting at its seams into a mess of poorly planned streets, and choc-a-bloc with traffic. Largely very poorly designed and maintained, these roads bear the demands of massive clusters of high-end apartments and villas emerging almost everywhere, snuck as they are into erstwhile villages in the peri-urban region, even as they support the demands of transport hubs, business districts and middle and low income neighbourhoods. With 8 million private vehicles, Bengaluru is now behind only Delhi which has about 15 million. The consequent pollution (not merely air, but also of noise and aesthetics) has reduced this really charming metropolis which not too long ago was considered India's 'garden city', even 'pensioners paradise', into a challenge of a metropolis. The most common critical concern of residents of the city is about how expensive it has become to live and work here, particularly given the increasing consumption of time, money and patience demanded by daily commutes.



*Source: Priya Chowdhury's article, "Deadliest traffic bottlenecks in Bengaluru", dated April 16 2018*

## **Making everyone's mobility a priority, despite disparities:**

As with every metropolis of India, Bengaluru too is characterised by socio-economic, health and environmental disparities. There are neighbourhoods where upper classes live which are plush with infrastructure: good bus and metro connectivity, plenty of schools, hospitals, open spaces and recreation facilities. And then there are those where massive populations of poor and working classes live, where transport and social infrastructure is weak or non-existent, and health and education infrastructure rarely accessible. As the city balloons into the rural hinterland, growing numbers of middle classes are buying up houses, apartments and properties in regions that have no proper roads, no water and no public transport. In such a complex landscape that Bengaluru now constitutes, working, trading and student populations grind great distances every day across the city. This compels many to self-drive in order to cut travel time in order to cut down on expensive loss of productive time. The commute of today has a very devastating impact on lives and livelihoods, particularly of the working classes and the poor who do not have the means to buy their way out of the inconvenience.

Meanwhile, the city draws massive investments in high-tech, manufacturing, FMCG, education, health, recreation, and other sectors. The metropolis needs to critically examine what these current paths will lead to. The woeful condition of Delhi's air is highly instructive. To not suffer urban decay, it is critical for Bengaluru to front-stage public transit systems, particularly of the bus, and integrate it intelligently and inclusively with cycling, walking, auto/taxi and the Metro, and integrate bus lanes into the traffic flows of the city's transport system. In this way, regular commutes can be primarily shifted to make public transport the main choice. Which is not happening now to its full potential, simply because this has not become the focus of acute attention of political and administrative systems, and of the media and civil society. As a result, the city is now a mess of nerve-racking, economically unproductive, and socially destructive traffic snarls which help no one.



*Bengaluru is the most traffic-congested city in the world, according to a report released by location technology company TomTom. Source: Times of India, Jan 30th 2020.*

### **Imagining a Metropolis for everyone, now and into the future:**

Bangalore has a chance of becoming that place on this planet where people are eager to cycle and walk to the bus, then ride it in comfort, shift to a metro if necessary, and without in any manner feeling the need to ride a motorcycle, or take the car to work, college and elsewhere. Such a shift has potential, and could turn this tiring metropolis into a thriving, bubbly city that welcomes and embodies the future and its demands, whilst still being a healthy and socially inclusive metropolis where deeply democratic decision making is a norm, not an exception. In such landscapes of metropolitan inclusivity, with bus lanes accommodating buses on priority, which in turn support mass commuter needs, there is a chance of carving out cluttered roads into truly productive, creative and calming regions. Such freed up spaces can then be turned sylvan, be secured with productive and secure vending strips, turning streets lively and safe while also encouraging walking and cycling as mobility choices. Overall such imaginaries have the effect of producing good health for all and are critical to laying foundations for worthy transitions to a metropolis that thinks well, feels well, lives well and cares about all its residents.



## **Building Positive Imaginaries for a Functional and Healthy Metropolis:**

To get such transitions into movement, it is critical that we address prevailing fixations on widening roads and building flyovers and elevated corridors - premised on a faulty belief that they will relieve traffic congestion and making life easier. World over, such infrastructures have failed to produce such expected results, and instead turned cities into a tangled mess of concrete and steel, filled with traffic, and producing foul air and poor health for all. Such projects end up promoting more aggressive use of private vehicles, and provide less and less secure and dignified space for walking and cycling. Truly, such urban formations are planned disasters!

It is high time that conversations about cities and their futures are steered in ways that energetically, imaginatively and intelligently promote the critical importance of safe, secure, affordable and accessible public transport. Indisputably, global experience suggests that making spaces for buses on city streets, and then ensuring bus based transit systems work well and for all, is the way forward. It is a system that can heavily be doused with carbon-neutral travel options, such as walking and cycling. To ensure such low cost but high utility systems are integrated into the public transit choice of a city requires pressure being built from multiple sectors and through diverse and distinctive narratives. It would imply reflecting on how the bus collates and unites such diversities towards moving a massive metropolis in the right direction.

Some questions that draw us close to such worthy imaginaries are:

- *Does this involve conversing about turning streets greener, saving tree canopies in particular, so that it is more pleasant to walk, cycle and take a bus?*
- *Does this require making bus lanes a priority?*
- *Does this require asserting the right to cycle, walk and bus is more privileged than the right to drive one's car?*
- *Does this mean taking a stand against Elevated Corridors which super expensive and promote privilege private travel modes that are destructive of various other public friendly options?*

- *Does this require demanding Metro systems must be supportive of bus systems, and seamlessly, and that the former should not be privileged over the other?*
- *Crucially, does this mean making public transport affordable and accessible to all?*
- *Does this mean making bus travel safe for all - women, children, senior citizens, disabled included?*
- *Does this mean imagining streets are well graded and fully accessible, and are a pleasant space for one to walk, pick up a thing or two from the street vendor, and then to wait in a nicely designed bus station to ride the bus home?*
- *Does this help us imagine how commuting is an overall enriching experience that helps support livelihoods while providing the commuter a chance to read and/or enjoy music?*

Such conversations need to be had amongst all peoples – especially key decision makers who fail to imagine how to make the metropolis function for all. The action sparked by such conversations will help shape a metropolis with a future, and for which future generations will be grateful.



*In Aarhus, Denmark citizens lobbied to remove a road covering a river, create a pedestrian walkway and restore the pristine beauty. Source: Riegels et al, 10 March 2020.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0048969719358310>

## **Sparking Conversations to Reimagine *Namma* City: The BetterBusBengaluru Webinar Series**

In cultivating such conversations based on imaginaries that accommodate current needs of all and demands of the future, ESG, in collaboration with Bengaluru Moving, organised a series of five webinars entitled ‘Better Bus Bengaluru’. These webinars provided a platform for conversations on just how mobility in the city can be revitalised, and turned into sustainable and effective, through deeply democratic processes. These conversations traversed and interrogated deeper layers, discontents, contradictions and also opportunities that often are unattended in formal, typically centralised and undemocratic decision making, as is prevalent now guided by parastatal agencies. The five public webinars were held on various interrelated themes between 3rd and 28th August 2020, via Zoom.

The conversations involved representatives of NGOs, citizens groups and youth networks such as **Bengaluru Bus Prayanikara Vedike**, **Alternative Law Forum**, **Gamana Mahila Samuha**, **YUGMA Network** and **ActionAid**. They were joined by academics from eminent institutions such as **Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi**, **KS School of Architecture**, **Jindal School of Government and Policy**, **Massachusetts Institute of Technology** and **Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore**. Senior representatives of Bengaluru’s major transportation authorities the **Bengaluru Traffic Police**, **Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC)** and **Directorate of Urban Land Transport (DULT)** were key intervenors in the discussions. And significantly key political leaders such as **Prof. Rajeev Gowda**, former Member of Parliament and **Mr. Uday B. Garudachar**, Member of Karnataka Legislative Assembly also participated. The webinars were associated with online social media campaigns, such as Twitter storms and conversations on ESG’s and BengaluruMoving Facebook Platforms. The reports of each of the webinars follow.

Leveraging the experience of experts to discuss innovative ideas to make our cities faster, smarter and more accessible

# BETTER BUS BENGALURU

The Sessions, the Speakers & the Moderator(s)

## AUG 3 2020, TURNING STREETS GREEN AGAIN-MAKING THE CITY HEALTHY FOR ALL

**SETHURAM NEGINAL**  
IFS Officer (Retired)

**PRADIP KRISHEN**  
Filmmaker & Author of Bestseller "Trees of Delhi: A Field Guide" (2006)

**SUPRABHA SESHAN**  
Rainforest Conservationist

**CYPRINE ODADA**  
Cyclist Consultant to UN Habitat, Urban Planner+Organiser of Critical Mass, Nairobi

**BRIJESH KUMAR**  
Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forest, Karnataka Forest Department

**VANAJA**  
Street Vendor in Gandhi Bazar

**BHARGAVI S. RAO (Moderator)**  
Trustee, Environment Support Group



Session 1 Speakers

## AUG 7 2020, BUS FROM ANYWHERE TO ANYWHERE ELSE: MAKING BUS LANES A PRIORITY

**PROF. GEETAM TIWARI**  
Architect of Delhi's BRTS + Professor of Transport Planning + Policy, Traffic Safety, Public Transport + NMV Planning at IIT Delhi

**SHAHEEN SHASA**  
Representative of the Bengaluru Bus Prayanikara Vedike

**USHA RAO**  
Co-maker of "Our Metropolis"- a documentary about Bangalore's Transformation

**C. SHIKHA, IAS**  
Managing Director, Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation

**LEO F. SALDANHA (Moderator)**  
Trustee & Coordinator, Environment Support Group



Session 2 Speakers

## AUG 14 2020, FEARLESSLY CYCLE, BUS+WALK EVERYWHERE: MAKING URBAN MOBILITY INFRASTRUCTURE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

**DR. KEN KRUKERMAYER**  
Former Associate Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Public Works + Project Manager of the Southwest Corridor in Boston

**SHAMANTH KUCHANGI**  
Head, TETC, Directorate of Urban Land Transport (DULT), Govt. of Karnataka

**NANDINI B. K.**  
Trustee & Coordinator, Environment Support Group

**DASARATHI G.V.**  
Cycling Enthusiast & Entrepreneur

**SATHYA PRAKASH VARANASHI (Moderator)**  
Architect + INTACH Member



Session 3 Speakers

## AUG 21 2020, MAKING PUBLIC TRANSPORT AFFORDABLE TO ALL

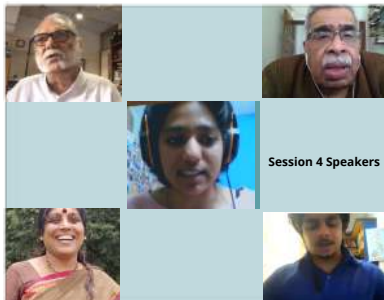
**PROF. DINESH MOHAN**  
Transport & Infrastructure Policy Analyst + Honorary Professor, IIT Delhi

**VINOD VYASULU**  
Former Professor + Vice Dean at Jindal School of Government & Policy, Sonapat

**MAMATHA YEJAMAN**  
Representative from Gramana Mahila Samuha

**TAANIKA SHANKAR & ROHIT VASISHTA**  
Co-founder, YUGMA Network: College Student Unions' Network

**VINAY SREENIVASA (Moderator)**  
Member of Alternative Law Forum & Bengaluru Bus Prayanikara Vedike



Session 4 Speakers

## AUG 28 2020, STREAMLINING + CALMING TRAFFIC

**PROF. RAJEEV GOWDA**  
Former Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha)

**DR. UDAY B. GARUDACHAR**  
Member of Karnataka Legislative Assembly (Chickpet, Bengaluru)

**V. MANJULA, IAS**  
Commissioner, Directorate of Urban Land Transport (DULT)

**DR. RAVIKANTHE GOWDA, IPS**  
Joint Commissioner, Bengaluru Traffic Police

**BHARGAVI S. RAO & LEO F. SALDANHA (Moderators)**  
Trustee, Environment Support Group



Session 5 Speakers

A campaign initiated by ESG in collaboration with #BengaluruMoving

## **“Turning streets green again and making the city healthy for all”, 3rd August 2020**

The discussants of the inaugural webinar were leading forester and retired IFS officer Mr Sethuram Neginhal, critically acclaimed filmmaker and author Mr Pradip Krishen, rainforest conservationist Ms Suprabha Seshan, UNEP’s mobility consultant Ms Cyprine Odada, Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests of the Karnataka Forest Department Mr. Brijesh Kumar, IFS and key leader of the street vendor’s movement in Bengaluru Ms. Vanaja who vends in Gandhibazaar. This session was moderated by Ms Bhargavi Rao, Trustee, Environment Support Group.

Mr. Seturam Neginhal inaugurated the webinar series by sharing anecdotes from his time as Tree Officer of Bangalore city in the 1980s. Innumerable treebanks once dotted the city in a clear demonstration of how greening efforts in erstwhile days were not a centralised effort. In his capacity as Tree Officer, Mr Neginhal ensured every urban resident became an active participant in promoting the green cover of the city. He kept emphasising on the importance of educating urban residents, particularly the young, on their role in halting the disappearing tree cover and re-greening the city again.

"Unless the public is involved, the attempt to regreen the city would never work." - SG Neginhal

Ms. Bhargavi Rao’s comments on drawing attention to the mass felling of trees in Bangalore, as a result of the financialisation of the city and Mr. Pradip Krishen’s emphasis on the lack of understanding of functional criticality of trees by the current “urban planners” resounded the importance of stepping back from what city planning has become today. As Mr. Krishen noted, in an



*A street lined with Gulmohar Trees in Bengaluru. Source: The Hindu, 3rd February 2017.*

effort to make the city appear “world class” large numbers of native trees have been felled to make space for infrastructure projects. At the same time greening efforts have been restricted to planting largely exotic, ornamental trees, that have neither ecological compatibility nor value to the urban landscape.

Through her rich descriptions of Bengaluru’s landscape that she has built from her extensive walks on the roads and footpaths of the city through the months when the city was under lockdown, Ms. Suprabha Seshan highlighted the need to have road space for things that are not just private vehicles. The ecological separation of city life and the utter lack of walking spaces is what she observed to be key reasons behind the pathetic and rapid disappearance of urban greenery.

Ms. Cyprine Odada’s focus was on how current urban planning systems the world over are shying away from making cities pedestrian friendly, even as the number of private vehicles steadily increases. She also highlighted the increasing apathy of urban residents to felling trees to erect concrete infrastructure. This according to her is the result of poor understanding among current urban residents about the value of trees.

Ms. Vanaja, talking from her experience of vending from under a tree in iconic Gandhibazaar, demonstrated how trees can make roads friendly for cyclists, shoppers and pedestrians. She spoke with much gratitude of the tree she sells flowers under, for it offers both



*Street Vendors in Gandhi Bazaar. Source: Deccan Chronicle, 10th March 2018.*

herself and her customers shelter, both in the scorching summers and rainy monsoon. She wondered why these aesthetic qualities of life and living in an urb are lost on key planners today, who rush to turn everything that is green and alive into concrete and dead.

Mr. Brijesh Kumar pointed out the immense utility of urban local bodies when it comes to greening efforts of concretised spaces. He spoke of the key initiatives that had been taken as

"Greening of the city doesn't appear to be a priority of urban planning in India." - Brijesh Kumar

an outcome of Public Interest Litigations, which brought together civil society and government agencies to work under Judicial oversight to re-green Bengaluru. The lack of implementation of such judicial directions is lamentable, he said, and called for critical and democratic interventions to set right the prevailing imbalance.

In light of the fact that ward committees are becoming functional in Bangalore, these conversations highlight how such people centred bodies are critical to greening efforts, which in turn are fundamental to make streetscapes people and public transport friendly.

### **“Bus from anywhere to anywhere else: Making bus lanes a priority”, 7th Aug 2020**

Prof. Geetam Tiwari, IIT Delhi, Dr. Usha Rao, film-maker and urban anthropologist, Ms. Shaheen Shasa, representative of Bengaluru Bus Prayanikara Vedike and Ms. C. Shikha, Managing Director of BMTC participated in this session moderated by Mr. Leo Saldanha, Coordinator and Trustee, Environment Support Group.

In a logical follow up to the earlier session, this webinar focused on make the Bus central to mobility in the city. As said by Mr. Saldanha, “the bus never gets enough attention from either the Government, or Finance, or even the public at large which relies on its service for their travel needs”.

Prof. Geetam Tiwari’s intervention interrogated the mindset of policy makers who consider people in cars as mainstream commuters, but those in buses as not.

"To bus, walk or cycle from anywhere to anywhere else is not just about convenience. It's a fundamental right we should all have in the city." - Leo Saldanha

This is symptomatic of the ecological disconnect, which Ms. Seshan had spoken of in the previous session. Adding to that thread, Prof. Tiwari highlighted that the tendency to provide priority to private vehicles on Indian roads is correlated with the fact that decision makers at the City, State and National levels are largely car users. It appears that their personal experiences have a direct bearing on the policies they make, which many a time end up favouring the usage of personal vehicles instead of highly economically, socially and ecologically viable mobility choices such as buses, cycles and pedestrian lanes.

"Decision makers at the City, State and National level are all car users. Unfortunately, their personal experiences are extended towards public policy." - Geetam Tiwari



*A clear cut case for prioritising bus lanes. Source: Mr. Dasarathi.*



Dr. Usha Rao brought focus to the lopsided financing logic which favours large construction projects like flyovers, elevated corridors and metro lines. She found this logic devalues transportation modes like buses, which are perceived as not being clean enough, or comfortable enough or even fast enough, unlike a metro or a private car. Also, despite the metro literally bulldozing people's homes, shops and spaces for recreation, and urban greenery, there is very little popular resistance to such mayhem, which is indicative of a myopic imagination of the public at large. To Dr. Rao this is probably because the destructive transformation wrought by such mega projects is never fully internalised in public memory.

Ms. Shaheen Shasa, as a representative of a bus commuters' group, focused her attention on buses are being co-opted in the class driven stratified landscapes of Bangalore. The rising bus fares and increased focus on prioritising bus lanes for IT workers, only demonstrate the complete disregard for the economically weaker sections. In this regard the Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) needs to remember that it is a public service agency and not a profit-making organisation.

"Fare is a big issue for commuters. The bus fares continue to be unaffordable for economically weaker sections of society." - Shaheen Shasa

Ms. Shikha, MD of BMTC picked up Ms. Shasha's argument, agreed that public bus systems shouldn't be considered from a pure financial viability perspective, and spoke of the need to disincentivize private vehicles toward making the public bus a viable option. Unless this is done it will be difficult to break the vicious cycle of slow moving buses stuck in traffic snarls, which increase reliance on private vehicles. In order to ensure that bus commuters have faster, more pleasant journeys Ms. Shikha highlighted the critical importance of making bus lanes available on all roads. She also drew attention to the need to integrate all public transport systems work under a common public service, instead of treating them as independent stand-alone profit making ventures.

**“Fearlessly cycle, walk and bus everywhere - Making urban mobility infrastructure accessible to all”, 14th Aug 2020**

Panelists for this session were Mr. Ken Kruckemeyer, Former Associate Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Public Works who also teaches at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, entrepreneur and cycling enthusiast Mr. G. V. Dasarathi, Karnataka Regional Director of ActionAid Ms. Nandini B K and Head TETC of Karnataka Directorate of Urban Land Transport Mr. Shamanth Kuchangi. The session was moderated by architect and urban conservationist Mr. Sathya Prakash Varanashi.

Mobility being the main point of discussion for this panel, Mr. Varanashi brought to attention the pressing need to have a comprehensive mobility plan for a complex city like Bangalore. At the moment such a task looks difficult to achieve with multiple agencies like the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), Directorate of Urban Land Transport (DULT), Bangalore Metro, BMTC, etc. working independently and handling public transportation without coherence to the city’s form, flow of life and structures of operation. A comprehensive mobility plan will be reliant on how successfully the auto-centric thinking prevalent among current urban and transport planners can be overcome.

“Our cities should be designed keeping the needs of people in mind, not cars” –  
Ken Kruckemeyer

Mr. Kruckemeyer sagaciously said that our cities should be designed keeping the needs of people in mind and not cars. He felt that it is time to realise that the street should be a provider of not just transit but also of access, reception and even recreation. Roads should not only connect people via cars and motorbikes, but also walking paths, cycling tracks and bus lanes.



*Delhi's iconic Chandni Chowk has been transformed into a completely pedestrianised space. Can such imaginaries be extended elsewhere? Source: Siddharth Singh, 25th July 2020.*

Mr. G. V. Dasarathi recounted his experiences of cycling through the streets of Bengaluru over the last two decades. Although he has not had the misfortune of meeting with an accident himself, he pointed out that every year thousands of people are not so lucky on India's roads. He also called for a large-scale transition towards non-motorised forms of transport, citing the alarming number of deaths caused by air-pollution, of which motor vehicle emissions are a major contributor.

Ms. B K Nandini speaking from her own experience of navigating the city with visual disabilities, spoke of how inaccessible the current mobility infrastructure of Bengaluru is. In her opinion, the current system is only accommodative of cars while excluding the mobility needs of children, senior citizens and persons with disabilities. She spoke of the need to plan and shape mobility and public transport taking into account vulnerabilities, and not merely based on the strengths and privileges of the elite. Ms. Nandini made an eye-opening

statement when she said that, ‘Long back, before Bangalore was a 'world-class city', I found it so much easier to move around. Now it's become really difficult’.



*It's not just buses which are a challenge for people with disabilities, but bus stops too. Source: Scroll, 16th October 2018.*

Mr. Shamanth Kuchangi, representing DULT, felt that one of the surest ways of reducing reliance on private vehicles is to come up with an inclusive public mobility plan that includes the interests of high-income citizens. At the same time, Mr Kuchangi stressed on the need to make the public bus system affordable and accessible to all. A city that is vying for world class status continues to witness the transportation of working class persons like cattle, herded in goods vehicles, he lamented. This is proof enough that the current planning is about privileging the interest of the rich without making any efforts to be equitable and inclusive of all.

### **“Making public transport affordable to all”, 21st August 2020**

The fourth session of the BetterBusBengaluru webinar series involved Prof. Dinesh Mohan, Transport and & Infrastructure Policy Analyst and Emeritus Professor at IIT Delhi, Prof. Vinod Vyasulu, an economist who retired as Vice Dean at Jindal School of Government &

Policy, Ms. Mamata Yejaman, Representative of the Gamana Mahila Samuha and Ms. Taanika Shankar and Mr. Rohit Vasishtha, co-founders of the YUGMA College Students Network. The session was moderated by Mr. Vinay Sreenivasa, Member of Bengaluru Bus Prayanikara Vedike and Alternative Law Forum.

The affordability aspect of public transport systems is actually an issue of exercising democratic choice, as was pointed out by Mr. Leo Saldanha at the very beginning of this webinar series. This ability to choose should also be available in terms of what modes of transport one chooses to avail, argued Mr. Vinay Sreenivasa, who also drew attention to how the current focus of public transport is largely on the metro because it transfixes the masses with its snazziness. This has pushed the woes of the bus commuters to the back burner of public transportation matters, notwithstanding the fact that far more people commute using the bus than the Metro. The consequence of this not merely impacts mobility of the masses but also people's right to access education and livelihood sources. Therefore, echoing Ms. Shikha's views from the previous session, he emphasised that public transport systems cannot function as corporations with profit making motives, but needs to be run as a public service. There needs to be a fundamental restructuring of how the government is presently looking at bus systems and bus fares he suggested, setting the tone for the discussion.



*Unaffordable bus fares means that working class people frequently travel in goods vehicles, often at great risk.*

*Source: The Hindu, 7th October 2016.*

Prof. Dinesh Mohan pointed out how transport by bus needs to be considered as a public good and thus should be publicly funded. As an innovative suggestion he said that bus services need not be subsidised from central funds. Instead a public transport tax of 1% should be deducted from all workers earning salaries above Rs. 20,000 a month. This tax can be dedicated to fund public transport. He also advocated for lowering of bus fares, making all buses air-conditioned, low-floor and fully accessible to every individual and finally to make our streets accommodative of buses and street vendors. According to him these are essential aspects of making daily trips pleasant, safe and secure.

Prof. Vinod Vyasulu emphasised upon the fact that public transport cannot be considered as a commodity. It's recognition as a utility is of utmost importance in order to address the issues of availability of bus services and fare hikes. Prof. Vyasulu was also severely critical of the government's increasing shift towards privatisation of public utilities. He called for a political movement to engage with all aspects of urban planning, governance and mobility, ensuring decision making solely by the privileged is rejected, and deeply democratic and representative decision making becomes the mainstay.

*“As a young girl, using the bus made me feel independent. I also saw it as a drastic step to reduce my carbon footprint” – Taanika Shankar*

Ms. Taanika Shankar and Mr. Rohit Vasishta, student representatives of the YUGMA Network, brought the concerns of the youth to the discussion. Having worked on popularising environmental concerns amongst youth in India, they highlighted the important role the humble bus has to play in mitigating the climate crisis. They also drew attention to issues of the last mile connectivity and the lack of availability of properly mapped bus routes that dissuade young persons from availing the bus service.

Ms. Mamata Yejaman's intervention focused on the wide range of issues women commuters face while traveling in buses. She pointed out that in many, if not most, households, women are the sole breadwinners and they often must travel long distances to financially support their families. Given the weak implementation of various guidelines intended at securing travel of women, third gender and children, not merely is the steep bus fare a serious issue of concern (as most women who use buses earn meagre salaries), the bus is also a place where

one is forced to endure harassment and sexual abuse. Ms. Yejaman argued for a very strong public movement to promote safety and security of women commuters that would make the entire bus system safe and secure for all.



*Two out of every three women have experienced harassment on BMTC buses. Source: Amala Dasarathi, August 29th 2014.*

### **“Streamlining + Calming Traffic”, 28th August 2020**

Discussants in the final session in the Better Bus Bengaluru campaign and webinar series were Prof. Rajeev Gowda, former Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha), Dr. Uday B. Garudachar, serving member of Karnataka Legislative Assembly from Chickpet, Bangalore, Ms. V. Manjula, IAS, Commissioner of Directorate of Urban Land Transport (DULT) and Mr. B. R. Ravikanthe Gowda, IPS, Joint Commissioner of Bangalore Traffic Police. The session was jointly moderated by Mr. Leo Saldanha, Coordinator/ Trustee of Environment Support Group and Ms. Bhargavi Rao, Trustee of Environment Support Group.

Having focused on issues of depletion of greenery of Bangalore, on the importance of prioritising bus lanes and non-motorised transport infrastructure, and advancing accessibility

and affordability aspects of the city's mobility infrastructure, in previous sessions, the final session's pivotal theme was to discuss how to make urban mobility infrastructure more effective and efficient, particularly for those who rely on public modes of transport. Prof. Gowda approached the theme with the idea of making information the tool to empower users of public transportation systems. He also spoke in favour of integrating bicycles and other means of non-motorised transport with priority bus lanes. For Prof. Gowda, "Public will use public transport more if it is multi-modally integrated".

To Leo Saldanha's interjection about how the prevailing wisdom in many major urban centres of the world now is to dismantle mega projects like elevated corridors and turn streets more people friendly, Dr. Garudachar remarked, "We must all ponder together over the mayhem that Bangalore has become". According to Dr. Garudachar the practice of parallel sanction of plans for the city needs to be brought to an end. This is one of the reasons, according to Dr Garudachar, which is resulting in the decreasing green cover and increasing concretisation of Bangalore.



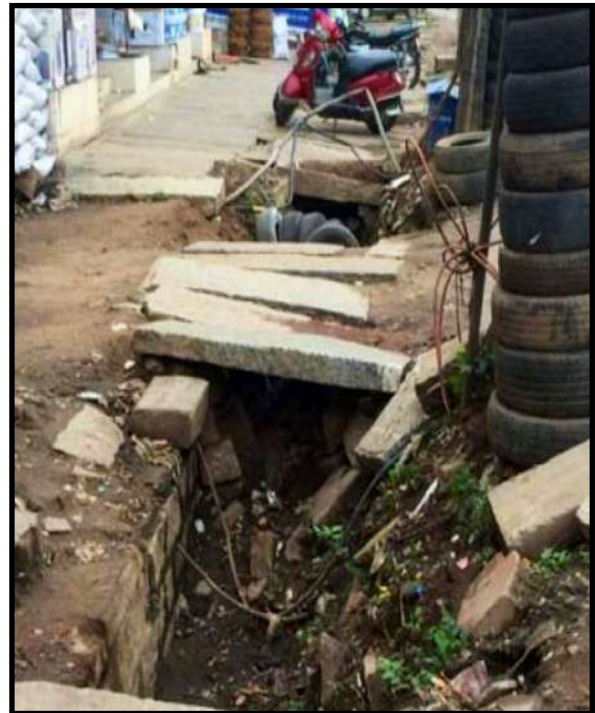
*In 2014, Seoul's Ahyeon overpass was demolished and replaced by a greener, bus-only lane. Source: The Guardian, 13th March 2014.*



Ms. Manjula echoed Prof. Gowda's suggestions and advocated for greater utilisation of digital information in bringing about operational improvements of public transport systems like buses. Ms. Manjula also spoke about the need to bring about behavioural changes for the public to be more accepting and embracing of public transportation options, and also to adopt non-motorised transport systems. She presented how the Government was making earnest efforts to turn streets cycling and walking friendly so everyone could feel safe and secure in moving about the city.

"Traffic decongestion needs a reduction in vehicles on the road. For this we need more people to use public transport." – Ms. Manjula

In the context of the present scenario of Bangalore roads being unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists, Mr. Ravikanthe Gowda expressed "It is saddening that there are so many deaths" indicating that "the city is being designed not with people in mind". Therefore, it is clear the current emphasis on incentivising private modes of transport is at the expense of public convenience and mobility, and particularly works against securing cycling lanes, footpaths and bus lanes that make public transport and transit mechanisms inclusive of all. In such a scenario, Mr Gowda was of the resolute belief that the humble bus is central to fixing many of these problems. As he put it, "A safe and affordable public transport system is key to resolving the traffic issues of Bengaluru."



*The poor condition of footpath on  
Doddabommasandra main road. Source: Deccan  
Herald, 12th November 2018*

## Participation

The five sessions of the BetterBusBengaluru webinar series received engagements from a large number of people across multiple social media platforms. The table below provides a breakdown of these various engagements.

Episode	Email Newsletter (Open)	Google Form Registrations	Facebook Live Views	Youtube Views	Twitter Impressions (top tweet)
1	1654	8	900	14	1029
2	2413	68	1000	19	595
3	1030	29	N/A	17	766
4	2240	48	N/A	14	581
5	2073	13	182	22	1140

## Necessary Steps For Moving Ahead

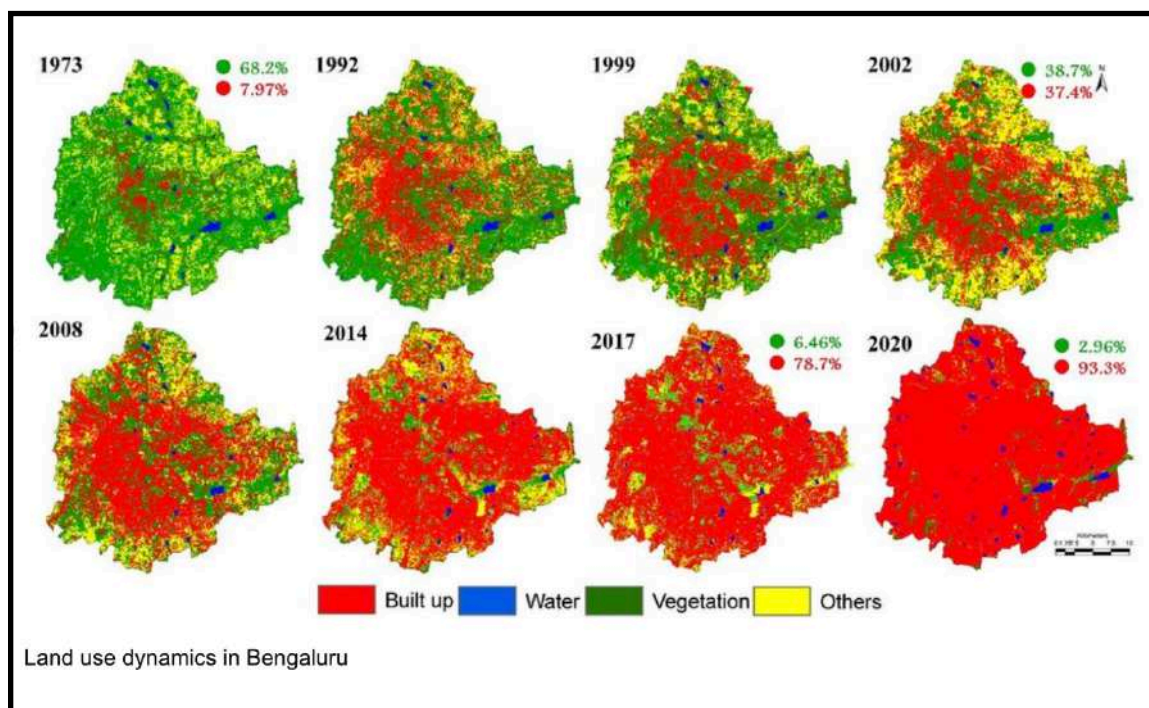
The germ of an idea behind this series of webinars was a simple question -- does the humble bus, which in a way has contributed to the creation of a city like Bengaluru, have a role in shaping the city's future at a time when private vehicles have come to capture the imagination of urban residents in most cities. People with diverse perspectives joined in to discuss, imagine and reflect upon what this transition means, particularly in a city like Bengaluru. The discussion focused on how the bus is being marginalised, when in fact centralising its utility would save such congested cities.

While dealing with the current scenario of withering public mobility infrastructure, the focus of the discussions was not merely on the lack of an option to bus from anywhere to anywhere else. It was also about whatever happened to walking and cycling as mobility

options, particularly in cities like Bengaluru famed for its salubrious climate year round. For even until a decade ago, the was relatively accommodative of cyclists and pedestrians..

The rich discussions in the webinars brought to light several issues that need careful consideration of just about everybody if Bangalore has to become once again a pleasant city to live in and travel through. Some of the major issues highlighted through the webinar series were:

1. **Ecological separation is mounting in the city, and this is costing people their health:** As trees are brutally cut for road-widening and other large infrastructure projects, it is clear where the priorities of our urban planners lie. In July this year, documents supplied by Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) revealed that the proposed construction of an eight-lane Peripheral Ring Road would require felling of 33,838 trees.



Source: *Envis - Environmental Information System, Sahyadri & Ramachandra, T V & Shivamurthy, Vinay & Aithal, Dr. Bharath. (2017). Frequent Floods in Bangalore: Causes and Remedial Measures.*

The discussions in this series, particularly the first webinar, revealed the critical role of trees, and appropriate urban greenery in general, in shaping a sylvan and healthy city-scape. Not only do they offer valuable ecosystem services such as mitigating air pollution, but they encourage walking and cycling as mobility options that are crucial to tackling climate change. Besides, they add value to urban aesthetics and bring biodiversity into the city. Crucially, they also have a direct bearing on the livelihoods of the city's working classes. As Ms. Vanaja, the street vendor from Gandhi bazaar, shared, "My family has been selling flowers under the same tree for three generations. Without the shade that tree offers, life would be much more difficult for me and my customers." *Can we strive to save our city's trees and wildlife instead of just building bigger roads at such a great ecological cost and public health loss?*

- 2. The current prioritization of private vehicles over public buses:** The lack of adequate bus lanes on the city's roads is proof that the mobility of commuters in private vehicles is given greater importance than of those in buses. Prof. Geetam Tiwari made an interesting observation in this regard: "The tendency to provide priority to private vehicles on Indian roads is correlated with the fact that decision-makers at the City, State and National levels are largely car users". *Can we push our policymakers to incorporate more bus lanes as a critical means of reducing congestion on our roads, a method that privileges public transport users over private?*

3. **The evident bias towards the metro over the bus within the ambit of public transit planning:** *Namma Metro* receives a far greater budgetary support, and also is supported to receive massive loans from across the world, in contrast with Bengaluru's bus system which gets no such attention. This despite the fact that the Metro carries a small fraction of daily commuters when compared with the bus system. The Metro also offers very limited connectivity across the city and travel by Metro is far more expensive than the bus. This promotes ridership of Metro by middle and privileged classes, and even amongst those, benefits mainly those who live and work along its alignment.



*An over crowded BMTC bus. Source: Deccan Herald, 25th July 2011*

Moreover the construction and operation of metro systems are highly intensive of materials and energy, and thus their argument as being environmental benign is contestable. Dr. Usha Rao questioned this evident bias towards the Metro: "The fact is that the exclusivity of the Metro is it's selling point. So, in that case, why not have an exclusive corridor for the bus? Are commuters on buses not important?". *Can we*

*question this bias that now exists favouring the Metro, and ensure that Namma BMTC receives equal treatment and also more financing? Can the bus be made accessible to all, and also more functional, by ensuring there is a bus lane everywhere?*

- 4. The unaffordability of bus fares to large sections of the population:** Prices of bus tickets in Bengaluru are amongst the highest in the country. So it is little surprise that working-class people are often seen packed into goods vehicles, often at great discomfort and physical risk. As Prof. Dinesh Mohan pointed out, high bus fares simply incentivise the usage of private vehicles, thereby congesting our roads even more. Ms. Shaheen Shasa, representative of the Bengaluru Bus Prayanikara Vedike, asserted that bus fares are unaffordable for economically weaker sections of the city, particularly working-class women who are the sole breadwinners of their families.
- Can we treat our bus system as an essential public good, a public service, so that it is accessible and affordable to all, especially to those who need it most?*

- 5. The need for a comprehensive mobility plan integrating all modes of transport:** Another major talking point that came up in many of the discussions was the fact that different public transportation systems such as the bus, Metro and suburban railway are not well-integrated into mobility options that must include safe cycling and walking just about on every street. Such lack of integration only serves to cause greater difficulty for commuters and incentivises people to prefer private modes of mobility to ensure their quality of life does not suffer. Prof. Geetam Tiwari pointed

this out in her presentation: "We have always treated the Metro and bus systems separately. Unfortunately not as complementary systems but as competing systems". To resolve this issue she called for an integrated transport authority which would ensure the smooth functioning of these different systems. *Can we work towards democratically creating an integrated public transport system so that different mobility modes can function in a complementary manner?*

- 6. The current inaccessibility of buses to people with vulnerabilities:** It appears that our city, and by extension our bus system, has not been planned keeping in mind the challenges faced by people with various disabilities. Speaking from her experience of being visually impaired, Ms. Nandini BK complained that the traffic and poor urban design cause her great difficulty in navigating through the city. Wheelchair accessibility is another issue our bus system does not appear prepared to address. Not only is it a great challenge for wheelchair users to board buses, the poor design of bus stops means that even these spaces are inaccessible. *Can we design our bus system, and cities in general, in a more humane way and fully accessible manner, with design focused on primarily accommodating the needs of those most at risk, the most vulnerable, and thus everyone in general?*



*People with vulnerabilities need more accessible buses. Source: The Hindu, 9th June 2020*

7. **The challenges women face in accessing and using public transport:** Many women think twice about travelling in a bus, especially if it is crowded. This is because the bus is a space where they are afraid they will be harassed in different ways, including sexually. Ms. Mamata Yejaman, representative of *Gamana Mahila Samuha* called for action to make buses safer for women, asserting that they face harassment not just in buses but in bus stops as well. It was heartening to hear from Ms. C. Shikha that efforts are underway to make BMTC safe and secure for women and children: "We are installing cameras and panic buttons in all our buses to ensure safety of women. We are also conducting training sessions to sensitise our staff about the safety of women and children". *Can we ramp up these efforts and ensure that not a single woman has to step into a bus with fear in her mind?*
8. **The lack of infrastructure to walk or cycle safely in the city:** Not only are many of our city's footpaths in poor condition, cycle paths are also in short supply, mostly non-existent. Speaking from his experience of cycling through the city for over two decades, Mr. Dasarathi called for introducing cycle lanes across all the city's roads.



*Sorry state of a footpath on Bengaluru's Bannerghatta road. Source: The Hindu, 10th October 2019*



Mr. Ravikanthe Gowda, Joint Commissioner of Bengaluru Traffic Police, also called for an improvement in the city's footpaths, to encourage more people to walk and simultaneously ensure their safety. The importance of trees to shoppers, pedestrians and cyclists was highlighted, for trees not only offer shade, they also make commutes more pleasant. *Can we work on improving infrastructure for non-motorised mobility, especially in light of the mounting climate crisis?*

9. **The need for sustainable and carbon-neutral mobility:** Automobile emissions are direct contributors to serious problems such as air pollution and climate change. Taanika Shankar and Rohit Vasishta, student representatives of the YUGMA Network, were quick to point out the urgent need to transition towards less polluting forms of transportation. In this regard, public transport is important, as it produces significantly lesser per-capita emissions than private mobility. But what is more important is proactive promotion of carbon-neutral mobility, such as walking and cycling. For longer distances, these forms of non-motorised transport need to be well integrated with a thriving bus system. *Can we push our policy makers to improve infrastructure for carbon-neutral mobility, and simultaneously begin to adopt it ourselves?*

10. **The importance of street vendors in the city-scape:** Multiple speakers highlighted the very important role street vendors play in a city. Not only do they offer critical and highly affordable services to urban residents, but studies reveal that streets which have a high concentration of vendors report low incidences of crime. Road-widening

projects threaten the livelihoods of these heroes of the city, like Ms. Vanaja in Gandhi Bazaar. *Can we recognise the importance of street vendors and ensure that their livelihoods are protected, so the city becomes safer and more affordable for all?*



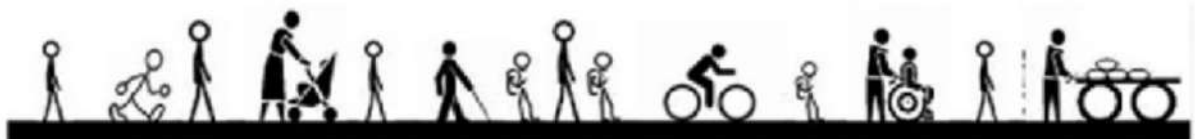
*Street Vendors in Bengaluru. Source: Economic Times, 17th May 2016.*

- 11. The need for bus commuters to lobby for their collective interests:** The Bengaluru Bus Prayanikara Vedike is a group of volunteers that has been campaigning for better BMTC services like reduced fares and for the active addressing of sexual harassment. They have also actively supported Bangalore Traffic Police, BBMP and BMTC efforts to create bus lanes. However, being a small group, there's only so much they can do. Ms. Shaheen Shasa, representative of the Bengaluru Bus Prayanikara Vedike highlighted the urgent need for a large-scale organised commuter movement which would have a greater impact on changing the mindset of decision makers. Prof. Dinesh Mohan also called for cross-institutional coalitions of citizens working in different areas to come together and make effective demands for the public good. *Can*

*we work towards building such coalitions and promoting the deeply democratic public involvement in public transport and city planning, and thus advance public transport systems that make the city more livable?*

At a time when the world is at the threshold of becoming predominantly urban, and when many of us have become accustomed to and even comfortable living in concretised and enclosed spaces, mobility as a function of urban living has emerged as a crucial factor. Lack of it, or the lack of comfortable, safe and affordable mobility, can make life dysfunctional. It adversely affects basic human rights: like the right to earn a livelihood or the right to education. A poorly designed mobility system can make cities almost inhospitable.

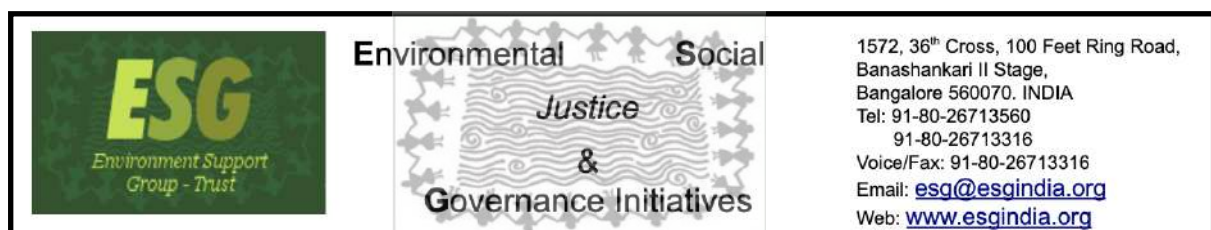
Everyone who now lives in megacities like Bengaluru now suffers the stress of navigating through chockablock traffic. We've all breathed the toxic fumes emitted by the city's innumerable automobiles. We've all yearned for days when *Namma Bengaluru* can be as it once was: greener, easier to travel in, and thus inclusive of all and a real pleasure to live in. The discussions in this webinar series focused their interventions in assisting a reimagination of public mobility in a burgeoning metropolis like Bengaluru, and turning this into an opportunity to make the city functional, environmentally secure, socially just and economically viable. The conversations focused on accommodating needs of the present and the demands of the future, and by ensuring public mobility speaks to everyone's needs and feelings. The idea of this campaign is to ensure everyone can be a participant in building such imaginaries where inclusivity is celebrated and making cities functional is an empowering process. Finally, it is about ensuring everyone feels healthy, safe and secure when they move about and live in the city.



The videos of the all the webinars in the Better Bus Bengaluru series are available for viewing online. Please watch them by clicking on the links provided below:

- **Inaugural Webinar: “Turning streets green again and making the city healthy for all”, 3rd August 2020: <https://bit.ly/2OtOcGX>**
- **Second Webinar: “Bus from anywhere to anywhere else: Making bus lanes a priority”, 7th August 2020: <https://bit.ly/3hyOXm9>**
- **Third Webinar: “Fearlessly cycle, walk and bus everywhere - Making urban mobility infrastructure accessible to all”, 14th August 2020: <https://bit.ly/2YE8sds>**
- **Fourth Webinar: “Making public transport affordable to all”, 21st August 2020: <https://bit.ly/2YFH7Yn>**
- **Fifth Webinar: “Streamlining + Calming Traffic”, 28th August 2020: <https://bit.ly/3iWXEPy>**

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