

Pune Leads India Toward a Sustainable Future

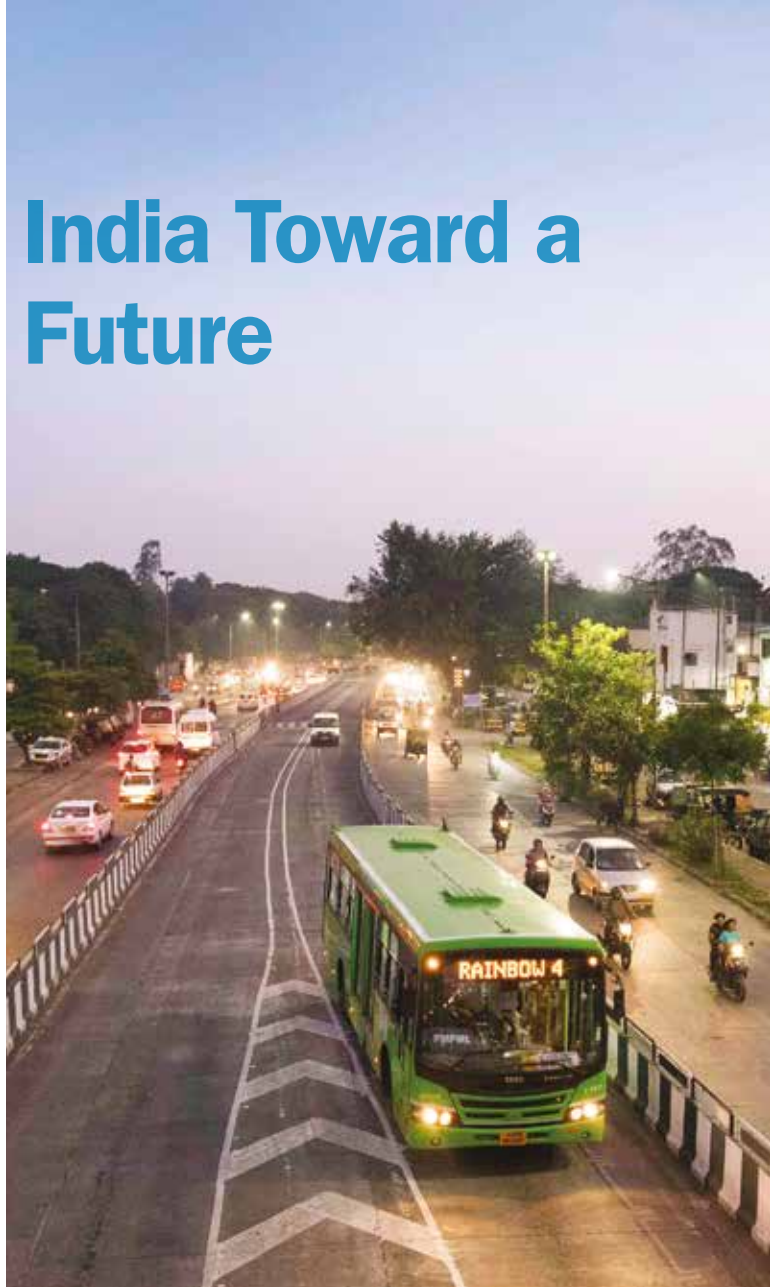
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Photos: ITDP India

Every year, the Sustainable Transport Award is given to a city that has implemented innovative sustainable transportation projects to improve mobility, reduce air pollution and greenhouse emissions, and advance safety and access for pedestrians and cyclists. Pune has been awarded the Sustainable Transport Award 2020, making it the second Indian city to receive this award since Ahmedabad won in 2010.

Indian cities have not typically embraced radical approaches to urban mobility, which focuses on efficient and sustainable forms of transportation. Pune has distinguished itself from other Indian cities by prioritizing sustainable mobility putting people first.

Pune, home to four million people, has started a series of initiatives to shift people away from cars and toward sustainable modes of transportation. Since 2016, with ITDP's guidance, the city has allocated over half of its transport budget to sustainable transport. The United Nations Development Programme estimates that by 2030 India's urban population will reach 538 million, an increase of nearly 40 percent since 2015. To meet transportation needs and keep cities moving, India must promote the ways most Indians already travel: walking, cycling, and public transport.



Above: Rainbow BRT line 4, which runs from Pune to Pimpri-Chinchwad.
Left: A new footpath in Pune, as part of the Complete Streets Program.



The Rainbow BRT in Pune moves about 120,000 people a day.

According to the 2011 Census of India, less than 10 percent of all urban commuters use a private car for their daily commute, and less than 25 percent use personal motorized transport. Unfortunately, most people are traveling in sub-standard conditions. India, like so many other nations, has prioritized building roads, flyovers, and parking for cars, and has neglected other modes of transit and pedestrian infrastructure. Formal public transport is often of poor quality or even non-existent in several cities. Unorganized and unregulated informal public transport services, such as rickshaws, fill the gap for those who can afford to take them. Walking and cycling infrastructure is also absent, or unusable where it exists, making travel by those modes dangerous, and encouraging car travel. As a result, personal motor vehicle ownership is growing, doubling every decade, at nearly three times the rate of population growth. With less than ten percent of Indians owning cars, cities are already choking with traffic and pollution.

PUNE'S PATH TO BUS RAPID TRANSIT

Pune first attempted the bus rapid transit (BRT) system in 2006 but failed to implement many standard BRT features and was unsuccessful. However, the lessons from these early trials and those of other Indian cities helped guide the 2015 inauguration of the Rainbow BRT of Pune, for which ITDP India provided technical support. The Rainbow BRT has successfully proven that a well-designed and managed system will induce people to shift from personal motor vehicles to public transport. Within three months of operation, the Rainbow BRT gained eight percent of private vehicle users. Overall, almost 12 percent of the Rainbow BRT users switched from using other modes including two-wheelers, paratransit, and cars.

“Some of the challenges during the implementation of the BRT were the lack of basic understanding about BRT and a lack of political will to implement [true] BRT,” said Ranjit Gadgil. “[Today], the people who use buses and BRTs are very happy. Civil society needs to keep pushing the BRT for needed improvements and institutional changes. Someone has to become a champion for the system.”

The Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC), the governing body of Pune, worked with many civil society groups to develop and improve sustainable transport. Ranjit Gadgil, an engineer with the civil society organization Parisar, explained the evolution of BRT in Pune. “Some of the challenges during the implementation of the BRT were the lack of basic understanding about BRT and a lack of political will to implement [true] BRT,” said Gadgil. “[Today], the people who use buses and BRTs are very happy. Civil society needs to keep pushing the BRT for needed improvements and institutional changes. Someone has to become a champion for the system.”

Today, the Rainbow BRT operates along a 50 km network and anticipates a 45 km expansion. It is a hybrid system featuring high-quality buses with doors on both sides, median-aligned stations within the dedicated BRT corridors, and left-aligned bus stops outside the dedicated corridor. The system uses a fleet of Euro-IV CNG buses and has 125 electric buses, a rarity in India. The success of the Rainbow BRT has earned acclaim and has inspired growth. There are ambitious plans to expand the network and its ridership.

STREETS FOR PEOPLE

One of Pune’s most important initiatives is the improvement of the pedestrian and cycling environment. It is redesigning arterial roads as complete streets: with high-quality footpaths, segregated cycle tracks, safe pedestrian crossings, and regulated on-street parking. ITDP India worked with the city to develop guidelines for complete streets and Pune became the first Indian city to adopt its own Urban Street Design Guidelines which give clear priority to walking and cycling. By setting standards for street design and providing templates catering to the needs of all road users, this manual illustrates how good design can transform Pune’s streets into safer and more livable public spaces. It disproves the harmful assumption that streets are only for vehicles.

In 2018, the PMC took a major step toward regulating cars by creating a public parking policy to manage on-street parking. The policy regulates on-street parking by clearly marking legal and restricted parking spaces per Pune’s Urban Street Design



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Guidelines. The PMC is also working on a demand-based parking system, which will be the first of its kind in India.

The first phase of these projects transformed two major streets into vibrant public spaces. These pilot projects have been lauded across the country and won many awards. Plans call for an additional 100 km of street networks that prioritize aesthetically pleasing streets to make walking a joy. To build support among the public, the city has conducted several trial runs in which it converted road space to pedestrian space. These trials successfully demonstrated the previously unimaginable power of complete streets: children playing, families strolling, shoppers browsing, and seniors engaging in animated conversations on benches.

A RESURGENCE OF CYCLING

Pune, once known as 'Bicycle City,' has seen a major drop in cycling in the past decade as more and more cars dominate the streets. However, the city is determined to bring cycling back and is engaging with several civil society organizations, including Parisar and Centre for Environment Education (CEE). "The Pune Cycle Plan was prepared through an extensive participatory process," said Sanskriti Menon of CEE. "It envisages the creation of a Bicycle Department, cycling infrastructure including around 825 km of a city-wide cycle network, cycle parking, integration with transit, enforcement planning, promotion of cycling, monitoring and evaluation."

In 2017, the PMC general body approved a comprehensive bicycle plan to build a 400 km cycling network. It will create a public bicycle sharing system, bicycle parking facilities, and design guidelines for cycle-friendly infrastructure, and a strategy for awareness campaigns. Pune has also passed a policy for Public Bicycle Sharing. The plan suggests 388 stations, 4,700 bicycles, and 13,100 docked bicycles in the first phase. In 2019, Pune piloted a dockless public bicycle sharing system with 4,000 cycles.

An integral aspect of Pune's success is visible in its budgets. Pune's 2016-17 budget called for more than half of transportation spending to go to footpaths, cycle tracks, and BRT, thus prioritizing sustainable transportation over car-oriented infrastructure. Revenue generated from parking will begin to be used to build streets with better walking and cycling infrastructure as well as to expand public transport. There are also plans for vehicle-free zones, particularly on busy shopping streets.

The 2020 Sustainable Transport Award is a much-needed pat on the back for the many right steps that the city has taken. The Sustainable Transport Award will encourage the city to upgrade its existing initiatives, scale-up projects, and expand upon its success. It will also serve as an inspiration to other Indian cities to follow in Pune's lead and take a leap towards sustainable urban mobility. While Pune has not yet reclaimed its 'Bicycle City' title, it is paving its way to a strong cycling network.



Pune is determined to bring cycling back as a safe, preferred, and comfortable form of transport.

