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Bangalore to be the first city to adopt international bus systems

NEW DELHI: In its race to develop an efficient public transport system, Delhi is about to be overtaken by the city of Bangalore.

The capital of Karnataka will be the first city in India to adopt high capacity bus systems with modern high-capacity buses plying on a network of exclusive bus lanes and bus ways. And **it is high time that the Delhi government too conducted a pilot study to checkout the feasibility of such a system**, urge the traffic experts at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi.

On the eve of an international workshop on high capacity bus systems to be held at the Pragati Maidan, Delhi, on January 20, 2002, traffic expert at the IIT, Delhi, Dr. Geetam Tiwari, who has developed the blue print of such bus systems for Delhi, said that since the roads are limited and cannot grow at the same pace as the population of an urban city, there is a need to use the road infrastructure efficiently by promoting high capacity public transport. And there are many examples to prove that she may be right.

Bangalore had already conducted a feasibility study of a public transport system based on bus technology drawing upon experiences from developing countries, particularly Curitiba in Brazil.

At present the traffic scenario in Delhi and other urban cities in India is caught in a vicious cycle. The steady increase of smaller vehicles such two-wheelers, three-wheelers and cars on the roads has led to traffic congestion resulting in the deterioration of the bus system in terms of reduced mobility, economy and service levels. This has further stimulated the increase of small vehicles.

To break out of this quagmire, the best option would be to adopt high capacity bus systems .i.e. a mass transit system with modern, high-capacity buses plying on a network of exclusive bus lanes and busways. This would provide an outstanding level of service and would be built at a fraction of the cost of a metro rail system.

There are **numerous examples of new busways** i.e. buslanes effectively segregated from the automobile traffic and allowing a higher speed for the benefit of their customers, says Pierre Laconte, secretary-general, International Association of Public Transport (UTIP).

Curitiba in Brazil was the first city to introduce the busways system. Its example has been copied in other Latin American cities like **Sau Paulo**. **Bogota** in Columbia too decided to adopt this system in 1995 by providing 41 km of exclusive busways. Their long-term plan is to place 85 per cent of the population within 500 mts of a busway station, using the busway network as a tool for high-density development.

When the city of **Nagoya**, Japan, adopted this system of mass transit, it not only increased the speed of traffic but also managed to recoup the cost of the project in less than six months.

Page 2:

Busways system was initiated in Paris in 2001. It did reduce the automobile capacity of throughfares and these measures did evoke a lot of criticism from the Press, but to every ones surprise, the system proved to be very successful, very quickly. As many drivers left their cars at home to take the bus, the flow of automobile traffic remained fluid, reduced pollution and traffic congestion, says Laconte.

Closer to home, inspired by the Curitiba example, Kunming in China introduced the concept in 1999 and it has already increased the passenger capacity of the public transport system by 50 per cent and has reduced the automobile capacity by 20 per cent. Busways networks in large cities have proved to be flexible alternatives to heavy rail or light rail networks as their cost allows to cover a whole city for the price of a short stretch of rail, says Laconte.

Back in Bangalore, making sure that existing resources would be used as efficiently as possible instead of starting afresh with a new expensive infrastructure, the study conducted in collaboration with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) in 1999, revealed that given a choice between high-capacity public transport system and an increasing traffic chaos, a modernised bus system was a necessity in all scenarios. It was efficient, economical and reduced pollution. Plans are now afoot to introduce the system in Bangalore.

The International Workshop on High Capacity Bus Systems seeks to inform decision makers about high capacity bus transport systems that are being effectively and efficiently used in many countries and its potential applications in urban India. It will also offer a platform to all stake holders to interact with professionals involved in designing and managing high capacity bus systems around the world.

The one-day-long international workshop has been organized jointly by the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC), the Infrastructure Development Finance Company (IDFC), Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) and the Transportation Research and Injury Prevention Programme (TRIPP) of the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi. It will be inaugurated by Delhi Chief Minister Ms Sheila Dixit. Delhi transport minister Ajay Maken and Karnataka transport minister Sagir Ahmad will also take part in the discussions along with high-ranking officials from the major public transport corporations of the country.

The workshop will be attended by international experts in the field on traffic management like Lee Schipper, Enrique Penalosa, Ralph Gakenheimer, Llyod Wright, Lew Fulton, S.K.Jason Chang, Gerhard Menckchoff, Pierre Laconte and others.