

# **IMPROVE PMT, CURB GROWTH OF PRIVATE VEHICLES, SAVE THE ENVIRONMENT**

## **Join hands for a holistic solution to Pune's transport problems!**

Pune, once famous for its greenery, for its open spaces, for its clean air, for the beautiful lush green tekdis surrounding it, and once renowned as a cyclists' paradise, is today its exact opposite. It is today one of India's most polluted cities, the roads have become very congested making it a cyclists' nightmare, the greenery is disappearing, even the tekdis are being destroyed. If this development continues, the city will soon become unlivable.

The roots lie in the entire policy orientation of the Central and State governments towards transportation issues. As a part of globalization, their entire orientation has shifted to promoting private vehicular transport rather than public transport, building expressways rather than improving railways network, reducing price of aviation fuel to make air travel cheaper and reducing excise duty on cars rather than subsidizing public bus services and railways. And so, like in every big city in India, in Pune too, there has been an explosion of private vehicles, and a neglect of public transport, creating mayhem.

## **Neglect of Public Transport**

The problems of the PMT are well-known:

1. The total number of buses is much less as compared to the needs of the city. Transport experts recommend at least 40 buses for 1 lakh population, so Pune should have at least 1200 buses, whereas the present number is 850.
2. Even of these, just 650 are on the roads. Nearly a hundred buses breakdown every day. This number is so high because of the poor quality of the spare parts.
3. And the buses in running condition are also in such a rickety shape that only those who have no other alternative travel in them.

Because of all the above reasons, the frequency of the bus service is very poor; on top of it, the buses run late, very often they get cancelled too; consequently, bus users have to spend a considerable amount of time waiting at bus stops; finally, when the bus does come, it is often over-crowded!

Worse, inefficiency and corruption have made the bus tickets very costly, so that for the poor, even the public bus system is no longer affordable.

A central reason for this dismal state of affairs is the present Transport Committee. Whereas the law says that experts should be appointed to the Committee, it is composed of corporators from various political parties. They are more interested in siphoning off money from the PMT rather than improving the public bus service. Commissions are taken on purchases, poor quality spare parts are purchased, and so on. The PMT has recently been given Rs. 550 crores by the Central Government, and the PMC is using it to build a Bus Rapid Transport (BRT) system. But considering the present state of affairs, the chances are a large part of this sum will simply be plundered.

And so the number of bus users has been coming down and today just 22% of the city's population use the public bus service.

## **Growth of Private Vehicles**

Because it takes so long to go anywhere by the PMT, whoever can afford it buys a scooter/motorcycle or a car. The result is: Pune's become swamped by private vehicles. The number of vehicles in the city has crossed 14 lakhs, and is increasing by the hour. Every day in Pune, more than 450 vehicles are registered – 13,000 a month, 1.6 lakhs a year. And even this huge growth is increasing every year, at a whopping rate of 33%!

It is evident that this growth rate is simply unsustainable. Urgent steps need to be taken to curb this increase in the number of vehicles. Otherwise, Pune's roads, already heavily congested, will get totally clogged. But PMC is attempting to tackle this problem through exactly the opposite method. It is implementing costly schemes like widening roads, building flyovers and new roads, and so on. But this only promotes a further growth in the number of private vehicles. It's a vicious cycle: this then creates the demand for yet more roads.

And what about the other problems arising from this ever increasing number of vehicles on the roads? Road accidents will increase. Pune is already amongst the most polluted cities in Asia. The cutting of trees and forests to make new and wider roads to accommodate more vehicles is going to make pollution levels increase at double-quick rates, because trees are pollution sinks. The quality of life in the city will also rapidly worsen, as open spaces and gardens get used up to build parking lots for cars. The city is headed for destruction.

## **Paud Road – Bal Bharati Link Road**

All this is commonsense, yet the city's planners are bent on taking us down this suicidal road. Ten years ago, the huge banyan trees lining both sides of Fergusson College Road were cut down to widen the road. But half the widened road has been taken up by parked vehicles, so effectively for moving traffic the road is still as wide as it was earlier. New flyovers are being built, at the cost of crores of rupees. The city's entire population is paying for these flyovers, which are meant for just 30% of the people who use private vehicles.

Now, in another ruinous decision, the PMC is constructing a link road to connect Paud Road to Bal Bharati (Senapati Bapat Road). This link road is going to pass through the lush green SNDT-Law College tekdi (hillock). This is one of Pune's most beautiful forests, with an enormous biodiversity. The building of this road will lead to the cutting of hundreds of trees, and the complete destruction of this wonderful green belt.

The PMC's argument is that the link road will be a shortcut and will ease the traffic congestion on Karve Road. But it is not just this road which is facing this problem. All of Pune's roads are getting choked. And because the number of vehicles in Pune is increasing very rapidly, even this new road is going to see jams within just 3-5 years.

The PMC is going to spend Rs. 30 crores on building this new road. The PMC has crores of rupees to spend on building new roads and flyovers. But when it comes to improving the PMT, it declares it has no money. The PMC is deliberately driving the PMT to a slow death.

## **The Alternate, Only Possible Solution**

Dear friends, there is only one rational solution to the problem of increasing congestion on the roads, worsening pollution and declining quality of life in Pune (and for that matter, for any city in general). It is: *improve the city's public transport system, and simultaneously, impose curbs on the growth of private vehicles, especially cars.*

It is also the most equitable solution, benefiting the ordinary people, who cannot afford to buy a two-wheeler or a four-wheeler, and travel by the PMT-PCMT.

Hence, all of us, residents of Pune as well as students who have come to study in Pune, must come together and mount pressure on the PMC to implement this solution. As a first step, we must raise the following demands:

1. Impose curbs on growth of cars in the city. For this:
  - a) Impose a license fee on those who wish to drive a car in Pune, which would have to be renewed every year.
  - b) Impose a congestion tax on those wishing to drive cars into the more congested areas of Pune, such as old Pune city.
  - c) Ban car parking on major roads. In this way, the space available for moving traffic can be doubled. Speed of traffic will also increase. Car parking can be allowed in the vicinity of these main roads on the side lanes. But not for free!
2. Stop building new flyovers and new roads, especially on the hills surrounding Pune. Spaces kept reserved for schools, gardens, etc. should not be de-reserved for roads and parking lots.
3. Improve the PMT. For this:
  - a) Increase the number of buses significantly, and drastically improve their maintenance.
  - b) Reduce bus fares, which are so high that for two people it is cheaper to travel by a two-wheeler
  - c) Rationalize bus routes.
  - d) To get the above demands implemented, and bring about a qualitative change in the functioning of the PMT, the key obviously is: Dissolve the present transport committee of corrupt corporators, and replace it by an experts committee.
  - e) Bring about transparency and efficiency in the functioning of the PMT.
  - f) The funds for improving the PMT can be mobilized through:

- parking charges and license fees imposed on private cars;
  - the money saved by not building flyovers and new roads.
- 4) As the road congestion reduces through the above measures, emphasis must also be put on building footpaths and cycle tracks.

There is actually nothing new in the above measures. Planners across the world are now realizing that building new roads and flyovers does not reduce traffic jams; on the contrary, it only worsens the congestion on the roads. In many developed countries, from Toronto to London to Stockholm to Singapore and Melbourne, steps similar to those proposed above are being taken. Third world cities of Bogota (Colombia) and Curitiba (Brazil) have actually implemented even more radical measures, which has so totally transformed the traffic situation and life in these cities that it appears almost unbelievable. And in neighbouring Mumbai, because of the good quality of BEST, the number of private vehicles is less than in Pune, even though the population of Mumbai is far more.

People of Pune, we cannot sit silently and allow our city to die a slow death. Let us get out of our apathy for public causes. And in fact it is not a public cause, because, by remaining aloof, we are all actually committing collective suicide. We must join hands, and launch a movement to pressurize the PMC to implement the above proposals.

We, some social activist organizations, NGOs, and individuals, have come together to form a SAVE PUNE FORUM to fight for the above demands. We call upon you to join us for the following action program:

1. **Film festival** on BETTER TRANSPORT, BETTER ENVIRONMENT  
Date: 9-10 December, 2006 (Saturday-Sunday) Time: 4-8 pm.  
Venue: Lokayat Hall, opp. Syndicate Bank, Law College Road, Near Nal Stop, Pune.
2. **HUMAN CHAIN** on Jungli Maharaj Road.  
Date: 17 December, Sunday. Time: 10-11 am.
3. **PROTEST DHARNA**  
Date: 6 January, 2007. Saturday. Time: 4-6 pm  
Venue: Outside PMC office.

## **SAVE PUNE FORUM**

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