

The Seventh Generation

"In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations."

-From the Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy

Bengaluru Goes from Garden City to Nano Land

by Tom Angotti
Bengaluru, India

Last in a series on urban apartheids.

When public authorities in Bengaluru (formerly known as Bangalore) set out to tear up 375 large trees in May of this year, the activist Environmental Support Group (ESG, www.esgindia.org) went to court demanding "that the tree-felling be stopped immediately." Joined by other civic organizations and bicycle and pedestrian advocates, ESG is waging a running battle to prevent authorities from knocking down trees, widening roads, filling lakes and wetlands and tearing up neighborhoods so they can turn India's fabled "Green City" into a highway haven. The city is being sliced and diced by giant road projects, cloverleafs, pedestrian overpasses and underpasses and a minimalist mass transit system designed to serve the business class. As the Indian economy expands, the nation's largest auto manufacturer is unleashing on cities what it claims will be the world's

cheapest car, wiping out many choices for pedestrians and bicyclists. The ESG recently lost a campaign to stop the taking of a portion of the city's botanical gardens for the metro system.

The road-building frenzy is the most obvious element in a dramatic and even brutal process of urban growth that cuts up Bengaluru to make way for real estate investors, shopping malls, gated communities and high-tech industrial parks. The roadways are the prime infrastructure for the Indian version of the neoliberal city—fragmented, auto-dependent and unsustainable.

Now a city of over 8 million residents—India's fifth largest—Bengaluru began its rapid transformation from green to gray in the last two (**cont. on page 9**)

THANKS TO ANN FORSYTH FROM THE EDITORS

Ann Forsyth coordinated the first issue of Progressive Planning Magazine in 2002, when the bimonthly Planners Network newsletter became a quarterly magazine. That issue focused on Youth and Planning and set the standard for excellence in the ensuing years. Since 2002 Ann and Tom Angotti have shared overall responsibility for the magazine along with a growing and experienced editorial group.

With the current issue Ann is handing over her responsibility for co-editing to Marie Kennedy. In addition to her extraordinary contributions to the magazine, Ann continues to serve as Treasurer for Planners Network and as a member of the PN Steering Committee.

We would like to thank her for her superlative commitment and contributions and look forward to her continued support.

-- Tom Angotti, Eve Baron, Jason Blackman, Chester Hartman, Kara Heffernan, Clara Irazabal, Marie Kennedy, Norma Rantisi, and Amy Siciliano

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decades when investors, both global and domestic, targeted the city because of its developed industrial infrastructure, research and educational institutions and highly educated workforce. The focus was the information technology (IT) sector, where jobs once located in the United States were outsourced to Indian workers who were paid a fraction of what their U.S. counterparts would have earned. Segregated IT parks and upscale gated communities—with security guards, parks and exclusive services—began sprouting up all over absent any serious citywide planning. This led to traffic problems and calls for infrastructure modernization, calls that were quickly answered by a central government attuned to the needs of investors and the auto industry.

Urban growth in India would not be as vigorous but for the government's infatuation with neoliberal economic policies that favor public-private partnerships, deregulation and the downloading of central government responsibilities onto weak local governments. India's government has reduced investments in rural areas and is building infrastructure for the cities, especially those that have large pools of educated, low-cost labor attractive to global investors. In this diverse nation of 1.2 billion people, 90 percent of whom live in towns, villages and cities with populations under a million, larger cities like Bengaluru were selected as prime recipients of aid under a massive "urban renewal" program in which the largest expenditure category has been highways. The shift in public spending is encouraging an historic increase in migration from rural to urban areas. Subsistence agriculture is in crisis as industrial agriculture grows, and small farmers are being pushed off the land. This process also has its brutal side, including a much-publicized and chronic rash of suicides by farmers unable to pay back loans or hold on to their land.

The Karma of Robert Moses?

Robert Moses, New York City's legendary planner who bulldozed neighborhoods to build highways, may have died in 1981, but his spirit seems to have returned in the bodies of Bengaluru's bureaucrats. But while Moses embellished his road-building projects with public parks

and open space, the Bengaluru bureaucrats will have none of it. They are filling lakes and wetlands, cutting down trees and shrinking and privatizing parks. Like Moses, however, they are designing streets and roadways for the exclusive use of motor vehicles. (I realize that this talk about Moses sounds like a Westernized view of the situation, but I don't mean to suggest that India doesn't have its own homegrown power brokers and master builders also capable of destroying urbanity.)

This urban makeover is all the more nonsensical since Bengaluru already had wide avenues and ample rights-of-way. Some careful thought might have produced a transportation scheme that would allow the monumental roadways to be used more efficiently and by multiple modes of transportation without turning them into motorways.

Bengaluru's road builders, consciously or not, are preparing the way for the recently announced Tata Nano, a cute two-cycle engine with four wheels that could do for Indian cities what Henry Ford's Model T did for America. Tata, one of India's largest corporations, is promoting the Nano as the cheapest car in the world and within reach of India's growing urban working class. While the Nano is likely to reduce the proportion of two- and three-wheel motorized vehicles (auto rickshaws, motorbikes and motorcycles) on the streets, the overall impact, as has been the case in cities throughout the world, is bound to be more traffic. Furthermore, because people with modest incomes will continue to rely on the two- and three-wheelers, they will become more vulnerable to crashes and conflicts with the heavier vehicles.

The invasion of the car and its culture to serve the new elites has already transformed Bengaluru. A walk along any of the city's wide boulevards is already perilous for the majority who don't drive. The new six-lane road to the airport is one example of how the road-building frenzy is making life more difficult for local workers and residents. The road's six traveling lanes are flanked by service roads, also used by motor vehicles. There are no sidewalks for pedestrians or bicycle ways. People without motor vehicles often have to go miles before finding a traffic light and crosswalk, and often risk their lives getting from one side to the other. The medians and shoulders are demarcated

by iron barriers meant to keep pedestrians from crossing, but these devices are really anti-pedestrian, an invitation for people to break holes through or jump over them. Pedestrian overpasses and tunnels are infrequent, but they too are unfriendly to pedestrians and often unused. There are no bus bays or shelters on the highway, and buses normally stop in moving traffic lanes. The airport highway is typical of others that are planned and under construction, suggesting a future Bengaluru made exclusively for private vehicles and privatized places.

Indian cities, like many cities in Asia, Latin America and Africa, emerged in rural societies that made no sharp distinction between public and private space. As a result, streets and sidewalks are used by everybody for just about everything, and every vehicle is allowed to ply its way. This tradition works reasonably well in small towns and cities, but in the large metropolitan regions it is undermined by uncontrolled use of motorized vehicles—cars, trucks, scooters and auto rickshaws. In their air-conditioned motorized bubbles, the upper and middle classes have monopolized the space, made it dangerous for pedestrians, bicyclists and merchants and encouraged

the myth that building more roads will make things better. The well-documented history of road construction over the last century shows that greater road capacity leads to more, not less, traffic and congestion.

Urban Renewal/ People Removal

The impact of road-building is acutely felt in Bengaluru's older neighborhoods characterized by narrow local streets. Chikpet has long been the city's market center and is still packed with artisans, merchants and residents. All around, however, real estate investors are buying up properties to put up malls, commercial high-rises and hotels. Instead of preserving Chikpet's center as a vital local economy and historic district and reclaiming the streets from the vehicular monopoly, government plans are to slice up the area with widened roadways. This will push out small businesses and open up more opportunities for real estate deals. Street vendors, who make up a large portion of the local economy, are likely to lose their spaces and livelihoods.

Robert Moses, ever the public works entrepreneur, no doubt chose Bengaluru as the place to be reborn when he heard of the enormous pot of rupees that India's government was offering to local governments. The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) created large pools of low-cost financing to local governments that undertake "urban renewal." Throughout India, about half of the funds go to road-building, and a significant portion to "slum improvement," which often means "slum clearance"—eliminating poor neighborhoods and replacing them with profitable, upscale developments. Indeed, the real "slumdogs" are the investors who become overnight millionaires from land and public infrastructure gotten at

All photos by Tom Angotti



LEFT: A typical open market and a modern pedestrian barrier

RIGHT: Bengaluru Metro under construction
FAR RIGHT: Chikpet, the old city center

bargain basement prices. The JNNURM funds come with a set of neoliberal conditions that include promotion of public-private partnerships (spend public money to make private investors better off), promotion of local revenue generation (raise local taxes to pay off the loans) and citizen participation (make it all appear to be legitimate and democratic).

Nano-Sized Transit

It might seem contradictory that India's road-building craze is accompanied by significant investments in urban mass transit in all major cities, but it's not. In fact, Bengaluru's first metro system, now under construction, will reinforce, not counter, auto dependence. The system is expected to handle between 5 and 10 percent of all regional trips encourage land speculation and disproportionately serve exclusive business and residential enclaves. The elevated structure will produce vast dead spaces at street level and encourage more driving where it is given over to parking or roadway. While cheaper to build than an underground train, the metro will cost much more than a surface system with an exclusive right-of-way, which would have had the benefit of reducing road capacity for cars, thereby encouraging mass transit use. And to build the metro, authorities are cutting down thousands of mature trees, further graying the Green City.

The most grievous omission in mass transit planning, however, is the thorough lack of a safe pedestrian infrastructure and a system of public open spaces linked to the metro. I visited the functioning metro system in Chennai (Madras), an even larger city that also has IT enclaves, and I could see Bengaluru's future. The metro handles only a small portion of all trips. Stations are easy to drive to but not easy to walk to. And wide avenues with metal barriers to contain pedestrians cut through a



city of maximum traffic and pollution that can't easily be walked. This is the future in Nano Land.

But other futures are possible. Activists in urban and rural areas from across the political spectrum are challenging the neoliberal model. Mahatma Gandhi's spirit of social justice, disdain for privilege, respect for community and peaceful resistance is challenging the specter of Robert Moses. In rural areas, activists continue to stall and stop giant dam, road and forestation projects that displace millions of people and the destruction of nature by agribusiness, chemical farming and genetically engineered foods. In metro areas like Bengaluru, neighborhood, environmental and civic groups are fighting for the right to a city without the walls of apartheid.

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