

POINT BLANK



GOVERNMENT IN A HURRY

Questions have been raised on the speed with which the government has cleared the project in spite of a strong and sustained public outcry. The High Court which is hearing the Public Interest Litigation filed by the Namma Bengaluru Foundation said that the project is subject to the outcome of the case.

As per the estimates made by architect Naresh Narasimhan on the Rs 1,791 crore project cost given by the government, each km of the bridge will cost around Rs 300 crore and requires cutting of 100 trees.

Various citizen groups and prominent personalities have expressed their dismay at the government's decision to go ahead with the project. Urban planner V Ravichandar who has been vocal against the steel bridge says that it just reduces the journey time to airport by 10 minutes. Actor Prakash Belawadi says that the entire project is shrouded in secrecy. There is hardly any information available on the project. By now, the BDA should have put all information in the public domain, he pointed out.

Rajya Sabha member Rajeev Chandrasekhar has been time and again terming the steel flyover from Basaveshwara Circle to Hebbal flyover as a money-making project for Assembly elections. "We, as citizens, see more of these ad hoc projects being pushed through closer to elections. The political class will make sure more such project ideas suddenly come up and rush them through to make political money," he says, explaining that the flyover project is neither citizen-driven nor plan-driven. "These are purely contractor and politically driven," the MP said. BBMP technical advisor R K Jaigopal says that the proposed flyover could be built for just Rs 567.49 crore as against the government's cost of Rs 1,791 crore.



Tear down flyovers, create public spaces, make city friendly for 8-80 year olds

The result of lack of urban and transport planning is the steel flyover to chaos announced last week. Passenger Car Unit (PCU) counts by the BDA stated that the traffic will reduce on the existing carriageway anywhere between 30 and 50% after the bridge gets built.

Decrease in PCU is just half the story. The other half, which includes projections of traffic for the next 20 years and how the flyover will not suffice then, is a story left unsaid. The answer to this will be another layer of flyover? How long do we adjust the belt to fit our obesity epidemic? And at what cost?

Over 800 trees are expected to be felled to fit our appetite for cars. What is the environmental cost to this destruction? It is reported that the trees will be planted elsewhere on the outskirts. Does that mean the residents along the corridor go to the outskirts for breathing?

The earth has crossed the 400PPM threshold permanently. Our children will never get to breathe the air we breathed when we were children. Yet, we are not able to see past our nose and reverse this trend. Where is our individual accountability to this problem?



The real transformation is in making policy changes to reverse the unsustainable way the city is growing, by making bold decisions like prioritising people over cars

cities friendly for 8-80 year olds, who today are resigned to their homes like caged animals for the fear of being knocked dead by cars.

Public transportation is becoming popular and is something that is beyond a build-contract by the BDA. Defining modal share and prioritising them are in the realm of planning by an independent authority.

The need for a Unified Metropolitan Transport Authority (UMTA), which looks at integrated planning and prioritises road space for moving people instead of cars, is now more than ever. Until such time the UMTA steps in and town planning bodies chart out a vision for intelligent integrated mixed use planning, the city is going to suffer the consequences.

It is time the people stepped and said "NO" to more flyovers and asked for an UMTA which decides what gets built.

Sathya Sankaran
Founding member of CiFoS and Praja RAAG

Flyover returns, ignoring protests

Steamrolling widespread public protests, criticism by urban planners, architects and advocacy groups, the government is going ahead with its ill-planned, hyper-expensive steel flyover of dubious utility.

It was branded hyper-expensive, of dubious utility, unaesthetic and absolutely unnecessary. Urban mobility experts unanimously rejected it, but the monstrous, Rs 1,791-crore Chalukya Circle-Hebbal steel flyover is back with a firm 'go-ahead' seal of the state Cabinet.

Creaking, poorly designed, poorly executed flyovers across Bengaluru are proof enough that another questionable project will not decongest the roads. But in their hurry to get the flyover off ground, the state and BDA are in no mood to look at clinching evidences across the city.

Escalated cost
The project cost has escalated from Rs 1,100 crore to Rs. 1,350 crore to Rs. 1,791 crore without justifiable reason. By the government's own admission, a total of 812 trees will

have to be axed and several acres of heritage land acquired to make way for the flyover.

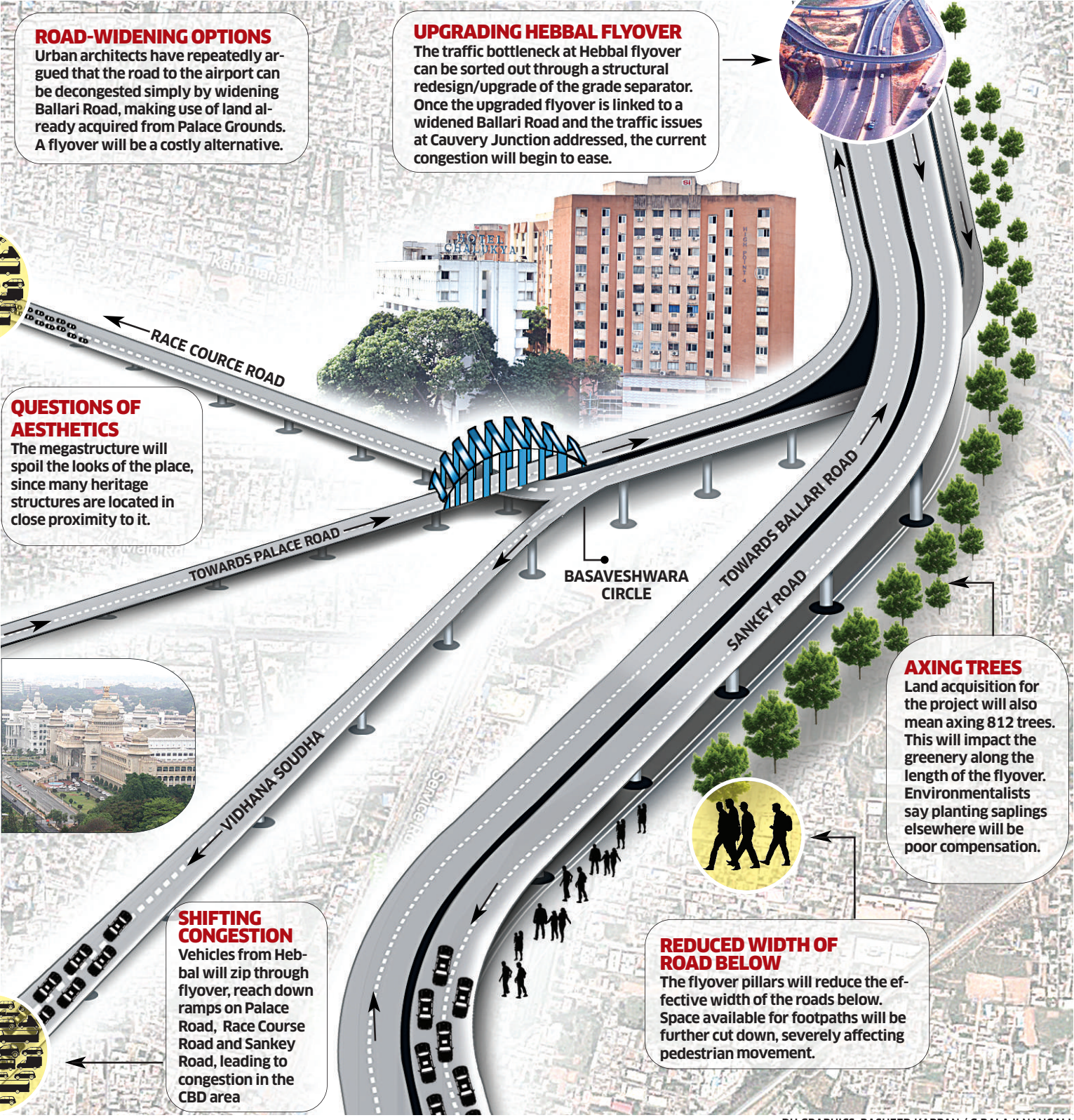
Are these efforts, money and environmental costs justified for a project catering only to those heading to the airport in their personal cars? Absolutely not, says architects, transport specialists and commuters. Elevated roads only shift traffic congestion from one junction to another and this will be no exception.

Transport studies linked to airport commute has come out with a range of alternatives, far more sustainable and cheaper than the steel flyover: Widening Ballari Road using space already acquired from Palace Grounds is one. Upgrading the Hebbal flyover to ease the traffic bottleneck there is another.

Citizen petitions
But these alternatives have had



The opposition to the steel flyover project from Chalukya Circle to Hebbal has been mounting. Open letters have been sent, online petitions launched and PILs lodged. DH readers and civil engineers/architects could now mail their opinion, suggestions and actual cost estimate on the project to pointblank@deccanherald.co.in



Drop project, give better transport: Citizens

While the government focuses on making the car ride to the airport smoother, citizens are demanding better public transport and a pedestrian-friendly city.

Praveen S, a resident of Indiranagar, asks why the government is spending public money on the flyover when citizens are in need of better roads, footpaths and public transport. "Why is the government catering only to car users? There will never be enough road or parking space for vehicles. The more roads you provide, vehicle numbers will also increase," he says.

Citing the example of European countries, he adds, "When population in these places exploded, they too constructed flyovers and bridges, reasoning that such projects were the solution. But now they have learnt that promoting public transport and cycling is the way to go. When will our government realise this?"

A civil engineer by profession, Nithish Bhat opines that the steel flyover is not a good development plan. "Maybe, if they had built it several years ago, it would have been helpful. Their planning was poor, so bridges and flyovers already constructed will now have to be demolished," he points out.

"The drive from Raj Bhavan to Mehkri Circle is nice with a canopy above for most part. Once the flyover is built, it will look like a metal cage," explains Bhat. "Destroying the green cover and heritage buildings to build a steel flyover which will be difficult to maintain is not worth it. Rather, they should invest in completing the metro link to the airport faster."

Concerned citizens want to know why the details of the project have not been made public. "It is a public project that is using taxpayers' money. The details should be out in the open for everyone to see. There should be a proper consultation with the public before they go ahead with it," feels Sandeep Anirudhan, an entrepreneur.

The flyover, he says, is only a temporary solution and after spending close to Rs 2,000 crore, we will only have new traffic jams. "This will distract the government from creating a metro link to the airport and might delay its completion. While the flyover is an elitist project which will benefit few, the metro will help the masses," adds Anirudhan.

The commute to work is a daily ordeal for Varun Suresh, a software developer in the city. Despite starting early from his residence in Hebbal, it takes him two hours by bus to reach his workplace in Electronic City. "If the flyover work begins, things will only get worse for me."

The government in going for a temporary solution to the traffic problem instead of planning for the future, he observes. "Shouldn't we be focusing on better public transport which will benefit more people?"

Many other citizens are concerned about the environmental impact of the project. "Bengaluru was known as a garden city and now it is just a concrete jungle. Instead of cutting down more trees, they should try to preserve the remaining green cover and think of alternative solutions," says Valson Vakayil, a financial consultant.

The situation today is the result of improper planning without anticipating how the city would grow. "Why is the government coming up with short-term solutions? Will this bridge be of any help, 20 years from now?" he wonders.

Roopa Vijaykumar
architect

When there is a plan to create metro connectivity to the airport, is it really necessary to have a flyover? Considering the number of trees which will have to be chopped down, I am not sure if this project is worth it.



NITHISH BHAT
Civil engineer

A six-lane road will not ease congestion if it leads to a two-lane road. Often, when the government changes, plans too change and work is left unfinished. What if this flyover too meets the same fate?



VALSON VAKAYIL
Financial consultant

It is shocking to see that they are not considering the environmental impact of the flyover. The project will affect green cover and heritage buildings in a prime area of the city.



VARUN SURESH
Software developer

The steel flyover is a temporary solution which will only make the traffic situation worse. We need better public transport facilities such as a Bus Rapid Transport System (BRTS)

