Editorial

Considered one of the greatest cities in the world, Kolkata has for centuries nurtured a cosmopolitan character that not only respects different communities and cultures, but also reveres the way its citizens live and travel in the city. When the modern metro came, the city continued with its treasured trams and rickshaws that run even today. All that culture and tradition were thrown to the winds by the shocking decision of the Kolkata Traffic Police to ban cycles from many of the city's streets. According to the civic body, the ban on cycles will give enough space to cars and other motor vehicles to maintain their high speed. The decision reeks of insensitivity to the common citizen. In every city in India, there are thousands of cyclists who pedal their way through the city traffic to earn a livelihood. A ban like this robs them of their right to live. Invariably, these cyclists are captive users and are completely dependent on it. The order is completely against the essence of the National Urban Transport Policy and the National Mission on Sustainable Habitat policies, which accord priority to non-motorised transport.

There could be multiple arguments in favour of the ban, but the lack of awareness about a sustainable transport system and disregard to needs of the users and their rights reflects a callous approach to dealing with the problems of urban transport. The ban comes at a time when more and more cities in the world are creating dedicated amenities for cycles to win them away from motor vehicles and make the cities and their environment sustainable. One of the ways of engaging with the society and stakeholders and make them aware of mobility and accessibility issues is to create a conducive situation where people can look at a map of their neighbourhood and find the various interconnecting nodes. Last month, we attempted a session on sustainable mobility with the University of Michigan, United States at the picturesque Sanskriti Kendra in New Delhi by bringing together people from diverse backgrounds. The participants were handed out maps of the city and they were asked to find out if their city are accessible and friendly to commuters and whether there are better ways to make the streets approachable and friendly. The
solutions offered by the participants ranged from providing cycle stands, battery operated auto rickshaws, mobile apps, improving policies on road safety and a host of others (The article on the session appears in the current newsletter). We need the civic bodies to involve the citizens in solving the transport problems of a city, not exclude them like the Kolkata authorities did when they banned cycles.

Happy beginning of the Festive season & Happy Reading!

Parthaa Bosu

PS: We have started a hash tag - #savecyclists, please do use it in your posts

**Mapping the City Better for Cyclists and Walkers**

Transport planners, architects, social NGOs, development agencies, students and teachers came together at the beautiful Sanskriti Kendra in Indian capital New Delhi, for a mapping exercise aimed at understanding how transport points served walkers and cyclists so that solutions could be found out to make walking and cycling in cities safer and comfortable.

Hosted by Clean Air Asia with the support of the ‘Steer to Safety’ campaign of PVR Nest, the corporation social responsibility arm of multiplex chain PVR Limited and an NGO, the exercise was conducted by a team representing University of Michigan, USA’s SMART (Sustainable Mobility & Accessibility, Research & Transformation).

Led by Susan Zielinski, MD of SMART, the half-day mapping exercise was attended by over 30 participants, who were divided into three teams to give a balanced background. In the exercise, the participants were asked to look at a map to understand how the different transport points such as metros, bus stops, auto stands and cycle rickshaw stands are connected. The exercise enabled them to realize how the transport points could be better connected and what the possible improvements are.

Dial a Cycle Rickshaw

In June 2008, the Fazilka town in India’s north-western state of Punjab began an experiment with its rickety local transport system by adding cycle rickshaws that a person could hail by dialling a phone number. Eco Cabs, as the ‘Dial a Rickshaw’ project was called, went on to transform the way people travelled in the town with a population of 67,000. Within three years, Eco Cabs won the Indian government’s Rs 500,000-award for the Best Urban Non-Motorised Transport model in the country. Inthe last five years, the popularity of Eco Cabs has influenced as many as 22 towns in Punjab to replicate the Fazilka experiment with considerable success.

Last month, Eco Cabs launched the service in the Union Territory of Chandigarh. Christened ‘Rapid Rickshaw Transit’, the facility will be available to the residents of 30 of Chandigarh’s 56 sectors to begin with. Eco Cabs, which made the air of Punjab cleaner by drawing people out of their cars, will now try to repeat its success in Chandigarh, the most well planned city in India. Along with the dial service, ‘Rapid Rickshaw Transit’ has also added a mobile application to help commuters get a rickshaw faster and easier.

When Eco Cabs was first launched in Fazilka, its private owners realized that they needed to do something different to draw the attention of the commuters to the rickshaws, a traditional mode of transport in many Indian towns. “We were trying to improvise all the three elements, namely rickshaw, driver and society,” says Mr Navdeep Asija, the founder of Eco Cabs. “It also meant jobs to the poorer sections of the society, digital empowerment and saving the environment,” he adds.

A real time infrastructure was soon put in place by handing over cheap mobile phones to some of the town’s residents on a permanent basis and creating a call centre to facilitate them hail a rickshaw by making a phone call. The quality of the rickshaw was initially improved by reducing its weight from 90kg to 65kg. Another measure was adding more luggage space. Later, the floor space was also reduced from two feet to 30 cm to help the commuters, mostly the elderly and women. For the rickshaw drivers, Eco Cabs became a welfare measure, helping them work and earn and be part of an organized transport system with a cause, in this case, to save the environment from the pollutants spewed by motor vehicles. In that respect, the members of the society became the biggest partners of the Eco Cabs project, by shunning their cars for errands in the town whenever they could.

Read more: http://walkabilityasia.org/2013/09/05/dial-a-cycle-rickshaw/
X Crossings: Will India get them?

At the ITO intersection in Delhi situated a few hundred metres from the city police headquarters, crossing the road is a nightmare for pedestrians, who are forced to literally run to escape from menacing motor traffic. The story is repeated in all the major intersections in cities across the country where vehicles are more important than human beings. Traffic signals seldom stop for motor vehicles allowing ‘pedestrian only’ movement so that walkers can navigate a crossing in peace. Almost always, the light turns green for the pedestrians on one side while the vehicular traffic continues on the other. In a scenario where the volume of pedestrian traffic is high, X crossing is favoured in major cities across the world.

Read more: http://walkabilityasia.org/2013/09/05/2400/

Ecomobility Readiness Assessment: Bhubaneswar: Pilot cycle track

Bhubaneswar, the capital of the eastern Indian state of Odisha, is also popularly known as the “Temple City of India”. With a population of over 8 lakhs as per 2011 census, it is a regional hub and one of the oldest planned cities in India.

Noticing issues and challenges in the city pertaining to transport, public space and road utilization, the Public Works Department in Bhubaneswar helped make Bhubaneswar one of the first cities to construct a cycle track along a pilot stretch of road in the city. Other cities such as Pune also belong to this pioneering group. More cities have since constructed cycle tracks along BRT corridors, but Bhubaneswar was among the first cities in India to have a non-BRT cycle track.

Read more: http://ecomobilitynmt.blogspot.in/2013/09/pilot-cycle-track-bhubaneswar.html
Kolkata: Cyclists demand reversal of ban

Dozens of cyclists, members of the group ‘Ride 2 Breathe (R2B)’, assembled at Victoria Memorial early on Sunday morning to protest against the decision to ban cycles in the city. They rode down from all over the city – Rajarhat, Kasba, Sinthee and Alipore – to show their stand against the decision, pointing out the imminent environmental damage if more and more commuters depended on smoke-belching buses and cabs. The worst sufferers of the ban would be vendors and daily-wagers, they said. Read more: http://walkabilityasia.org/2013/09/03/kolkata-cyclists-demand-reversal-of-ban/

Mumbai: Free bicycle share system in Bandra Kurla Complex

MMRDA move to set up dedicated bicycle stands will encourage people to cycle around the business district, using the two-year-old tracks.

The forgotten bicycle track at the business district of Bandra Kurla Complex might now be of some use to citizens as the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) has planned to source out bicycles in the coming months, which people can use without having to pay. Read more: http://walkabilityasia.org/2013/09/03/mumbai-free-bicycle-share-system-in-bandra-kurla-complex/

Chennai: Community engagement on walkability

On August 4th, Transparent Chennai held its first community meeting in KK Nagar to bring the residents of the locality together advocate for improvements in KK Nagar.

About 25 residents from the community including the ward councillor, resident welfare association members and other residents participated in the meeting. Prior to this meeting, we had worked with a few residents to survey the quality of footpaths but less than ten had participated. The poor response from the residents prompted us to organise a community meeting to elaborate the walkability project, create an awareness about the importance of pedestrian infrastructure, its condition in their neighbourhood and demand for change.

Read more: http://walkabilityasia.org/2013/09/03/chennai-community-engagement-on-walkability/

Kathmandu: Paved Sidewalks in Central Areas

The Government has stepped up efforts to improve road around the historical sites and tourist routes in Kathmandu. In order to promote walking culture and also enhance the aesthetic beauty of the commercial and historic sites in the inner areas of Kathmandu, the Government has decided to develop stone paved sidewalks and convert several streets into pedestrian walkways.

As part of the Kathmandu Sustainable Urban Transportation Project (KSUTP), the Kathmandu Metropolitan City is set to develop 7.5 kilometers of stone paved footpath on both sides of the road in the inner areas with the help of the ADB.

The KMC has decided to develop 3.6m wide sidewalks along the road stretches in Kantipath, Tripuroshwar, Thapathali, Putalisadak, Sahid Gate and Durbar Marg.

Read more: http://walkabilityasia.org/2013/09/12/kathmandu-paved-sidewalks-in-central-areas-to-enhance-walking/
**The Beijing**
Beijing is like the ancient Greece of bicycle cities. A comparison was done on the number of daily bike trips in Beijing in 1986 when it had the highest ridership compared to other modern cities that are really getting into cycling. If you look at Copenhagen, which is small city but with high bicycle rates, it has something like 200,000 bike trips per day.

**City bike lanes part of plan to open up light rail corridor**
Construction on one of Sydney CBD’s new bike lanes is expected to begin next month, following the release of plans for a complete network by the O’Farrell government. The government also endorsed a lower speed limit in inner Sydney, as well as a steep reduction in on-street parking numbers in the city, as part of a package of measures designed to help accommodate a light rail corridor through the centre of the city.

**Bay Bridge bike, pedestrian path opens**
For cycling advocates, the opening was a chance to remember the man who championed bike and pedestrian access to the span, a celebration of the new path and the reinvigoration of an effort to get a bikeway built on the west span so people can pedal, walk or run all the way from the East Bay to San Francisco.
Read more: [http://walkabilityasia.org/2013/09/12/bay-bridge-bike-pedestrian-path-opens/](http://walkabilityasia.org/2013/09/12/bay-bridge-bike-pedestrian-path-opens/)

Beginning in March, each of the Walkability parameter is briefly described

**PARAMETER 6: Amenities**
This parameter looks into the availability of pedestrian amenities such as benches, street lights, public toilets and trees. Amenities greatly enhance the attractiveness and convenience of the pedestrian environment and make streets livelier. Amenities add value to the walkability of a street by making it more convenient. Street lights can enhance the safety of a street and benches for example can increase the eyes on the street. Maintenance of these facilities are equally important as much as their availability.