

Commercialisation and urban transport



Amid all the confusion and pain that the city has witnessed in the past fortnight, and amid the throw-ball matches between the Centre, state and Supreme Court, many things have happened which need to be brought to public

knowledge, and perhaps public debate.

Last week saw the department of urban transport begin work on the first of seven HCBS (high capacity bus system) and rapid transport bus corridors in Delhi, starting from Ambedkar Nagar to the centre of the city. Simultaneously design work on six more such corridors has also been initiated.

All these corridors shall be built on some of the widest roads, which the Capital is lucky to have inherited, thanks to our urban planners who laid out the city four decades ago. These corridors will run between parts of the city which are presently choked with traffic.

At the same time, the department put out advertisements for consultancy offers for the LRTS (the light railway transport system), a system of surface and, in some places, elevated light railway tracks to carry citizens on corridors where neither the Delhi Metro, nor the HSBC will operate. The LRTS has been cleared by the Delhi cabinet a few months ago, and the roads where such urban rapid transport systems shall operate have already been identified by technical experts. These are now part of public knowledge. In addition to this, a monorail system has also been designed.

In fact, there shall be about 40 such high capacity, light railway, monorail or high speed bus corridors to be built during the next five years or so, in addition to multi-level parking blocks and other nodes which shall allow commuters to park-and-ride, and to use rapid transport systems which are so common in all civilized capitals of the world. It is projected that this work shall be finished by 2011, as per the estimates of the Delhi government.

But why the above reminders? Simply because an analyses of the published data of the proposed urban transport systems, if

compared with the list of roads notified by the Central and Delhi governments, will show that there has been no coordination between the two arms of government before these roads were notified for mixed land use and commercialisation. If these were to be superimposed on each other, it would be clear that chaos would prevail on many roads in Delhi. For example, the LRTS shall be built on parts of the Ring Road where the UD ministry proposes to allow mixed land use and commercialization.

Few would know that the Inner Ring Road, though designed before the outer one, is wider in its ROW (right of way) than the outer one. It is still wide enough to allow four two-way carriageways, two service roads, and a little bit of work would allow either the HSBC or the LRTS to run along the road. Such beautiful widths are the legacy of our planners of the 1960s, and we are enjoying the fruits of their foresight.

This is also true for many of the radial spines — Aurobindo Marg, Mathura Road, and many others. We have the road widths available for the HSBC, the monorail, and the LRTS of the future.

Apart from these, the Regional Rapid Transport System (RRTS) is also being designed by another set of urban designers. This system shall connect the suburban towns with the capital, much like the British Rail system. All these systems shall form the IMMPT network in the city.

Have all these planning initiatives been considered by the mandarins in the UD ministry who have swished their magic wands while encouraging mixed land use and commercialisation of our wide roads? Or will these wide roads get so cluttered by the time the work starts on these transport systems that it shall be impossible to work on the ground? Only they can answer this.

But till they do, it would be interesting to put a tracing sheet of paper on the IMMPT network plan for Delhi, and to see how the present burst of land use abuse, as encouraged by the ministry, shall affect the future of the capital's mass transport systems.

Will we be able to reach the nodes and the Metro stations to catch the Metro? Or will we be get caught in traffic snarls outside the borders of our colonies and ghettos? Only time will tell.

