Transforming Urban Mobility - III

Click here for Part I and here Part II

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What is the issue?

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Urban commutes can be made more efficient by having a wide variety of travel modes and seamless connectivity.

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What should urban mobility focus on?

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- **Heterogeneity** - A usable mobility framework must accommodate individual user needs.
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- Travel duration and economics as well as factors like convenience, safety, and ambience influence a user's choice of modes and routes.
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- Indian cities need main high-density corridors as well as lower density peripheral lines.
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- Urban mobility architecture must, therefore, effectively include the widest heterogeneity of modes possible.
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- Policies and regulations must increasingly embrace the vibrant innovation in mobility, in this regard.
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- **Connectivity** - As a journey's length increases, a commuter typically traverses localities with different characteristics.
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- E.g. A suburban resident commuting to a city centre workplace travels through lower density suburbs and high-density city centre areas.

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- So after ensuring adequate heterogeneity, cities must address improving connectivity between travel modes.
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What are the concerns in India?

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- As in Europe, a lot of intra-city travel in India is over relatively short distances.
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- Yet Indian cities have been indifferent to pavements and bike lanes.
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- Personal transport (cars and two-wheelers) is increasing when mass transit investments have been slow.
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- In western cities, new app-hailed crowd-sourced van services are being widely encouraged.
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- But in India, the similar home-grown modes like share-autos are left to operate in unregulated fringes.
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- Also, neglect of connectivity causes many suburban commuters to use a sub-optimal mode for the entire journey.
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- This contributes to congestion and enduring unnecessary stress.
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What could be done?

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- **Connectivity** - Efficient connectivity gives rise to numerous combinations of modes and routes which may be enhanced by investing in physical infrastructure.
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- E.g. Singapore has convenient integrated transport hubs to allow easy multi-modal connections.

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- Ensuring variety of modes and seamless connectivity requires coordination among various transit authorities (metros, suburban rail, buses, etc.).
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- **Digital** - Increasingly, connectivity is also fostered through digital infrastructure.
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- E.g. London’s Oyster “smart” card allows a commuter to move from one mode to another with minimal loss of time or effort.
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- The large number of travel apps are inexpensive to use and can work across travel modes.
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- Traffic delays, cost of travel and schedules can all be factored in selecting a mode or combination of modes.
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- Vehicles (trains, buses, cars, two-wheelers) can increasingly be connected and made “smart”.
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- With 'smart city' investments, these add to the pool of information, allowing commuters to make intelligent choices.
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- **Policies** - All these necessitate a pivotal role for policies and regulations, guided by socially relevant tenets.
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- What is needed is a policy framework rather than independent solutions.
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- Policy framework must embrace objectives such as equity, inclusiveness, economics, space efficiency, environmental impact, and user convenience.
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- Policies need to be dynamically adjusted reflecting a fast-changing world, especially in regulating the new innovative modes to align them with safety and labour laws.
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- Personal transport modes could be made expensive.
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- E.g. in Singapore, users are obliged to pay for societal costs related to road-use, impact on air quality, and allocation of valuable real estate for parking
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- As India encounters urbanisation, it is imperative that urban mobility architecture is steered to be an asset and not a liability.
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Source: BusinessLine

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