

# A City for People, Not Cars

## Reclaiming Pune's Streets for Care, Trust, and Connection

Pooja Tanna, Save Pune Traffic Movement

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Pune, once celebrated for its year-round pleasant weather and human-scale living, now faces a different reality: scorching summers, sudden floods, and unpredictable seasons. The city continues to expand outward, absorbing waves of migration from villages, nearby towns, and other states. But with this growth, we have also absorbed a lifestyle defined less by community and more by consumption – bigger homes, private schools, overseas vacations, and, most visibly, a motorised vehicle for every family member.

A family of four often owns four two-wheelers and at least one or two cars. Comfort, after all, has become our currency of aspiration. Yet, behind this comfort lies a deeper cost. Roads are widened, flyovers multiply, and budgets tilt toward car-centric projects, all under the influence of oil, road, and automobile lobbies – the three-headed monster of “development.” The city is being shaped for vehicles, not people.

So why question it? Because the choices we make today are writing Pune's legacy for tomorrow. The real question is: what kind of city do we want to leave for the next generation?

What do we expect from a good city? The city should be child friendly. People should be ‘connected’ – with people, opportunities, with nature. The city should be trusting – where anyone can step out without fear. And it should reclaim the future – for our children to inherit a liveable city.

## The Child-Friendly City

In today's Pune, childhood has changed. Parents, busier than ever, spend much of their day shuttling children between school, tuition, sports, and extracurricular classes. What's missing is freedom. Children rarely step outside on their own. Walking to a nearby shop or cycling to a friend's house has become unthinkable.

Instead, kids are chauffeured everywhere, or worse, confined indoors. In the process, a whole generation is at risk of losing a simple yet transformative skill – cycling. And with it, the joy of discovering their city: the wind on their face, the thrill of finding hidden corners, the feeling that the world is theirs to explore.

If childhood becomes only about schedules and vehicles, what future are we shaping? A truly child-friendly city is one where children are trusted to step out, where safe footpaths and cycling lanes are not luxuries but everyday realities, and where the city nurtures curiosity, independence, and joy.

## **The Connected City**

For many residents, especially those who rely solely on buses, the daily commute is a test of endurance. Hours are wasted in traffic, leaving little time for rest, family, or personal growth. And yet, inside those buses, something beautiful happens. People strike up friendships, share stories, support each other, and weave invisible threads of community.

Contrast this with private vehicle ownership. Sitting alone behind the wheel comes at a much bigger price than the one on the bill. It costs us our connection – with neighbours, with the city, even with ourselves. Instead of community, we inherit stress, pollution, and isolation.

And the traffic we complain about? It isn't an external problem – it is us. Every time we choose the convenience of a private vehicle over public transport, we add to the very congestion we despise. Meanwhile, city administrations showcase endless flyovers and highways as signs of progress, while reliable public transport remains underfunded.

A connected city is not about how many expressways we can build, but about how meaningfully we connect people to each other, to opportunities, and to nature.

## **The Trusting City**

On World Bicycle Day 2024, Pune lost a cyclist to a road construction crane. Similar tragedies replay across our city – pedestrians hit by speeding vehicles, walkers falling into open ditches, cyclists pushed to the margins. Fear has become stitched into our everyday commute.

But should simply walking or cycling through our own city feel like a gamble with life? A trusting city is one where citizens step out without hesitation, confident that the streets belong to them as much as to any vehicle. It is a city where roads and footpaths are designed with care, where construction sites are secured, and where rules are enforced not only for order, but for dignity and inclusion.

Urban design guidelines exist to make this possible, to bring safety, balance, and accessibility. But they are often ignored. Until trust is restored in our city's spaces, our streets will never truly feel like ours.

## Reclaiming the Future

The decline of Pune's pedestrian infrastructure, public spaces, and liveability is not an accident. It is the direct outcome of collective choices – by administrations, but also by us, the residents. And if we are part of the problem, we must also be part of the solution.

Every time we choose to walk, cycle, or take public transport, we begin to care more deeply about our city. We notice the broken pavements, the blocked bus lanes, the waste piling on corners. We see and absorb what is often invisible from behind a windshield. That awareness translates into responsibility – and into action.

A graceful, liveable city will not be built by prioritising cars over people. It will come when we demand and embrace streets that are safe, accessible, and shared. When we raise children who know their city not as passengers but as participants. When public transport becomes the default, not the last resort. And when trust is stitched back into every crossing, every bus ride, and every neighbourhood.

Pune does not have to surrender its legacy to asphalt and exhaust. It can still choose to be a city that cares – for its children, its elders, its workers, and its future generations. But that choice begins with us.

**Because the city we shape today is the city our children will inherit tomorrow.**

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