New Solutions to Air Pollution

What is the issue?

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Solutions such as introduction of **Hot lanes and Toll differential system** are being debated to control air pollution.

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Is the air pollution under control?

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- The odd-even (licence number) scheme undertaken by the government during the first half of 2016 was one of the most ambitious.
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- However, despite the initiative, general air pollution in the city, which is measured by PM2.5 rose by 15% and 23% during the first and second phase of the odd-even rule, respectively.
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- This raises some important concerns regarding the current policy on tackling air pollution.
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What are HOT lanes?

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- A high-occupancy toll lane (or HOT lane) is a type of traffic lane or roadway that is available to high-occupancy vehicles and other exempt vehicles without charge.
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- Other vehicles are required to pay a variable fee that is adjusted in response to demand.
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- While this was pioneered in the U.S. in 1969, its effective implementation in other countries such as China and Indonesia has **encouraged millions of**

commuters to opt for car-sharing as it ensured them a speedier and less costly journey.
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- In India, however, such an idea is still far from being imagined. Ex. In Delhi, there exists no policy in relation to car-pooling till date.
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- Critics highlight that given India's **peculiar disregard for lane-driving,** the implementation of HOT or HOV lanes seems to be a long shot.
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- However, the effective implementation of HOT lanes can provide significant incentive to fostering a more disciplined driving culture.
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What could be done?

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- Its implementation would require important considerations like,\n\n
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  - whether it should be enforced during particular hours, or
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  - whether the minimum number of passengers required to avail of the benefit should be two or more, or
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  - whether HOT lane commuters will pay a lower road toll or will be completely exempt from it, to name a few.
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- However if we impose **significant fines on violators on HOT lanes** and strictly monitor the policy by first applying it to limited areas, the results are bound to reduce air pollution by **incentivising passengers to carpool.**
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- Also, in India, where most cars carry two-three people on average, it is perhaps preferred to dedicate such HOT or HOV lanes to cars carrying more than three occupants.
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- Completely exempting these lanes from toll or substantially reducing the toll levied on them in relation to other lanes would provide significant incentive to the commuter.
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What is the way ahead?

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- A **toll differential system** based on the number of car occupants and on the latest pollution check of the vehicle is the need of the hour.
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- The government should introduce a **differential toll treatment** for less polluting and higher occupancy vehicles.
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- Moreover, electric cars or battery electric vehicles should be completely exempt from the toll.
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- This will not only incentivise people to regularly check their vehicle’s pollution, but will also help reduce air pollution.
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Source: The Hindu

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