Transforming Urban Mobility - I

What is the issue?

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With India aspiring to be the second largest economy, it is essential that it prepares for a rapid increase in demand for mobility.

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What is the urbanisation reality?

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- In most cases, per-capita income in a nation increases when more than half its population is urban.
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- This is attributed to the agglomeration economics.
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- It propounds that "people in cities are more productive, innovative, and have higher skills".
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- This is largely boosted by the access to a wider range of opportunities in cities.
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What is the rising need?

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- Across nations, and through decades, economic development has been correlated to personal mobility.
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- So as economic growth accelerates, there is also a need to anticipate faster urbanisation.
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- As this densification accelerates, there is a need for focussing on the symbiotic relationship between urban form and mobility.
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- Because, designing cities for cars is becoming as important as designing them for people.
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- Traffic congestion, extension of roads, and worsening air quality are issues to be reckoned with.
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How do global examples differ with India?

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- **Space and Transit** - The US city of Los Angeles with 18 million population ranks number one among US cities in terms of expanse.
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- It is also number one in density and length of roads and highways.
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- Despite this, it is burdened with worst traffic congestion and air quality among large US cities.
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- On the other hand, cities like Tokyo Singapore and Hong Kong have higher population but utilise less space.
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- They also have a very significant dependence on mass transit.
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- Tokyo thus allocates a mere 15% of its urban land for roads to sustain its car-dependence, as against 40% in some US cities.
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- But Indian cities do little to limit the urban expanse and utilise the space effectively with mass transits.
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- Notably, there is a proposal in Bengaluru to sustain the expanse with six new interconnected elevated roadways.
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- Over the last two decades, in Chennai, the modal share of public transit has diminished.
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- These seem to be ignoring the global lessons of managing population with less space and well-targeted transit investments.
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- **Expenditure** - Copenhagen (Denmark) with a sensible mix of public transit

and bike-lanes spends about 7% of regional GDP on transport.
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- On the other hand, a car-dependent Houston (in the U.S. state of Texas) allocates over 17%.
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- But the Indian cities can ill afford to be unmindful of such economic waste.
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- **Ecology** - Air quality degradation from automotive emissions is a growing menace.
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- WHO data says 14 of the top 20 most polluted cities (measured by particulates) are in India.
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- Densely populated cities can have a lower ecological footprint by mainly relying on shared or mass transit.
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- New York City has lower per capita carbon emissions despite higher average income, mainly due to its transportation patterns.
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What lies ahead for India?

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- India’s continued dependence on expensive imported oil seems certain for the foreseeable future.
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- It is thus essential that its mobility architecture is guided by energy efficiency.
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- Reducing dependence on fossil fuels through more efficient mobility will contribute to environmental and economic gains.
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- Transforming urban mobility requires
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i. a clear articulation of goals
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ii. careful framing of policies
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iii. targeted investments
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iv. rigorous implementation backed by enforcement
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- It is high time that India rethinks of urban planning and favours densification and transit-oriented development.
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- Integration of urban planning with promotion of mass, rather than private, transport should be a priority.
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Source: BusinessLine

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