



ISSUE BRIEF

# ACTIVATING URBAN MOBILITY IN INDIA: Reclaiming the public realm through tactical urbanism

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## Abstract

Imbalance in infrastructure planning and street design factors have impacted the modal share of active mobility in urban centres. However, tactical urbanism has the potential to measure the impact of temporary interventions to make a permanent mark, by bringing pedestrians and cyclists to the forefront of street-design interventions. Tactical urbanism serves as a means to ensure that the residual spaces in urban areas can be revitalised, through a citizen-led approach. However, in India, tactical urbanism projects have had a difficult time scaling up. They are regarded as demonstration projects or informal measures addressing urban issues. Therefore, the aim of this issue brief is to present tactical urbanism guidelines with regulatory and institutional bearing, which mainstreams the use of tactical interventions for promoting active mobility. This issue brief presents case studies from San Francisco, New York, Vermont, Copenhagen, and Sao Paulo to highlight the roadmap that these global cities have followed - from demonstration to pilot, and finally permanent fixtures. Indian cities have tried to implement tactical interventions, but there is still a long way to go. Unlike non-Indian cities studied, there is little-to-no policy framework or regulatory mandate that guides India to mainstream tactical urbanism for city planning processes. This issue brief presents a framework that outlines immediate and long-term strategies for Indian cities to revitalise the public realm by means of tactical interventions.

## Introduction

Roads were originally built as “pathways” for access to houses but with rapid motorisation, these roads are increasingly appearing to shrink. Speeding automobiles, on their part, have driven slow-moving road users lower down in the priority list for development. Similar to other parts of the world, this has led to Indian roads currently having an inequitable share of road space between motorised transport and active mobility commuters, i.e. pedestrians and cyclists. About 47% of urban India walks or cycles for work (Tiwari & Nishant, 2018) and yet, have a meagre right on the roads and are pushed to the curb.

As we pave our way into a sustainable mobility future, it becomes essential to reclaim streets for people through solutions that are simple, scalable, and sustainable. Conventional street design projects are slow and capital intensive, leading to city authorities struggling to balance long-term mobility vision with immediate mobility needs. Furthermore, not all solutions create the desirable impact and hence, tactical urbanism. Tactical urbanism has multifarious applications across several areas of mobility, especially to equitably revitalise urban spaces. As an approach, this tool serves as a test bed to improve efficient use of space by prioritising pedestrians and slow-moving traffic, and gauging user experience.

However, in India, most of these tactical interventions stay limited to temporary pilot projects only, diluting the impact-oriented vision with which the project was conceptualised. Therefore, the aim of this issue brief is to present tactical urbanism guidelines with regulatory and institutional bearing. This would help mainstream the use of tactical interventions for promoting active mobility. Accordingly, this brief has the following objectives.

- Understand the foundational features of tactical urbanism, both as an approach and a tool;
- Analyse how global cities adopted tactical interventions to create permanent solutions;

- Present a set of guidelines for India to tactically reclaim streets and promote active mobility.

Although city authorities have taken measures to streamline road hierarchy and space distribution, much more needs to be done. These include infrastructural changes, citizen-led urban design, and regulations for streets etc. all of which would unlock the full potential of tactical experiences for the wellbeing of all road users - moving from demonstration to implementation at large scale.

## Tactical Urbanism (TU): The What, Why, How, When, and Where of TU

### *The Concept of Tactical Urbanism*

Tactical Urbanism (TU) is defined as “a city and/or citizen-led approach to improve public realm at neighbourhood level using temporary, low-cost, and scalable interventions to catalyse permanent change by influencing behaviour” (Lydon, 2020). Tactical Urbanism involves three broad stages, which may be termed the 3Ps of Tactical Urbanism (Lydon, 2019):

1. The People -
  - a. Public engagement is the crux of tactical urbanism and requires that citizens, neighbourhood associations, and local authorities lead the inception, conceptualisation and demonstration of the projects.
  - b. The people must be engaged at all levels of city planning to ensure that the primary goal of the project is fulfilled i.e; to improve safety and efficiency or mere beautification if that is the goal/ purpose of the project.
2. The Process -
  - a. The project begins with the creation of temporary fixtures at low-cost.
  - b. The flow of events are as follows - plan, test, iterate, plan and test again, plan, iterate if needed and invest. The viability of tactical urbanism is bidirectional - the success of the pilots determine the scalability of the tactical interventions. Therefore, tactical interventions need to result in conclusive guidelines, implemented within a specified time period.
  - c. Tactical interventions become the prerequisite for a larger vision of city-planning by means of an implementation framework involving street redesigns, infrastructure for active mobility, etc.
3. The Policy -
  - a. The TU processes need to be embedded in the city’s planning strategies, and thus, institutionalised.
  - b. The policy or regulations ensure that the interventions not just have institutional support, but also form a pathway for future mobility solutions.
  - c. Furthermore, policies and programmes help keep a regular qualitative and quantitative account of all validated interventions related to the TU processes - say, ridership numbers, reduction in accidents and fatalities, etc.
  - d. Lastly, the usability and restrictions revolving around the byproducts of a tactical intervention must be regulated by the policy, and not an afterthought which may result in vandalism.

## Tactical Urbanism Around the World

Inspired by the work of Jane Jacobs, William Whyte, Oscar Newman and Christopher Alexander, the initial principles on the theory of human-centred urbanism was developed by the pioneer architect and urban designer, Jan Gehl (Hidalgo, 2014). Gehl found that urban spaces 'between buildings' were activated due to stationary social activities and pedestrian flows, creating vibrancy and lively atmosphere. Copenhagen was Gehl's lab as he transformed the city from a car-centric city in the 1970s to its present-day sustainable mobility champion, by changing one street at a time. His role was pivotal in creating the extensive 'car-free zones' in the city, with 50% of all Copenhagengers commuting to work or school by bike, including 63% of the Danish parliament (Hidalgo, 2014). His work was not just limited to The Netherlands. He has also played the counsel in building 'people-friendly streets' and 'complete streets' across Europe, North America, Australia, Japan, and Singapore.

Building better streets for active mobility in Copenhagen has improved mobility and beyond. For every 10% of the population that cycles to work, the city saves over USD 10 million in healthcare annually while avoiding 57,000 sick leaves and adding 61,000 extra years of life (ITDP et al., 2011). Overall, revitalising the streets for active mobility has improved the lifestyle of the city manifold.

In 2008, the sidewalks in Times Square, New York were so overcrowded that it was a threat to both pedestrian and motorist lives. The Broadway Boulevard Project implemented in 2009 reclaimed streets from motorists and created pedestrianised zones, causing an overall reduction in congestion, 63% decrease in traffic injuries, and 35% decrease in pedestrian injuries (Global Designing Cities Initiative, 2015). Today, a trip to NYC is incomplete without experiencing the lively streets of Broadway!

Be it the accessible and active laneways of Melbourne, the Parklet program of San Francisco, the roundabout project in Fayetteville or the infamous Demonstration Project Policy from Burlington, Vermont - all projects scaled up from micro-level, citizen-led programs to permanent projects through regulations and policies. This helped ensure that the tactical interventions became a part of future local area plans or master plans. However, each city identified the strengths and weaknesses of its TU projects and built its long-term strategy accordingly. The following section shall detail the learnings from each of these projects.

## Analysing the Success of TU Interventions Around the World

City (Year of Pilot)	Project Goals	Tactical Solutions	Outcomes	Long-term Implications	Key Takeaways
San Francisco, USA (2005)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Re-imagine the potential of city streets</li> <li>2. Encourage Non-motorised transport (NMT)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pop-up parklets<sup>1</sup></li> <li>2. Having a "permit plan" for the local businesses to use the parklet</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. World's first formal public parklet in 2010 - a template for other cities to follow</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Institutionalised "Pavement to Parks" Policy</li> <li>2. San Francisco's official Parklet Manual released in February, 2013</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The citizen-led "one-day-a-year" event on Park(ing) day took a formalised form -now, a long-term activity</li> </ol>

<sup>1</sup> Repurposed residual space of the streets along the sidewalk used to provide amenities like seating, planting, bicycle parking, activities, and art.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Encourage pedestrian safety &amp; activity</li> <li>4. Foster neighbourhood interaction</li> <li>5. Support local businesses</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. 76 parklets installed in SF city by 2020, out of which 59 remain and 17 have been removed; taken up 109 parking spots adding 19,620 square feet of open spaces</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Permit-system made the program democratic - rights still remained with local businesses and the neighbourhood</li> </ul>
New York City, USA (2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To ensure all citizens live within 10-minute walk of quality open spaces</li> <li>2. Rethink how unused roadbed could be converted into spaces for public use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Temporary plazas using expense funding<sup>2</sup> rather than capital investments</li> <li>2. Design and build the plazas within 5-6 months which are inexpensive (&lt;USD 100,000)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 71 Plazas citywide, with 49 open to public as of 2015<sup>3</sup></li> <li>2. Receive 10-12 applications for plazas each year: 2-3 receive capital funding while 5-6 receive expense funding</li> <li>3. Local community groups catalyse the creation of plazas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "Green Light for Midtown" - initiative to create pedestrian plazas in Times Square and Herald Square areas, on the Broadway corridor</li> <li>2. Over 6 years, it helped reduce 40% particulate emissions, 35% pedestrian injuries, 63% traffic injuries and increased 11% pedestrian volumes and bus ridership by 1.5% on 6th Ave.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Plaza Program is cost-effective measure to revitalise public spaces and ensure safety</li> <li>2. Supports temporary surface treatments, collect data from interim changes to support a more cost-intensive permanent change</li> </ul>
Burlington, Vermont, USA (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create a policy for short-term, community-led projects to improve streets</li> <li>2. Short-term projects inform long-term change - collect data to expedite</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Short-term projects that last less than 7 days, permitted by the city agencies as per the policy - "Demonstration projects"</li> <li>2. A four-phased permit system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Temporary parklet and curb extension - "easy project"</li> <li>2. Parking Protected Bike Lane - "complicated project" owing to the complications in installation,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Community-led Demonstration Project Policy - Outlines the designated roles of community partners, city authorities and other stakeholders - Detail clearance and funding process laid out</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Demonstration Project Policy provides a formal platform for community partners to engage in TU Projects</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> Funds budgeted under operational expenses (OPEX) and not capital expenses (CAPEX)

<sup>3</sup> Data at the end of project timeline

	projects, widen public engagement and deliver along the lines of community needs		maintenance and traffic control	- Permit system - Safety guidelines for TU projects	
Copenhagen, The Netherlands	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use people-centric metrics and tactics to cultivate higher quality of life</li> <li>2. Shift away from car-centric mentality</li> <li>3. Increase awareness and safety among cyclists, pedestrians, and motorists using design and pop-up changes</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Evidence-based approaches - checking the viability of parklets, street art, and play streets</li> <li>2. Activating spaces between buildings - "soft edges" - using human-centric urban design conceptualised by Jan Gehl</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dedicated bike lanes - 350km of cycle tracks and 40km of green cycle routes</li> <li>2. More than 61% cyclists chose to bike by 2008</li> <li>3. The mode share of cycling and walking is close to 37% and 4% respectively (as of 2008).</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Bicycle Account (1996) - municipal transparency to demonstrate city's commitment towards active mobility</li> <li>2. "Metropolis for People" Project - a commitment to qualitative and quantitative targets for better public life</li> <li>3. Formalised the yearly data collection program - "Public Life Account"</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Equitable road share for motorised &amp; NMT</li> <li>2. User experience drives change - priority of bicycling environment &amp; investments for the same created shift to NMT</li> <li>3. Bike lanes function when supported with better traffic calming measures and shared street designs - moving from pop-up interventions to permanent feature</li> </ol>
São Paulo, Brazil (2016)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create safe, pedestrian-friendly spaces in the city</li> <li>2. Reclaim road space dominated by motorised vehicles</li> <li>3. Build a mutual level of respect among motorists,</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pop-up interventions of junction redesign - approved by 97% of the local community</li> <li>2. Transformation of 450 sq.mts. of underutilised road space</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The intervention reduced fatality of pedestrians at crossing by 75%, 23% reduction in turning speed of buses, and a 40% increase in cars yielding to pedestrians</li> <li>2. 91% of the</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Permanent installation of the street redesigns in 2018 by the city</li> <li>2. "Urban Collectives" movement</li> <li>3. Grassroots urbanism - 370 projects since 2004</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Informal urbanism initiatives are intertwined with formal and institutional spheres of the government</li> </ol>

	pedestrians, and cyclists		local users liked the intervention and 88% voted for it to be permanent		
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*Table 1. Global case studies of successful tactical interventions;*

*Source - Groundplay & City of San Francisco, 2020; The Street Plans Collaborative, 2018; ITDP et al., 2011; Pfeifer, 2013; Hoppe, 2018; Global Designing Cities Initiative, 2015.*

The key takeaways from the aforementioned case studies are:

1. Tactical interventions must be citizen-led during inception but will require formal support to thrive.
2. City authorities must provide regulatory and institutional support for TU either from the beginning or develop policies and mandates in due course of time that may be supported by an Act.
3. People are the backbone of urban spaces - therefore, the foremost goal of these interventions should be to address the issue of inequitable use of road space and safety of vulnerable road users, primarily pedestrians and cyclists.
4. Lastly, the core values of TU are - simple yet technical strategies, low-cost measures, scalable micro-scale plans, and a visionary foundation for the future of a sustainable city.

## For the People, By the People: India's quest with tactical interventions

The institutional context of roads in India is a complex paradigm - State public works departments (PWD) to municipal bodies creating roads, to utility companies and citizens who drive change at the street-level are all involved. Therefore, for successful TU projects, it becomes essential to demystify the stakeholders involved at every stage and road section of the project.

The Indian Roads Congress (IRC) codes set the design standards for building footpaths and cycle tracks. However - they are only advisory and not mandatory for cities to comply with. As a result, the infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists in most Indian cities is either incomplete or of sub-par standard. The IRC: 103 on "Guidelines for Pedestrian Facilities" was recently revised to include guidelines for designing safe, accessible, and lively streets for Indian cities.

In 2021, Karnataka became the first Indian state to draft an Active Mobility Bill (Directorate of Urban Land Transport (DULT), 2021). It seeks to protect pedestrians and cyclists in the urban areas by creating a safe and accessible environment. In Delhi and Gurugram, *Raahgiri* movement<sup>4</sup> achieves the same, raising demand for state-powered non-motorised transport (NMT) projects. Apart from state-level interventions and policies, central funding schemes such as Smart Cities Mission (SCM) have attempted to put NMT in the forefront of the city's urban mobility agenda. The Greater Chennai Municipal Corporation created the first-ever NMT Policy in the country, prompting the city authorities to allocate 60% of its budget towards NMT (ITDP India, 2021). This created the necessary sentiments in the city to rigorously integrate the policy with the Chennai Mega Streets

<sup>4</sup> India's earliest car-free citizen initiative started in 2013. <https://raahgiriday.com/>

Project. However, tactical urbanism as part of street rejuvenation has not been regarded as a serious measure in all parts of the country. In most cases, the tactical interventions failed to scale up at the city level, remaining limited to demonstration or pilot projects alone. Therefore, it is crucial to unpack the various TU projects in India, and understand what worked over the years.

### *The Past and Present of TU in India*

As Indian cities go through a paradigm shift, decision-makers are rethinking their approach to urban design as a medium to make cities inclusive and equitable. The table below summarises how India is building its cities as per outcomes from tactical interventions<sup>5</sup>.

City (Year)	What	Why	Key Takeaways
Mumbai (2022)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation allocated INR 50 crores for interventions to improve public spaces as part of the municipal budget 2022-23</li> <li>2. BMC has a dedicated Tactical Urbanism Mumbai team</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Successful intervention for road safety tactical measures outside a private school in Byculla</li> <li>2. HP Junction improvement for pedestrian safety - 30% reduction in pedestrian crossing distances</li> <li>3. Transformation of various pop-up cycle lanes favoured by locals</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Institutionalisation of a citizen-led city-making process helps bring fluidity between the formal and the informal</li> <li>2. The citizen-led approach allows for more accountability in the part of all stakeholders involved</li> </ol>
Ranchi (2020)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ranchi Municipal Corporation has issued a call to repair drainage systems in MG Road, and is planning a complete redesign of MG Road with permanent footpaths - a pilot trial for entire city</li> <li>2. Ranchi Traffic Police plans to implement smart parking</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Overnight tactical interventions on MG Road - using simple temporary measures - created dedicated walking paths for pedestrians</li> <li>2. A two-day trial with the support of RMC and RTP - before final tactical intervention</li> <li>3. Pedestrians and cyclists expressed how they felt safer and comfortable in the feedback surveys - asking the project to be made permanent</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tactical interventions must begin with demonstration but have a vision and commitment for a long-term permanent change, if successful</li> <li>2. These interventions bear results in short time periods (a week in case of Ranchi) and can be used as prototypes for other similar interventions in a similar context</li> </ol>
Delhi (since 2020)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Delhi Government has proposed tactical</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tactical urbanism trial at Bhalswa Chowk,</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Given the scale of the city, the scalability of</li> </ol>

<sup>5</sup> While this is not an exhaustive list, the author has made all attempts to include cities where tactical urbanism interventions have been institutionalised partially or fully.



	interventions for junction redesign at several locations across Delhi - for pedestrian and NMT safety 2. These interventions are in line with the government's proposed "Zero Fatality Corridor"	Mukundpur Chowk, Burari Chowk and Jahangirpuri Bus Stop - reduces vehicular conflict by 100%, 70% reduction in pedestrian exposure and 50% reduction in pedestrian conflict	tactical interventions is dependent on several there factors - therefore, requiring multiple, comparatively exhaustive demonstration trials prior to creating a large-scale permanent project
Chennai (2020)	1. Greater Chennai Municipal Corporation has worked towards several programs that implement tactical interventions 2. Adopted the Complete Street Guidelines for all future street design projects	1. City adopted the NMT Policy in 214, that allocated 60% of the budget for NMT 2. Pondy Plaza Project - as a model for other streets	1. Chennai is an example of how a guiding policy for an urban local body helps institutionalise the process of creating "streets for people", by the people

*Table 2. Institutional measures for tactical interventions in India;*

*Source - Tak, 2017; ITDP India, 2021; Kukreja, 2022; Yadav, 2020; ITDP India, 2019; BMC, 2021; Virani et al., 2022; ITDP India, 2019.*

### **Mainstreaming TU for People-friendly Streets in India**

Presently, tactical urbanism is limited to demonstration projects only, and does not have policy, regulatory or institutional mandates. This prevents tactical interventions from creating measurable impact owing to the following reasons.

1. Lower levels of accountability among citizens, community groups and city authorities - most feel that the projects are bound to be dissolved with time.
2. Lack of regulatory mandates and formal backing has only led to lack of replicability and measurable impact of such interventions.
3. Despite TU being a well-known concept, it is only now that city authorities in limited numbers are recognising the need of formalisation of tactical interventions for promotion of active mobility. Whether this is the start or another demonstration among the many over the years, remains a question.

Although a few initiatives are receiving their due backing from city authorities to redesign their streets for pedestrians and cyclists, the success of these demonstration projects remains a blur to the common people. However, a framework beyond mere demonstration projects that strategises a path for cities to move from short-term tactical interventions to long-term change is the need of the hour. The framework must be a double-sided coin, where one must coexist with the other. On one side, an institutional framework ensures that the roles of all stakeholders are designated, defining the level of accountability for each. On the other, a long-term policy or design strategy sets the vision for tactical interventions, adhering to a timeline in case of both hits and misses.

## 1. Institutionalising the Stakeholder Engagement

The Tactical Urbanism plan must clearly outline “the people” involved - local residents, community groups, residential associations, urban planners and designers, city authorities, traffic police and any other relevant stakeholders. It becomes essential that all of them work in synergy to build a strategy in phases, where informed decisions are made in a democratic manner. Just as seen in the case of San Francisco and Copenhagen, the citizens took ownership of the short-term interventions but the long-term viability of the same relied on planning and enforcement authorities. A similar approach is required in Indian cities, to improve mobility related decisions - whereby, multi-stakeholder committees can help maintain consistent dialogue between residents and developers.

There needs to be a bi-directional coordination between decision-makers and users, ensuring that all trials are tested, and only successful pilots providing adequate evidence to prove the impact TU has created should materialise into permanent changes.

## 2. Long-term strategies

The parklet programme in San Francisco, the Public Plaza programme in New York, etc. paved the way for tactical interventions to take shape. Furthermore, periodic data collection and impact from the interventions will strengthen the cause to make it a permanent feature (Global Designing Cities Initiative, 2022). Therefore, transparent measures ensuring desirable outcomes equipped by a policy or regulatory mandate sets the stage for the same.

Indian cities must also work towards having their own policies, at the city or state-level which outlines important features for tactical interventions- e.g.: funding, permit systems for residual spaces, phases for development, strategic stakeholder engagements and a transparent, long-term vision. In the long-run, this helps build trust among citizens to take up ownership of TU projects within their neighbourhoods, since the policy acts as a sense of statutory support to which that authorities commit.

Furthermore, similar to road development proposals mentioned in the city master plan, zonal development plan and local area plan, it becomes crucial that tactical interventions which inform permanent change must be added to these city planning documents. This ensures a coherence between different scales of development and citizens are informed about the past, present, and future of the mobility in their cities and neighbourhoods.

## Conclusion

Across the globe, people are yearning for innovative approaches to foster inclusive city planning. With citizens wishing to drive change in whatever capacity they can, local communities are eager to help. Cities need policies, programmes, design and stewardship that enable a people-first (and not vehicle-first) environment for all. Our Indian cities have the requisite guidance, but all we need is more accountability and policy appetite for short-term experiential interventions, ably supported by long-term strategies.

The concept of Tactical Urbanism is slowly shaping up. Learning from the markets of Old cities like Udaipur, Bhopal, Madurai or the mall road of Shimla and Darjeeling, and revitalising spaces between the built environment have helped Indian cities understand TU better. The need of the hour is for our focus to shift from

motorised traffic in these spaces between buildings and let vital nodes of the public realm function with vigour and social activities. Tactical urbanism could be the long-awaited answer to our struggles with user experience in the context of today's urban mobility.

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#### Author:



#### Sayani Mandal

*Sayani is an Urban Mobility Research Consultant at OMI.*

*She holds a Bachelor's in Planning from the School of Planning and Architecture, Bhopal.*

**Editors:** Roshan Toshniwal, Associate Director and Head, Urban Mobility; Aishwarya Raman, Director and Head of Research, OMI

**Peer Reviewers:** Sonal Shah, Founder, The Urban Catalysts; Bankim Kalra, Chief Executive Officer and Astha Malhotra, Urban Development Head, Centre for Green Mobility; Rajeev Malagi, Manager, Urban Development, Sustainable Cities, WRI India

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