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Where Beggars are Choosers

Beggars at Different Traffic Junctions in Jaipur



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Who said beggars can not be choosers? At most signalised road intersections in Jaipur, they choose the place to sit, stand or walk and do not care if the traffic is being disturbed and obstructed.

The objective of a signalised intersection is to control vehicular conflicts and regulate traffic flow in a controlled manner. Each traffic signal is designed as per Indian Road Congress (IRC) standards, based on actual time taken by a pedestrian to cross the road safely. The obstructions created by beggars and vendors, in addition to the time taken to give way, once the light is green, do not constitute a part of the design parameters.

At a signalised intersection, beggars and vendors can be seen selling newspapers, tissue papers, sun shields for cars, etc. Others run to wipe off dirt from vehicles. Many of them are children with babies in their arms. The general scene and environment disturbs the emotions and mental peace of drivers, as some of them appear pathetically ill, others seem to be physically handicapped. In such circumstances, many drivers face a dilemma of either being a good human or a good driver.

Humanity demands a helping hand, but the law forces them to act as responsible drivers, to be attentive and cautious. The kind of distraction caused to drivers of vehicles by beggars and vendors at signalised road intersections may not be sudden, but it persists for a long time. Further, studies have shown that a momentary, single distraction of even a-tenth-of-a-second can cause an accident. If the driver ignores the beggars and vendors, often, he is subjected to abuse. Drivers, upon encountering beggars on road intersections, either feel sympathy or annoyance and both these emotions, normally, last throughout the trip and could be dangerous.

The impact of such obstructions can be life-threatening, particularly in cases of an emergency. At particular risk are those waiting for expeditious arrival of an ambulance, a fire brigade or a police vehicle.

Unfortunately, the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, considers that only 'vehicles' can distract the attention of a driver. Section 201 is about penalising a person who keeps a disabled vehicle at any public place, in such a manner as to cause impediment to the free flow of traffic. Distraction caused by humans was not thought of at the time of framing of Section 201. Further, Section 125 lays down that "no person driving a motor vehicle shall allow any person to stand or sit or to place anything in such a manner or position as to hamper the driver in his control of the vehicle". Here, again, the law does not address the malady of beggars and vendors at road intersections.

The authorities are seeing this for years, yet there is no attempt to either rehabilitate them or amend the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988. There is a need to protect the basic objective of roads and completely ban the presence of beggars and vendors on the roads.

Traffic Calming Strategies to Improve Pedestrian Safety in India



Dignitaries at the Project Launch Meeting

Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS), Jaipur, and the Lund University, Sweden, are implementing a project entitled, 'Traffic Calming Strategies to Improve Pedestrian Safety in India', with the support of the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). The project aims at identifying six accident-prone sites, each in four locations (in all 24) of Jaipur city and adjacent areas, studying the shortcomings and causes that make these sites accident-prone and then developing and testing holistic traffic-calming strategies on one of the selected sites in each of the locations.

The project intends to test and modify measures developed and found efficient from safety point of view in Sweden and other highly motorised and developing countries. The aim is to analyse whether these measures will have a desirable local impact on the behaviour of different kinds of Indian road users – primarily pedestrians and car drivers. The measures that are found to be effective in Indian conditions will then be summarised in a manual for the Indian traffic police personnel, planners and engineers, suggesting remedial road designs that would help in calming

traffic. No such manual exists, till date, in India.

This manual aims to become the basis for generating awareness among Indian traffic and transport personnel in the years to come. It would also help in launching of awareness generation programmes and workshops on traffic-calming methods, with the ultimate aim of reducing the number and severity of pedestrian and other vulnerable road user causalities.

The recommendations of this project will directly help improve the quality of the environment on the roads for the pedestrians, in addition to the people living around the main arterial roads. It will also reduce the risk of major accidents and indirectly help reduce noise and air pollution. It will build a partnership with Sweden, which, in the long run, will help imbibe successful experiences from Sweden and other parts of the world, in order to change the Indian road safety scenario.

Regional workshops are proposed to be organised in Kolkata, Bangalore, Mumbai and a state-level workshop in Jaipur in which the findings of the studies and the results of the expert assessment will be presented. Also, a two-day

National Dissemination workshop will be organised in New Delhi. The local authorities, experts and policy/decision makers of the region will attend the workshops. The presentations in the workshops will involve animations built on video-recorded events from locations that have been studied. The main idea behind the use of animations will be to facilitate a discussion that is built on facts, rather than "general ideas".

The manual will be documented, taking in all the feedback and harmonising the measures. The final version will be presented to the Advisory Board of the project, before being distributed to the concerned departments, such as transport, traffic, etc.

CUTS launched the project on March 03, 2008, at Hotel Country Inn, Jaipur. Experts from Transportation Research and Injury Prevention Programme (TRIPP), Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi, Traffic Police Department, Transport Department and Nagar Nigam, Jaipur, participated in the meeting. Speaking on the occasion, Jagdish Chandra, the Transport Commissioner of Rajasthan, opined that voluntary organisations should work jointly on road safety issues in Jaipur.

In order to give a practical shape to Jagdish Chandra's suggestion, CUTS initiated the formation of a forum for road safety in Jaipur, on April 10, 2008, and invited 13 voluntary organisations of Jaipur city working on the road safety issue. Three broad categories of activities were agreed on for collective action: (a) *Sadak Mitra* and compliance education for drivers; (b) policy and enforcement issues; and (c) infrastructure issues. Till now, three meetings have been conducted at CUTS office in Jaipur, as it was decided that the Secretariat of the informal forum shall be housed in CUTS premises for three years. The network has been named as the Network for Action on Road Safety (NARS).

Urban Transport – BRTS Approach

Urban centres in India constitute 28 percent of the total population, contributing to more than 65 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country. The State of Rajasthan also has a high growth potential, due to its geographical location. Many of the important cities of the State are in close proximity to the National Capital Region and on NH 8. Some cities of the State have a high tourist inflow round the year. Jaipur (also known as the Pink City) and Ajmer-Pushkar have been identified as Mission Cities in Rajasthan. Jaipur, being the State capital, is a bustling city, with its share of transportation bottlenecks in the wake of the increasingly unruly traffic.

Under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), urban development projects of Rs 1,00000 crore are proposed to be implemented in 63 cities, in phases. Total funds allocated for the Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS) in Jaipur are approximately Rs 539 crore and the expected total length to be covered under the programme is 42 km.

The BRTS is viewed as one of the alternatives for providing high performance, high capacity public transport in the growing cities of the developing world. Globally, about 50 systems are in operation and a further 25 are in various stages of planning/implementation in China, India and South Africa alone. A typical BRTS chisels out a dedicated bus corridor in areas where traffic is dense and unruly, with separate corridors for cars and other traffic. The buses are low-floored, ply on designated corridors, offer frequent services and halt at attractive

stations or bus stops. It aims to provide a means of alternative transport, thereby promoting a shift from personal to public vehicles, easing congestion on the roads and affording safe commuting. BRTS comes at a fraction of the cost of Metro Railway.

However, BRTS, to be successful, needs effective administration of traffic rules. Primarily, it needs lane discipline, which is lacking in India, in general, and Jaipur, in particular. To address this malady and to prevent violations, in Seoul, cameras have been installed and delinquents are fined in excess of US\$100. Other requisites are adequate parking spaces near bus stops, a minimum length of a BRT corridor of about 12 km, to significantly save travel time, safe pedestrian crossings every 500 meters, etc.

The BRTS in New Delhi, has come in for considerable criticism in recent times, primarily from the residents, for exacerbating traffic problems. The SP Traffic, Jaipur has, however, gone on record saying that the BRTS in Jaipur would run better, as it is proposed to reserve two lanes for buses, with proper parking facilities. The engineers have ensured adequate width for bus shelters and bus stops and have kept the main carriageway wide. There would be railings throughout the stretch of the corridor, except on the cross sections, to avoid traffic jams on the



↑ Traffic Chaos in Jaipur

Traffic Discipline in Bogota after Implementing BRTS ↓



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dedicated corridor, meant only for the buses.

The bane of successful reforms in India has been the exclusion of the stakeholders from the process. The power sector reform in Orissa comes to mind as one of the examples. One of the main problems in the New Delhi BRTS was, and is, the complete lack of involvement of the public in the issue. Writing in 'Civil Society', Umesh Anand laments "...motorists have found themselves caught in a confusing maze of new lanes. Buses...have done pretty much as they please. The result has been excruciating traffic jams with vehicles looking for escape routes through nearby residential colonies. Ask a South Delhi motorist about the BRTS and the response will invariably be very negative. To the average person no good can possibly come out of such chaos...".

The authorities in Jaipur ought to take note of this, while there is still time, and take steps, with the assistance of civil society organisations (CSOs), to prepare and educate the citizens.

News & Views

Committee for Traffic

The Chief Minister, Vasundhara Raje, has approved a proposal to constitute a high-powered District Traffic Management Committee (DTMC) in each district of the State.

The Committee is intended to strengthen transport system in the state, give suggestions for stopping road accidents and control pollution. The Committee will meet to discuss how to make the transportation system more convenient, transparent and answerable, improve urban traffic, ensure that traffic rules are followed, etc.

The Committee will have the District Superintendent of Police (SP), *Jila Pramukh* and all the MLAs of the district, among others, as members.

(HT, 08.07.08)

Seven Flyovers Proposed

In the Traffic Control Board meeting, the Jaipur Development Authority (JDA)



Commissioner, Ashok Jain directed to give practical shape for construction of seven flyovers in Jaipur city under the flyover development project by August 15, 2008. He informed that the flyovers will be constructed at Gurjar Ki Thadi, Stadium Circle Sanganer, Dantli near Goner Road in the Sitapur Industrial area, Khirni Phatak, Dadi Ka Phatak, Bassi, and near Loco Shed.

The JDA Commissioner also directed to finish the repair work of 33 roads in the city by first week of October. In the meeting, it was also decided that for better transport management in Jaipur city, roads at Rambagh Circle, from Sodala to Hawa Sadak and from 22 Godam to JDA, will be widened.

Smita Srivastava, SP, Traffic, informed about the purchase of three Interceptors for modernisation of transport management, closing of the road cuts at various places, and creation of law for slow driving vehicles etc.

It was suggested to the city corporation to consider issues like running signal lights. Also, the meeting accepted the vehicle tracking system for traffic police vehicles and parking charges for various industrial parking lots in the city.

(DB, 17.07.08)

Land (un)Banked

The Commissioner, JDA, said that the 56000 *bigha* land bank, created three years back, mostly comprises land which is not usable. A large part of it has been either encroached upon or has rivulets/hills. In addition, many pieces of such land are under litigation, for which effective follow up is being carried out.

At the same time, the JDA does not have land left for auction and this might adversely affect development work. The JDA has planned for Rs 500 crore revenue through land during the current financial year. For implementing this plan, all Zonal Deputy Commissioners have been directed to identify auction-worthy land in their areas.

(DB, 28.05.08)

Dial '108' for Emergency Service

The Emergency Management & Research Institute (EMRI) in partnership with the State Government launched the free 108 emergency response centre that was inaugurated at the State Institute of Health and Family Welfare Building, Jhalana Institutional Area, Jaipur by Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje. Initially five ambulances are deployed equipped with Geographic Information System (GIS) & Global Positioning System (GPS), defibrillators, ventilators, to

extrication tools to handle almost any medical emergency situation. The service is free of cost and should take 25 minutes to reach the caller within the city and 35 minutes for rural areas.

It is expected that by March 2009, Rajasthan State will have 450 ambulances to cover the population of 5.6 crore. 108 is a toll free number and is accessible from landline, mobile, local telephone booth without any prefix or suffix.

(HT, 21.09.08)

Master Plan for Jaipur

In order to address the rising problems of parking and traffic congestion, the JDA Traffic Control Board, which was created to address the rising problems of parking and traffic congestion Jaipur city, remains on paper. The reason is obvious: the Board often calls meetings, officials talk and take decisions but on the implementation fronts, things are still cipher. Under Section 13 of the JDA Act, the major function of the Board is to develop master plan of Jaipur, policy decisions and their implementation to improve traffic problems, and provide adequate parking lots.

(RP, 06.05.08)

Parking in the Walled City

Jaipur Nagar Nigam and the Transport Department would identify parking and no-parking areas in the walled city of Jaipur. This decision was taken in the meeting of the Committee set up for beautification and development of the city. This identification would be carried out under the directions of SP, Traffic, and



accomplished in 10 days.

(DB, 25.05.08)

Sources: HT: Hindustan Times; DB: Dainik Bhaskar; TH: The Hindu; RP: Rajasthan Patrika