

To
The Chief Minister,
Karnataka

26th September 2022

Respected Sir,

It has been over 20 days since unprecedented rains and floods ravaged parts of Bengaluru displacing citizens and causing damages worth hundreds of crores. While steps were taken in the immediate aftermath of the floods to provide relief and shelter to those affected, we write this open letter to you as concerned citizens witnessing the devastating impact of extreme weather in Bengaluru. As the city and its citizens attempt to recover from the massive losses endured, it is essential to use this moment to build equitable, sustainable and accessible cities.

According to media reports, at least [9500](#) houses, 22000 vehicles and 30 apartment complexes in Bengaluru were damaged by the heavy rains and flooding. As the Outer Ring Road Companies Association(ORRCA) wrote in their recent letter, businesses in the area suffered losses worth [225](#) crores in a single day due to the flooding and traffic congestion. Hardships and losses faced by thousands of families from marginalised, vulnerable communities are yet to be documented in its entirety, although some reports suggest that at least [1,500](#) houses of low-income families were washed away.

According to Mongabay India's analysis of [IMD data](#), Bengaluru received 79.2mm rainfall from 4 September 2022 to 5 September 2022 as opposed to the normal of 4.5mm - a staggering 1660 percent in excess. Latest IPCC Projections suggest that rainfall will become more incessant and erratic leading to floods with a 20 percent surge in extreme rainfall related events in the Indian subcontinent. As the city's infrastructural problems come into focus amidst the calamity, we would like to invite your attention to the bigger picture at play - that of increasing extreme weather events and the need for our cities to become more climate resilient.

The need today is to adapt our cities to the climate crisis at hand and make it equitable and accessible. If the state waivers from taking the right action here and now Bengaluru and its citizens will become progressively vulnerable to a calamitous future.

In such a situation, the state government's knee-jerk response by promoting more car-centric infrastructure is disappointing and worrying. The proposed [three-layer flyover](#) over the national highway through the city in an attempt to decongest Bengaluru is a sad reiteration of the above statement. Taking a small group of commuters on a car ride ironically credits concrete-based structures as the solution to our mobility and flooding problems, while [studies](#) clearly show otherwise. More flyovers can further incentivise private vehicles, making the city more exclusionary, worsening traffic congestion, pollution and proving to be counterproductive if not more damaging. Furthermore, this so-called solution does not address systemic issues such as

last mile connectivity, accessibility to transport especially among vulnerable groups like women, children, urban poor, sexual minorities, backward communities and differently abled.

According to the draft of Karnataka State Action Plan for Climate Change and Human Health by the state's Department of Health and Family Welfare, the vehicular population in the state increased by almost 70 percent between 2003 and 2009 and continues to rise. As the state evidently wants to and needs to decongest the city for the best of reasons, it should focus on investing in mobility systems that are inclusive and accessible, rather than energy-intensive and unsustainable silver bullets. Stakeholders who are demanding for more concrete-based infrastructure should reconsider the unsustainable nature of their proposed solutions. Even [Nitin Gadkari](#), the Honourable Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, recently commented on the crisis asking for increased use of public transport instead of focusing on cars.

According to Greenpeace India's BMTC-based public bus transportation survey and Bus Lane Perception Survey a majority of surveyed bus users want more frequent and disciplined bus infrastructure along with last mile connectivity for better experience and ridership. Not to mention the bus passengers account for nearly [50 percent](#) of the commuter share. Recent scientific [models](#) also suggest that introducing solutions such as bus priority lanes have positive results, reducing congestion and delays, even during peak hours.

The Two Big Questions

The state should be guided by two critical questions. One, what is a sustainable and long-term solution for efficient public mobility? And two, who all should be heard while looking for solutions? The entire city with its mobile and burgeoning population is being affected. Therefore, the stories of all communities including women, minorities, urban poor, sexual minorities, differently-abled people and migrant populations should be carefully considered to formulate equitable solutions. We need to move away from our collective 'concrete' delusion that keeps a substantial section of our population outside the purview of the 'ideal city' and build back a Bengaluru that is thriving, accessible and a city for all.

In an effort along similar lines, Greenpeace India has commenced a mass listening exercise across Bengaluru to get a better understanding of what the people of the city have to say. We extend an invitation to the state government and other partners to join us on this mission. It is high time that the state and the people's representatives listen to all its citizens, especially the most vulnerable, and not just the select elite and seek sustainable, just and long term solutions with and for all citizens.

Greenpeace India demands the following actions from the city's stakeholders:

1. The government must cease plans to construct the proposed three-layer highways owing to their unsustainability and limited purpose. In lieu of the new highways which are limited to being car-centric, the government must reinvest and focus on its public road transportation system.
2. ITeS, BPO and other companies and tech parks in Bengaluru should be encouraged to adopt flexible work policies. The companies should incentivise working professionals who commute to work by cycles and by means of public road transportation.
3. The Karnataka state and local governments should provide adequate funding and support to implement localised climate action plans with a clear timeline and in close consultation with citizens.
4. The government as well as citizens should conserve, revive and protect Karnataka's natural resources (such as water bodies, tree cover etc.) to help maintain its sensitive ecosystem of flora and fauna and build on its nature-based resilience capacity.

#TogetherTowardsBetter

Greenpeace India,
Bengaluru.