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Road to development needs breathing space, say experts

The Capital got its share of expert opinion on alternative urban planning at the recent Urban Habitat Summit, held at the India Habitat Centre. Newslite spoke to three experts and asked them to identify the single-most important issue in Delhi that bothers them, and how best to deal with it.

Over to the experts

Phillipe Rode, executive director, Dept of Urban Age, London School of Economics and Political Science

Even the short distance between India International Centre and the India Habitat Centre is an ordeal for Rode. "There are no proper pavements and signal meant for pedestrians don't seem to work."

The BRT corridor, he says, is the answer to the city's traffic woes, besides fulfilling the need to have proper pedestrian and cyclist pathways. Rode says Connaught Place is the ideal model that upcoming city centres and private developers should emulate. "It is comfortable to walk around the area; it is an urban space that welcomes even those who do not have cars."

Rode suggests stringent laws for private developers while giving out land: “They must ensure there are walkways or lawns for the public around the property, as in London.

“But they must ensure that ownership of this space lies with the government, which unfortunately is not the case in the UK.”

Manit Rastogi, managing director, Morphogenesis

Fed up of Delhi’s stinking drains, Manit Rastogi decided to deal with the issue head on. And what emerged is a “sustainable urban blueprint”, or the Nullah Project.

Rastogi’s solution focuses on converting the city’s 350-kilometre drainage network to green inter-connected walkways linked to mass transit routes. “The sewage flowing through these drains should be organically cleaned at source, as opposed to carrying the sewage through the length of the city to inefficient sewage treatment plants.”

So emerged a vision of green alleys flanked by clean drains, linked to major bus stops and Metro stations — a vision that may soon see light of the day.

“The Lieutenant-Governor has reacted positively to the project and it was decided last week to pick the Gautam Nagar drain as a pilot

project.”

The project, when implemented, would solve multiple problems such as the issue of sewage treatment, provide for groundwater replenishment, and provide interconnected walkways, Rastogi says.

Sanjeev Sanyal, founder, The Sustainable Planet Institute

For Sanyal, the biggest issue in modern Delhi is the “walkability” factor.

The ability to walk around the city is critical to many things, he says.

“Public transport cannot work effectively unless there are proper walkways because that last mile to and from major bus stops and Metro stations has to be covered by walking.”

Having authored a report on Walkability in Delhi, Sanyal says instead of creating more footpaths and pedestrian lanes, roads at most places are being broadened at the expense of footpaths. He says the solution is “very low-tech and easy to implement”: the government has to plan towards including well-designed walkways that autos and cars cannot encroach.