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Bangalore learns Swedish lessons in urban planning

BANGALORE: Sweden is at least 600 times bigger than Bangalore city but their population is almost the same. On an average, 250 people die in Swedish road mishaps against 750 in Bangalore. Sweden has also managed to cut down on its carbon emissions by about 10% over the last 15 years.

With the Scandinavian republic's roads having become the world's safest and pollution free, a workshop here on Monday provided a perfect opportunity for Bangalore to look at that nation's best practices.

How did Sweden do this? In 1997 the Swedish devised a plan called "Vision Zero", promising to eliminate road fatalities and injuries altogether. "We simply do not accept any deaths or injuries on our roads considering the impact it makes on families if he or she is the sole bread-winner. Sustainable urban transport coupled with better planning played the biggest part in reducing accidents. Roads were built with safety prioritized over speed or convenience. Low urban speed limits, pedestrian zones, cycle tracks and barriers that separate cars from bikes and oncoming traffic helped," said

Matts-Ake Belin, project manager, Vision Zero Academy, Swedish Transport Administration.

Jonas Hafstrom, ambassador and senior advisor to the minister of trade in Sweden, said: "We developed companies that could offer solutions to sustainable urban transport."

Additional chief secretary K Ratna Prabha, who led a six-member delegation recently to Sweden to study urban transport, solid waste management and investments, said: "Their solid waste management plant looks exactly like a mall in Bangalore and is located in the heart of the city without causing any harm to public health. They recycle their entire waste and convert it into biogas and biofuel for use in public transport. They even import waste to recycle."

A round table conference later in the day looked at SymbioCity — a Swedish concept that integrates community planning and urban development from an ecological, social, economic and spatial perspective.