



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**INDIA NEEDS A NATIONAL
MISSION FOR URBAN ROADS**

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In Context

- India's urban roads have deteriorated significantly, marked by potholes, broken footpaths, unplanned utilities, and flooding.
- Unlike the mission-driven transformation of national highways and rural roads, urban roads suffer from fragmented governance, lack of standards, and poor design expertise. This has impacted city mobility, safety, and public health.

Significance of Urban Roads in Urban Development

- Urban roads are not just transport corridors, they are multifunctional urban assets that influence:
 - ♦ Public safety and women's mobility, by ensuring secure and well-lit pathways.
 - ♦ Public health, by encouraging walkability and reducing vehicular emissions.
 - ♦ Climate resilience, by integrating stormwater management and flood prevention.
 - ♦ Economic vitality, as better streets enhance land value and business activity.
- A well-designed urban road is, therefore, a **social equalizer and an environmental asset not merely a mobility channel**.

Systemic Issues in Urban Road Governance

- **Absence of Mandatory Road Design Standards:** There are no legally binding norms on footpath width, drainage, signage, or materials.
 - ♦ Roads constructed based on municipal engineers' discretion leading to quality variance.
- **Lack of Design Drawings and Expertise:** Urban roads are often built without Good for Construction drawings.
 - ♦ Certified urban designers are rarely employed.
- **Flawed Procurement Model:** Lowest cost (L1) tendering prioritizes cost over quality.
 - ♦ Fragmented contracts attract unskilled contractors and cause repeated digging.
- **Missing Lifecycle Digital Management:** No unified digital system to track road design, construction, maintenance, and utilities.
 - ♦ This undermines inter-agency coordination.

Model Example: Tender S.U.R.E.

- Tender SURE (Specifications for Urban Roads Execution), pioneered in Bengaluru, provides a blueprint for urban street reform.
- **Features:**
 - ♦ Standardized travel lanes and footpaths with tactile pavers for accessibility.
 - ♦ Organised underground utilities and chamber-based stormwater drainage.
 - ♦ Integrated tendering ensures inter-agency coordination.
- **Impact:**
 - ♦ Bengaluru's study showed:
 - 228% rise in pedestrians, 117% increase in women commuters,
 - 55% rise in land value, and better safety and maintenance outcomes.

Six Structural Reforms for Urban Roads

- **Institutionalise Urban Design Cadres:** Municipalities must employ certified urban designers and planners to oversee road layout, safety, and aesthetics.
- **Legally Mandate Road Design Standards:** Adopt frameworks such as Tender SURE, IRC 86, and Complete Streets Guidelines as legal benchmarks.

- **Model Tender Documents:** Include design specifications, material standards, and digital GFC drawings.
 - ♦ Tailor for different city typologies like metros, mid-sized towns, and heritage cities.
- **Reform Tendering System:** Shift from L1 (cost-based) to Quality-and-Cost-Based Selection (QCBS) for road contracts.
- **Digital Coordination Framework:** Emulate PM Gati Shakti's National Master Plan for mapping utilities, planning maintenance, and ensuring inter-agency accountability.
- **Capacity Building:** Launch certification-based training for municipal engineers and contractors in modern road design, materials, and safety audits.

Proposal: Pradhan Mantri Shahari Sadak Yojana (PMSSY)

- A national mission for urban roads, akin to PMGSY for rural areas, can transform city mobility:
 - ♦ Create dedicated funding and institutional framework for urban street development.
 - ♦ Enforce national design and safety standards.
 - ♦ Build citizen-centric, climate-resilient, and inclusive roads across 6 lakh km of urban networks within a decade.

Way Forward for Urban Mobility

- Transition from car-centric to citizen-centric street design philosophy.
- Integrate roads with urban flood management and public health initiatives.
- Leverage technologies like digital twins and urban observatories for real-time monitoring.
- Institutionalize urban road safety audits as part of Smart Cities 2.0.

Conclusion

- India's urban roads epitomize the governance challenge but also hold immense potential. The same mission-based approach that transformed highways and rural roads can revitalize city streets into safe, inclusive, and sustainable public spaces.
- The Pradhan Mantri Shahari Sadak Yojana could be a landmark initiative turning every urban road into a janpath, enhancing both quality of life and urban resilience.

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Daily Mains Practice Question

[Q] Discuss the need for a national urban roads mission in India. How can models like Tender SURE and Gati Shakti address systemic deficiencies in urban road development?

