

Active Mobility in India

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Active Mobility in India: Status, Significance, and Challenges

Context

India's rapidly urbanising landscape has led to **rising traffic congestion**, **air pollution**, **sedentary lifestyles**, and an alarming increase in **pedestrian and cyclist fatalities**. In response, there has been a renewed focus on **active mobility**—a sustainable, health-oriented, and inclusive mode of urban transport.

What is Active Mobility?

- Active mobility refers to human-powered modes of transport used for daily travel, rather than recreation.
- This includes walking, cycling, skateboarding, and other non-motorised forms of movement.
- These modes are increasingly recognised globally as **sustainable**, **cost-effective**, and beneficial for **urban health and equity**.

Current Trends and Data

- In 2020, Karnataka reported the highest number of pedestrian deaths in India, accounting for 13% of total pedestrian fatalities.
- In **2024**, there was a **notable improvement**: **Bengaluru reported 233 pedestrian fatalities**, a decline due to targeted interventions.
- Across Indian cities, active mobility remains underutilised due to inadequate infrastructure and low policy prioritisation.

Initiatives by Indian States

• Karnataka:

- Introduced the **Active Mobility Bill, 2022** the **first of its kind in India**.
- Aims to **legally safeguard the rights of pedestrians and cyclists**, promote inclusive access to public spaces, and integrate active mobility in urban planning.

• Delhi:

As part of the **Delhi EV Policy**, the city is expanding **cycling tracks and pedestrian zones** to reduce car dependency.

• Pune:

 Has implemented a Comprehensive Bicycle Plan with over 300 km of dedicated cycling lanes.

• Chennai:

• Is redesigning urban roads under the **Smart Cities Mission (SCM)** to enhance pedestrian safety and walkability.

• Kochi:

 Launched a Public Bicycle Sharing (PBS) system to improve last-mile connectivity.

Global Best Practices

• The Netherlands:

 Leads globally with over 35,000 km of cycling lanes, supported by strong urban design and policy frameworks.

• European Union (EU):

• The **Mobility and Transport Department** promotes walking and cycling to foster **low-emission, citizen-centric cities**.

• Germany - Berlin Mobility Act:

 Mandates wider sidewalks, cycling infrastructure, and reduced urban speed limits to protect non-motorised users.

• Vision Zero Network:

 A global initiative aiming to eliminate traffic-related deaths and injuries, with a strong focus on pedestrian and cyclist safety.

Benefits of Active Mobility

• Environmental Benefits:

- Walking and cycling produce negligible emissions, reducing India's 12% share of carbon emissions from road transport.
- Help improve air quality, lower noise pollution, and contribute to energy security.

• Economic Benefits:

- Reduced expenditure on fuel, personal transport, and public healthcare.
- Pedestrianised zones and cycling paths boost local business revenue by increasing footfall.

• Health Benefits:

- Regular active commuting lowers the risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and improves mental well-being.
- Encourages **physical activity** across all age groups, especially in dense urban areas.

Challenges in Promoting Active Mobility

• Infrastructure Deficits:

 Poor or non-existent sidewalks, cycling lanes, and crossings discourage safe walking or cycling.

• Social Barriers:

• In many areas, **private vehicles are linked with status and prestige**, undermining efforts to promote non-motorised transport.

• Climatic and Geographical Constraints:

• Extreme weather, long distances, and poor connectivity reduce the practicality of walking and cycling.

• Road Safety Concerns:

• High traffic volumes, weak enforcement of traffic laws, and lack of dedicated safe zones pose severe risks to non-motorised road users.

Way Forward

Policy Support:

 Central and state governments must enact legal frameworks and integrate active mobility in urban planning and transport policies.

• Infrastructure Investment:

• Build inclusive transport networks with wide footpaths, cycle tracks, resting areas, and safe street crossings.

• Awareness Campaigns:

- Promote the **economic, environmental, and health benefits** of walking and cycling through **mass outreach** and **school-level programmes**.
- Integration with Public Transport:
 - Enhance last-mile connectivity by integrating active mobility with metro, bus, and rail networks.

UPSC Relevance

General Studies Paper II:

- Governance and Policy Initiatives for Public Health and Urban Development
- Citizen-centric and inclusive governance

General Studies Paper III:

- Infrastructure (Urban Mobility)
- Environmental sustainability and pollution control
- Science and Technology in service of society
- Disaster management and road safety