



Pedestrian Infrastructure and Accessibility

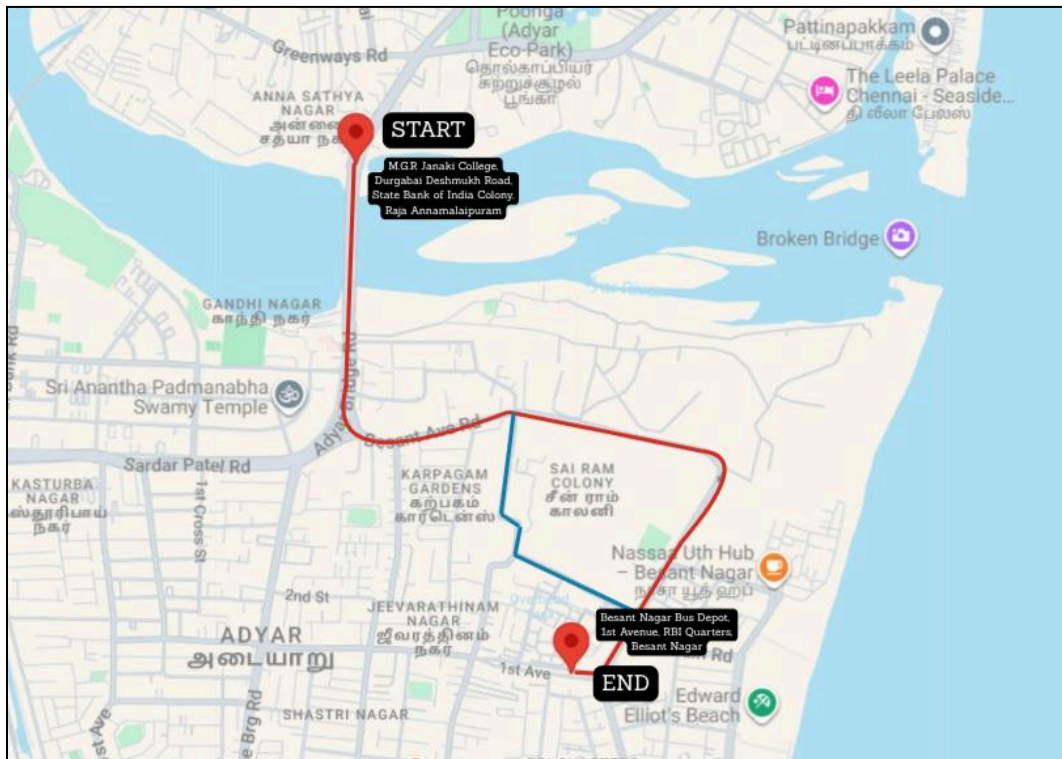
Findings from CAG's Jane's Walk - Chennai Edition

Introduction

On 23.05.2026, Citizen consumer and civic Action Group (CAG) undertook The Jane's Walk - Chennai Edition in Besant Nagar with the intention of understanding pedestrian infrastructure and accessibility in the region.

The Jane's Walk is a movement of free, citizen-led walking conversations in honour of the influential urban planner Jane Jacobs. The walk is undertaken annually in the month of May in more than 500 cities across the world and encourages people to share stories about their neighbourhood, discover unseen aspects of their communities and use the art of walking as a way to connect with their neighbours. Find out more about the volunteer-driven walk here:

<https://janeswalk.org/>





Map showing the path of Jane's Walk route - Chennai Edition

Starting Point: M.G.R Janaki College, Durgabai Deshmukh Road, State Bank of India Colony, Raja Annamalaipuram

End Point: Besant Nagar Bus Depot, 1st Avenue, RBI Quarters, Besant Nagar

Study Rationale:

Jane's Walk looks different in every city. In Chennai, Citizen consumer and civic Action group took the walk as an opportunity to understand pedestrian infrastructure along Besant Nagar.

The neighbourhood was chosen considering its familiarity to those from our team conducting the walk. The neighbourhood's proximity to Elliot's beach also made it a region with heavy footfall where pedestrian infrastructure can determine the quality of the public space for a large population.

The walk also passed through the 8km stretch that is the **Health Walk** route - inaugurated in 2023, starting and ending at the arch on Besant Avenue Road opposite Dr. Muthulakshmi Park in Adyar. This allowed participants to understand both old and new (as recent as 2023) pedestrian infrastructure.

Participants: 18 people undertook the walk between 5 pm and 7:30 pm. The group consisted of journalists, disability rights activists, wheelchair users, researchers, urban planners, children, mothers and civil society members. People of all age groups participated on the four-kilometer long walk; the group was also diverse in terms of gender.

Methodology:

The Jane's Walk route was observed primarily in the context of the quality of pedestrian infrastructure and accessibility. All observed metrics were compared against Indian Roads Congress ([IRC](#)) standards.

The IRC is India's National body for laying down and designing standards for roads and highway construction. With 13,500 members, it also functions as a national knowledge sharing



platform. Although it is not in itself a government body, the IRC works in close collaboration with the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH). The Guidelines published by IRC function as the codes of practice for planning in the Indian context.

The IRC Guidelines for pedestrians published in [2012](#) specifies parameters for pedestrian crossings along with nine parameters that affect the quality of a footpath. Out of the nine, six pertain to the physical characteristics of the footpath facility. These are: **Footpath facility, footpath width, footpath surface, obstruction, encroachment, potential for vehicular conflict and continuity**. The remaining three parameters are user factors which are **pedestrian volume, security, comfort and walking environment**. These are some of the parameters used in this study to assess road crossings and footpaths on Jane's Walk.

IRC's [Manual on Universal Accessibility for Urban Roads and Streets](#) (2018) provides a checklist for universal accessibility on urban roads and streets. Accessibility on the Jane's Walk route was assessed using the same parameters.

The walk relied heavily on participatory research, where first-hand experience of members on the walk is used as evidence. The mixed-method uses observation and visual documentation for its quantitative data as well as in-time oral narration and group discussions for its qualitative data. The walk relies heavily on primary data, while secondary sources have been used largely for verification. The participants were asked to fill out a survey at the end of the walk; their responses have been integrated into the findings.

Our findings were shared with Women on the Move - Transforming Transport in South Asia (WoTM) and Women in Transport Leadership (WiTL), both networks working at the intersections between gender and transportation.



Elements of Pedestrian Infrastructure Analysed

S.no	Title
1.	Pedestrian crossings
2.	Footpaths
2.1	Footpath facility
2.2	Footpath width
2.3	Footpath surface
2.4	Obstruction
2.5	Encroachment
2.6	Potential for vehicular conflict
2.7	Continuity
2.8	Comfort and walking environment

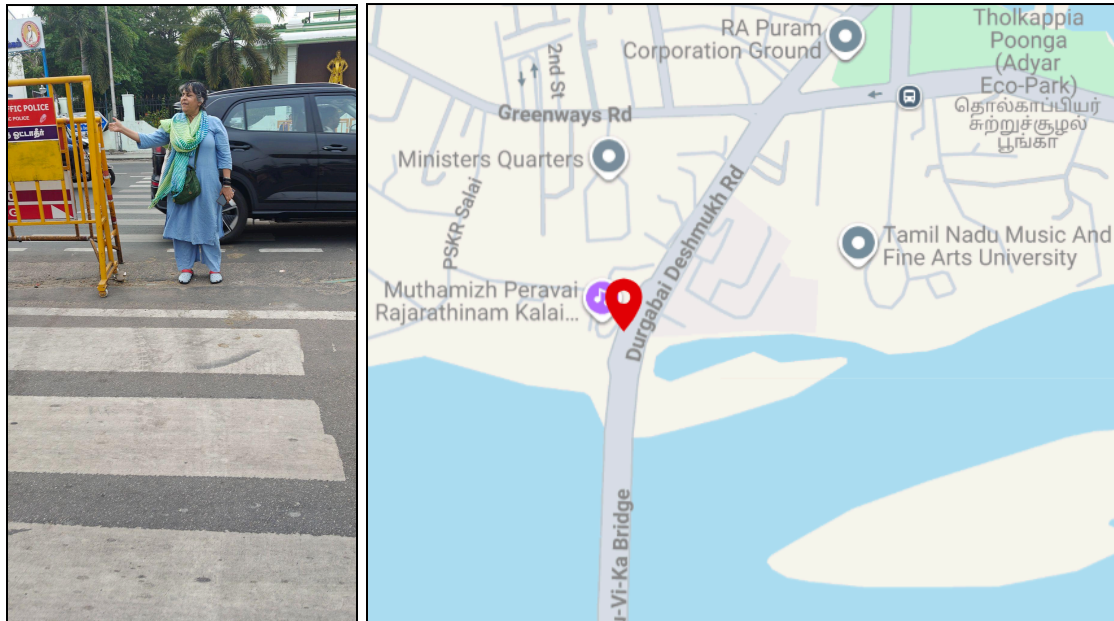
1. Pedestrian Crossings

Pedestrian crossings are crucial in carrying people from one side of the road to another. They provide [legal](#) priority to pedestrians. The Supreme Court of India [declared](#) the Right to Walk on demarcated footpaths as a fundamental right under Article 19(1)(d) (right to move freely) read along with Articles 19(1)(a), 19(1)(b), 19(1)(c) and Article 21 (right to life) of the Constitution, in June 2026. This provides pedestrian movement priority over the movement of motor vehicles.

IRC Guidelines suggest that pedestrian crossings must be provided at all T-Junctions. They also suggest that mid-block crossings must be provided for people to cross the street safely between



building entries or bus stop locations or active land uses on opposite sides of the street.



Participant on Jane's Walk (Sudha) finding it difficult to cross the road (Left)

Location of Sathya Studios crossing on a map (Right) | [CAG](#)

The Impossible Crossing: Sathya Studios

The Jane's Walk began at the the crossing near Sathya Studios bus stop which is an extremely important crossing for multiple reasons:

- Proximity to a bus stop
- Proximity to educational institutions (eg. M.G.R Janaki College of Arts and Science and Archery Institute)
- Proximity to cultural institutions (eg. Muthamizh Peravai Rajarathinam Arangam and the Sivaji Ganesan Memorial)
- Gendered usage - proximity to a women's college (women are more likely to use public transportation).



- Proximity to hospitals and healthcare institutions with high footfall (eg. MGM Healthcare, Malar - Adyar and Durgabai Deshmukh General Hospital and Research Centre - Chennai)

The crossing is crucial for it is the only formally provided space to shift from one side of the road to the other for many kilometers on either side of the road. Failing this, one would have to cross the Adyar Bridge and walk till the Adyar Signal for the next formal pedestrian crossing; this would add an additional 1 kilometer to a person's journey. On the other side, there is no crossing available for the foreseeable distance as Durgabai Deshmukh road cuts into Greenways Road.

The Sathya Studios Crossing was **one out of the two formal pedestrian crossings** along the Jane's Walk route. Many participants found it difficult to cross the road, not because the infrastructure was absent, but because enforcement was. Although a signal is present at the crossing, it cannot be relied upon to work or followed by vehicle users when it does. This results in pedestrians spending much time waiting for the mercy of vehicle users to stop or risking their lives to cross the wide road.



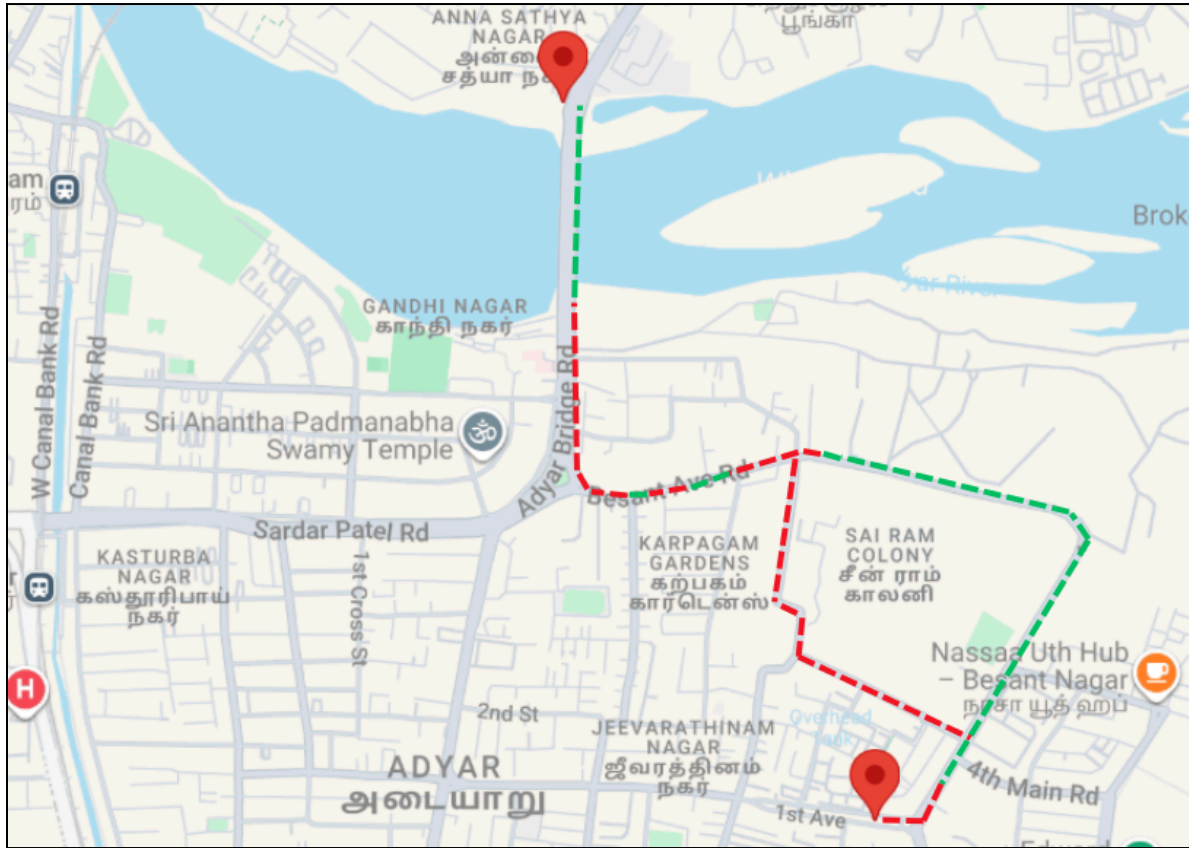
Sathish Kumar R (Member of Disability Rights Alliance) finding it extremely difficult to cross the road near Dr. Muthu Lakshmi Park. | [CAG](#)

2. Footpaths

2.1 Footpath Facility

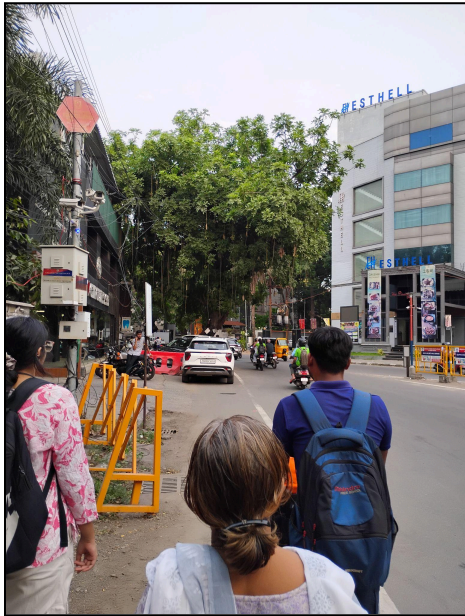
According to the scope of the IRC Guidelines - Every traveller is a pedestrian at some stage of his or her travel and hence pedestrian facilities are significant in urban transportation. In view of the paradigm shift from ‘moving the vehicles’ to ‘moving the persons’ while planning for transportation facilities in cities, provision of integrated and barrier free pedestrian facilities is essential to ensure inclusive mobility.

The map provided below outlines the parts of the walk where footpaths are technically present, (without taking into consideration its condition) with green and where they are not present at all with red.



Map of Jane's Walk route with portions where footpaths are present marked in green and where they are absent marked in red | [CAG](#)

As shown, parts of the road that are straight stretches are more likely to have footpaths, while closer to junctions/intersections, they are more likely to be absent. Given that Besant Nagar is a neighbourhood that witnesses massive footfall due to the presence of Elliot's beach, this state of infrastructure is worrying. 4th Avenue Link Road (a.k.a Blue Cross Road) also has a school, where the complete lack of pedestrian infrastructure at best discourages children from walking and at worst puts them at risk.



Completely missing footpaths on the Jane's Walk route | [CAG](#)

As seen above, footpath facilities were found to be completely absent on many parts of the walk.

2.2 Footpath Width

IRC Guidelines recommend that footpaths should be wide enough to accommodate pedestrian flow at any point of time. More specific recommendations are that they be at least 1800 mm wide in order to accommodate wheelchair users and persons with vision impairments assisted by a person or a guide dog - or an adult and a child to walk together. This will allow people to pass each other.



Pedestrian using the footpath on the Adyar Bridge (Thiru-Vi-K-Bridge) and not finding enough space for his pet on the footpath| [CAG](#)

As seen above, the road user did not have enough space for himself on the footpath leading up to the Adyar Bridge (Thiru-Vi-Ka Bridge).

2.3. Footpath surface

IRC Guidelines suggest that firm, even paved surfaces be utilised on footpaths as they are important to people using sticks or crutches, or wheelchairs or anyone with mobility difficulties.

Paving should have an even surface to prevent tripping and be laid evenly to allow proper drainage and prevent the formation of puddles. The gap between paving slabs or any vertical deviation between slabs should not exceed 5 mm.



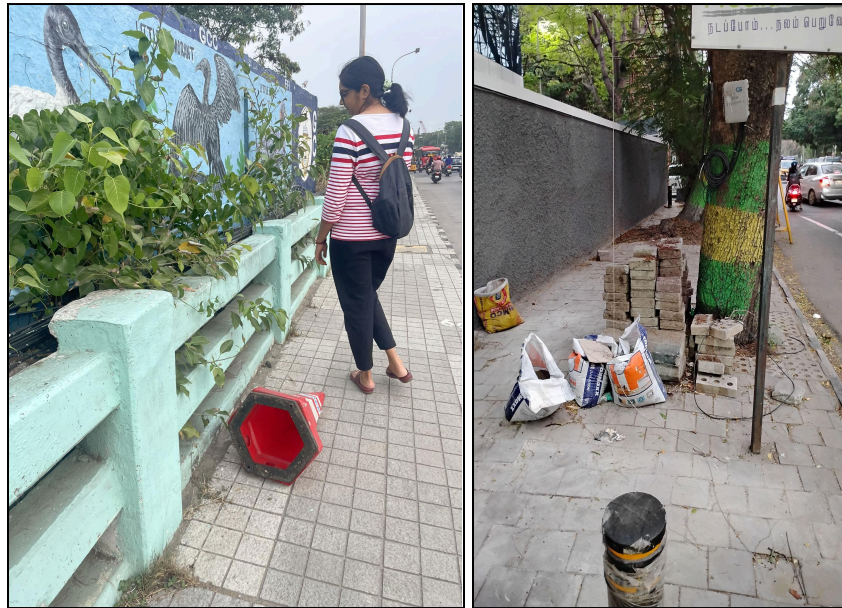
Uneven footpaths with poor maintenance on the Jane's Walk route [CAG](#)

As seen above, uneven surfaces are rarely intended by design. Poor road maintenance leads to broken footpaths that create uneven surfaces.

2.4. Obstructions

IRC Guidelines suggest that obstructions such as electric poles, garbage bins and hoardings not be there on a footpath. Features such as road signs should be on one side of the footpath to give a clear walkway to the pedestrian.





Various types of obstructions on the Jane's Walk route | [CAG](#)

As seen above, permanent obstructions such as electricity furniture were abundant on the route. Temporary obstruction such as road cones, broken tree branches and construction material were also present.

Bollard Placement:

Bollards are placed on footpaths in order to prevent vehicular traffic from entering the footpath. However, in many instances they act as hindrances rather than infrastructure that protects. This is particularly concerning for wheelchair users as the bollards are not placed at a wide enough width to accommodate them. The IRC Guidelines suggest that bollards at suitable locations

should be provided with a clear gap of 1200 mm between two bollards.



Bollards along the Jane's Walk acting as obstructions rather than lane segregators | [CAG](#)

2.5. Encroachment

IRC Guidelines look at informal commercial activities as encroachments although the routes indicated that they were not the only form of encroachments. Parked vehicles are a prevalent

form of encroachment. IRC guidelines recognise the importance of commercial activities as an integral part of Indian street life and recognise their need by the pedestrians as well. Commercial activities are eyes on the road that keep streets safe. IRC guidelines suggest that road design integrates this such that vendors are provided the space to operate.



Parked cars and closed shops on the footpath along the Jane's Walk route | [CAG](#)

2.6. Potential for vehicular conflict

IRC Guidelines suggest that footpaths be segregated from roads where fast moving vehicles ply. The two approaches used to protect pedestrians from vehicle conflicts are through raised footpaths and guardrails.



Participants of the Jane's Walk in close proximity to moving vehicles | [CAG](#)

As seen above, the potential for vehicular conflict was high on the Jane's Walk route.

2.7. Continuity

IRC Guidelines underline the importance of the continuity of pedestrian facilities. This is especially important for pedestrians with disabilities and senior citizens. Discontinuous pavements force users onto the roads putting them in danger.

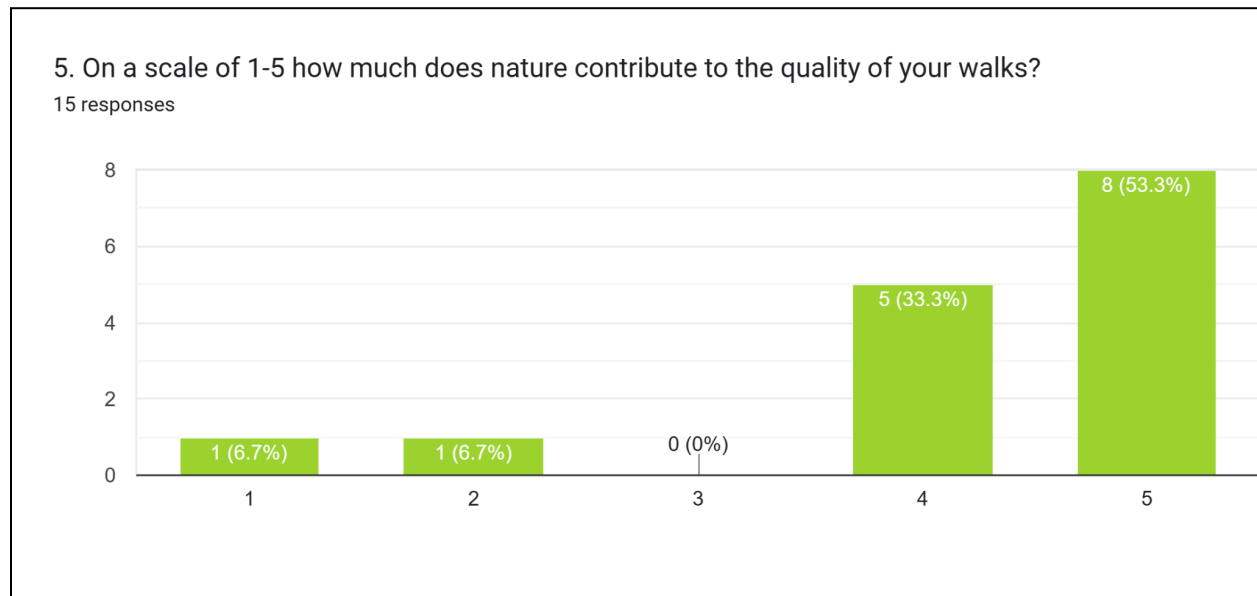


Discontinuous footpaths along the Jane's Walk route | [CAG](#)



2.8. Comfort and Walking Environment

When asked how much nature (e.g. trees, green cover, water bodies, etc.) contributes to the quality of the walk on a scale of 1-5, on average, the participants of the walk gave it a 4.2, indicating that nature contributes very heavily to the quality of their walks.



Average Rating = 4.2



The Adyar River

The Jane's Walk requires that participants walk across natural spots and heritage sites as part of the walk - this route took participants across the Adyar River.



Waste Management disrupting the picturesque Adyar River near Malar Hospital

Existing alongside the Adyar River was a local dumpyard near Malar Hospital. While waste disposal was not a prevalent concern during our walk, pockets of dumped waste were found



across the walk, as shown above. This affected the comfort and walking environment of the participants on the Jane's Walk route.

3. Accessibility

Much of the pedestrian infrastructure on the walk was assessed through the principle of **Universal Design**, where designing infrastructure that is accessible for people with disabilities ensures that it is safer, more comfortable, accessible and functional for all other groups such as pregnant women, parents with children, and younger citizens as well as senior citizens.

We were grateful to have four wheelchair users with us on the Jane's Walk, who helped us assess accessibility from their first-hand experience.

IRC's [Manual on Universal Accessibility for Urban Roads and Streets](#) (2018) provides a checklist for universal accessibility on urban roads and streets. The Jane's Walk route was assessed using the title headings of the same parameters (mentioned below):

S.no	Parameter Surveyed	Yes/No/Partially Present	Comment:
	Walking at Modal Conflict	Yes	Along many parts of the walk, pedestrians are put at risk of conflict with vehicles.
2.	Whether Footpath exists	Partially Present	Only in some parts
3.	Availability of Crossing Points	No	Not available
4.	Quality of Crossing Points (Kerb Cuts)	No	Not present
5.	Amenities:		
i)	Parking	Partially Present	Much of the parking is not designated
ii)	Lighting	Partially Present	Some parts of the walk have no



			lighting (eg. Blue Cross Road)
iii)	Signage	Partially Present	Not clearly visible in many parts of the walk
iv)	Bus Stop	Yes	Present
v)	Trees	Partially Present	Present in many parts of the walk, absent in some.
vi)	Site Furniture (Rest Areas, Dustbins, signs, lights and shade)	Partially Present	Present in very few places
vii)	Public Toilets	Yes	Only one public toilet
6.	Accessible furniture (Audible traffic signals, tactile pavers)	No	Completely absent
7.	Security	Yes	Largely secure path
8.	Motorists' behaviour	No	Motorists do not yield to pedestrians and are often seen violating their right to the road
9.	Obstructions	Yes	Many obstructions along the path



Broken ramps and footpaths acting as hindrances to accessibility on the Jane's Walk route

| [CAG](#)

4. Snapshots from the HealthWalk

The Health Walk route was inaugurated in November 2023 by the State Health Department. The Health Walk route fell within the Jane's Walk route, and we could therefore assess the pedestrian infrastructure of this route as well.



Snapshots from The Health Walk revealing similar state of pedestrian infrastructure as the rest of the Jane's Walk Route | [CAG](#)

The findings along the Health Walk Route were largely the same as that along all of Jane's Walk Route. This is shocking given that The Health Walk route was inaugurated as early as 2023.

5. Recommendations:

- **Footpath Continuity:** IRC Guidelines suggest that footpaths should be treated as a transportation system which is connected and continuous, just like roadways and railways. They should not be placed sporadically, but be provided consistently between all major attractions, trip generators and other locations. Footpath continuity was a sustained issue during the course of the Jane's Walk.

We found that footpath continuity was affected by multiple factors:

- By Design: Footpaths were absent in parts of the walk by design. Footpaths need to be planned and executed on parts of the road where they are absent.



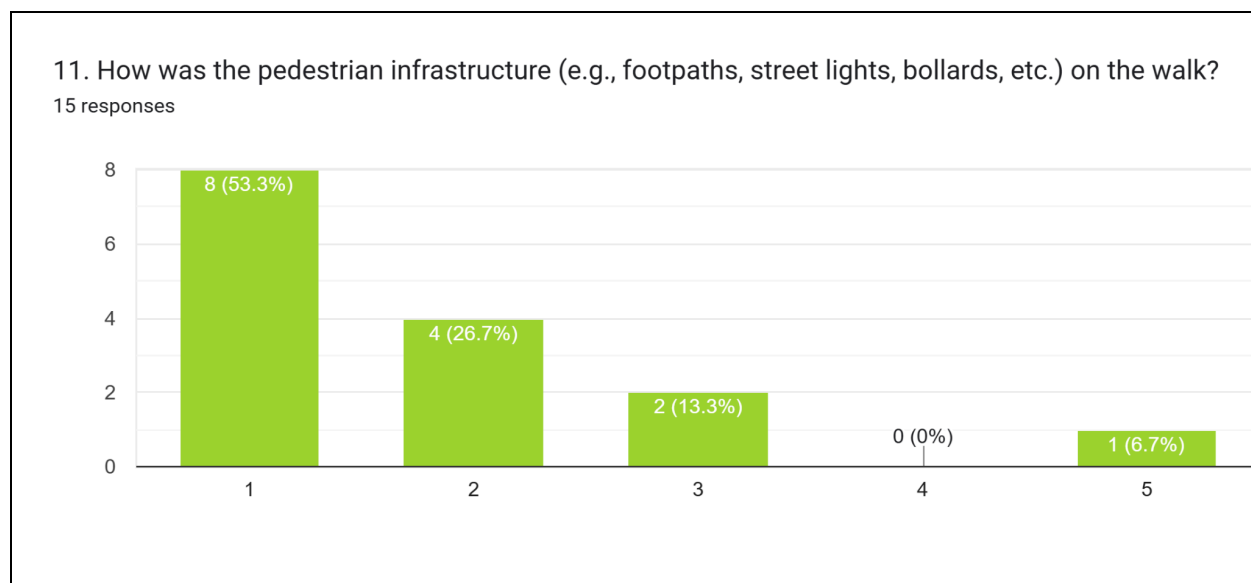
- **Poor Maintenance:** Broken footpaths contributed heavily to lack of continuity of the footpath. Timely and periodic maintenance of footpaths is essential
- **Obstruction:** Obstructions such as lamp posts, dustbins, electric poles, etc contributed heavily to breaking footpath continuity. The obstructions must be removed and relocated urgently.
- **Encroachments:** Parked vehicles contributed heavily to footpath continuity along with some vendors. Both need to be accounted for and accommodated into the footpath by design such that they don't affect the pedestrian negatively.
- **Accessibility:** Almost all of the pedestrian infrastructure remains inaccessible by people with disabilities and senior citizens.
 - **Footpath width:** IRC Guidelines recommend that footpaths width be at least 1800mm wide, which was not the case in most parts of the walk even where footpaths were present. The narrow footpaths do not allow wheelchair users to use them with ease. We recommend that footpaths be widened throughout the route of Jane's Walk.
 - **Ramps:** Kerb ramps are useful when transitioning between the footpath and carriageway. They are essential for wheelchair users. They were largely absent throughout the walk and need to be established urgently.
 - **Tactile Tiles:** Tactile pavers assist people with disabilities in using a pedestrianised area. While these are present in our Metro Stations, they are absent on our roads. Tactile tiles are an important feature of a pedestrian pathway that can make it truly inclusive and accessible.
- **Pedestrian Crossings:** Road crossings are largely absent along the stretch although people continue crossing the road anywhere they find or feel is safe. These are pedestrian behaviours and needs that design has not taken into consideration. Pedestrian crossings need to be established at shorter intervals along the route (eg. near Dr. Muthu Lakshmi Park, Blue Cross Road intersection).
 - **Pelican Signal:** Audible crossings and signals that can be activated by pedestrians will make road crossings along with footpaths more accessible.



6. In Conclusion:

Speaking directly to the participants

When asked to rate the quality of pedestrian infrastructure along the path of the walk, between 1 and 5, the participants provided an average rating of 1.8.



Average rating = 1.8

This is a deep and collective reflection of the dissatisfaction many of the participants felt as they undertook the walk. The Jane's Walk concluded with participants sharing their experience during the walk and the unanimous demand for better pedestrian infrastructure was a result of these discussions.



Photo of all the participants gathered together at the end of Jane's Walk - Chennai Edition |

[CAG](#)

About CAG:

Citizen consumer and civic Action Group (CAG) is a forty-year-old non-profit, non-political and professional organisation that works towards protecting citizens' rights in consumer and environmental issues, and promoting good governance processes including transparency, accountability and participatory decision-making.

