**PRESS RELEASE**

**Launch of report: ‘Safe School Zones - Enhancing Sustainable Mobility & Creating Safe School Routes in Chennai’**

***Chief Guest****: Joint Commissioner of Police (Traffic), Mr. Bandi Gangadhar, IPS*

**Speakers**: Mr. Bhaskaran, Assistant Commissioner, Planning, Traffic

A V Venugopal, *Program Manager, ITDP*

*G Ananthakrishnan, Writer and Editor, formerly with The Hindu*

*Dr. Divyalakshmi, Assistant Professor, Sri Ramachandra Medical College*

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**Chennai**

Historically, streets have been designed for motorised transport, excluding vulnerable road users. Children, one of the most vulnerable of road users, are at high risk on our roads, due to their limited physical and cognitive abilities. Every day in India, 45 children lose their lives in road crashes.

Citizen consumer and civic Action Group (CAG) organised an event to launch their report *“Safe School Zones – Enhancing Sustainable Mobility & Creating Safe School Routes in Chennai”.* The aim of the study was to understand what might discourage a reliance on motorised transport during school journeys and support a switch to sustainable transport. The study audited and analysed road infrastructure in the neighbourhood of three schools across different locations in Chennai. It also included perception surveys with parents, discussions with students, and air quality measures. The findings reveal critical challenges that directly affect how safe, healthy and independent children’s journeys to school can be. Speaking at the event, Joint Commissioner of Police (Traffic), Mr. Bandi Gangadhar, IPS, highlighted the urgent need to protect vulnerable road users. He noted that “Chennai has recorded 1,000 road crash deaths so far, of which 35 per cent, about 350 lives, are pedestrians.” Since a large share of school children rely on walking as their primary mode of travel, he emphasised that their safety must be given priority.

Another risk factor analysed as part of the study, was air quality measures during the school day. This is because children are also disproportionately affected by air pollution. Studies indicate that a third of particulate matter pollution in the country is from vehicular traffic. On average a

child in Chennai spends anywhere from a few minutes to *more than two hours* travelling to school. The longer the journey, the more the risk of young lungs being exposed to air pollution. Dr. Divyalakshmi, Assistant Professor, Sri Ramachandra Medical College, also speaking at the launch of the reportexplained that ‘Children are more vulnerable than adults to air pollution, as their bodies are still developing and their immune systems are comparatively weaker, making them more prone to its harmful effects’. Sadly, it is children from middle- and low-income families who are disproportionately affected, as they depend on walking and cycling, exposing them to road traffic injuries and air pollution in unsafe road conditions.

With walking and cycling being viewed as dangerous, it is natural for parents to choose motorised modes of transport for transporting their children to school. What this unleashes is a vicious cycle that increases the number of motorised vehicles on our roads, substantially increasing the risk of both accidents and exposure to polluted air. Mr. Bhaskaran, Assistant Commissioner Planning, Traffic, emphasised the importance of promoting shared transport modes for school travel, highlighting that this can significantly reduce traffic congestion. He also stressed the need to designate school zones as non-vending areas in order to prevent encroachments, thereby improving pedestrian space and ensuring safer, more accessible routes for children. Adding to this, Mr. A.V. Venugopal, Programme Manager at the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP), spoke about ITDP’s work on creating safe school zones in Chennai and Coimbatore. He remarked that the solutions required are often quite evident, yet what is most important is to recognise that children themselves have first-hand experience of these challenges. Their voices and inputs, he stressed, must be taken into account while planning and implementing safe school environments.

Mr. G. Ananthakrishnan, writer and editor, formerly with *The Hindu*, stressed that the safety of school students is a serious priority across the world and must be treated with equal importance in India. He pointed out that the right to an unhindered pavement is enshrined under Article 21 of the Constitution — the Right to Life. As a first step, he demanded that basic infrastructure such as continuous, walkable footpaths must be put in place. He also underlined the need for a zero-tolerance approach to traffic violations and the adoption of technology-based solutions to strengthen safety in school zones.

While the report itself contains actionable measures that can significantly improve safety standards around schools, CAG has also released a toolkit to help schools with step-by-step guidance on identifying risks, planning interventions, and implementing effective measures through education, enforcement, engineering, and encouragement. Sowmya Kannan, Researcher at CAG, stressed that the recommendations presented in the study are not ‘nice to have’ elements but are a vital component of safe school zones.

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**About CAG**

CAG is a 39-year-old non-profit, non-political organisation committed to protecting citizens’ rights in areas such as consumer protection, civic engagement, and environmental sustainability. We work to strengthen governance systems through transparency, accountability, and participatory decision-making.