

National Pedestrians' Conference
Dates: 11th, 12th March, 2022
Venue: Ramada, Egmore, Chennai

Pedestrians are one of the most vulnerable road user groups in India. With little space or facilities given to them to walk safely and motorists aggressively encroaching on what little space they have, it is no wonder that fewer people are walking every day. To highlight the plight of pedestrians, SUM Net India (Sustainable Mobility Network India) organised a National Pedestrians' Conference on March 11th and 12th, 2022 in Chennai. This was the second national conference, the first being held in 2020 in Pune. As a SUM Net India member, CAG acted as the local host for the Conference.

SUM Net India is a network of civil society organisations and individuals across India working to promote sustainable mobility. The theme of the second National Pedestrians' Conference was Voices of Pedestrians and true to that theme, varied groups of pedestrians spoke and shared their experience of walking on India's roads. The Conference attendees included NGOs, social groups, urban planning professionals, and individuals who are actively involved in pedestrian issues.

On the first day of the conference, speakers from different sectors of the society like domestic workers, women, the disabled, elders and school children spoke about their experience as pedestrians. Some of the topics covered on this day were pedestrian experience, pedestrian infrastructure, governance and ways to improve pedestrian infrastructure in our cities. In addition, social issues such as women's safety, child safety, vendors, and homeless people were also covered during these sessions.

Ms. Santa Sheela Nair IAS (retd) was the keynote speaker. She emphasised the benefits of walking, as it helps to reduce stress levels and depression. She also spoke at length on why safe spaces must be allocated for pedestrians while also integrating roadside hawkers into the streetscape. She urged governments and citizens to rethink the craze for private transport and said there must be a concerted effort to promote walking, cycling, and public transit.



Ms. Santa Sheela Nair IAS (retd) was the keynote speaker, addressing the importance of walking



Mr. Ranjit Gadgil, Parisar, addressing the audience on women's safety

Mr. K. Raghuraman, a disability activist, listed out the daily difficulties and the terrible experiences he faced as a disabled person on the roads. He said that even new urban projects such as the metro, pedestrian plaza, street projects, etc, do not make adequate provisions for persons with disabilities.

Mr Anuj Malhotra, a landscape architect and an urban design specialist, suggested that local level area planning needs to be emphasised and practised. Local area planning is important as it is an implementation plan that takes its directives from the master plan. Mr Dharmendra Kumar, a street vendor-activist raised his concerns regarding street vendors. He pointed out that street vendors are an important part of the Indian economy - their inclusion in street space therefore needs to be planned for, through the allocation of vending spaces and through

creating inclusive street designs. Street vendors also make the streets lively and safe for users, making them an important part of the street scene.

Apart from hearing from different pedestrians, there were discussions on finding solutions to various pedestrian-related civic issues from an institutional level. Following that, the difficulties faced due to the poor integration of various traffic-institutions, the poor organisational structure and the resulting drawbacks were also highlighted.



Discussions to find solutions to critical pedestrian issues

From issues related to footpaths to institutional capacity, various topics related to pedestrians were covered. The importance of promoting walking and non-motorised transport were endorsed by almost all stakeholders. To further highlight pedestrians, SUM Net is calling for January 11th to be declared as the National Pedestrians' Day for a walkable India.

To add your voice to this demand, visit: <https://www.sumnet.in/npd/>