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Citizen consumer and civic Action Group

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May 19, 2020

To

Thiru. Edappadi K. Palaniswami
Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu

Dear Sir,

Sub: Importance of Road Safety during Lockdown and after – need for release of road safety protocol

Greetings from Citizen consumer and civic Action Group!

I am writing on behalf of Citizen consumer and civic Action Group (CAG), a 34-year-old non-profit and non-political organisation that works towards protecting citizens' rights in consumer and environmental issues and promoting good governance processes including transparency, accountability and participatory decision-making.

CAG has been working on road safety issues since 2015 and is a member of the Road Safety Network, a body of organizations that seek to promote road safety in India. We have been in regular contact with both, the concerned State government bodies and the Central government agencies, and have been conducting public awareness programmes as well.

Road crashes killed 1,51,417 people in 2018 of which, Tamil Nadu accounted for 12,216. We are deeply concerned that road crashes and traffic violations have continued to put many lives in danger even during the national lockdown. Since March 24th, there have been at least 1,137 crashes nationwide and 274 deaths. Media reports on May 10, noted that 25 people were injured in a crash in Karur district when a lorry and a bus collided. While there has been a dip in the absolute number of crash fatalities, the ratio of deaths to road crashes has remained unchanged.

Risk factors like speeding, driving while fatigued, not wearing helmets, continue to be responsible for fatalities. Speeding on empty roads has been one of the most common reasons for road crash deaths across the country. Pedestrians in both urban areas, as well as on State and National Highways, remain at tremendous risk from speeding vehicles. There is an urgent need to effectively enforce speed limits.

Trustees

Mr. Sriram Panchu (Senior Advocate)

Dr. R. Hema (Associate Professor)

Dr. Suchitra Ramkumar (Doctor and Teacher)

Dr. George Thomas (Orthopedic Surgeon)

Dr. C Rammanohar Reddy (Economist and Editor)

Mr. Kesav Desiraju (IAS Retd.)

Advisors

Ms. Tara Murali (Architect)

Mr. NL Rajah (Senior Advocate)



While we welcome the decision and efforts taken by the Tamil Nadu government to run special trains and buses for ferrying migrant workers, students, and others to their hometowns, we remain concerned about the safety of drivers and passengers on the journeys by road. Recent media reports indicate that driver fatigue combined with speeding has been responsible for recent crashes.

There have been recent reports that migrant workers have begun walking home, including from Tamil Nadu. This is very unfortunate and raises many questions including with regards to their safety while walking on highways that are not constructed for pedestrians. With the empty roads, private vehicles and essential vehicle drivers are liable to speed and drive rashly, endangering themselves as well as migrants who may be walking on the highway.

As the lockdown gets lifted, there will no doubt be a surge in vehicular traffic leading to road crashes and many unnecessary fatalities. Therefore, it is crucial for the Government to devise strategies in advance to ensure that road crashes are minimised. We urge the Government of Tamil Nadu to incorporate issues of road safety into its post-lockdown plan.

We are attaching herewith a set of road safety protocols for your kind consideration. We urge you to follow this or issue similar guidelines to prevent road crashes and deaths/injuries. If you require more information, we'll be happy to discuss any time.

1. **Mitigate Speeding:** To prevent speeding, electronic enforcement, use of GPS/speed governors should be employed wherever possible. Staff training and briefing would be essential to ensure that the driver is not speeding.
2. **Driver Related Procedure:** Government bus drivers and other staff should be briefed and trained about the SOPs and safety precautions. Driving timings should be fixed - not more than 8 hours.
3. **Enforcing the Motor Vehicles Amendment Act 2019:** Violation of the road rules should be acted upon seriously, in particular, speeding, non-compliance with helmet and seatbelt rules, and drunk driving.
4. **Access to Safe Road Infrastructure and Vehicles:** The State Government should create temporary lanes for cyclists and pedestrians on urban roads, State and National Highways to ensure the safety of vulnerable road users dying in road crashes.



5. **Establish & Implement Safety Protocols:** In light of the current Covid-19 pandemic, the State Government should establish a clear health and hygiene protocol (disinfection, social distancing, etc) to be adhered to by government bus services (drivers, conductors, and other staff of both city and intra/inter state buses) as well as norms to be followed by citizens availing themselves of such services. Protocols regarding private vehicles should also be laid out, such as the number of occupants allowed.

We look forward to your prompt action on the matter.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

S. Saroja
Director, Citizen consumer and civic Action Group (CAG)

Copy: Chief Secretary, GoTN
Home Secretary, GoTN
Transport Commissioner, GoTN
Transport Secretary, GoTN
DGP, TN Police
Commissioner, Chennai Police