

COMMUTE-RELATED POLLUTION: KOLKATA SHINES AMONG MEGACITIES

Relevant for: Environment & Disaster Management | Topic: Environmental Degradation - GHGs, Ozone Depletion & Climate Change

An analysis of 14 cities in India, including six mega cities and eight metropolises, on how they fare when it comes to pollution and energy consumption from urban commuting, places Kolkata as the top-performing megacity. Bhopal leads the list on the lowest overall emissions. Delhi and Hyderabad are the two cities that fare at the bottom of the table in terms of pollution and energy use.

'National crisis'

The report titled 'The Urban Commute and How it Contributes to Pollution and Energy', compiled by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), was released in Kolkata on Friday. Anumita Roychowdhury, executive director-research and advocacy, CSE, said air pollution was a national crisis and road transport was the sector showing the highest increase in emission of greenhouse gases.

"Motorisation in India is explosive. Initially, it took 60 years (1951-2008) for India to cross the mark of 105 million registered vehicles. Thereafter, the same number of vehicles was added in a mere six years (2009-15)," Ms. Roychowdhury said.

In the study, with an aggregate of toxic emissions from urban commuting practices, such as particulate matter and nitrogen oxides, the cities were ranked based on calculations of heat trapping (CO₂). The study took two approaches to rank the cities — one based on overall emission and energy consumption and the other on per person trip emissions and energy consumption.

Six megacities (Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore and Hyderabad) and eight metropolitan cities (Bhopal, Lucknow, Jaipur, Chandigarh, Ahmedabad, Pune, Kochi and Vijayawada) were evaluated.

In terms of overall emissions and energy consumption, Bhopal was followed by Vijayawada, Chandigarh and Lucknow. Kolkata, which comes in at the sixth place on overall emissions, won among the six megacities. In fact, smaller cities such as Ahmedabad and Pune ranked below Kolkata for overall emissions.

Delhi ranked at the bottom of the table for overall emission. Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Chennai fared a little better than Delhi.

According to the report, though metropolitan cities scored better than megacities due to lower population, lower travel volume and lower vehicle numbers, they were at risk due to a much higher share of personal vehicle trips.

'Resounding message'

"Kolkata provides a resounding message that despite population growth and rising travel demand, it is possible to contain motorisation with a well established public transport culture,

compact city design, high street density and restricted availability of land for roads and parking,” the report pointed out, comparing Kolkata to Hong Kong and cities in Japan.

Mumbai, the report stated, had the highest GDP but a lower rate of motorisation compared with other megacities, proving that income levels were not the only reason for deciding a population’s dependence on automobiles.

“Both Kolkata and Mumbai have grown with a unique advantage of a public transport spine well integrated with existing land use patterns,” the report said.

Meanwhile, “It [Chennai] was the first city to adopt a non-motorised transport (NMT) policy in 2004 that aims to arrest the decline of walking or cycling by creating a network of footpaths, bicycle tracks and greenways,” the report said.

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