

Pedestrian's the king here

■ The city's first Pedestrian Plaza at Pondy Bazaar offers metro citizens a new experience

SINDHIYA SAMUEL | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH 4

Pedestrian Plaza, an exclusive passage meant for pedestrians and shoppers at Pondy Bazaar in T Nagar, has become a point of attraction for the metro city in less than four months since its launch in November. Young parents walk their toddlers, elders enjoy a cool evening and shoppers shop around without fearing for the vrooming vehicles in the exclusive zone even as the street vendors who have been evacuated from the spot rue the loss of their livelihoods, all thanks to the project.

Developed under the Smart City Mission at approximately Rs 36 crore, the 800-metre long Pedestrian Plaza extends from Thanikachalam Road signal to the Pondy Bazaar police station. As part of the project, traffic to the Panagal Park side is retained after closing the one in the opposite side. Space thus released was used to build walkways on either side of the road. They were smoothly paved and equipped with benches and bollards to prevent two-wheeler invasion. The ramps made movements easier, too.

"My son is four years but only in November last that I walked him to the evergreen shopping hub," Sindhuja, a resident Pondy Bazaar, told *Deccan Chronicle*. "As a child I often shopped at Pondy Bazaar but the road slowly turned unsafe for the elderly and the children. The jam-packed busy bylanes have now become a sight of the past."

The project was a welcome break from the way city roads are designed, she said. "Engineers are trained to design roads for



A bird's eye view of the Pedestrian Plaza at Pondy Bazaar in T Nagar. — DC

vehicles, and not the pedestrians. This project has changed that pattern."

The Chennai corporation, which implemented the project, has ensured that the street is maintained well, allaying the fears of the shop-keepers and the public in the beginning about its upkeep. "Around 50 workers are employed to check on encroachments and unauthorised vehicle parking and keep the place clean," Hari, who runs a garments shop in Pondy Bazaar, said. But the project has created its own problems, too. A section of residents in neighbouring areas claims they have been affected by traffic congestion since the traffic in one side was closed, said Hari.

Raghu, who regulates traffic, agreed. "The traffic has worsened after the plaza was launched," he said. "The cars and bikes

are given slots to park on either side of the already narrowed road, causing a heavy disruption of traffic flow during peak hours. The situation worsens on Sundays." He, however, said it could improve once the multi-level parking station which can accommodate 250 cars and 550 bikes came up.

Roadside vendors are another lot impacted by the project.

"A bazaar isn't same without hawkers," says Vijayalakshmi, who beads jewellery in Pondy Bazaar.

"Our business was affected after we were forced to move into the shopping complex, meant to accommodate the street vendors. Many have now shifted to Usman Road. It is the nature of our people to buy things displayed in the platforms as they pass by. Since we are moved inside the complex, not many climb up the stairs

and purchase our goods."

Whom does the government build 'smart cities' for if they put the livelihood of the common man at stake, Vijayalakshmi asked.

Moorthy, a shopper who is skeptical about such park-like plazas, however, appreciated the use of shuttle carts and said that they would be extremely

useful for elderly and women with kids while travelling within the plaza.

Encouraged by the overall response, the government is understood to be going ahead with the plan to build pedestrian plazas in Nungambakkam, Tondiarpet and Anna Nagar with similar facilities.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL?

- Hassle-free wheelchair passage for the disabled.
- Senior citizens and pedestrian-friendly footpath.
- Street furniture-like seating arrangements

SIGNAGES

- Children play area
- Greenery
- Smart toilet
- Separate ducts for telephone and electricity cables
- Stormwater drain on either side
- Bus shelter
- Ornamental streetlights
- Street art like statue, fountain
- Pedestrian crossing at regular intervals

WHEN IT ALL STARTED

- **2011:** Concept of a pedestrian plaza in T. Nagar was first proposed in the T. Nagar Redevelopment Plan prepared by Jones Lang LaSalle. Oasis Designs Inc. was appointed by the Greater Chennai Corporation to design the plaza.
- **2014:** A development bank expressed interest in funding the project.
- **2018:** Commencement of Construction
- **2019:** Plaza inaugurated.