

How India moves: The average speed on the roads of Dhanbad, India’s ‘Coal Capital’, halved a decade ago



Her plan is not unique. Many urban commuters are abandoning public transport not only because it’s costly, but also because it’s inconvenient. For a city that is often referred to as a global IT capital and the ‘Silicon Valley of India’, this trend is troubling. Bengaluru today has 2.55 million cars, according to Karnataka's Transport department data, as of April 30, 2025. The car ownership has increased from two million cars in 2020-21.

In 2024, the city topped India’s list for traffic gridlocks, with an average speed of just 18 kilometres per hour during rush hour. This was calculated by a Dutch navigation technology firm TomTom. However, despite this, city residents were rushing out to buy more private vehicles.

Apart from cars, the number of two-wheelers in the city also increased from 6.7 million in 2020-21 to 8.3 million as of April 30, 2025. In total, the number of vehicles on the city’s roads increased from 10 million in 2020-21 to 12.4 million in April 2025. These numbers may be underestimated as many migrant residents opt for registering their vehicle in their own cities as Karnataka has one of the highest road taxes in the country.

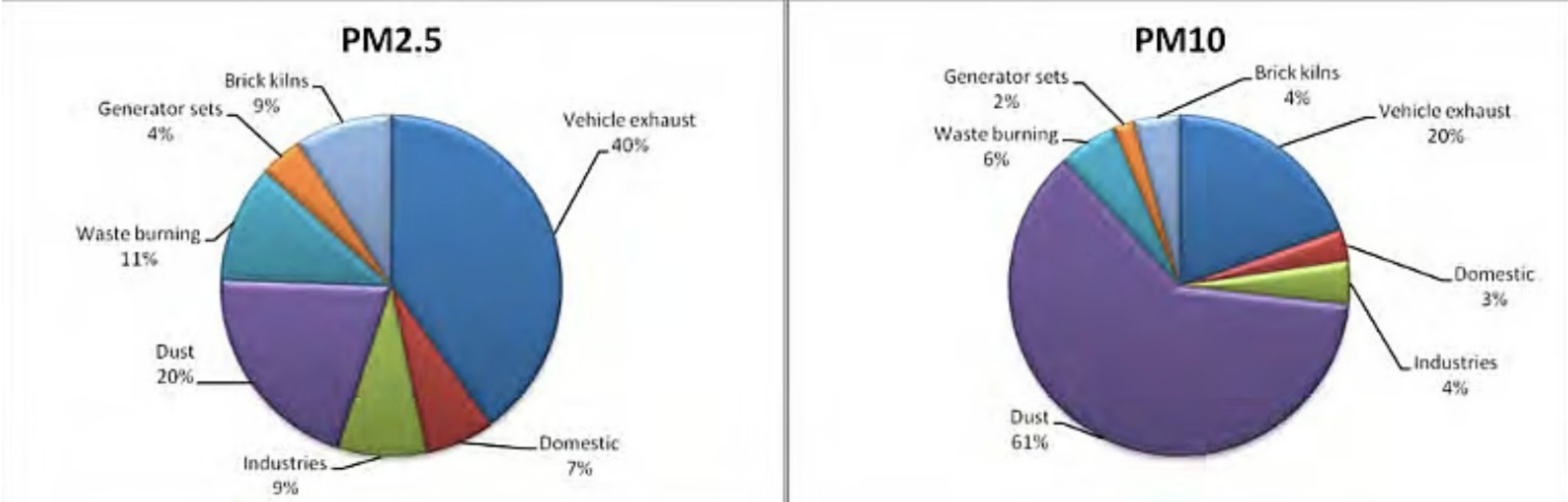
The increase in car and two-wheeler ownership is because of the huge gap between demand for travel and supply of infrastructure to satisfy that demand, said **Ashish Verma**, professor at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) Bengaluru, and convenor of IISC’s Sustainable Transportation Lab that works on transportation research and policy.

Contrastingly, the number of buses in the city remain more or less stagnant at 0.1 million between this period. The Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC), which provides bus services in the city, has failed to expand its fleet size and increase the ridership in over a decade. While the number of buses in 2011-12 was 6,064, now it is 6,835, as per BMTC data.

Air quality nosedives

More private vehicles also mean more fuel consumption. Bengaluru stands second in fuel consumption in the country only behind Delhi, according to data given in government’s own ‘Comprehensive Mobility Plan 2020’. The petrol consumption in Bengaluru is about 70,000 kilolitres a month on an average, according to Indian Oil.

As per a 2019 research paper *Air quality, emissions and source contributions analysis for Greater Bengaluru region of India*, vehicle exhaust and on-road dust resuspension account for 56 per cent and 70 per cent of total PM2.5 and PM10 emissions respectively.



Source: Comprehensive Mobility Plan for Bengaluru, 2020

While Bengaluru boasts of one of the fastest-expanding metro systems in India, entire pockets of residential zones are still off the grid. While ownership of private vehicles is fast expanding, the operational metro network has just reached 77 km since the development of its first phase started around 14 years ago in 2011. “In the same period, the population has more than doubled. So, there is a massive short supply of public transport,” said Verma.

The delays in metro construction, while crushing whatever optimism commuters once had, has in fact aggravated traffic snarls. And residents say that even the proposed metro routes are ill-conceived and will not be of much help to them.

Criticising the low ridership of Bengaluru metro, a parliamentary standing committee report presented in Lok Sabha in 2022 had said that the actual average daily ridership was only 96,000 then, as compared to average ridership of 1.85 million required for breakeven.

Public transport: Source of frustration

For Sai Krishna Tatta and Prem Kumar, both government employees and living in different parts of the city, the daily trip to work is less of a routine and more of a well-planned battle. While Bengaluru dreams of becoming a smart city, the basics of mobility infrastructure are warped.

One of the main challenges for both is that the metro route from their areas will first take them farther away from their destination before looping back, requiring multiple line changes. For both, there is no shortest option to the office when it comes to public transport.

Tatta, a resident of HSR Layout in city’s southeast, covers a distance of 14 km through his car due to a distinct lack of better options. “There’s no direct metro from HSR Layout to Vidhana Soudha,” he explained. “Even when the proposed metro line is completed, I’ll have to change trains twice or thrice. I’ll have to take a metro line going away from my office, then switch to other trains. That just doesn’t make sense.”

He drives his own car instead, and carpools with two or three others and spends around one hour on average and sometimes an hour and a half each way.

At certain junctions, like a particular stretch on Hosur Road, which is the key road to scores of IT companies, he spends 10 minutes crawling through just 100 metres of traffic. “It’s chaos. A three-lane road becomes two because of bottlenecks and rule-breaking,” he said. The city was ranked third slowest in travel time, after Barranquilla in Colombia and Kolkata, in the global traffic index for 2024 by TomTom.