

CONCEPT NOTE

Parallel Session:
**Right to Walk – Creating Safe, Walkable and
Well-Connected Cities**

National Urban Conclave
24-25 October 2026

1. Background

Walking is not a peripheral activity; it lies at the heart of urban life and mobility, the universal interface between people and the city itself. They function as shared public spaces where walking, cycling, local livelihoods, public health, climate resilience and social inclusion come together. Walking remains the single largest individual transport mode across Indian cities, commanding 31 per cent of all urban trips, which expands to 48 per cent modal split when combined with cycling¹, making walking the most prevalent mode of commuting; overwhelmingly evident through a gender lens, as nine out of every ten trips made by women in urban India are undertaken on foot or via public transport. However, private motorised vehicles, which represent a mere 27 per cent of total urban trips, consume 75 per cent of available street right-of-way¹, creating a spatial imbalance in the street space allocation. This disproportionate allocation deprives pedestrians of continuous, safe, and universally accessible walking infrastructure, restricting physical access and undermining public health, climate resilience, and economic productivity.

The consequences of this imbalance are most visible in the lack of safety and accessibility of everyday journeys. Rather than being limited to major transport corridors, road crashes are also closely associated with these skewed everyday urban spaces, where the surrounding street environment plays an important role in shaping safety. Notably, 31.7 per cent of crashes occur on residential streets, 6.1 per cent at pedestrian crossings, and 7.1 per cent near educational institutions². These conditions highlight the need to move beyond conventional mobility planning towards a people-centred approach to street design, where pedestrian safety, universal accessibility and safe and orderly movement are treated as integral components of the transport system.

Policy interventions for walking and non-motorised transport are already emerging across different levels of governance. The National Urban Transport Policy 2006 recognised the need to mainstream non-motorised transport within urban mobility planning, while several cities have subsequently introduced their own pedestrian safety, NMT and healthy streets initiatives. These efforts have contributed to improvements in pedestrian infrastructure, street design, traffic management and active mobility in different urban contexts.

Furthermore, emphasising and recognising the importance of pedestrian movement, the Hon'ble Supreme Court and the Punjab and Haryana High Court³ have provided multiple directions on elevating pedestrian safety from a planning objective to a constitutional obligation; the judiciary has provided a legal mandate to transition from automobile-centric planning to democratic, human-centric street design, mandating safer

¹ https://www.itdp.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/CS-Policy-Framework_Web-Version-compressed.pdf

² <https://www.ncrb.gov.in/uploads/files/1ADSIPublication-2024.pdf>

³ <https://www.scobserver.in/journal/sc-directs-union-to-frame-pan-india-guidelines-for-pedestrian-safety/>

and universally accessible footpaths. The recent Hon'ble Supreme Court 2026 judgment too, affirmed the right to walk on safe footpaths as integral to the fundamental rights under Articles 19(1)(d) and 21⁴.

Building on these efforts, there is now an opportunity to bring individual policies, projects and city-level initiatives together within a common, integrated framework for pedestrian mobility. Such an approach can strengthen the linkages between street design, land-use planning, public transport, traffic management, road safety, accessibility and enforcement, enabling coordinated action towards safer, more inclusive and people-centric streets.

This presents an opportunity to chart a clear way forward: strengthening pedestrian-friendly urban environments in metropolitan cities while adapting and extending proven approaches to Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, which are emerging as important drivers of India's future urban growth. The session to be conducted under this theme will focus on how existing efforts can be better integrated, scaled and contextualised across different city typologies, while identifying the actions, institutional mechanisms and implementation pathways required to embed safe, accessible and inclusive pedestrian mobility as a core component of India's urban development agenda.

As our cities transform to become the vibrant, economic powerhouses of this century, we must actively re-engineer and re-activate the fundamental spatial assets that power daily urban life.

2. Objective

This session aims to validate and operationalise national and city-level implementation strategies for pedestrian mobility through multi-stakeholder deliberations.

- Institutionalising context-sensitive design: Standardising continuous, barrier-free, and universally accessible footpaths across all categories of urban centres, including existing metros and upcoming metros.
- Reimagining the Right-of-Way and Transit-oriented Development: Integrating land use, catchment area planning, and transit influence zone design to prioritise active mobility over private vehicular throughput.
- Coexistence of livelihoods and public realm: Establishing spatial management models that accommodate micro-informality and street vending while preserving pedestrian passage.
- Unlocking scalable urban financing: Leveraging innovative financing modes, market finance, municipal bonds, and central government mechanisms such as the Urban Challenge Fund, to accelerate pedestrian infrastructure delivery.
- Citizen-centric governance mechanisms that need to be adopted for context-specific designs – using innovative mechanisms

⁴ https://api.sci.gov.in/supremecourt/2024/42514/42514_2024_3_1501_71888_Judgement_19-Jun-2026.pdf

3. Guiding Questions

- Identification of priority areas for improving the integration of pedestrian mobility within urban planning and transport systems.
- A set of transferable lessons to guide pedestrian mobility planning in Tier-II and Tier-III cities.
- Indicator-based KPI frameworks for tracking pedestrian safety, modal split, and infrastructure quality.
- A practical framework for coordinated implementation, monitoring and scaling of pedestrian and NMT interventions.
- Guidance for cities to access central assistance such as the Urban Challenge Fund, and innovative financing model adoption for active mobility projects.