

Why is PMPML still without a cashless ticket system?

THE TRANSPORT UTILITY IS LEAKING CRORES IN TAXPAYER MONEY. A QR CODE-BASED PAYMENT PROCESS WAS PART OF ITS RECOVERY PLAN AFTER COVID-19. THERE'S STILL NO SIGHT OF IT

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In mid-2021, as public transport in Pune started to resume after waves and waves of Covid, the PMPML found itself in a crisis. The pandemic had severely impacted its ridership. On its buses, many seats were empty.

Weeks later, transport officials announced a recovery plan. Among the ideas, for 12 lakh PMPML customers, was an impressive, hassle-free cashless ticket-payment system. PMPML conductors would have hand-held ticket-vending machines with QR codes for passengers to scan. The QR codes would also be pasted on the back of seats, improving convenience and speed of collection.

DEEP DIVE

But two years on, there is still no sign this cashless system. During this time, Mumbai's BEST (with a fleet of more than 3,000 buses) and MSRTC (with over 1,000 buses) went on to develop their own cashless payment systems. MSRTC tickets can even be booked online.

It's also not as if PMPML had to develop a completely new system from the ground up. In 2017, then PMPML CMD Tukaram Mundhe had introduced the 'PMP e-connect' app, which had several features, including a cashless ticket-purchasing system for commuters. However, Mundhe was transferred after just 10 months on the job. And with his departure, died an already developed app.

Passengers were stunned to hear the service had a cashless app ready to be deployed six years ago. "What's the point of spending taxpayer money on services that never see the light of day?" asked Agnesh Jadhav, a regular commuter. He added: "Why couldn't PMPML just revive 'PMP e-connect'? This would have been better than trying to develop an entirely new system. PMPML should learn from BEST, which has a very smooth and efficient payment



Ashish Gupta



No more scouring for loose change



The Centre has been promoting 'Digital India'. It makes sense for buses to have cashless payment. Tickets are cheap and finding the right change can be hard. Cashless payment will definitely help — **Omkar Bagul** | STUDENT



Cashless app good for small amounts



Many people now prefer digital payments for small and big amounts. PMPML's proposed cashless system will benefit passengers. A system similar to BEST is the way to go — **Nitesh Kamble** | STUDENT



Rush-hour commute will be smoother



Cashless payment is a convenience. During rush-hour, one will not have to spend time searching for money. A phone is a lot more accessible. It's also a great way to keep track of money being spent on travel — **Priti** | HOMEMAKER

Both BEST in Mumbai and the MSRTC have successfully launched cashless ticket-payment systems for their passengers. It's only PMPML that's still struggling to get an app off the ground

system in place." It's unclear why 'PMP e-connect' was put in storage. But momentum has been building towards the new system, albeit intermittently. Last month, PMPML CMD Om Prakash Bakoria said the QR code system was nearly ready and a trial run would be carried out on one bus. The trial never happened. In an earlier conversation with TOI, Bakoria had said

the system was awaiting final approvals from Software Technology Parks of India (STPI), which approves all such transaction processes. He said: "They had found some bugs that could've compromised security. So, we did not get the final certificate. But we're hopeful the certificate will come soon. After that, we'll train our conductors and carry out a trial run. We hope to launch the system

by next month." TOI attempted to reach out to Bakoria for an update on the trial. But PMPML officials said he's away on training. Satish Gawane, PMPML's traffic manager said: "Three buses will have the system installed. But it's hard to say when. It's in process." A source from PMPML said it's still early days. "There has to be a bank in between for cashless transac-

tions and currently, only discussions are on. The same can be said about PMPML's tie-up with Google for bus tracking. There's certainly money that will have to be paid to these agencies. The services are not free," the source said, adding that both the cashless system and live-tracking are far from ready. "The planned trial run for the QR code-based system is still a month away, at least. Its launch also depends on how quickly conductors adapt to it," the source said.

"PMPML has always had a problem gauging commuter trends," said Sanjay Shitole, of PMP Pravasi Manch.

"Many people nowadays prefer cashless payment. If PMPML was serious about passenger count, its new system would've been launched days ago," Shitole said.

In the last financial year, PMPML showed operational losses of Rs 673 crore. Its daily ridership is still between 10-12 lakhs. The passenger count hasn't gone up in five years.



Will we ever swim in Pune's rivers again?

Mehak Malhotra

That was a very sincere question posed to our civic officials by a citizen who was part of a recent panel discussion on river rejuvenation. The programme was attended by officials from PMC and the water resource department. There was a very healthy debate on the topic with many people presenting their points of view. Yet that one simple question stayed with me.



Imagine a wound on your arm. Would you apply makeup around it to make it look better? No, you wouldn't. You would choose to seek medical care to heal the wound from the inside. So, why are we allowing superficial beautification of Pune's rivers, when they are deeply ailing from within?

Pune's riverfront development scheme is riddled with planning flaws. The project, projected as a river rejuvenation exercise, will actually concrete areas around the river, narrowing it and affecting its ecosystem while creating greater flooding risks. There is no plan for river cleaning, sewage treatment and protection of natural springs that flow into the river.

The poor state of Pune's rivers — Mula and Mutha — is not a secret. But ask elders in the family, and they will tell you of the time, around 50 years ago, when citizens used to hold swimming competitions in Pune's rivers.

ENVIRONMENT



A healthy river's biodiversity is equipped with natural mechanisms to clean and rejuvenate itself. The poor state of Pune's rivers — Mula and Mutha — is not a secret. But ask elders in the family, and they will tell you of the time, around 50 years ago, when citizens used to hold swimming competitions in Pune's rivers.

ian trees on the banks will solve the problem? Since we're talking about trees, did you know that the area along the riverbanks is a riparian zone — a deemed forested area under the Forest Protection Act and a natural habitat for endemic flora and fauna? Then how have blanket permissions been given to cut and transplant over 7,500 trees along a 44km stretch of the riverfront?

Alarming, when transplanted, these trees have a survival rate of just 15-20%.

Who is responsible for all this? The tree authority I would imagine. However, the tenure of the PMC tree authority expired in February 2022, and no head has been appointed since then. Therefore, the default head of the tree authority is the PMC commissioner. It's something like the CEO of a company also being the head of the audit committee. With such governance systems, how can citizens trust that their city administrators are taking the right decisions?

Transplanting trees that have been cut does not negate the loss of the original trees. The trees are part of a living and thriving ecosystem that, as a whole, plays an important role in carbon sequestration.

The riverfront development scheme is a classic example of missing the woods for the trees.

— The writer works as a volunteer with Jeevitnadi, Living River Foundation

MAILBOX

Abusive graffiti near schools

I'm a resident of Pune. It really upsets me to see young people damaging public signboards. For example, there are many of these 'I love...' signs that have come up across the city. Many of these signs have been erected using public money. But they are being defaced by people who scratch names and even broken hearts on them. The problem is not limited to these 'I love...' signs. Boards erected outside schools have abuses and filthy words written on them with spray paint. There's a school in Wakad that has banners on its walls with abuses written on them. The students see that graffiti. I request the civic bodies and the police to keep up effective patrolling at night, to discourage such acts. We must find a way to catch and penalise mischief-mongers who're spraying the walls with abusive messages — **Lucas Roy**



No space to walk on Baner road

This photograph shows how pedestrians are being forced to walk on the main carriageway at Ganraj chowk, Baner Road. Metro construction and the many encroachments on footpaths here have left no space for people to walk safely. What about the elderly? What about the children? We are all just a few feet from passing cars and trucks. I request the authorities in Pune to pay close attention to pedestrian safety. The safety of those on foot should be priority before barriers are erected for any type of construction — **Shivaji Mookherjee**

by cyber criminals. Many people think twice before buying something online or applying for a job. What has gone wrong here? We Indians are careful people. Why are we suddenly taking the Internet so lightly? Why are we not cross-checking a job opportunity with family or friends before applying or before making payments? I fear there's a component of carelessness among people who've lost money to crooks online. Schools have started sessions on internet-safety awareness. But what about adults. This is my appeal to anyone reading this: The Internet can be a dangerous place and it's really up to us to stay safe — **Sohini Mahapatra**

No quality of life on Porwal Road

I'm writing to highlight the problems being faced by residents who live along the Porwal-Lohegaon road. The facilities here are pathetic and quality of life is way below the general standards of a cosmopolitan city like Pune. The roads are terrible shape. There's a lot of noise

Shocked to read about G20 facelift

I was shocked by the photos published of PMC's beautification works carried out in January for G20 (Ahead of June's G20, citizens call for fixes instead of just facelifts in Pune, May 7). Paint is not cheap. Why should PMC spend money painting walls, when several stretches of footpath are begging for attention? As a taxpayer, I don't want money spent on painting flowers and trees on walls. This money should be used to create more parking spaces for motorists and better footpaths for senior citizens. The PMC should also release details of how much it has spent on this G20 beautification — **Vikram Desai**

To tackle city's waste problem, let's target its 'garbage vulnerable points'

SEVERAL LARGE NEIGHBOURHOODS TODAY HAVE A CHRONIC DUMPING SPOT

Mangesh Khirsagar

All of us know of places in the city where mounds of trash are a permanent feature. Even when our municipal vehicles collect the waste from these spots, more garbage somehow reappears. Such chronic garbage spots — also called garbage vulnerable points, or GVPs — are a stark reminder of how much more work we all have to do when it comes to keeping our city clean.

Usually, a corner of a road, an empty public space, an unguarded private space etc. can turn into a GVP for a range of reasons.

MY SPACE

People delinked from the garbage-collection network — residents of a new housing society or staff of a commercial establishment — get into this habit of throwing their dry and wet waste at these locations. The garbage keeps collecting and the entire area



Aditya Wankar

PRIME CANDIDATE FOR A CLEAN-UP

This particular spot, along the Pune-Bangalore highway at Warje (near Vadgaon bridge) is a prime example of a 'garbage vulnerable point'. It has dead animals, waste from roadside food stalls and household refuse from nearby homes.

"The smell is just terrible. You can't walk past this place without covering your nose. People have been dumping waste here for years and I have never seen the municipal staff removing the garbage," said Sumita Chikane, a passerby.

The Pune Municipal Corporation has estimated there are at least 600 'garbage vulnerable points' across the city today, all in need of immediate attention

ple really. If waste generated by local residents is thrown in the open at a particular spot, which, despite frequent cleaning, remains filthy, then it is a chronic spot. A chronic spot is like a magnet, where garbage attracts more garbage. People

of garden waste or construction debris at a location does not automatically make it a chronic spot. However, it can become one, if people start dumping household garbage on the accumulated garden/construction waste.

first step is to identify where and when the waste is generated. Whether it is garbage thrown by people or by hawkers. Early mornings and late evenings are the peak hours. Citizens should not think these GVPs cannot be tackled.

this next step to happen, there must be coordination between waste collectors and local area residents. This will need both time and effort.

GVPs are the prime indicators of broken garbage collection networks. If we tackle