



Clean Air News

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 7

JUL 2012 (JUL 1-JUL 31)

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3 Years on, Vehicle Test Centre not in Operation

By Samik Kharel

As the number of vehicles rises steadily in the Kathmandu Valley, chances of opening the proposed Vehicle Fitness Test Centre at Teku still seem nowhere near. Although the government had promised its full-fledged operation by 2009, the high-tech vehicle inspection centre hasn't seen the light of day even after the Ministry of Finance (MoF) recently allocated an additional budget of Rs 17 million.

Chandra Man Shrestha, director general of the Department of Transport Management (DoTM), said the centre had been delayed due to inefficient contractors. "The completion of the centre was halted because the contractors hired to build it were incompetent and failed to work according to the contract. When the contract deadline passed, they started creating more problems." He also said that the machines imported for the centre were awaiting official documentation.

"The other problem is that we are waiting for ISO certification for the machines. Only after we receive the documents can we begin their functioning, as required by law."

The government initially invested Rs 40 million in the construction of the test centre. An extra Rs 17 million was recently approved to bring it into operation. Civil and mechanical costs have been approximately Rs 2 million each.

While Shrestha claimed that the centre will be fully operational within the next two months, he is worried about the lack of expert manpower required to properly operate the centre. "We haven't yet trained anyone to operate the centre and its sophisticated machines properly. But we do have plans to send a few staff for proper training to the companies that we imported the machines from and also bring in a few experts from abroad for training," said Shrestha.

With the centre, the government plans to reduce pollution in the Capital and replace irritable and noisy vehicle horns with ones that comply with international standards. Shrestha believes the centre will ensure better rides for public commuters and will decrease road accidents. "Right now, the checking of vehicle conditions is irregular. The centre will use automatic machines that give out printed results, severely decreasing irregularity and corruption." The DoTM plans to enforce regular vehicle check-ups twice a year, as mentioned in the Vehicle and Transportation Management Act. Vehicles brought into the centre will go through various tests for pollution, engine status, external appearance, horns, chassis and all-round fitness.

Source: <http://www.ekantipur.com/July 08, 2012>

Experts' Pill to Cut Down Kathmandu Air Pollution

Though Kathmandu Valley is said to be one of the most polluted cities of Asia, it still has time for improvement in terms of air pollution by focusing on its huge base of zero-emission non-motorised and sustainable public transport, according to experts.

Sharing their views during a briefing session on 'Challenge of air quality and mobility management in South Asian cities' in the Capital on Friday,

experts from the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), a leading research and advocacy body based in New Delhi, India, said Kathmandu should not repeat the same mistake that Delhi and many other cities have made by focusing on road widening, building flyovers and facilitating personal mobility through cars.

The programme was jointly organised by the CSE and the Nepal Forum for

Environmental Journalists.

Various studies have shown that more than 63 per cent of the daily travel trips in Kathmandu are still carried by buses.

Similarly, pedestrians and cyclists together meet close to a quarter of the daily travel demand in Kathmandu.

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“These both are low polluting and low carbon mobility paradigm that the world is trying to achieve today to be more sustainable. Kathmandu must sustain this strength,” said Anumita-Roychowdhury, executive director and head of the CSE’s air pollution control unit at the programme.

Due to high particulate matter concentrations in Kathmandu, increased rate of mortality and various health complications, including air-borne diseases

and skin diseases, are taking a toll on the public health.

Though Nepal has done some positive interventions to reduce air pollution, including the implementation of zero-emissions Euro I standard vehicles in 2003 and a ban on brick kiln, the city needs to do more to control pollution, expert said.

Some measures, shared by the experts, to control air pollution and traffic congestion in Kathmandu are scaling up

and accelerating bus transport reforms, integrating public transport and non-motorised transport, building pedestrian infrastructure and strengthening ways to control emissions of vehicles.

Source: <http://www.ekantipur.com/> July 31, 2012

Cycle Rally for Urban Greenery and Bicycle Infrastructures in the River Corridors of Kathmandu Valley

Clean Energy Nepal, Kathmandu Cycle City 2020, NGO Federation for Environment Conservation (NGOFEC) and Solid Waste Management Association (SWMA) organized a cycle rally on July 21 to demand bicycle infrastructures and promote urban greener and clean spaces in river corridors of Kathmandu Valley. Around 200 cyclists participated in the event.

Letter to Hello Sarkar for Cycle Lane-

Clean Energy Nepal submitted letter to Hello Sarkar, Prime Minister Office and demanding cycle lanes in the widened roads. CEN also submitted letters to other concerned agencies to promote cycling by building better cycling infrastructures in the valley.

Please [download the letter here](#).



Photo Courtesy: Clean Energy Nepal

Kathmandu Dialogue Air Quality and Transportation Challenge in South Asia: An Agenda for Action

The Clean Air and Sustainable Transport Programme of the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) organized the Nepal Country Workshop on Air Quality and Sustainable Transportation Challenge in South Asian Cities in collaboration with the Ministry of Physical Planning, Works and Transport Management, Government of Nepal in Kathmandu on July 26, 2012. This event is part of the ongoing effort to enable region level dialogue on the critical issues of transport management for clean air and energy security in the South Asia region and also find solutions to the scary air pollution challenge and the mobility crisis facing the South Asian cities today. This is an initiative to engage with the policy makers and concerned stakeholders of these cities to deepen public understanding, strengthen the policy action on air pollution and urban mobility and also share experiences and lessons to address critical issues of common concerns and look at a range of strategies from Indian cities like Delhi to chart the future course of action and also act upon its immense strength to achieve sustainable mobility in our cities

The workshop brought together a wide spectrum of stakeholders including policy makers from concerned departments, experts, academia, civil society and industry representatives who are involved with the implementation of the clean air, transportation and mobility related policies in Nepal. The high level panel that addressed the gath-

ering included the Secretary, Ministry of Physical Planning, Works and Transport Management; Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology; Commissioner, Kathmandu Valley Development Authority; Director General, Department of Transport Management; Executive Officer, Kathmandu Metropolitan City Office; Senior Public Health Administrator and Coordinator of the Health Sector Reform Section, Ministry of Health and Population; Deputy Inspector General, Metropolitan Traffic Police Division. The panel also included air pollution, health and transport regulators, experts, academia and also from UN Habitat South Asia and Clean Energy Nepal.

Delhi and Kathmandu both are rapidly growing cities in the South Asian region and face serious concerns about the likely adverse impact of motorisation. The intense discussions focused on the key policy issues that can help both the cities manage this growing menace by understanding the emerging learning curve at the early stages of motorisation. Though each city will have to address the unique local challenges and potential and work according to its own imperatives simultaneously, Indian experiences on first generation action in cities can be used to inform action in other South Asian cities which are facing similar challenges. For Kathmandu and Delhi, maintaining urban air quality and protecting their sustainable urban commuting practices are some of the toughest challenges. Delhi, while having made

some significant strides in meeting air quality challenges, has slipped and made terrible mistakes as well. Kathmandu still has a chance to plan differently. Its strength remains in its huge base of zero-emission non-motorised and sustainable public transport. All it has to do is to recognize and act upon this immense advantage and strength.

The discussion on action strategy focused on public transport improvement, walkability, technology roadmap, and travel demand management measures.

Source: <http://www.cseindia.org> July 26, 2012

Treacherous traffic

By Binod Ghimire

With a few hundred casualties every month, Nepal's road safety record remains poor at best. Traffic rule violations are considered the main cause for concern. The poor condition of the roads, highways and vehicles, lack of stringent requirements for driving licences and insufficient number of traffic police are also responsible for the numerous road accidents.

Though the government has long imposed over 100 percent customs duty on vehicles, contributing a lot to the country's revenue collection, roads are not being improved and widened in accordance with the increasing number of motorcycles, cars, buses, trucks and so on.

An economic survey published two weeks ago paints a worrisome picture of the country's road network. Only 245 km of roads were added in the 2011-12 fiscal year, an increment of just 1.05 percent from last fiscal year. This tiny addition brings the total length of blacktopped roads to 9,917 km, gravel

roads to 5,715 km and earthen roads to 7,822 km. While the road network remains stagnant, vehicle imports increased by 8.6 percent in the same fiscal year, increasing pressure on the already poor roads, according to the survey. The number of vehicles per one kilometre of road has increased by around 4 percent to 55 by mid-March from last year. Records at the Department of Transport Management show 1.28 million vehicles are plying just 23,454 km of roads across the country.

The scenario gets more grim in the Kathmandu Valley. According to the traffic police, vehicle flow in the Valley is more than double the infrastructure capacity at hand. In the last fiscal year, 420,000 motorcycles and 137,000 four-wheelers had been registered here alone.

In 1994, when the total length of roads in the Valley was just 1,319 km, there were 94,000 vehicles. In the past 17 years, there has been a five-fold increase in the number of vehicles while existing roads have only been expanded by 116 km.

"The increasing vehicle flow is exerting huge pressure on traffic police, contributing to the number of road accidents," says SP DevBahadur Bohara, spokesperson at the Metropolitan Traffic Police Division (MTPD).

Another major factor that contributes to the spate of accidents is the skills and coherence of drivers. Though there are formal hurdles to getting a driver's licence, these are easily circumvented by corruption rampant in licensing. Despite calls from various sectors to curb corruption and effectively manage licence issuing process, the government has yet to make any changes to this effect.

MTPD records show that there are a total of 1,065 traffic police in the Valley, while a district outside the Capital has around 10 to a few dozen traffic personnel, depending on the traffic flow there.

Source: <http://www.ekantipur.com> July 26, 2012

Nepal: Road Traffic Accidents on the Rise

Some 130 major accidents and thousands of minor ones are reported every day in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, says the country's Traffic Directorate. At this rate, the roads are as deadly as the decade-long civil war that ended in 2006 after killing almost 18,000 people.

Rajju Shakya, 19, was driving her scooter to university in the capital last year. "There was a turning point at the junction. I switched on my sidelight and waited. Something hit from behind and I can't remember anything else," she said. Shakya lost both her legs below the knee as a result.

"The road traffic accident rate is frightening... The number of vehicles is increasing... The roads are narrow, and we don't have enough space to expand these roads," said Ashim Bajracharya, a senior lecturer in the architecture and urban planning department at Tribhuvan University's Institute of Engineering, located in the capital.

The World Health Organization's (WHO) most recent Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study reported road traffic accidents as one of the fastest growing "epidemics" in the Southeast

Asian region.

Most of the world's road fatalities occur in low and middle-income countries, which have less registered vehicles, according to WHO.

The growing number of vehicles in Kathmandu has far outstripped road capacity, resulting in congestion that was fatal at times, Bajracharya said.

"The accident rate is particularly high among teenagers, so we have decided to submit a proposal to change the legal age to drive two-wheeled vehicles from 16 to 18," Ganesh Raj Rai, Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of the Traffic Directorate, told IRIN. The directorate is working with the Higher Secondary Schools' Association Nepal to reach teenager drivers.

A UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) report in 2011 estimated that road traffic accidents in Nepal had increased fourfold in the last decade, leading to 1,734 fatalities nationwide in 2009-10.

Almost half of the people who die in road accidents are pedestrians, cyclists, or people on motor scooters and motorbikes, and many studies indicate that this proportion can be

higher in poorer countries.

Nepal has built about 7,000 kilometres of roads nationwide in the past decade, according to the World Bank, but this still leaves more than half the population without access to all-weather roads.

Although the Traffic Directorate is implementing an accelerated road-building campaign, there is little awareness or information about traffic rules and road safety, which is part of problem.

"A new six-lane [13km] highway has been built in between Kathmandu and Bhaktapur [where] a large number of accidents were reported in less than a year. The government does not make the public aware about its new plans and this is where the problem resides," said Kichah Chitrakar, chief executive of a local private engineering company, Development E-fort Nepal. The Traffic Directorate is planning to introduce road safety education in schools, and said it is making awareness campaigns a priority.

Source: <http://www.irinnews.org/> July 27, 2012

More than 600,000 Households Get Pollution Free Stoves

While more than 80 percent of the people in the country still depend on traditional cooking methods fraught with serious consequences to health due to indoor air pollution, the center for alternative energy promotion center (AEPC) has shared a good news that at least 621,826 households are now free from such risks as they have been provided improved cooking stoves (IPS).

Speaking at a press meet in the capital on Monday Dr Govind Raj Pokhrel, executive director of AEPC said that the center aims to install the mud and metallic IPS in additional 600,000 households throughout the country

within the next 5 years.

Interestingly, if the pace does not accelerate, it might take another 20 years to make the entire country free of traditional stoves. The national development index 2011 shows that 3 million households in the country follow traditional cooking method.

Strikingly, the world health organization (WHO) ranks indoor air pollution as the fourth main culprit for deaths in developing countries and adds that 7,500 in Nepal die due to indoor air pollution alone while thousands suffer from different related diseases.

Women and children are the most badly affected due to indoor pollution as they remain close to the kitchen for longer hours.

According to Pokhrel, with the instillation of the improved stoves 50 VDCs of 22 districts can now be declared indoor air pollution free households. "It is a significant achievement but more needs to be done in this regard. We plan to install at least 100,000 improved cooking stoves every year for the next 5 years," he said.

Source: <http://www.myrepublica.com> July 16, 2012

Cut Air Pollution, Buy Time to Slow Climate Change: US

By Alister Doyle

Cutting soot and other air pollutants could help "buy time" in the fight against climate change, a senior U.S. official said on Tuesday as seven nations joined a Washington-led plan.

Air pollution, from sources ranging from wood-fired cooking stoves in Africa to cars in Europe, may be responsible for up to six million deaths a year worldwide and is also contributing to global warming, the U.N. Environment Programme (UNEP) said.

Seven countries -- Britain, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy and Jordan -- formally joined the U.S.-led Climate and Clean Air Initiative, bringing the total of members to about 20 since the plan was launched in February.

"If we are able to do this we could really buy time in the context of the global problem to combat climate change," Jonathan Pershing, U.S. deputy special envoy for climate change,

told a telephone news briefing from Paris.

Pershing said that time was "desperately" needed to slow global warming. Unlike other developed nations, the United States has not passed laws to cut greenhouse gas emissions despite proposed cuts by President Barack Obama.

Pershing said that Washington was in talks trying to attract more nations to the air pollution plan, including China and India which are the number one and three emitters of greenhouse gases respectively, with the United States in second.

The U.S.-led plan in Paris focuses on limiting soot, heat-trapping methane, ground level ozone and HFC gases. Soot, for instance, can speed the melt of Arctic ice when it lands as a dark dusting that soaks up more heat and thaws ice.

By contrast, U.N. plans for fighting climate change focus mainly on carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas released by burning

fossil fuels that are blamed for causing more droughts, floods, wildfires and rising sea levels.

The U.N. Environment Programme, which is a partner with the U.S. initiative, said that success could reduce the projected rise in global temperatures from a build-up of greenhouse gases by 0.5 degree Celsius (0.9 Fahrenheit) by 2050.

By 2030, fast action could also prevent millions of premature deaths and avoid the annual loss of 30 million tons of crops, it said.

Pershing said that the small amount mobilized so far in pilot projects -- \$13 million -- could catalyze wider change. And many projects paid for themselves in greater efficiency.

Karen Luken, of the C40 Partnership and the Clinton Climate Initiative, said that exploiting methane from trash decomposing in a landfill in Mexico City had reduced greenhouse gases and was providing energy for 35,000 homes.

Source: <http://www.reuters.com/> July 24, 2012

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Building Partnership for Clean Air

Clean Air Network Nepal (CANN) is a network of organizations and professionals involved in air quality management in Nepal. The goal of CANN is to increase the ability of professionals and other interested stakeholders to effectively address the problems of air pollution in Nepal. We encourage you to join hands with us to expand our campaign for clean and better Air.

CANN is a Country Network of Clean Air Initiative for Asian Cities and hosted by Clean Energy Nepal.

For more information: www.cen.org.np/cann
www.cleanairinitiative.org

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