Step out at any hour of the day and the roads are chock-a-block with traffic... the only respite people have is the much-awaited Hyderabad metro rail project, which promises to put an end to all traffic woes. But is the project a reality and is the government actually doing its job? Putting to rest all controversies and questions, NVS Reddy, IRAS MD of Hyderabad Metro Rail, talks to Sinduri Vuppala

“IT’S A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO REHAB THE CITY”

It may seem ironic, but the last time I interviewed NVS Reddy was in October 2009, when he promised our city would soon be another Singapore or Thailand and we would not have to worry about traffic or commuting any more. The metro rail project, which would be the solution to all our traffic problems, was to be ready by 2011. Today, four years later, I go back to him with the same question: Will our traffic woes never end?

“ALMOST 300 AGENTS ARE WORKING SILENTLY AND NOT MANY ARE AWARE OF THE KIND OF WORK THAT IS BEING DONE. I AM NOT JUST LOOKING AT THIS AS A SIMPLE TRANSPORT AND TRAFFIC PROJECT”

“While the Chennai and Delhi projects were government projects (where there is a tremendous burden on taxpayers) the Hyderabad metro was undertaken as a public private partnership. Unfortunately it was caught up in the Satyam fiasco, and two years were lost. There has been a lot of uncertainty in the state ever since. The CM, YSR passed away and the project suffered delays. However, because of its robust and transparent model, the city has been lucky. L&T was chosen to implement the metro in September 2010. Having achieved financial closure in six months, it is the largest fund tie-up in India for a PPP (Public Private Partnership) project till date. A project of this magnitude (Rs 14,132 crores) has never been done in a public private partnership, and the whole world is watching,” he explains.

NVS Reddy explains how most of the design work is already in progress. “Almost 300 agents are working silently and not many are aware of the kind of work that is being done. I am not just looking at this as a simple transport and traffic project. It is a wholen of an opportunity for me to redesign and rejuvenate the city,” he explains.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Eco-friendly elevated metro stations will be located along the route every one kilometer with passenger access through staircases, escalators and lifts.
- The project will be well integrated with the existing suburban railway network (MMTS) and bus stops so as to ensure seamless and comfortable travel for the passengers.
- Adequate parking and circulation areas adjoining the stations shall be provided at 25 locations along the corridor.
- The metro system being planned for the city can carry the same amount of traffic as seven lanes of bus traffic or 25 lanes of private motor cars and is more reliable, comfortable and safer than road-based systems. It will also reduce journey time by between 50 per cent to 75 per cent.
With eco-friendly stations, sky-walks, ramps and a host of other commuter-friendly facilities, the metro project, which was planned after doing an intensive study of other countries, aims at making Hyderabad world class. “It will also help to revive several parts of the city that are decaying,” explains Reddy.

“I GIVE AN OPEN INVITATION TO ALL THESE SO-CALLED HERITAGE LOVERS TO COME FORWARD, MOBILIZE MONEY AND IMPROVE THE STRUCTURES”

Yet another problem plaguing the project is the Sultan Bazar issue (the heritage street may be affected by it). Reddy exclaims, “In the 71 km metro project, Sultan Bazar is just 200 meters. The issue is simply being blown out of proportion. The rest of the city has undergone road widening more than once. There are 100 shops and the ones affected will be accommodated in a complex just 300 meters away for which we are ready to spend Rs 7 crores. Even after the metro stations are built, the space under the stations will be assigned to hawkers and the stations will be designed with walkways and paths providing complete access to the stores. People working against us may think they are campaigning for a great cause, but they are just hindering the city’s development.”

Is it true that several heritage structures like the Assembly, Mozamjahi market and Secunderabad Clocktower might be in danger because of the metro? “The city has a total of 145 heritage structures and we are going in front of nine of them, but a minimum distance of 50 feet will be maintained. In fact, some of these structures are in such bad shape, the less said the better. I give an open invitation to all these so-called heritage lovers to come forward, mobilize money and improve the structures. I will hand over the property as a challenge and I am willing to contribute half the sum towards it. Talking is easy, but doing things in an Indian context is difficult. Even when the flyovers were being built, there was a lot of opposition. But today everyone is reaping their benefits,” he sums up.

Grandma knows best

Grandmothers are exceptional people. And we’ve all had these sensible and practical women as part of our growing up years. Sadly however, over the years we relegated them to the background of our lives as we imagined their ideas about food and health were not in keeping with contemporary views.

But I have good news for all grandma lovers: let’s bring out grandmums and celebrate their wisdom in public. Because it turns out, the things that they believed in, especially with regard to food, have actually been proved healthy (at least for the moment).

Dr Mehmet Oz, the author of a recent cover story in Time magazine titled, “What to Eat Now” is talking of the precisely the things our grandmothers believed in. Remember how grandma would cook hot rice and pour spoonfuls of ghee into our plates? We would scream that ghee would make us fat, but it turns out one of the biggest food myths is that we must restrict ourselves to fat-free food. We are now told we need a daily dose of fat in the form of whole milk, butter and cheese to prevent heart ailments, and stop our joints from creaking!

To be healthy and fit we have been urged to eat freshly cooked and locally produced vegetables. My grandmother did that a long time ago. We had a subziwali bringing a toffi full of fresh vegetables every evening and my grandmother would chose from these according to what she was going to cook that night. Food couldn’t get any fresher, as we waited with our steel thalis for the brewing sambar and rice to be put on our plates. Food such as this has few parallels in the world, surely.

Upma and idli were our staples for breakfast until we were told that they made us fat and unhealthy.

Cereals that came in colorful boxes became the fashion. And grandma was slotted as old-fashioned because she made fresh upma with kaju and ghee. But, surprise, it has been discovered that what is making us fat is actually the boxed and packaged food! Back in the land of the Big Mac and Burger King, they are now rooting for ethnic foods. But, sadly, even our grandmas, because of various scare such as high cholesterol and diabetes have switched over to eating cereals. (Cholesterol, Dr Oz says is not so bad for those with good genes).

Till the big oil lobbies infiltrated the country, grandma would use cold-pressed gingelly and groundnut oil. But she was made to feel inadequate by the oil lobbies and their wonderful advertisements which had world-wise daughters-in-law using the right kind of oil and sunflower oils that prevented their husbands from having a heart attack. But our American researchers (who start all the food rumors and diet fads in the first place) are now recommending that we go back to cold pressed groundnut and sesame seed oils. (Cold pressed is the new buzz word, annma. Back in your time they used to call it ganugu noone). Olive oil too is good we are told, but that’s for Italian grandmothers. Mine, who was cost-conscious would never buy olive oil at Rs 700 for half a liter. And try making avakai with anything other than gingelly oil!

Nothing has confused humanity as much as foods, diets and health. For instance just as I was getting used to eating soya and tofu, I’ve received messages from American researchers that it’s a no-no. I am so confused about foods that I have to eat and not eat, that on certain days I think I should not eat anything at all.

So now, I have decided not to follow any study on fats, oils, grains, and anything that mentions the word ‘heart disease’ or ‘diabetes’. Above all, I have decided to only eat what grandma recommends. (Not what the FDA or American Cholesterol or Heart Association recommends).

RATNA RAO SHEKAR