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Hyderabad's growth story has rarely followed a straight line. From a princely capital with early sewerage systems and campus universities to a global technology hub stitched together by ring roads and metro corridors, the city has expanded by constantly rethinking how people live, work and move.

A Times Conversation organised by The Times of India, in association with Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (HMDA) and Hyderabad Metro Rail Limited (HMRL), offered a view at how Hyderabad's next phase is being imagined, not as a single project or zone, but as a metropolitan system built for scale, mobility and everyday life. The panellists included Sarfaraz Ahmad, IAS, metropolitan commissioner, HMDA, and Anand Mohan, chief project manager, HMRL.

HYDERABAD: A GLOBAL-SCALE METROPOLIS IN THE MAKING

What stands out today is the sheer size of Hyderabad's metropolitan footprint. What began in the early 1970s as a planning authority overseeing about 2,000 sq km has steadily expanded with the city's ambitions. By 2008, the Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority governed nearly 7,000 sq km.

The most recent expansion takes this to roughly 10,500 sq km, and when the proposed Future City jurisdiction is included, the metropolitan region touches 11,250 sq km.

The core city, now largely defined by the Outer Ring Road (ORR), has reached a point where congestion, land prices and infrastructure stress demand a new approach. The strategy has been to allow the ORR to remain the city's dense economic heart while opening up the vast peri-urban region between the ORR and the proposed Regional Ring Road (RRR) for planned growth.

OPENING NEW DIRECTIONS OF GROWTH

Rather than letting the city sprawl randomly, Hyderabad is witnessing specific growth corridors. "The most prominent is the Future City, where around 30,000 acres are planned as a core urban zone, supported by a 700 sq km development authority area. A new radial road will connect the



Sarfaraz Ahmad, IAS, metropolitan commissioner, HMDA & managing director, HMRL; Anand Mohan, chief project manager, HMRL (L-R)

Hyderabad's blueprint for growth

From ring roads to walkable neighbourhoods, Hyderabad is reimagining how megacities grow, planning ahead for mobility and everyday life at an unprecedented metropolitan scale

ORR through Future City to the RRR near Amangal, complete with a dedicated public transport corridor, a shift from past models where transport followed development, often too late," mentioned Sarfaraz Ahmad.

A second growth direction stretches from Budvel through the Chandanvelly and Sitarampur industrial parks up to Kozgi, forming an 81-km corridor. Along this axis, the authority expects 10,000–15,000 acres to evolve into a new integrated township cluster. The third follows the proposed Greenfield highway towards Amaravati and the Bandar port, restoring Hyderabad's historic coastal linkage. For Telangana, which lost direct port access after bifurcation, this

As Hyderabad expands into one of the world's largest metropolitan regions, authorities are reshaping growth through new corridors, integrated townships, early infrastructure and people-centric mobility, signalling a decisive shift from reactive expansion to deliberate, future-ready urban planning

corridor is an important feature of the city's economic geography.

THE PLANNING MASTERY OF HYDERABAD

One of the most striking shifts in Hyderabad's planning philosophy is the move away from rigid zoning. Earlier models separated industrial, residential and commercial areas, often forcing long commutes and creating dormitory suburbs. "The new approach favours multi-use layouts, where housing, workplaces, services and commerce coexist," Ahmad said.

Except for heavy "red category" industries, most modern industrial activity,

particularly white and green category units, can function alongside residential and commercial spaces with minimal buffers. This enables the much-discussed 'walk-to-work' neighbourhoods, which reduce travel demand, improve health outcomes and lower environmental pressure.

AFFORDABILITY AND MIGRATION

Migration has played a big role in Hyderabad's growth. The city continues to attract talent and labour from across India. "Today, prices vary sharply by geography: eastern parts of the city still offer homes at Rs 4,500–Rs 5,000 per sq ft, while Neopolis and Kokapet range between Rs 12,000–Rs 14,000, and Jubilee Hills and Banjara Hills touch Rs 16,000–Rs 20,000. The pricing pressure is felt most where high-end housing and employment are tightly co-located, especially in the western corridor," Ahmad added, in response to a question on equitable housing plans.

The HMDA is working on this twofold, he said. "Release more land for development to moderate prices and actively work on an affordable housing policy through planning relaxations, fee rationalisation and stamp duty measures," he shared. The intent is to ensure the city offers viable options across income groups.

INFRASTRUCTURE BEFORE OCCUPANCY

Hyderabad has a defined approach to city planning – to build the infrastructure before people arrive. In areas like Neopolis and Kokapet, road widths have increased from 30 metres to 45 metres, while water and sewerage networks are integrated before large-scale occupancy.

Public transport is being planned in parallel. "Metro extensions under Phase 2A, including the Raidurg–Neopolis corridor (about 11.4 km), are designed to absorb future commuting demand. In the Future City area, metro planning has begun even before construction density takes shape," informed Anand Mohan.

Also, constant efforts have been put in to make Hyderabad Metro a safe mode of transport for commuters, especially women. Diversity measures taken up range from the deployment of transgender personnel in metro security roles to continuous patrolling inside train coaches, reinforcing a strong emphasis on passenger safety.

Beyond metro lines, elevated corridors, greenfield road alignments and targeted flyovers aim to decongest existing arteries and create alternative movement paths that bypass the city's core altogether.

WATER, LAKES AND THE ECOLOGY

No conversation about Hyderabad's future is complete without water. Bulk water supply from the Krishna and Godavari rivers has stabilised availability, while "Water Ring Main" project around the ORR will allow inter-basin transfers during shortages.

Equally important is what happens within the city. "Nearly 35 lakes have already been developed or restored, with more are underway in collaboration with agencies like HYDRA. Stormwater master planning aims to ensure rainwater flows into lakes rather than streets, while treated sewage water is increasingly reused to recharge water bodies," stated Ahmad.

Rainwater harvesting norms, lake demarcation, transfer of development rights (TDR) for nala protection, and new sewage treatment plants together point to a recognition that Hyderabad's ecological systems must grow alongside its built environment.

PLANNING THE CITY AROUND PEOPLE

Perhaps the most telling shift is philosophical. Hyderabad is moving from a phase where building roads and layouts was the priority to one where human experience, safety, accessibility, proximity, and dignity shape planning decisions. This is visible in gender-sensitive metro operations, inclusive mobility planning, and the gradual acceptance that cities succeed when they are comfortable for ordinary, everyday lives.

Hyderabad's greatest strength may lie beyond infrastructure, in its social openness, historical depth and ability to absorb newcomers without friction.

That spirit is as critical to the city's future as any ring road or metro line.