

# FLUSHED OUT



## Unravelling the Labyrinth of Public Toilets in Bengaluru

A Tale of Access, Equity and Quality



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“When we question whether the cities are designed for people, we can simply ask do they allow them to relieve themselves privately, comfortably, and safely?”

# Introduction

Public toilets play an essential role in the urban infrastructure. Beyond addressing a basic human need, public toilets also play a crucial role in ensuring safe and quality access to public spaces for all members of general public.<sup>i</sup> Using a public toilet can be a harrowing experience, which many people in India only resort to at times of extreme need. However, not all sections of public have choice to selectively rely on public toilets. Many sections of public like street vendors, gig workers, and homeless people are dependent on public toilets for their daily activities.

Access to clean toilets enhances mobility and freedom, allowing individuals to engage in various activities outside their homes without the worry of finding a restroom when needed. Public toilets promote inclusivity and equity in urban environments, fostering a sense of belonging and ensuring that no one is excluded from enjoying public spaces due to a lack of restroom facilities. They are not just a matter of convenience but a fundamental human right, which ensures dignity, and well-being for all members of society in their daily lives.

Prioritising the development, maintenance, and accessibility of public toilets should be a crucial aspect of urban planning. However, the issue has rarely been given the importance that it deserves. In 2014, it was reported that nearly 60% of the world's open defecation happens in India, where more than 800 million people still do not have access to improved sanitation.<sup>ii</sup> While traditional beliefs have often emphasised that sanitation challenges primarily stem from rural areas, research indicates concerns regarding insufficient access to improved sanitation in urban areas as well.<sup>iii</sup>

This unfortunate situation changed with the launch of Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) on October 2, 2014. It aimed to eliminate open defecation, eradicate manual scavenging, and implement scientific solid waste management. SBM guidelines emphasise on construction of adequate toilets for men, women and facilities for the disabled in public areas like markets, train stations, tourist spots, and office complexes.<sup>iv</sup> The launch of a centrally sponsored scheme, with a central focus of eradicating open defecation, helped elevate this issue in India. The program has been able to achieve its objective to a certain extent considering that there has been an unprecedented rise in access to individual household toilets.<sup>v</sup>

However, in spite of its achievement in terms of increased construction of toilets, reports highlight that construction of toilets has not resulted in increased use of the toilets.<sup>vi</sup> For example, while more than 6700 sanitary toilets have been built in the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh<sup>vii</sup>, 45% of the population in this region still defecates in the open. Lack of proper maintenance of these toilets was reported as one of the fundamental reasons for such a wide gap between construction and usage of toilets.<sup>viii</sup> These reports highlight that while there is an increased focus on construction of toilets, appropriate governments fail to attach the same gravity to regular maintenance of toilets. Reports on public toilets in India highlight a dire situation marked by inadequate facilities, poor maintenance, and lack of cleanliness.<sup>ix</sup> According to a study by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), many public toilets are unusable due to filth and neglect.<sup>x</sup> Similarly, a report by the NGO Dasra found that only 47% of urban public toilets are functional, underscoring the urgent need for improvement in sanitation infrastructure.<sup>xi</sup>

Consequently, discussions surrounding public toilets necessitate a comprehensive consideration of people's experiences in utilising them, and the functions fulfilled by these spaces, which could then inform the formulation of toilet design and policy initiatives. We intend to do the same with this report and delve deeper into the factors which enables and facilitates the use of public toilets by the public. In doing so, it will not only investigate the factors which may enhance the user experience and thereby encourage the use of public toilets, but also on how access requires accommodation of different needs of the different sections of the public. Currently, the design of city spaces is influenced by the prevailing patriarchal, heteronormative, ableist and gender-binary norms. The same stands true for public toilets as well. While the law requires that public toilets should be accessible for persons with disabilities<sup>xii</sup> and cater to transgenders,<sup>xiii</sup> the current status of public toilets also fail to cater to specific needs of this section of public rendering them non-usable for these members of public.<sup>xiv</sup> Thus, the report focuses on a more nuanced examination of 'accessibility' to comprehend how do public toilets accommodate the different needs of different section of communities.

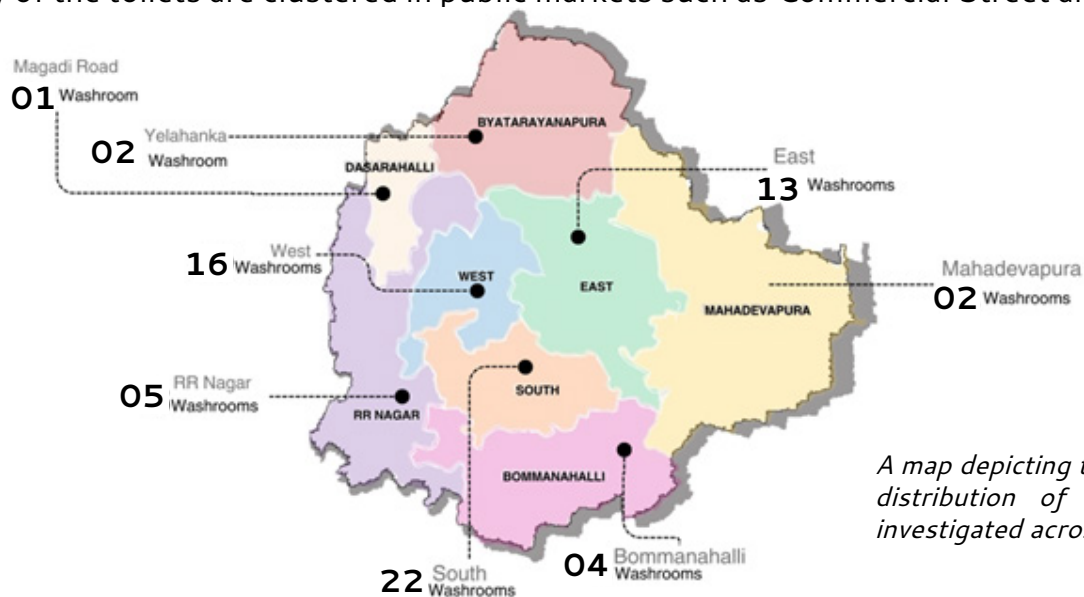
## **Public toilets in Bengaluru**

Bengaluru, one of India's fastest-growing cities, experiences a population growth rate of 2.94% annually.<sup>xv</sup> With the rise of city's economic growth, there is a corresponding expectation for adequate facilities, including the access to safe and hygienic sanitation facilities. Apart from the diverse group of population, there is plurality in the forms of economy as well. The rise of the gig-worker economy in the city has increased the dependency and need for safe sanitary-infrastructure.<sup>xvi</sup> These workers, along with street vendors play an important role in the delivery of basic services and amenities. As they are more reliant on public toilets, it is important to understand and incorporate the needs and requirements of these groups into the development policies.

At present, Bengaluru is divided into 8 zones for operational and management ease. As per the data released by the Solid Waste Management department<sup>xvii</sup> in August 2023, there were 803 public

toilets in the city. These are classified into six different types– existing public toilets, E-toilets, existing community toilets, modular toilets, ODF++ toilets, and restrooms for Pourakarmikas. An analysis of BBMP’s toilet data highlights that:

- There are 360 public toilets in Bengaluru.\*
- There are lesser toilets in the residential areas.
- The toilets are found to be aligned alongside the outlines of the highways of Bengaluru.
- The toilets are mostly placed near the BBMP parks.
- Major tourist attractions like Cubbon Park, Lalbagh, and Ulsoor lake do not have any toilets in the nearby areas although certain number of toilets are located inside Lalbagh and Cubbon Park each.
- Many of the toilets are clustered in public markets such as Commercial Street and Chickpete, etc.



*A map depicting the zonal-wise distribution of public toilets investigated across Bengaluru.*

These toilets may not be sufficient to cater to the entire population of Bengaluru as suggested by recent policy initiative that also acknowledge the same.<sup>xviii</sup> Ruling on a PIL, High Court of Karnataka in 2023 directed Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) to form a committee to oversee the maintenance of public toilets and devise a comprehensive plan for the construction of new toilets. This committee acknowledged that all 229 e-toilets in the city have been shut down due to lack of maintenance.<sup>xix</sup> It also plans to construct 356 new toilets including 100 ‘she-toilets’ in congested areas.<sup>xx</sup>

Given the development plans of the BBMP, it presents an opportune moment to investigate the public toilets and assess the ways in which Bengaluru can reject the patriarchal, heteronormative, ableist, and gender-binary narratives to accommodate the different needs of different section of community, enhancing their overall access to city spaces.

\* For this data we rely on the data provided by department of Solid Waste Management, BBMP. Available at [https://bbmp.gov.in/ucc\\_file/SWM29082023.pdf](https://bbmp.gov.in/ucc_file/SWM29082023.pdf) (Last Accessed: 30 Sept. 2024)

# Methodology

To assess the availability, quality, and accessibility of public toilets in Bengaluru, the team conducted field investigations over a period of one month.<sup>xxi</sup> The findings of this report are a result of ethnographic observations made during these investigations. In total, the team investigated 65 toilets in different public spaces: public parks, metro stations, bus stations, marketplaces, railway stations, and tourist places.

In the context of this report, the meaning and scope of the word 'public toilets' include any sanitation facility that is accessible to the general public, whether constructed by local authorities, non-governmental organisations or are a result of charitable endeavours. In this context, the 'general public' refers to the entire population and community without any exclusions or restrictions based on factors like age, gender, sex, disability, and socio-economic status.

In Bengaluru, the public toilets are generally situated roadsides at a reasonable distance from each other. In addition to investigating these toilets, the team has specifically focused on the toilets located in a 'public place'. For the purpose of this report, six categories of public places were identified: marketplaces, public parks, metro stations, tourist places, bus stations, and railway stations. The team selected those places that are generally visited by all members of the public community regardless of factors like age, gender, sex, disability, and socio-economic status. As such, commercial spaces like shopping malls, cafeterias, and restaurants were excluded from the scope of the study because they cater to members of a specific socio-economic class.<sup>xxii</sup> Further, the team selected those places that did not require any affiliation for entrance. As such, educational institutions were excluded because entry into them is subject to an affiliation with that respective institution.

## Matrix of standards

Each team investigated the public toilets against a matrix of standards.<sup>xxiii</sup> This matrix was developed after conducting a proper literature review and assessing factors like location and design, that encourage the use of such toilets by the general public. Using this matrix, the team investigated the public toilets on the following standards:



# MATRIX OF STANDARDS



AVAILABILITY

Public toilets should be conveniently located within each public place, ensuring that they are easily accessible to pedestrians. A comfortable distance is determined from the perspective of a pedestrian, with toilets ideally situated within walking distance of the public space.



EASE OF ACCESS

Accessibility is crucial for public toilets, encompassing factors such as the presence of route maps, use of universal symbols, location visibility, fee structures, operating hours, and staff availability. Ensuring ease of access enhances the usability and convenience of the facilities.



EASE OF USAGE

Maintaining cleanliness and hygiene standards is essential for public toilets. Adequate sanitation facilities, including running water, availability of dustbins, soap dispensers, mirrors, sanitary pad disposal units, and changing facilities, contribute to a positive user experience and encourage regular usage.



SAFETY

Public toilets should prioritise user safety, considering factors such as the toilet's location, presence of security personnel, effectiveness of locking mechanisms, and availability of emergency contact information. Providing a sense of privacy is essential to ensure user comfort and security.



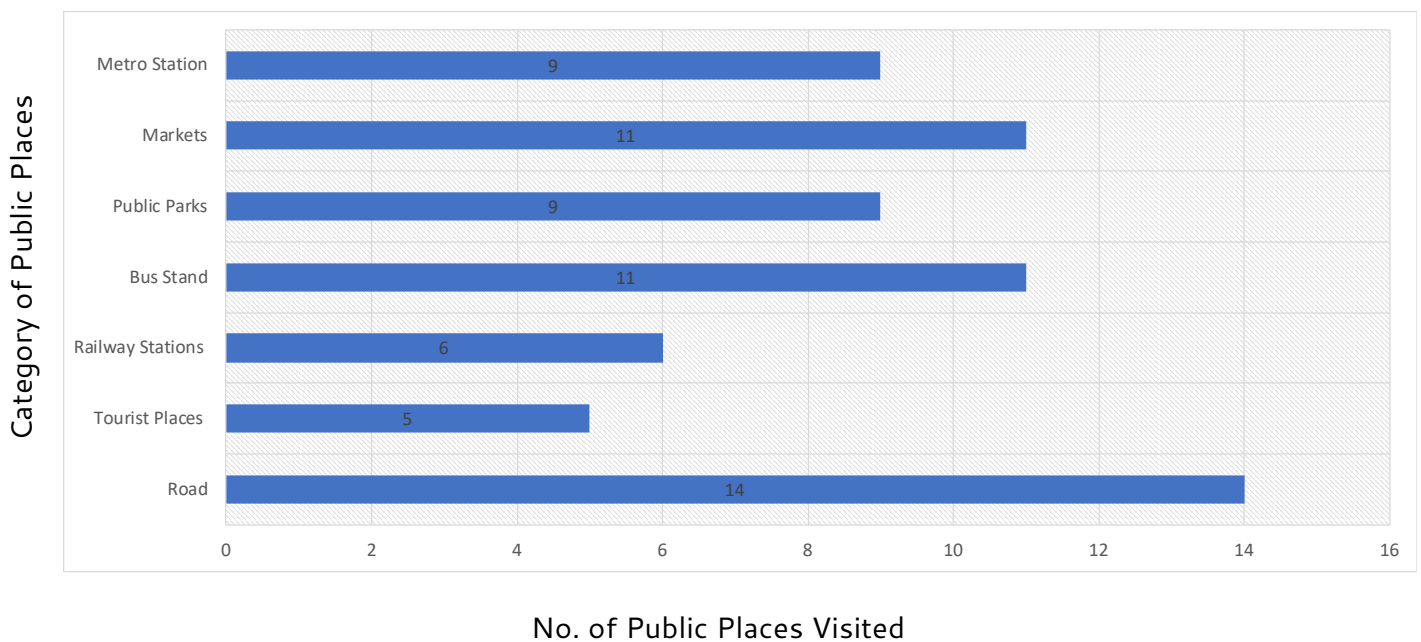
INCLUSIVITY

Public toilets should be designed to accommodate the diverse needs of all community members, promoting inclusivity and accessibility. This includes considerations for persons with disabilities, transgender individuals, and parents, with design features tailored to address their specific requirements. Selection criteria were established to reflect the unique needs of these community members, ensuring equitable access to public sanitation facilities.

## Sample Profile

In total, the team investigated 65 public toilets.<sup>xxiv</sup> To ensure an equitable distribution of the sample across the selected categories of public spaces, and throughout the different zones of Bengaluru, purposive sampling was used. However, to ensure unbiased results, the team used a randomised sampling method to investigate the public toilets within these public spaces and different zones of Bengaluru.

- A. Sample distribution according to zones: The team investigated 22 toilets in the South Zone, 16 in the West zone, 13 in the East, five toilets in RR Nagar, two in Yelahanka, two in Mahadevpura, one in Dasarahalli, and four in Bommanahalli.
- B. Sample distribution according to public places: The team investigated nine toilets in public parks, nine in metro stations, 11 in markets, 11 in bus stands, six in railway stations, 14 in roads and five in tourist places.



*A bar graph depicting the number of toilets in different categories of public places.*

- C. Relevant Authorities: Out of the total investigated toilets, 34 were constructed by government authorities (out of which 27 were solely by BBMP), 20 were constructed by non-governmental organisations, eight were constructed and maintained by metro authorities, and three were a result of charitable endeavours. Out of the 27 toilets constructed by BBMP, 25.92% were maintained by non-government organisations.

## Limitations

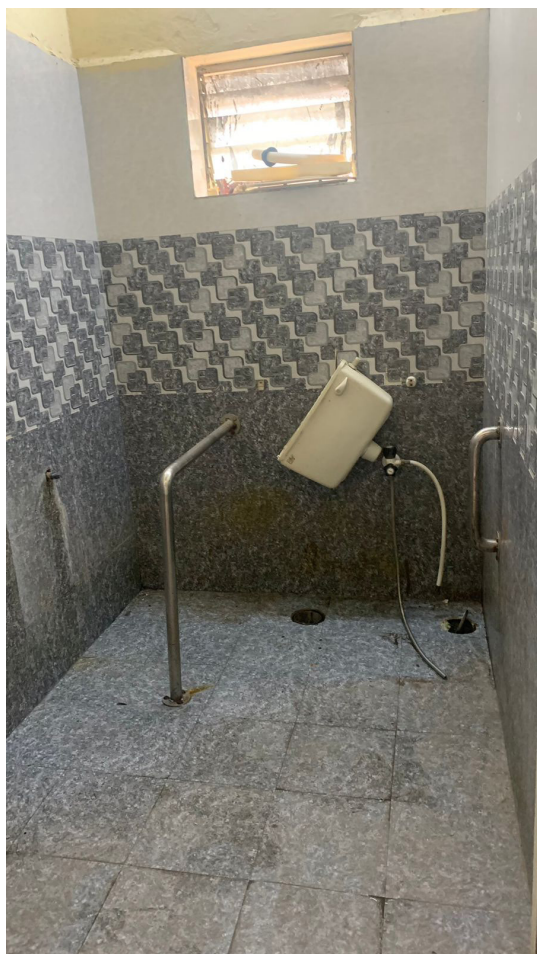
The findings of the report should be read in the context of the following limitations:

While efforts were made to investigate a diverse range of public toilets across different zones and categories of public spaces in Bengaluru, the sample size may not fully capture the variability and complexity of the city's public toilet infrastructure.

The findings of the study are based on observations made during a specific timeframe (one month), which may not fully capture seasonal variations, temporal fluctuations in usage patterns, or changes in maintenance and cleanliness standards over time.

The study focuses primarily on physical aspects of public toilets (availability, accessibility, quality) and does not delve deeply into socio-cultural factors, user perceptions, or broader policy implications.

The study has not included government buildings within its scope, as it was deemed that this subject deserves a separate study due to its vast scope and potentially distinct characteristics. Consequently, the findings may not fully capture the state of public toilets within government premises, which could represent a significant portion of the city's infrastructure.



*A stall dedicated for persons with disabilities which did not have a toilet.*



*The only toilet which had urinals for children.*

# Findings

## Availability of Public Toilets

Our investigation revealed that the majority of public places in Bengaluru are equipped with public toilets. However, notable exceptions were observed in certain marketplaces such as Church Street and Commercial Street, as well as one railway station, Jnanabharathi Railway station, a BBMP park in Koramangala, next to Silk Institute, and Audugodi Police Quarters, where no public toilets were found. Below is a summary of the findings:

Public Place Visited	Available Or Not	Public Place Visited	Available Or Not
Lal Bagh	✓	Church Street	✗
Cubbon Park	✓	Jnanabharathi Railway Station	✗
Chickpete	✓	Bbmp Park , 17th D Main Road Koramangala	✗
Commercial Street	✗	Audugodi Police Quarters	✗
Kengeri	✓	Majestic	✓
Planetorium	✓	Tipu Palace	✓
Chitrakala Parishad	✓	Bangalore Palace	✓
Silkboard	✓	Magadi Road	✓
Shivajinagar	✓	Yelahanka	✓
Gottigere	✓	Koramangala	✓
KSR	✓	Silk Institute (Central Bank)	✗

*A table representing the availability of toilets in different public places.*



## No toilets on Church Street and Commercial Street

There are no public toilets on Church Street and Commercial Street, necessitating individuals to seek facilities at a distance. In the case of Church Street, the nearest available toilets are located 13 minutes away (2.9 km from the MG Road Metro Station), either towards St. Mark's Road or 8 minutes away, towards Residency Road (in the city civil court premises; 1.6 km from MG Road metro Station). While upscale shops cafes and restaurant compensate for the absence of public toilets on Commercial Street and Church Street, accessibility remains a challenge in these specific places for certain community members, including street vendors, sweepers, and gig workers, who may not have access to facilities in cafes and restaurants located in these marketplaces and frequented by a specific socio-economic class.

## Ease of Access

The mere availability of public toilets is not sufficient to encourage their use. The public toilets must be easy to access which depends upon various factors like visibility of the location, availability of route maps, use of universal symbols, and availability of staff members.

## Lack of Route Maps

The public must be guided about the location of public toilets through proper route maps. Further, the route maps should use universal symbols and proper arrows to guide the public at proper intervals. In Bengaluru, while most public places have public toilets, these places do not have the proper route maps. Out of 65 toilets, 52 toilets did not have any route maps around them.



*Directions to the toilet in local language and English, without universal symbols.*

In Lal Bagh, despite the presence of five toilets, none of them were depicted on the map provided at the entrance. Consequently, individuals in need of a public toilet must navigate the park to locate one, resulting in an average search time ranging from seven to 19 minutes. This duration may vary depending on the number of inquiries a person is willing to make, as seeking guidance can expedite the search process. Notably, although route maps are available within Lal Bagh, they are positioned in such close proximity to the toilets that their utility is diminished. Upon encountering a route map, toilets are already within sight of the individuals, rendering the maps redundant for facilitating navigation.

- In contrast to Lal Bagh, Cubbon Park shows toilets on the map provided at the entrance. However, the lack of route maps throughout the park renders the search for a toilet equivalent to a treasure hunt.
- In Railway Stations, Bus Stations, and marketplaces like Chickpete, there were no route maps and the best possible way to find the location of the toilets was to make inquiries from vendors at these stations.
- In metro stations, only one out of eight stations had route maps.
- Without the availability of route maps, a user can only depend upon Google Maps for navigation to the nearest toilet. However the same may not be conducive for people who do not have access to digital technologies, or who are not comfortable with the use of such technologies. Further, Google Maps might not be a reliable source of information. During our investigation, we observed five instances, where there was no toilet, despite the Google map showing one on the exact location. Examples of these locations are Jnanabharathi Railway Station, Church Street, Adugodi Police Quarters, BBMP Park Koramangala, and Silk Board Institute.
- The lack of such route maps forces an intended user to enquire about the nearest toilet from people around them. While these circumstances may automatically push some people into an awkward and uncomfortable situation, it is even more concerning for women, for it might endanger their safety.



*A map depicting the location of toilets in Lalbagh.*

## Lack of universal symbols and identification of toilets through cultural symbols

How can one recognize a public toilet? Typically, signage such as “Pay and Use Toilets” or universal symbols indicating gender designation at the entrance serve as indicators. Utilising universal symbols is preferable as they transcend language barriers, ensuring clarity for all users regardless of literacy. Surprisingly, during our investigation, 20% of toilets lacked these universal symbols. However, the absence of such symbols doesn't necessarily impede the identification of a public toilet. Cultural cues, such as the unique architectural design, colour scheme, and distinct odours associated with public toilets, have become additional markers aiding in their recognition.



*A public toilet in Chickpete, with universal symbols in green color affixed on the walls outside.*

## Timings of public toilets: A reflection of boundaries between public and private space

The operational hours of public toilets in Bengaluru reflect the distinction between public and private spheres, further restricting access based on their schedules. Typically, these facilities operate from 5 AM to 10 PM, aligning with societal norms of acceptable public space usage. These temporal constraints not only limit availability but also contribute to a broader conversation on the division between public and private realms.

## Importance of location in access: A case study of Metro Stations

Location plays a pivotal role in facilitating access to public toilets, as evidenced by a case study of Metro Stations. While it's widely understood that every metro station houses a toilet, the effectiveness of this amenity hinges on its accessibility. Metro stations typically have multiple entry and exit points, platforms, and floors. However, without clear signage



or route maps, locating the restroom within these sprawling complexes can prove challenging. This lack of clarity often results in frustration for individuals seeking restroom facilities.

Consequently, a person intending to use the toilet may enter a metro station only to find that the restroom is located at a different entry point, exacerbating inconvenience and frustration. Further, the toilets were not consistently situated at entry points. Instead, they were often positioned beyond security checkpoints and ticket counters. This placement poses unnecessary obstacles, particularly for those solely seeking restroom access. Such conditions underscore the significance of strategic placement and accessibility in ensuring the utilisation of public toilet facilities.

## Pay and Use Toilets: Barriers in Access?

The team surveyed 65 public toilets, all of which operated on a pay-and-use basis. While certain public places like metro stations and iconic landmarks such as Bangalore Palace do not levy a specific fee for restroom access, the utilisation of these facilities isn't entirely cost-free due to associated entry fees.



*A pay-and-use toilet in Chickpete, with one female area situated between two male areas. The male staff member is sitting outside one of the male toilets on the left side.*

In Bengaluru, the average fee for using a public toilet is five rupees. However, pricing varies based on several factors:

1. Location: While the typical cost is five rupees, it escalates to Rs. 10 in upscale locales like St. Marks Road, or commercial places like Shivaji Nagar Market area.
2. Water Supply: During our study in February 2024, the average charge stood at five rupees. However, by April 2024,<sup>xxv</sup> reports indicated a doubling of prices due to the water crisis gripping Bengaluru.



3. Nature of Use: In some places, charges differ based on the type of facility utilised. Urinal usage typically incurs a lower fee of five rupees compared to the use of water closets (W.C.), which may cost Rs.10. This pricing discrepancy disproportionately affects women, as women's public toilets typically only feature W.C.s, regardless of the intended nature of use. Consequently, men often pay five rupees for restroom use compared to the Rs. 10 charged to women. This creates discomfort and privacy concerns for men as they are required to disclose the nature of their use to staff.

The imposition of fees on public toilets erects a financial barrier to access, disproportionately affecting individuals solely reliant on these facilities, such as street vendors, cleaners, gig workers, and the homeless. This impact is particularly acute in upscale locales and commercial places, where prices are doubled. During our investigation, we observed a social practice wherein staff permitted street vendors and cleaners to use facilities without charge, reflecting a recognition of the need to mitigate financial barriers for certain vulnerable groups. This underscores the necessity to address or exempt such individuals from restroom fees, acknowledging their reliance on these facilities for daily living or livelihoods.

## Ease of Usage

Public toilets should be managed in a manner that encourages their utilisation by the general public. Effective upkeep not only enhances the user experience but also facilitates public access. Conversely, neglect in managing public toilets can swiftly hinder the proper utilisation of public spaces. To investigate whether public toilets in Bengaluru are managed in a manner that promotes their use, we examine two key factors: the availability and quality of fundamental sanitation facilities, and the level of cleanliness maintained within these facilities.



*A sit-down toilet with a recycled paint bucket of blue color, used for manually flushing the toilet after each use.*

## Availability and quality of sanitation facilities

Every public toilet should have basic sanitation facilities like a dustbin, provision of running water, availability of soap and handwash, and availability of sanitary pads.

**Dustbins:** During our investigation, we noted that dustbins were positioned either in the general area of the toilet (55%) or within specific stalls (18%), or both (15%). Interestingly, the presence of dustbins in the general area did not compensate for the absence of bins within individual stalls. Users tend to dispose of waste, particularly sanitary items, within the confines of a stall. This practice often led to blockages, inconveniencing both users and staff tasked with maintenance. Moreover, the efficacy of dustbins was influenced by their quality. We observed instances where upcycled containers were repurposed as bins and covered with makeshift

iron sheets. However, these bins remained largely unused, as users hesitated to handle the iron covers. Consequently, discarded waste tended to accumulate around these inadequate bins rather than inside them, exacerbating cleanliness issues within the facility.

**Lack of proper flushing system:** While the majority of surveyed toilets (96%) were equipped with running water for flushing, a significant number of them (55%) opted for a dabba system rather than traditional flush mechanisms. In this system, users are provided with upcycled plastic vessels to manually flush waste by filling them from the provided tap. However, the dabba system presents challenges as it can deter users due to the perceived aversion associated with handling the vessel and manually flushing waste. This setup not only discourages use but also places additional burdens on cleaning staff and compromises the overall maintenance of public toilets. Public toilet facilities should ideally encourage users to fulfil their civic responsibilities and contribute to upkeep. When facilities inadvertently discourage use, it not only impacts users but also exacerbates the workload for cleaning personnel.

**Availability of soap and handwash:** The availability of soap and handwash in public toilets is crucial not only for enhancing user experience but also for safeguarding public health. Particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasis on hand hygiene has surged, necessitating the provision of these amenities in all public spaces. During our investigation, we found that most of the surveyed toilets offered either soap (10.7%) or hand wash (30.7%). However, in one instance, the condition of the handwash bottle was so unsanitary that potential users may have been deterred from utilising it. Such incidents underscore the importance of maintaining a standard of quality even in the most basic facilities, ensuring that hygiene standards are upheld for the well-being of all users.



*A general area of a female public toilet with two wash basins and one mirror situated at a very elevated height. The picture also shows a bucket filled with water, supposedly to be used in case the water runs out.*

**Availability of sanitary products:** Sanitary napkins and tampons are fundamental essentials for the hygiene and health management of individuals who menstruate. In Bengaluru, only two public toilets displayed signage indicating the availability of sanitary napkins. However, upon inquiry, it was disclosed that these napkins would be sourced by male staff members from nearby pharmacies upon request. Sanitary napkins fulfil an urgent need for menstruating individuals, and this need could be better addressed by ensuring these products are readily available with staff members, rather than relying on arrangements made upon request. It's crucial to consider that even requesting such products from male staff members can place menstruating persons in uncomfortable situations.

## Lack of proper lighting: Rendering usage ineffective after sunset

The absence of adequate lighting in 52% of toilets rendered them effectively unusable after sunset. While natural lighting compensated during the day, the lack of proper illumination hindered nighttime usage. This deficiency not only poses practical challenges for users but also compromises safety and accessibility, highlighting the importance of ensuring consistent lighting in public facilities.<sup>xxvi</sup>

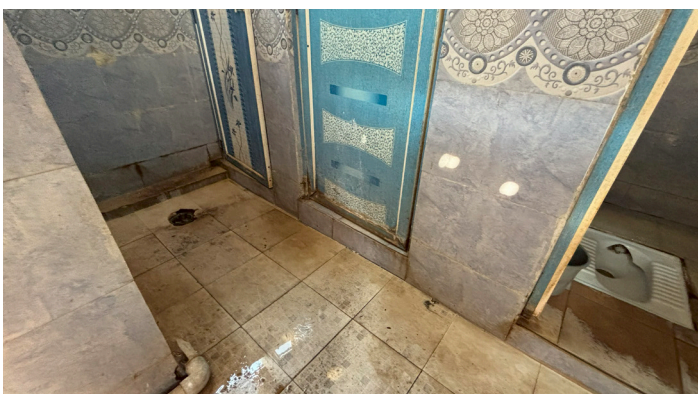


*A locked and non-functional stall in one of the public toilets, situated on an elevated platform. The general area also has big-sized dustbin a mirror at an elevated level.*

## Level of cleanliness maintained

Maintaining cleanliness in public toilets is crucial for encouraging their use by the general public. Our investigation into public toilets in Bengaluru revealed that, overall, they adhere to a standard of hygiene that should not deter their usage. This standard includes clean floors, properly flushed toilets, and a tidy general area. However, we did encounter some cleaning concerns during our investigation:

- Three toilets were found to be unflushed, which stemmed from the previously discussed issue of drainage blocking due to indiscriminate disposal of waste (stemming from lack of availability of proper dustbins for waste disposal).
- 24 toilets exhibited unclean and slippery surfaces, posing a potential safety hazard to users.



*A picture depicting the general area of a female public toilet in Bengaluru, and one of the stalls with a sit-down toilet in an unsanitary condition, with wet floors, and undischarged waste on drain-mesh.*



*A cockroach in one of the public toilet in Chickpete, Bengaluru.*



- One of the significant features we observed in all the toilets was the prevalence of unpleasant odour. There is a need to highlight that in 17 of these toilets, the odour was so unpleasant that it was interfering with the comfortable use of the public toilet. One of the contributing factors to these is the lack of ventilation in public toilets, found in 42% of toilets. Bad smell prompts users to leave quickly, neglecting their civic responsibility to maintain cleanliness.

### **Preference to sit-down toilets: Ensuring ease of usage for elderly**

Squat toilets were present in 49% of public facilities, while 50% featured sit-down toilets, indicating a higher prevalence of squat toilets. This prevalence may pose challenges for senior citizens, who often experience physical discomfort when using squat toilets. Prioritising the installation of sit-down toilets in future public facilities would promote accessibility for all individuals, particularly senior citizens, ensuring ease of use for a broader spectrum of users.

### **Safety and privacy concerns**

Given its purpose, public toilets should offer a safe and secluded environment for users. Safety hinges on various factors, including appropriate location—avoiding secluded or remote areas—presence of staff or security personnel, provision of secure locking mechanisms, adequate lighting, especially after dark, and availability of emergency contact information for users in distress. Our investigation uncovered the following concerning these aspects:

- **Location:** Three public toilets were situated in isolated areas, posing safety risks to users.
- **Locks:** Five toilets lacked locks within stalls, leaving users vulnerable. Absence of locks inside the stalls also posed privacy concerns for the users. Additionally, 63% of toilets had locks outside stalls, which, while serving no purpose for users, posed a security risk of the person being trapped inside.
- **Staff Presence:** 22 toilets lacked staff or security personnel during our investigation.
- **Emergency Contact Information:** Only nine toilets out of 65 investigated provided emergency contact details, limiting users' ability to report safety concerns.

## **Social Hubs or Safety Hazards: The Surprising Phenomenon Around Public Toilets**

In the public toilets situated in the City civil court premises (Mayo hall), Shivaji Nagar Bus Stand, and outside the KSR Railway station, we observed that both the interior and exterior areas of public toilets were occupied by groups of men associated with the staff member. These men used the space for socialising, akin to what might be expected at popular gathering spots like tea stalls. While this socialisation at public toilets presents an intriguing phenomenon, it also poses safety risks for women intending to use such facilities. The occupation of public spaces of such a private nature by a group of men not only discourages women due to the potential for leering and comments and raises concerns about privacy and safety.<sup>xxvii</sup>

## **Privacy Concerns for Urinals in Men's Public Toilet**

The lack of partition between men's urinals is a prevalent norm in our society, yet there is a notable dearth of studies examining how this lack of partition impacts privacy concerns for men. Additionally, our study identified another design feature warranting investigation: the proximity of male toilets to female toilets. This setup often results in a visibility overlap, where a section of male toilets, including rows of urinals and users, is visible from female toilets and vice versa. While female toilets typically offer only a view of the general area, male toilets may expose users to uncomfortable visibility.<sup>xxviii</sup> Further inquiry is needed to explore how such design choices affect user privacy and contribute to discomfort for both users and observers.

## **Who do public toilets cater to?**

Public toilets constitute an essential part of public infrastructure. Their availability, location, and design should cater to the needs of all members of society. However, the current status of the prevalence, design, and quality of public toilets renders them unusable for certain members of the public or for certain specific needs of these members of the public, which includes persons with disabilities, transgenders, elderly, parents, gig workers, homeless people, and street vendors.

### **Persons with Disabilities**

While the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, of 2016 mandates that public facilities should be accessible to all persons with disabilities, there is a concerning lack of accessibility for persons with disabilities in public toilets in Bengaluru, compounded by disrespectful management practices. Out of the 65 toilets examined, 14 public toilets had a specific stall for persons with disabilities.

However, out of these seven were found to be locked. This process resulted in a frustrating series of inquiries to locate the appropriate staff member authorised to unlock the facilities.

Additionally, we observed the use of braille-encoded signage in just one toilet at KSR Railway Station. Regrettably, despite this attempt at accessibility, the signage was positioned in a manner that obstructed access for blind individuals. Planters placed in front of the wall where the signage was located created a physical barrier, preventing blind individuals from reading the signage.

In one toilet in Shivaji Nagar marketplace, the signage indicated that a particular stall is for a person with disability. However, the toilet was constructed in such a confined and constricted space that it was impossible for a wheelchair user to even enter the toilet. In Shivaji Nagar bus stand, the toilet delineated for persons with disabilities was used as a store room. These instances of neglect and disregard for the needs of persons with disabilities demonstrate a troubling lack of respect and highlight the urgent need for improved accessibility measures in public facilities.

### **Inclusive Design: Commendable Practice of Transgender Toilets**

In two public toilets, there were separate toilets for transgenders, representing a commendable best practice in inclusive facility design. These dedicated spaces prioritise the needs and dignity of transgender individuals, setting a positive example for future replication and adoption in public infrastructure.

### **Parents**

Out of all 65 toilets examined, only one had a changing station for babies, highlighting a significant gap in provision for parents' needs in public facilities. Notably, these stations were exclusively available in women's toilets, reflecting the assumption that caregiving responsibilities primarily fall on women. However, this absence in men's toilets not only reinforces gender stereotypes but also disregards the importance of involving men in parenting responsibilities.

### **Requirement for Child-Friendly Urinals**

Among the 65 toilets surveyed, only one public toilet featured a child-friendly urinal. There is a pressing need to introduce similar facilities in other public toilets, as they serve a considerable demographic—children—and alleviate the burden on parents assisting their kids.

## Neglected Needs of Certain Communities:

Certain segments of the public, such as gig workers, street vendors, and homeless individuals, spend a significant amount of time on the streets, making them heavily reliant on public toilets. These individuals not only require access to toilets for basic needs but also for additional sanitation requirements, such as changing clothes or cleansing themselves. However, the current design of public toilets in Bengaluru often overlooks the specific needs of these populations. In 86% of public toilets, there were no bathing stalls available for individuals to cleanse themselves, while 93% lacked designated changing spaces. Additionally, 17 toilets did not offer sufficient stall space to accommodate these needs. A clear indication of the inadequate design is the absence of proper hooks in 77% of toilets for hanging clothes. The absence of such facilities suggests that public toilets in Bengaluru are primarily designed to address the immediate needs of a certain demographic, failing to effectively accommodate the needs of the community's most dependent members.



*A public toilet in Cubbon park consisting both sit down and western styles of toilet, with a slippery floor and a non functional light bulb.*



*An open urinal for both males and females near Nexus mall, Kormangala.*

# Recommendations

The recommendations presented here stem from an expanded understanding of public space, transcending the conventional limits in imagining the varied needs of our society. We assert that the accessibility of public spaces is intricately linked to the inclusivity of public amenities, advocating for an approach that surpasses traditional ableist and heteronormative paradigms. By integrating accessibility concerns for marginalised groups often excluded by prevailing norms, our proposals aspire to create environments that are authentically equitable and accommodating for all members of society. This holistic perspective not only enriches the fabric of public life but also underscores the imperative of societal progress grounded in principles of inclusivity and social justice. Our recommendations are in hope to improve accessibility, usability and security of public toilets, endeavouring to make public space more accessible for all.

- 1. Route Maps and Signages:** It is recommended to implement improved route maps and signage, within or around public toilet spaces, facilities can significantly enhance accessibility, aiding individuals in navigating the space more efficiently.
- 2. Location and Placements:** It is recommended to assess the location of toilets while considering various factors highlighted in this report. The location and placement of public toilets play a crucial role in ensuring both accessibility and security for users. Firstly, prioritising safety involves avoiding secluded or poorly lit areas for toilet placement. Areas with limited visibility can pose security risks, as they may provide cover for illicit activities or compromise the safety of users, particularly during off-peak hours or late at night. Therefore, reimagining toilet placement to steer clear of such locations is essential to mitigate potential security concerns and ensure a safer environment for users.

Furthermore, especially for Metro stations, strategic placement of toilets to provide easy access from all entry points within the station is paramount for enhancing accessibility. Placing toilets in central or high-traffic areas of the station ensures visibility and convenience for users, reducing the likelihood of individuals getting lost or encountering obstacles along the way. This not only enhances accessibility for all users, including those with mobility challenges but also contributes to a more user-friendly and welcoming environment within the Metro station.

- 3. Cost Disparities:** Due to different physical attributes, women have to use a water closet, when a man can relieve at a urinal. Both these facilities come at different costs, women paying almost the double than men. The significant cost disparities between men's and women's facilities needs to be addressed. Such discrepancies may disproportionately affect women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, thus, it is recommended that efforts should be made to mitigate these barriers to accessibility.

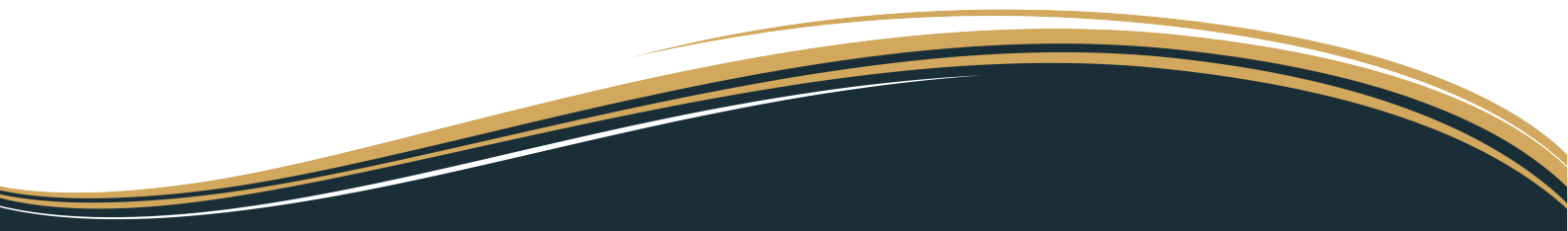


- 4. Maintenance Guidelines:** It is recommended to establish a comprehensive policy framework/ guidelines for the maintenance of public toilets. It is imperative to address this existing void at the policy level and ensure consistent standards of hygiene and upkeep across all facilities. Particularly in Bengaluru, disparities in maintenance quality have been observed, with some contractors exhibiting exemplary standards while others fall short. It is recommended that minimum standards of compliance be established and strictly enforced across all public toilet facilities. These standards should encompass criteria such as cleanliness, hygiene, regular servicing, repair, and upkeep of essential amenities. Furthermore, mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation should be implemented to assess compliance with established standards and identify areas requiring improvement. Regular inspections and audits conducted by designated authorities can help identify deficiencies in maintenance practices and facilitate timely corrective action.
- 5. Waste Disposal:** It is recommended to provide adequate number and quality dustbins for waste disposal, including provisions for sanitary pad disposal, to promote cleanliness and hygiene within public toilet facilities. It is imperative to also have a maintenance plan of these dustbins, as that increases the usability.
- 6. Running Water:** It is recommended to adopt cistern flush systems can contribute to maintaining cleanliness within toilets, as opposed to traditional dabba systems that place the burden of cleaning on users. While the dabba system gets waste down, for proper cleaning of the toilet cistern flush is proved to be hygienic as it cleans the toilet pot from all angles. Additionally, addressing hardware issues is a necessity in Bengaluru as many toilets has water dripping from taps/leakage issues that hamper the maintenance and keeping the space dry.
- 7. Hygiene Products:** It is recommended to better ensure the provision of soap and sanitary products within public toilets, as these are essential for maintaining personal hygiene. While many toilets had some form of soap, the conditions of the same were far from being hygienic. Uniform and consistent supply of liquid hand soaps and soap dispensers is recommended. Further, a few toilets had provisions of sanitary pads for menstruating people. Implementing vending machines or alternative mechanisms for dispensing such products can enhance accessibility and comfort for users.
- 8. Inclusive Arrangements**
  - a. Accessibility for Elderly and People with Disabilities:** It is recommended to incorporate sit-down toilets and other accessibility features such as grab bars, colour-tonal mechanisms, to accommodate the needs of elderly individuals and those with disabilities, promoting inclusivity and dignity within public toilet facilities.
  - b. Accessibility for Transgender people:** It is recommended to have more transgender friendly toilets all around the city.
  - c. Accessibility for Parents:** It is recommended to have more baby changing stations in

all toilets, child friendly urinals and develop specific arrangements tailored to meet the needs of parents, to ensure equitable access and comfort for all.

- 9. Cost Considerations for Workers:** It is recommended to provide additional support such as subsidised or cost-free toilet-access cards to groups of community who rely on public toilet amenities (such as bath stalls and changing spaces) in order to accommodate their accessibility of toilet spaces and increase the usability of the same.
- 10. Lighting:** It is recommended to install adequate lighting, inside and outside the premises, particularly in secluded or dimly lit areas, to improve visibility and deter potential security threats. Utilising motion-sensor lighting would also enhance security and reduce the energy consumption.
- 11. Staff Presence:** It is recommended to ensure the presence of trained staff members within the vicinity to provide immediate assistance in case of emergencies or security incidents. It is also recommended to increase the number of female staff at the toilets as that creates a comfortable environment for female users.
- 12. Controlled Entry Points:** It is recommended to reassess the one-point entry design as followed in Bengaluru and have different entry points for all genders. Implementation of such a controlled entry point layout with security measures such as access control systems or turnstiles to regulate the flow of individuals entering and exiting the facility, helps in enhancing the overall privacy and security within the premises.

We hope for our recommendations to pave the way for discussions that bring substantive shift in the imaginations and discourse on understanding of public spaces and public facilities such as toilets, leading up to policy level changes and implementations.



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## Annexure 1 – Matrix of Standards

AVAILABILITY	EASE OF ACCESS	EASE OF USAGE	SAFETY	MAINTENANCE	INCLUSIVITY
Ease of location	Timings	Number of stalls in each toilet	Security of location	Display of cleaning schedule	Accessibility for persons with disabilities
Availability of route maps	Charges	Type of toilet- Sit down/ western	Provision of helpline number	Noticeable cleaning concerns	Availability of separate washroom available for transgenders
Use of universal symbols	Availability and gender of staff personnel	Provision for running water	Availability of locks inside the stalls	Availability of basins	Availability of baby changing stations
		Provision of adequate ventillation	Availability of locks outside the stall	Availability of hand wash/soaps	Provision of sanitary napkins
		Provision of adequate lightning	Privacy of the user	Availability of dustbins in general area	Availability of hooks and nails
		Type of flush mechanism available		Availability of dustbins in specific stalls	Availability of bath stalls
		Availability of mirrors			

## Annexure 2 – List of Public Toilets Investigated

Sr. No	Address of the toilet	Public Place category	Public Place Specification	Zone	BBMP/Private
1	Outside Lalbagh West Gate	Road	Lalbagh	South	BBMP
2	Lalbagh Metro	Metro Station	Lalbagh	South	Private (BMRCL)
3	Inside Lalbagh (Gate 1)	Public Park	Lalbagh	South	Constructed by Lalbagh Horticulture department, maintained by Swachha City Foundation.
4	Near Glasshouse	Public Park	Lalbagh	South	Maintained by PES University
5	Near Parking	Public Park	Lalbagh	South	Constructed by Lalbagh Horticulture department, maintained by Swachha City Foundation.
6	Gate no.4 west gate	Public Park	Lalbagh	South	BBMP
7	Between Parking and Gate 1 (Near the Bonsai Garden)	Public Park	Lalbagh	South	Built and maintained by GMR Varalakshmi Foundation
8	Front of Tipu Palace	Tourist Place	Tipu Palace	South	BBMP
9	Sajjan Rao circle	Road	Vasavi Temple Street	South	BBMP
10	Inside Tipu Palace	Tourist Place	Tipu Palace	South	Private
11	K R Market Metro	Metro Station	KR Market	South	Private (BMRCL)
12	A.V. Road	Road	Opposite HP petrol bunk, near Tipu palace	South	Constructed and maintained by Sulabh. (BBMP)

13	Inside Cubbon Park (Near High Court)	Public Park	Cubbon Park	South	Swaccha City Foundation
14	Near State Central Library	Public Park	Cubbon Park	South	Private
15	Near Gate 6	Public Park	Cubbon Park	South	Swaccha City Foundation
16	Near Bal Bhavan	Public Park	Cubbon Park	South	SBM
17	Cubbon Park Metro	Metro Station	Cubbon Park	South	Private (BMRCL)
18	Jayanagar Metro Station	Metro Station	Jayanagar	South	Private (BMRCL)
19	Mahatma Gandhi Metro	Metro Station	MG Road (Near Platform 1)	East	Private (BMRCL)
20	Mahatma Gandhi Metro	Metro Station	MG Road (Near Platform 2)	East	Private (BMRCL)
21	Next to City Civil Court	Road	Mayo Court	East	BBMP
22	St.Marks road	Road	St. Marks Road	East	SBM
23	In front of Alice Jewellery	Market	Commercial Street	East	BBMP
24	Merchants Market	Market	Commercial Street	East	BBMP
25	Russell Market	Market	Commercial Street	East	BBMP
26	Shivajinagar bus stand -1	Bus stand	Shivajinagar	East	BBMP
27	Shivajinagar Bus stand -2	Bus stand	Shivajinagar	East	BBMP ( Maintained by private contractors)

28	Race Course	Road	Race course (Next to Taj Hotel)	East	BBMP
29	Planetorium	Tourist Place	Jawahar Nehru Planetorium	East	Private
30	Bangalore Palace	Tourist Place	Bangalore Palace	East	Private
31	Vidhan Soudha Metro	Metro Station	Vidhan Soudha	East	Private (BMRCL)
32	Chitrakala Parishad	Tourist Place	Chitrakala Parishad	East	Private
33	Waiting hall for PWD	Railway Station	KSR Railway	West	Private (Comes under KSR)
34	Waiting area for female on P.F.1	Railway Station	KSR Railway	West	Private
35	P.F.5 in KSR Railway Station	Railway Station	KSR Railway	West	Private
36	In front of KSR	Railway Station	KSR Railway	West	Constructed by Nirmala Bangalore, Maintained by BBMP
37	Outside KSR Railway	Railway station	KSR Railway	West	Private
38	Inside Majestic Bus Stand	Bus Stand	Majestic	West	Private
39	Majestic Bus Stand Outside	Bus Stand	Majestic	West	BBMP
40	Majestic Bus Stand Outside	Bus Stand	Majestic	West	Private (Vishal International Association NGO)
41	Majestic Metro	Metro Station	Majestic	West	Private (BMRCL)
42	Kengeri Railway Station Inside	Railway Station	Kengeri	RR Nagar	BBMP



43	Kengeri Vegetable Market	Market	Kengeri	RR Nagar	Nirmala Nagar
44	Kengeri Metro	Metro Station	Kengeri Bus Terminal Metro	RR Nagar	Private (BMRCL)
45	Kengeri Bus Stand	Bus Stand	Kengeri	RR Nagar	Private
46	Opposite Kengeri Bus Stand	Road	Kengeri	RR Nagar	BBMP
47	Gottigere Bus Stand	Bus Stand	Gottigere	Bommanahalli	Private
48	Gottigere Main Road	Road	Gottigere	Bommanahalli	BBMP
49	Jambu Savari Dinne	Road	Near Kanti Sweets, Main Road	Bommanahalli	BBMP (Swachha City Foundation Maintenance and Construction)
50	Sultanpet Circle	Market	Chickpete	West	BBMP
51	Sultanpet	Market	Chickpete	West	BBMP
52	Ballipet, Opposite South Ruchi's Restaurant	Market	Chickpete	West	BBMP
53	City Police Station	Market	Chickpete	West	BBMP (Maintained by Private)
54	Near City Market	Market	Chickpete	West	Private
55	Huriopet	Market	Chickpete	West	BBMP (Constructed and Maintained by Karnataka Dalitha Sangarsha Samithi)
56	Mamulpet	Market	Chickpete	West	BBMP (Construction and maintenance by Janakalyan Foundation, Bangalore)
57	Near Santhe Circle	Bus Stand	Kogilu, cross Yelahanka	Yelahanka	Private

58	Near BBMP Office Park	Road	Kasturinagara	Yelahanka	BBMP
59	Koramangala Bus Depot	Bus Stand	Koramangala	South	Private
60	In front of Nexus Mall	Road	Koramangala	South	No signs
61	Silk Board Bus Stand	Bus Stand	Silk Board	Bommanahalli	Private
62	Audugodi Maternity Home	Road	Audugodi	South	BBMP
63	Kadugodi Bus Stand	Bus Stand	Kadugodi	Mahadevpura	Private
64	Brookfield, Opposite Rameshwaram Cafe	Road	ITPL Main Road	Mahadevpura	BBMP
65	Jai Munni Rao Circle, Magadi Road	Road	Magadi Road	Dasarahalli	BBMP (Swaccha City Foundation Maintenance)