

3. Urban Planning in India

India's urban centers need to evolve from being reactive spaces to proactive engines of growth and focus on land-use zoning, as it aspires to become a \$30 trillion economy by 2047 under the vision of Viksit Bharat

Need of Urban Planning in India & Strategic Role of Cities

Economic Growth & Urban Competitiveness – Cities currently contribute over 63% of India's GDP, projected to rise to 75% by 2030, highlighting their central role in growth. Urban planning ensures spatial efficiency, reduces congestion costs, encourages innovation clusters, and enables productive labour markets. Well-designed cities attract FDI, startups, skilled workforce, logistics hubs, and global talent, strengthening India's economic base.

Demographic Transformation & Urban Expansion – Over 400 million Indians currently live in urban areas; expected to reach 600 million by 2036 and 800 million by 2050. Requires proactive planning for housing, transport, utilities, education, healthcare, safety, and resilience infrastructure. Without planned growth, cities risk slums expansion, informalisation, infrastructure collapse, and socio-economic inequality.

Climate Action & Sustainability Imperative – India's net-zero 2070 commitment positions cities as climate action front-runners. Cities consume ~70% of energy, generate 65%+ emissions, and face acute heat island, flood, pollution, and resource stress. Planning must integrate green mobility, energy-efficient buildings, renewable energy, blue-green infrastructure, disaster-resilience, and compact urban form.

Urban Planning

Urban planning is a constitutional function under 12th Schedule—Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) & Development Authorities. MoHUA supports capacity-building via AMRUT, Smart Cities Mission, PMAY-U, Capacity Building for Urban Development (CBUD). States & ULBs remain key planners—but capacity and training gaps persist.

Limits of Traditional Urban Planning in India

Static Master Plans vs Dynamic Demands – Traditional planning focuses only on land-use zoning; neglects economy, jobs, innovation, climate, mobility, digital systems. Plans often outdated, rigid, and poorly implemented.

Fragmented Governance & Weak ULB Capacity – Multiple overlapping agencies (Development Authorities, ULBs, Transport Boards, Water Boards) hinder coordination. ULBs lack planning staff, financial autonomy, and technical capability.

Mobility & Transport Crisis – Rapid urban sprawl without integrated mobility → congestion, pollution, long commute times, productivity loss. Public transport share declining in many cities → rise in private vehicles. Environmental Degradation Urban growth has triggered water scarcity, waste crisis, heat stress, air pollution, loss of wetlands & green cover. Stormwater mismanagement → urban flooding (e.g., Chennai 2023, Bengaluru 2022).

Social Infrastructure & Inequality

Housing shortages → 70+ million urban poor; slums house ~25% of urban population.

Poor access to schools, healthcare, sanitation, safety, especially in small/medium towns.

Economic Disconnect – Plans rarely align with employment zones, logistics hubs, MSME belts, innovation corridors, service clusters. Missed opportunities for manufacturing decentralisation to Tier-2, Tier-3 cities.

Financing Gaps – India needs ₹70 lakh crore by 2036 for urban infrastructure (World Bank). ULB revenues low—municipal bonds/PPP under-utilised.

Toward a New Urban Planning Paradigm

Economic Vision Pedestal – Plans must be economy-driven, identifying future industries, jobs, GDP targets & land needs. Align spatial planning with industry clusters, logistics networks, skill ecosystems.

Natural Resource & Environmental Budgeting – Water, green cover, waste capacity, energy, groundwater as planning criteria. Adopt circular economy, demand management, climate budgeting.

Climate-Integrated Urban Development – Urban Climate Action Plans aligned with NDCs, SDG-11

(Sustainable Cities), Net Zero 2070. Incorporate solarisation, green buildings, EV readiness, carbon-neutral zones.

Mobility & Environmental Networks – Encourage public transit, TOD (Transit-Oriented Development), NMT (cycling, walking). Green & blue infrastructure – lakes, riverfronts, wetlands, parks, bio-swales, urban forests.

Regional Urbanisation & Balanced Tier-2/3 Growth – Metropolitan region-based planning; peri-urban integration. Tier-2/3 cities as industrial expansion nodes → lower land costs, decentralised production.

Data-Driven Smart Urban Governance – GIS-based planning, digital twins, AI analytics, urban observatories for real-time insights.

Institutional & Educational Reforms – Modernise Town & Country Planning Acts. Create skilled cadre through urban planning universities, new post-graduate programs, interdisciplinary training. Build cadre of urban economists, climate scientists, mobility experts with planners.

Government-Led Planning Reforms

NITI Aayog (2021 Report) – Recommended All-India Urban & Regional Planning Service (AIURPS). Reform state planning laws & curricula; strengthen urban finance, autonomy, accountability.

MoHUA Initiatives

URDPFI Guidelines – Model planning standards.

Model Building Bye-laws – Green construction, TOD, safety compliance.

National Urban Digital Mission (NUDM), Swachh Bharat, PMAY-U, AMRUT 2.0, SCM.

India Infrastructure Report 2023 – Emphasises urban redevelopment, municipal capacity, financing innovation, climate cities.

PM Gati Shakti – National Master Plan – Unified infrastructure & logistics integration across transport & economic corridors. Crucial for multimodal transport, industrial parks, planned growth.

Smart Cities Mission – ICT governance, efficient public services, green mobility, smart infrastructure.

Urban Infrastructure Funding – India investing ~3.3% of GDP in infra; focus on metro rail, roads, water supply, sewerage, e-governance, transit-oriented networks.

Conclusion

India stands at an urban turning point—urbanisation will shape its economic destiny, climate commitments, and social cohesion. Traditional master-plan models must evolve into economic, climate-driven, technology-enabled, inclusive, and regionally integrated frameworks. Strengthening ULB capacity, financing, digital tools, climate planning & human resources is essential to build future-ready cities.

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