

Welcome to Smart Thiruvananthapuram or What !

In 2015, the Union Ministry of Urban Development announced the Smart Cities Challenge. The challenge aims to create exemplar areas in cities by merging innovative plans with latest technologies. By creating these replicable exemplar areas it aims at redefining the way city is imagined in India. The Challenge aims to find solutions for the major problems of the cities by merging innovative plans and latest information technologies. It aims to improve economic opportunity, quality of life and ensure public accountability. In short, it aims at making life in the cities smarter and faster.

The Smart Cities Mission proposed a two stage selection process. In 2015, in the first stage of the challenge only Kochi got selected from Kerala though the state nominated six other cities including Thiruvananthapuram. Thankfully Kochi got selected in the final list of twenty states. To win the Smart City challenge, the cities chosen for challenge have to present project proposals developed in consultation with public and various other stakeholders. The mission stresses the use of information technology and social media to reach out to various sections. Once selected, the city will receive Rs.500 crore from the centre in a span of five years to implement the proposal while the city administration and state government has to finance an equal amount. Though Thiruvananthapuram was not selected among the first 100, fortunately it was selected again for competition in May 2016. This has once again opened a chance for Trivandrum to finally prove its mettle and become a Smart Thiruvananthapuram. Smart Thiruvananthapuram is the bold response of the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation and its people to the challenge thrown at it by the Smart Cities Challenge. By taking this challenge up, the city corporation aims to remake the life and image of the city and create a city of a better future.

What is Smart about Smart Cities?

There cannot be any universally accepted definition of what is a Smart City. What is smart in the case of one city need not be smart in another city. However there are some basic facilities which every citizen needs and aspires in a city. Thus the Smart City Challenge aims at developing core infrastructure, clean and healthy environment, a decent quality of living and essentially achieving these targets through the application of cost-effective latest technological advancements. For example, in waste management smart solutions will include projects that aim at converting waste into energy and compost. This will also include introducing successful technologies that will treat waste water and make it eligible for reuse. Such smart solutions need to be introduced to address problems of other aspects of urban life. Various measures like integrated traffic management, smart parking, smart meters for energy and water management are examples of other smart solutions. These solutions need to be cost-effective, business promoting while enhancing citizen participation and public accountability.

What is challenging about it?

To win the smart city challenge the city should come with the most innovative proposal. According to the guidelines, the Smart City Proposal involve two plans. First, a **pan city plan** and second an **area based plan**. Under pan city plan the city should devise a plan that uses modern information technologies to develop basic facilities and service delivery catering the entire city. The area based plan, in contrast should chose and develop infrastructure and services of a specific region of the city. Three alternative approaches can be chosen to implement the area based plan – **retrofitting, redevelopment and green field development**.

- Retrofitting – we can enhance existing services and infrastructural facilities in a minimum area of 500 acres (or)
- Redevelopment - we can fully replace outdated infrastructure and redevelop facilities with latest technologies in a minimum area of 50 acres (or)
- Greenfield development - we can freshly develop at least 250 acres of vacant lands in the suburban region equipped with modern technologies to meet the housing needs of the poor can be devised.

In short, a comprehensive smart city plan should include a pan city plan and one of the area based plan. These plans are primarily intended to provide exemplary models for other urban areas to replicate. While preparing proposal, certain basic features have to be maintained to ensure sustainable and equitable results. These basic features have to be kept in mind by all of us when we propose smart solutions.

Basic features of Smart City

- Promoting mixed land development i.e. promoting developments in areas that provide multiple services to the residents and users in contrast to specialized zones. This model demands that areas should not be developed with singular focus but should be developed in such manner that it provides a mixture of functions that support each other. For example business areas with residential, shopping and recreational facilities rather than business only or standalone residential areas. Such a plan will also radically reduce transportation costs. It is also imperative that these developments are inclusive and ensure housing opportunities for all. The plan should also make the city less vulnerable to disasters.
- With respect to transport, the Smart City must create walkable localities reducing congestion and pollution. Walking and Cycling should be promoted through necessary infrastructure discouraging use of automobiles. The citizens should receive necessary administrative services within walking or cycling distance. Transport facilities should immediately connect residential, business, shopping and recreational areas with public transport. Last mile transport services like mini-bus are must.

- Preserving and developing open spaces like parks, playgrounds, and recreational spaces that promote healthy life style and preserve ecological balance.
- Making governance citizen-friendly and cost effective using online and mobile services. For example, forming e-groups to listen to people and obtain feedback and use online monitoring of programs and activities with the aid of cyber tour of worksites are suggested. It aims to reduce the need to visit the administration offices simultaneously promoting a transparent and accountable administration.
- Giving an identity to the city based on its main economic activity, such as local cuisine, health, education, arts and craft, culture and industry.

How are we going to win the Challenge

In the run-up to the preparation of smart city proposal, Thiruvananthapuram Corporation has prioritized and fast-tracked its initiatives and activities under Mayor's leadership. Ward Sabha meetings are being conducted all across the city to ensure highest level of citizen participation unseen in any other competing city. Consultations with eminent personalities and technical specialists hailing from the city are being conducted. College and school students are being engaged in debates, discussions and promotional activities. The participation of citizens of Thiruvananthapuram in the dialogue process is expanding day by day. The corporation is leaving no stone unturned in involving all the stakeholders in this democratic process. People from all walks of the life such as academicians, government officials, engineers, lawyers, medical professionals, labourers, information technology professionals, women's groups, trade unions, marginalized groups, differently abled, student and youth organisations are becoming part of this democratic process. The traditional media and social media are becoming vibrant with the discussions on Smart Thiruvananthapuram.

It is time we who love our city come and put our heads together and find smart solutions to long standing problems like waste management and parking and traffic management. As the city expands, it is also time we start identifying emerging problems and offset them with smart solutions. It is also time to create a hassle free administration.

Let us Create a Smarter Thiruvananthapuram! Let us Create a Smart Future!!