



## The Metro Rail: A Modern Lifeline or a Mixed Blessing?

The rise of the metro rail system across modern cities has been hailed as a triumph of urban planning and technological ingenuity. A metro is not merely a vehicle that ferries commuters from one point to another; it is, in a sense, a symbol of how a society envisions its own progress. Beneath the ground or above the traffic-clogged roads, sleek trains glide with clocklike precision, promising a mode of transport that is fast, efficient, and environmentally sustainable. India alone has built over **900 kilometres of operational metro network across 20 cities as of 2024**, while countries such as China boast a staggering **9,000 kilometres**, making metros one of the most rapidly expanding forms of mass transit in the world. Yet, beneath this sheen of modernity lie questions worth pondering—questions of inclusivity, cost, cultural identity, and long-term sustainability.

To begin with, the metro rail addresses one of the gravest challenges of twenty-first-century cities: congestion. Roads in populous cities are often reduced to crawling lanes of noise and fumes. The average speed of vehicles in central Delhi during peak hours, for example, is estimated at **14 km/h**, while the metro cruises at nearly **35–40 km/h**, offering commuters an escape from gridlock. For the student racing to college, the office-goer pressed for time, or the vendor carrying his goods, the metro embodies a promise of reliability. Moreover, it reduces the dependence on private vehicles, thereby cutting down emissions and contributing to cleaner air—a benefit whose importance cannot be overstated in the age of climate anxiety. A 2018 study by the Central Road Research Institute found that the Delhi Metro alone helps cut **630,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions annually**, roughly equivalent to planting **10 million trees each year**.

Yet, if the metro is an emblem of modernity, it is also a mirror reflecting the inequalities of our cities. Construction costs are astronomical: building one kilometre of underground metro line in India can cost up to **₹550 crore**, while elevated corridors average **₹250 crore per kilometre**. The burden often falls on public funds, supplemented by loans from global agencies like JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency). One might ask: does the government's investment in subterranean marvels serve the entire population, or only the urban middle class? Ticket prices, though subsidised, still hover between **₹10 and ₹60 per ride** in Indian metros—affordable for salaried commuters, but often prohibitive for daily wage workers earning less than **₹300 a day**. A metro line seldom snakes into the poorer outskirts where buses and shared auto-rickshaws still remain the lifeline. In this sense, the metro may inadvertently deepen the gap between the privileged commuter who

enjoys a silent, air-conditioned ride and the worker who still jostles on overcrowded buses.

Furthermore, the cultural dimension cannot be ignored. Traditional modes of transport—rickshaws, trams, or even local trains—carry with them the stories and rhythms of a city. Kolkata’s tram system, for instance, dating back to **1902**, is the oldest in Asia and still rattles through certain streets with nostalgic charm. A tram clattering through an old quarter, or a hand-pulled rickshaw navigating narrow lanes, embodies a sense of place. The metro, in contrast, is strikingly uniform: the same automated voices, the same glossy coaches, whether in Delhi, Dhaka, or Dubai. Does such standardisation risk flattening the uniqueness of urban experience? Or does it reflect a desirable universality, a language of mobility that transcends borders?

Equally pressing is the environmental paradox. While the metro reduces road traffic pollution, its construction entails massive excavation, displacement of trees, and sometimes even the demolition of heritage structures. During Phase III of the Delhi Metro, more than **16,000 trees had to be felled**, though compensatory plantations were mandated. The question then arises: is the short-term ecological damage justified by the long-term environmental benefits? This tension invites us to think beyond slogans of “green mobility” and to engage with the complex arithmetic of sustainability.

The metro rail thus becomes more than an engineering project; it becomes a philosophical inquiry into what a city values. Speed or inclusivity? Efficiency or heritage? Uniformity or cultural flavour? The answers are not simple, nor are they final. Perhaps the greatest merit of the metro lies not only in the journeys it enables but also in the debates it provokes. For in thinking critically about our transport systems, we are, in truth, thinking critically about the kind of society we wish to build.

1. The passage portrays the metro rail primarily as \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a) a technological symbol with social dilemmas
  - b) a heritage mode of transport
  - c) a solution without drawbacks
  - d) a replacement for cultural identity
2. The reference to “a mirror reflecting the inequalities of our cities” suggests that metro projects \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a) erase urban poverty
  - b) highlight class divisions
  - c) ignore environmental concerns
  - d) celebrate uniformity
3. The mention of ticket pricing implies that metro travel is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a) universally affordable
  - b) reserved for the wealthy

- c) partly accessible but exclusionary
  - d) entirely subsidised
4. The cultural comparison between trams and metros indicates that modernisation can lead to \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) loss of unique local identity  
b) complete destruction of heritage  
c) strengthening of tradition  
d) rejection of technology
5. The environmental paradox raised in the passage highlights that sustainability is \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) an illusion  
b) a simple calculation  
c) a balance of costs and benefits  
d) an outdated concern
6. The overall tone of the passage can best be described as \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) celebratory and unquestioning  
b) balanced and questioning  
c) dismissive and hostile  
d) nostalgic and romantic
7. The statement “the metro becomes a philosophical inquiry” implies that the author views infrastructure as \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) purely technical  
b) deeply connected to social values  
c) irrelevant to culture  
d) outside human responsibility
8. The debate about speed versus inclusivity in the passage indicates a conflict between \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) efficiency and equity  
b) cost and construction  
c) design and uniformity  
d) ticketing and funding
9. By comparing metros in Delhi, Dhaka, and Dubai, the author stresses \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) a universal sameness in modern mobility  
b) cultural distinctiveness of each city  
c) rejection of technological progress  
d) failure of metro projects globally
10. The author suggests that public investment in metros risks \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) ignoring wider social needs  
b) benefiting rural farmers  
c) supporting only heritage transport  
d) reducing pollution levels
11. The word *serene* in the description of metro rides suggests an atmosphere that is \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) calm and peaceful  
b) hurried and tense  
c) overcrowded and loud  
d) cold and mechanical

12. The word *astronomical* used for costs emphasises their \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) scientific nature  
b) enormous scale  
c) predictable trend  
d) ordinary character
13. The word *uniform* describing metro experiences conveys \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) sameness across places  
b) equality of access  
c) smart attire of passengers  
d) strictness of rules
14. The phrase *ecological paradox* refers to a situation of \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) perfect balance in nature  
b) contradiction between harm and benefit  
c) absence of environmental effects  
d) complete destruction of ecology
15. The final lines suggest that the metro's greatest merit lies in \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) provoking reflection on societal choices  
b) removing all heritage from cities  
c) serving only middle-class commuters  
d) avoiding environmental challenges