

## Expanding Chennai: 4 Key Considerations for a Smooth Transition



Posted by Praveen Ravi in [Public Policy Advisory](#)

With our head office and origins in Chennai (also known as Madras), Madras day is a focal point for Athena Infonomics. To mark this occasion, our Associate Director, Praveen Ravi and Senior Consultant, Sricharann Seshadri explore the challenges associated with the recent announcement to expand the Chennai Metropolitan Area (CMA) to 8,878 sq km from its current 1,189 sq km.

With "Old Madras" as its center, Chennai has expanded much beyond its original transacted area in 1639 (a plot of land around Fort St. George). However, balanced development of an ever expanding area (and population) is a key concern, especially in the context of a national narrative on "urban focused" development, spearheaded by programmes like Smart Cities and AMRUT.

With the CMA area limits being largely static over the past four decades (at about 1189 Sq Km), the recent proposed expansion of the CMA to 8878 Sq Km, including the whole of Kanchipuram and Tiruvallur districts, and parts of Vellore district represents a sweeping change to status quo. There are planned projects by the State Government, under its Vision 2023, to bolster economic activity and infrastructure within the region. There are proposed road infrastructure projects, such as the Strategic Roads Expansion Programme and Six-Eight Lane Triangular Corridor connecting Coimbatore – Chengalpet – Thoothukudi, that cover a significant portion within the proposed expanded CMA.

The Chennai-Bangalore Industrial Corridor, a marquee inter-State project, is planned to pass through the Vellore region resulting in job creation and economic activity. Vellore is the designated Aerospace hub of the State with an 'Aerospace Park' and an R&D facility to be setup in the region by 2018. A 'plastics' park will be established in Tiruvallur, to support existing industries in the region, and Kanchipuram has been earmarked as an Information Technology Investment Region with GoT incentives for IT investments in the region. While the planned activities will only further expand the already existing industrial/ economic activity in the proposed expanded CMA, it is unlikely to generate holistic development without the following 'proactive' considerations:

1. The massive growth opportunity that this expansion presents: With the current CMA being one of the most economically vibrant metropolitan regions in the country, this geographical expansion provides for greater leeway on integrated regional planning and development. With real estate being at a significant premium in the core city, such expansion can allow for development of true "hub and spoke" ecosystems which can allow for well-planned economic development, and improve decent jobs in the hinterland across services, industry and agriculture.
2. The challenge of infrastructure: Realizing the potential of the super area will require a common minimum level of infrastructure (transport, water, sanitation and land usage among others), which already is highly heterogeneous within the current CMA itself. Addressing this will require significant scale of investments, and more importantly planning, to ensure that the larger picture permeates local thinking on services.
3. Governance: Stakeholders (local governments, civil society organizations and communities) will be a part of the expanded CMA, an efficient, yet inclusive platform for governance needs to be quickly put in place.
4. Citizenship, and a feeling of a common identity: As physical umbrellas grow, so do the diversity of perspectives under them, and this requires a dynamic adaptation of narratives (both in content and form) on what unites the residents of Chennai. This challenge is unlike all others – it is not for citizens to throw into the yards of the elected. It is a challenge for the citizenry to internalize and address, assimilating a larger group of viewpoints and aspirations into the collective embrace we call 'Madras'.

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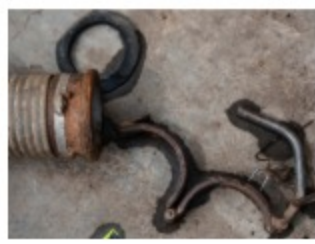
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About Praveen Ravi

Praveen is interested in Applied Decision Sciences, Impact Assessments and Governance and Reforms.

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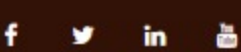
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