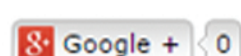


# Why smart cities should be dense and vibrant economic hubs

*Dense cities bring with them some economic benefits that cities spread horizontally do not offer.*



*Surendra Hiranandani*

India's new cities should be developed on dense and mixed use mode. Low density suburban development is a relic of the past, and we need to adapt to modern needs. The buildings, parking spaces, commercial establishments, parks, streets and

related resources within the city need to be planned in such a way that they could be subjected to mixed use, leading to their efficient utilization.

When cities first developed around industries, particularly during the industrial revolution, masses were crowded around work places that spewed toxic wastes and pollution. Diseases also spread more in dense environments. This automatically led the cities to be spread wide out.

Further, during World War II, the US encouraged sprawling development spread out over large areas as a survival strategy against being bombed, so that fewer people would be killed by enemy attacks.

Today, cities thrive around services, and polluting industries can be located afar. Density and mixed use planning makes infrastructure and service delivery economically viable that includes IT, health, emergency, education, sports and cultural services. In denser environments, these provisions will have more people in their catchment area, and construction will need to be less spread out to reach end users. The per capita cost of providing infrastructure decreases as density increases.

As author and journalist David Owen notes, "Moving people vertically through a city requires less energy and less infrastructure than moving them horizontally."

Mixed use cities also allow for better use of space and optimize infrastructure with 24/7 use. For instance, car parks can be used by people in offices during the day, and by people in shops and restaurants at night.

In fact, residence, work and leisure activities should be within walking distance. People then travel less between places of home, leisure and work, hence creating less traffic, less emissions, less time wasted, and less load on public infrastructure.

## Dense cities make public transport viable

Density is one of the keys to making public transit work. It allows for the development of high quality public transport that even more economically advanced constituents can use and benefit from. Low density suburban development incessantly consumes thousands of hectares of forests, farmland, woodlands and wetlands; reduces groundwater levels and destroys wildlife habitat. It also makes public transit systems inefficient and creates auto-centric communities, thus increasing the city's carbon footprint.

## Key to building an innovation economy

Leading cities around the world follow the dense, mixed-use development pattern, including New York, London and Tokyo. Studies have linked dense cities with greater economic growth and innovation. Syndicated reports show that as job density doubles, productivity increases 6-28%. A city with twice the employment density exhibits 20% more patents per capita.

## Density & mixed use planning are key to a safe city

Delhi is more sprawling and spread out city with lots of open spaces and deserted areas as against Mumbai. This could be perhaps one of the reasons why Delhi is more unsafe compared to Mumbai. Dense, pedestrian focused cities have more "eyes on the street" that help prevent crimes to a large extent.

To sum it up, the success of a city in the future is going to be determined by the human capital that it is able to attract and nurture. Cities today are competing for the best talent that can augment the productivity of their economies. If Indian cities fail to provide a good quality of life to its people; at some point you will see an exodus of smart people, which will be highly detrimental to the economy.

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